

The Museum of Extraordinary Things Study Guide

**The Museum of Extraordinary Things by Alice
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Plot Summary

Coralie Sardie is the daughter of the owner of The Museum of Extraordinary Things: a man known as the Professor. She grew up on Coney Island in New York during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Professor Sardie had strange views about health and fitness and forced Coralie to swim in the sea every night during the summer months and to take ice baths during the winter. Although their home was attached to the museum, Coralie was not allowed to go inside or look at any of the exhibitions before her tenth birthday because her father feared that the specimens and human performers on display would be too harrowing and distressing for a child. The Professor employed numerous humans with unusual appearances to perform in the museum. On Coralie's tenth birthday the Professor revealed that she was to become one of the performers – The Human Mermaid – because of the webbed skin on her hands.

When Coralie was older, her father concocted a scheme to fake the existence of a sea monster by having Coralie swim at night in the Hudson River. One night, the current took Coralie on an unexpected course and she found herself lost in the woods where she encountered a young man with whom she became fascinated, despite the fact they did not speak.

The young man in the woods was Eddie Cohen, a Ukrainian immigrant working as a professional photographer. Eddie and his father escaped Ukraine together when Eddie was just a child after Eddie's mother was killed. Eddie believed his father had tried to commit suicide after being fired from his factory job in New York. This created a rift between father and son which eventually led to Eddie abandoning his father and living alone. Eddie worked as a press photographer and was on the scene at The Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire in New York in 1911. After the fire, Eddie was visited by a man called Samuel Weiss whose daughter Hannah had worked in the Triangle factory. No trace of Hannah's body or possessions was found in the aftermath of the fire and Samuel asked Eddie to help him find Hannah.

During another night swim in the Hudson, Coralie discovered the body of a dead woman. When she told her father about the woman and he insisted on taking the corpse back to the museum so he could turn the body into something he could claim was a sea monster. While investigating the disappearance of Hannah Weiss, Eddie spoke to a hermit living in the woods along the banks of the Hudson who told him that he had seen someone take the body of a drowned woman. This led Eddie to The Museum of Extraordinary Things where he met and fell in love with Coralie.

Coralie helped Eddie smuggle Hannah's body out of the museum. When the Professor discovered that Coralie had betrayed him he locked her in the basement. Meanwhile, Eddie found the man who had murdered Hannah Weiss and brought him to justice. An old employer of Eddie's told him that Eddie had been wrong about his father and that he didn't try to commit suicide.



A devastating fire broke out at Dreamland, another attraction on Coney Island, and the fire spread towards The Museum of Extraordinary Things. The Professor was killed while trying to put out the flames on the roof of the museum. Eddie rescued Coralie from the basement and Coralie saved both of their lives by hiding herself and Eddie in the tank of water where she performed as The Human Mermaid until the flames had passed. Eddie and Coralie left Coney Island together and got married.



Chapter 1

Summary

In the opening section of Chapter 1 – The World in a Globe – Coralie Sardie described her life living amongst the exhibits at her father, Professor Sardie's, Museum of Extraordinary Things on Coney Island in early twentieth century New York, which included live performers as well as exhibition cases.

Coralie's father had strange views about health and fitness which he enforced on Coralie. These routines involved Coralie bathing in ice water for hours at a time and breathing through a tube. Coralie and the Professor would swim in the sea every night until the winter when it became too cold.

Coralie explained that her father made her wear gloves whenever she was in public to hide a deformity on her hands. The Sardie's housekeeper, Maureen, had scars all over her body from a jealous boyfriend who had attacked her with sulfuric acid. On Coralie's tenth birthday, her father allowed her into the museum for the first time. She discovered that she was to become one of the performers: The Human Mermaid.

In the second section of Chapter 1 – March 1911 – Coralie climbed out of the Hudson river during the dead of night and realized she didn't know where she was. She had been performing as The Human Mermaid for 8 years and was no longer as popular as she had once been. Her act had involved her wearing a prosthetic tale and swimming underwater, occasionally using a breathing tube. The effect was heightened by a birth defect: the thin webbing she had between her fingers. This night in March 1911, she was pretending to be a sea creature to help her father drum up publicity for the museum. She got out of the river at the wrong point and became lost. She happened upon a young man in the woods and was chased by his dog, but he didn't see her.

Analysis

Chapter 1 introduced the main structural technique of the novel which is the division of each chapter into two distinct sections: the first told in the first person from the perspective of one of the characters, the second told in third person with an omniscient narrator.

The division of the narrative this way allows the author to reveal a different perspective on Coralie's life from the version Coralie gives herself. Key differences between the information revealed in each section include the fact that, although Coralie often refers to the gloves her father forces her to wear in public, she doesn't reveal to the reader why she needs to cover her hands. In the second section, through the narration, the reader is informed that Coralie's fingers are webbed like a fish. Holding back this piece of information until the second section of the chapter has two key effects. The first is to reveal character: the fact that Coralie doesn't describe the deformity on her hands



reveals how ashamed she feels about her hands and how uncomfortable she is talking about it. The second effect is to build suspense. Because the reader does not know what Coralie's deformity is, it comes as more of a surprise when it is revealed that the Professor had been training her as a swimmer in order to have her perform as a human mermaid. Revealing the deformity earlier would give away the twist at the end of the first section.

Many of the novel's key themes are introduced in the opening chapter, most notably Family Loyalty and Difference. Professor Sardie kept Coralie away from all other forms of society, meaning she was incapable of seeing that the way he treated her was unusual and unkind. For this reason, she remained loyal to her father even when he revealed that he expects her to perform as part of the exhibitions in his museum. Everyone involved in the museum has been disfigured in some way (either through an accident or a condition they were born with) and their differences keep them isolated from the rest of society who judge them due to their physical appearance. Coralie is the most isolated of all, because she is not only kept separate from the public but also from the performers at the museum. Coralie is an outcast amongst outcasts.

Discussion Question 1

Why wouldn't the Professor allow Coralie into the museum before her tenth birthday?

Discussion Question 2

How did Coralie feel about her birth defect and the deformities of the other workers at the museum?

Discussion Question 3

Did Coralie consent to become one of the acts?

Vocabulary

anomalies, pinnacle, luminous, formaldehyde, molest, pavilions, milliner, wrought, frigid, strewn



Chapter 2

Summary

In the opening section of Chapter 2 – The Man Who Couldn't Sleep – Eddie Cohen recounts his childhood escape with his father from his home country of Ukraine, where his mother was murdered along with the rest of the people from his village. Eddie and his father survived in the woods after the massacre, eventually making their way to New York where Eddie's father was employed in a series of low paying manual jobs in textile factories. When he was 11 years old, Eddie stole a watch from Harry Block, the son of the factory owner. One day after all of the factory staff had been fired, Eddie saw his father trying to commit suicide. Eddie began working for a phony psychic called Hochman, where Eddie specialized in tracking down missing people. Later, Eddie encountered a photographer called Moses Levy and became his apprentice. Eddie cut off all contact with his father.

In the second section of Chapter 2 – March 1911 – Eddie inherited all of Moses Levy's property and possessions after his death. In the five years after Levy's death Eddie became a press photographer, making a living from photographing disasters and crimes scenes. Eddie had no friends except for his dog Mitts. One night when they were out in the woods together, Mitts ran away. When Eddie chased him he could sense there was someone in the woods watching him, but he didn't see anyone. He spoke with a hermit who lived in the woods.

Eddie was at the scene of the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire, in which 146 garment workers were killed. Eddie took numerous photographs of the disaster and the aftermath. Days later, a man called Samuel Weiss came to ask Eddie to help him find out what had happened to his daughter Hannah, who had gone missing after the Triangle Fire. There were no signs of her body anywhere around the factory. The man told Eddie that Eddie's father had said he would be able to help. Eddie agreed to try.

Analysis

Coralie and Eddie had similar backgrounds in the sense that both characters lost their mothers when they were very young and were raised solely by their fathers. In other ways, Eddie's upbringing – as described in the first section of Chapter 2 – was the complete opposite of Coralie's. Whereas Coralie always lived in the same location and was rarely allowed to leave the museum, Eddie travelled all the way from Ukraine to New York. Whereas Coralie was isolated from everyone around her, forbidden from going to school, interacting with the public, or talking to the performers at the museum, Eddie was part of a large and supportive Jewish community which lived and worked alongside each other, supporting the community at large. Coralie felt a sense of loyalty and obligation to her father, despite the fact that he mistreated and exploited her. Eddie,



in contrast, resented his father and cut off all ties with him, despite his father's attempts to work hard to support his son.

Coralie's character arc showed her progress towards breaking away from her father, whereas Eddie's character arc showed his progress towards reconciling with his father.

Many of Eddie's skills which were established in this chapter will become important later in the narrative, most notably his photography and his ability for tracking down missing persons, both of which will eventually help him to solve the murder of Hannah Weiss.

The second section of Chapter 2 introduced the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire, one of the major historical events around which the events of the novel are entwined. The graphic description of the devastating events of the fire foreshadows the second catastrophic fire at Dreamland on Coney Island which will occur in Chapter 10. The depiction of the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire ties in with the novel's theme of Industrial Relations which explores the poor working conditions that workers like the women at the Triangle Factory and Eddie's father were forced to endure at the turn of the century. The solidarity of the Labor movement contrasts with Eddie's solitude and his desire to cut himself off from his own people and from the rest of the world.

Discussion Question 1

Did Eddie and his father have a good life in America when they first came there from Ukraine?

Discussion Question 2

Why did Eddie steal the watch?

Discussion Question 3

Who was to blame for the fire in the textile factory?

Vocabulary

dybbuks, tenement, orthodox, expeditions, obscene, masquerading, measly, larder, reminiscent, threadbare



Chapter 3

Summary

In the first section of Chapter 3 – The Dreamer from the Dream – Coralie recounted when Raymond Morris, also known as the Wolfman, first arrived at the Museum of Extraordinary Things. Mr. Morris was raised in captivity at his home because his family was ashamed of his appearance. They provided him with everything he needed to be comfortable, including two servants. He thought he was happy until he read a copy of the novel “Jane Eyre” by Charlotte Brontë, in which a madwoman is imprisoned in the attic of a mansion and eventually burns down the house rather than continuing to live in captivity. The story inspired Mr. Morris to escape his home and move to New York where he believed he would find freedom. But people in New York were afraid of his appearance and attacked him, believing he was a monster. He was rescued from police custody by Professor Sardie who employed him as one of the acts at the museum. Mr. Morris fell in love with Maureen the housekeeper, but when Professor Sardie found out about their affair he fired Mr. Morris who was then forced to leave Coney Island.

One night, Professor Sardie accidentally left the door to the basement unlocked and Coralie took the opportunity to sneak inside. She read her father’s handbook and discovered that he had been accused of severely mistreating one of his performers when he was a magician in France. She discovered that her father had travelled to America alone, not with her mother, as he had always told her had happened.

In the second section of Chapter 3 – March 1911 – Professor Sardie’s plan to drum up publicity for the museum was going badly. He had failed to find a creature he could claim was a sea monster and all of the newspapers were focused on the aftermath of the Triangle Fire. A neighboring attraction on Coney Island, called Dreamland, was expanding and threatened to take away business from the museum. Mr. Morris was going to appear as one of the acts at Dreamland when it reopened after the renovations.

Professor Sardie sent Coralie for another swim in the Hudson, so she could pretend to be a sea monster. The currents were stronger than usual and Coralie became tangled with debris in the water. She realized there was another woman caught in the debris. She dragged the woman onto the shore but she was already dead. When Coralie found her father she told him about the dead girl and the Professor, the liveryman, and Coralie returned to the riverside to take the drowned girl’s body back to the museum. When they returned to the body, Coralie noticed that someone had crossed her arms over her chest and had made a pillow for her head.



Analysis

In the first section of Chapter 3, the stories of Mr. Morris and Jane Eyre had a profound effect on Coralie because of the way each of their tales reflected Coralie's own existence. In Jane Eyre the character Mr. Rochester married a woman who goes mad and decided to keep her locked in the attic of his home. In desperation at her circumstances and the cruelty of her treatment, Mrs. Rochester burned down the house, killing herself and permanently disfiguring Mr. Rochester. The story of Mr. and Mrs. Rochester foreshadows the fate of Professor Sardie. Because Mr. Rochester mistreated a member of his family, she eventually turned against him leading to his house burning down and him being permanently disfigured. Likewise, Professor Sardie's mistreatment of Coralie eventually led to his death and the destruction of the Museum of Extraordinary Things in a fire.

Mr. Morris's story reflected Coralie's life back to her because when he was growing up he, like Coralie, had no sense of how restricted his life was. Because he had never known anything else, he couldn't see the cruelty and the lack of experience and opportunity that was being forced upon him. This changed when he read about Mrs. Rochester being imprisoned in an attic, which inspired him to escape. Coralie's contact with Mr. Morris made her question her own upbringing and whether there might be more to life than what she had been exposed to at the museum.

When Coralie snuck into her father's basement it began the destruction of their relationship. The abuse of the performer in the Professor's magic show in Paris foreshadows the sexual abuse that Coralie will be subjected to in Chapter 5. When Coralie discovered that the Professor lied to her about travelling to America with Coralie's mother, it was the first hint in the narrative that he was not really Coralie's father.

In the second section of Chapter 3, Eddie and Coralie's stories started to intertwine for the first time when Coralie discovered a dead body floating in the river which matched the description Eddie was given of Hannah Weiss. The reader now knows that if Eddie is successful at tracking down Hannah, it will bring him into contact with Coralie.

Although the liveryman is involved in lots of unpleasant and illegal activity, his attitude towards Coralie and his kindness and compassion for her mark him out as a sympathetic character. He warned Coralie not to swim in such a rough current and showed more concern for her safety than her own father did. Coralie's conversation with the liveryman before her swim planted important information for later in the novel: the liveryman was very fond of birds, which was established in this chapter, and will be used as the information which allowed Eddie to identify the liveryman as one of the men who took the body away from the riverside.



Discussion Question 1

What role does Mr. Morris play in the novel? In what ways is his character similar to Coralie? In what ways are they different?

Discussion Question 2

Why did Coralie want to find out what her father kept in the basement?

Discussion Question 3

What are the differences between Dreamland and the Museum of Extraordinary Things?

Vocabulary

monarch, pleated, manservant, enriched, abundant, nuisance, forays, unseemly, distaste, jostled



Chapter 4

Summary

In the first section of Chapter 4 – The Man Who Felt No Pain – Eddie recounted how he had planned to sell the watch he stole from Harry Block to pay for Moses Levy's funeral, but the watch broke on the very same day. When he went to have it repaired, the watchmaker guessed that it was stolen.

Eddie photographed rallies for the labor movement and was confronted by a childhood friend, Isaac Rosenfeld, who criticized Eddie for abandoning his father, his religion, and his people. Isaac spat at Eddie.

Eddie started trying to track down Harry Block and spent many nights observing the Block family's brownstone mansion from across the street. One night, Eddie snuck into a party being held at the mansion by claiming to be an official photographer. He was dismayed by the show of wealth inside, which he photographed. As Eddie was leaving, Harry stopped him to ask for his name. Eddie didn't tell him his name, but he took the watch out of his pocket to check the time and Harry recognized it as his.

In the second section of Chapter 4 – April 1911 – Eddie attended many of the funerals of women and girls who had been killed in the Triangle Fire, looking for clues about the whereabouts of Hannah Weiss. He thought he saw her amongst a group of mourners but it turned out to be her sister, Ella, who looked just like Hannah. Eddie went to visit his old boss Hochman to ask for his help locating Hannah. Later, Ella told Eddie that she was sure her sister was dead.

One night, Eddie realized he was being followed and was attacked by an unknown man. Eddie looked through the photographs from the party at the Block mansion and saw that the man who attacked him worked for Harry Block.

Analysis

In the first section of Chapter 4, Eddie was continually haunted by his roots and his old life despite his attempts to leave the past behind him. Over and over again, Eddie's new life kept dragging him back to his old life. The watch which Eddie stole from Harry Block is the symbol of Eddie's childhood rebellion against his father. When he tried to sell the watch to pay for the funeral of Moses Levy (who functions as a surrogate father for Eddie), the watch broke. This prevented Eddie from parting with this symbol of the childhood betrayal of his real father, whilst mourning the death of his surrogate father.

When Eddie tried to follow in the footsteps of his surrogate father Moses Levy by becoming a photographer, he still could not escape his past: he was sent to photograph labor rallies where the men he grew up with had banded together in solidarity to improve working conditions for themselves and others. Eddie's childhood friend Isaac



Rosenfeld was disgusted with Eddie for abandoning his people and his roots and spat at him.

Instead of visiting his own father, who had recommended that Samuel Weiss should contact Eddie for help finding Hannah, Eddie went to visit another of his surrogate father figures: Hochman. Eddie didn't find what he was looking for in life through Hochman or Moses Levy because neither man can be a substitute for Eddie's real father.

Eddie's obsession with the Block family, who owned the factory in which Eddie and his father worked when Eddie was just a boy, symbolizes Eddie's inability to move on from the unresolved issues of his past. Although his obsession with Harry Block is part of the emotional subtext of the story, it also provides Eddie with important clues which will eventually allow him to solve the murder of Hannah Weiss.

The attack on Eddie in the alleyway was an important moment novel because it ultimately led to the Block family being implicated in Hannah's murder.

Discussion Question 1

Why did Eddie believe he will never be as good a photographer as Moses Levy?

Discussion Question 2

Why was Isaac Rosenfeld angry with Eddie?

Discussion Question 3

What motivated Eddie to watch the Block family so closely?

Vocabulary

bellows, exquisite, oversized, mentor, pneumonia, apprentice, mantle, ambrotype, asters, ravaging



Chapter 5

Summary

In the first section of Chapter 5 – The Original Liar – Coralie began to disobey her father's instructions in small, private ways, but she was too scared to go back into the basement even when she managed to steal her father's keys. She began to sneak out of her bedroom and wander around Dreamland in the evenings. The museum continued to struggle in the shade of the bigger more successful attraction. Some days they had fewer than ten customers, other days none at all. To make more money, Professor Sardie forced Coralie to perform nude shows in her mermaid tank after hours for groups of drunken men. The Professor hatched his plan to create a legend about a sea monster in the Hudson and Coralie began her nighttime swims, culminating in the discovery of the dead body. When her father took the dead girl back to the museum, Coralie knew that she would have to break free and disobey him.

In the second section of Chapter 5 – April 1911 – the Professor became increasingly preoccupied with his latest project in the basement. Coralie asked if there was anything else they could do for extra money other than the nighttime shows she was forced to perform in her tank. The Professor threatened that there were worse things that could happen. Coralie continued to visit Dreamland where she met a lion trainer called Bonavita who explained that his relationship with his lion was built on trust and compassion and that mistreating an animal meant that the animal would violently turn against its owner one day. Coralie went into the cage with the lion and it made her feel braver.

Coralie went back into the basement of the museum and discovered that the Professor was turning the body of the dead girl from the river into something he could claim was a sea monster. Coralie stole the dead girl's belongings and recovered her blue coat from a fire outside which the Professor had lit to try to destroy the evidence. Coralie stole her father's keys and had copies of them made by a locksmith.

Analysis

Chapter 5 is an important turning point in the novel because it marks the beginning of Coralie's rebellion against her father and the increase of her yearning for contact with the outside world. Her rebellion is symbolized by Dreamland. Dreamland is the bane of the Professor's life and threatens to bankrupt him and his museum. By extension, the Dreamland resort could be seen to be a problem in Coralie's life because it is the financial struggles of the Museum of Extraordinary Things caused by Dreamland which motivates the Professor to force Coralie to perform nude shows in her tank. Instead, Dreamland actually served as a place of sanctuary and hope for Coralie as it allowed her an escape from her usual unpleasant existence. However, Dreamland is still a false sanctuary for Coralie as she remained trapped in the world of freak shows and human



beings who are exploited and mistreated because of their differences and deformities. Coralie will have to leave the world of Coney Island altogether before she can truly escape the influence of her father and that won't happen until both the Museum of Extraordinary things and Dreamland have been destroyed.

Coralie's conversation with Bonavita the lion tamer foreshadowed Coralie's betrayal of the Professor. Bonavita explained that animals always attack their trainers if they have been mistreated by them. An animal can seem to be tamed and obedient for years and years but if it has been hurt and abused, one day it will turn against its owner. This is why Bonavita was not scared of his lion, because he had always treated him well. As the nude shows continued and Coralie's abuse worsened, it became clear that she too will eventually turn against her captor. The only question was when.

When Coralie discovered the fate of the dead girl she found in the river it had an effect on her that none of her own abuse had done so far. She was more disgusted by the mistreatment of this girl who she never knew than she was about her own sexual exploitation and abuse. Coralie's permanent psychological shift away from obedience towards her father is symbolized when she had her own set of keys made for the Professor's basement.

Discussion Question 1

Why did Coralie like to visit Dreamland?

Discussion Question 2

What did Coralie learn from reading Jane Eyre?

Discussion Question 3

Did Coralie want to swim in the Hudson?

Vocabulary

infractions, transgressions, dutiful, flushed, stammered, aperitifs, clientele, papier-mâché, deviant, awe



Chapter 6

Summary

In the first section of Chapter 6 – The Birdman – Eddie recalled his childhood escape from Ukraine with his father and their early years together in New York. Eddie felt that they had abandoned his mother when they left Ukraine, even though she was dead.

Eddie tracked down a friend of the missing girl, Hannah Weiss, who is identified only as “R”. R told Eddie that before she died Hannah had been attending labor meetings and had fallen in love.

In the second section of Chapter 6 – May 1911 – Eddie went fishing in his usual spot along the banks of the Hudson River. He discovered a shack belonging to the hermit he spoke with in Chapter 2. He discovered that the hermit kept a wolf tied up outside his shack. The hermit revealed that he saw two women coming out of the Hudson. One of them looked like a mermaid, but then he saw that she had two legs. The other one was dead. The hermit confirmed that the dead girl looked like Eddie’s photograph of Hannah Weiss. The hermit asked for a favor in return for the information and made Eddie agree that when the hermit died, he would come back to the woods to set his wolf free and burn down his shack. The hermit told Eddie that when he found the dead girl her lips had been sown shut with blue thread. He thought that was a horrible way to leave someone so he had cut the thread, folded her arms over her chest, and laid her head on a pillow of moss. The hermit told Eddie that Eddie had almost met the mermaid one night in the woods when his dog had chased after her, but that Eddie hadn’t seen her. The hermit told Eddie that he had seen one of the men who had taken the dead girl’s body feeding the blackbirds before they left. Eddie realized he was talking about the liveryman who lived in the stables beneath Eddie.

Eddie confronted the liveryman and he confessed that he had helped the Professor smuggle the body back to Coney Island. The liveryman drove Eddie to the Museum of Extraordinary things where Eddie began to take photographs of the employees. He saw Coralie and fell in love with her at first sight. Coralie told him that she’d seen him once before with his dog in the woods. Eddie told Coralie that he knew Hannah Weiss’s body was in the museum and Coralie agreed to help him by bringing him Hannah’s belongings. Before she had a chance to do so, Professor Sardie discovered Eddie on his property.

Analysis

In the first section of Chapter 6, Eddie ironically criticized his father for being stuck in the past and unable to move on from his grief about Eddie’s mother’s death. Despite the fact he resented his father for this behavior, being unable to escape the grief of his own past is Eddie’s greatest flaw.



Beck, the hermit in the woods, represents the novel's theme of the Wilderness versus Civilization. New York had been changing around the hermit, from a place of forests and wild animals to an urban environment of factories, sidewalks, and roads. Beck is a man out of time, stuck in a rural and agricultural past that was quickly disappearing around him. This struggle is symbolized by the wolf which Beck kept tied to his shack in the woods: not quite wild, not quite tame, there is no place in society where the wolf can feel at ease.

Although the hermit has been presented earlier in the novel as a potential danger to Eddie's safety, in this chapter he became a sympathetic character when it was revealed that he moved the dead girl's body into a more respectful position and cut the blue thread from her mouth as a sign of respect and sympathy.

When the hermit revealed that the liveryman was involved in moving Hannah's body, it builds huge suspense for the rest of the novel. So far the novel's two protagonists, Coralie and Eddie, have been kept entirely apart except for one brief encounter in the woods where Coralie saw Eddie but he did not see her. The first person narrations reveal that each character has felt haunted by the other, dreaming of meeting, ever since this first encounter. Once Eddie tracks down the liveryman, a real meeting can finally occur, forever altering the path of each character's life.

Although at this stage Eddie didn't have any idea about who Coralie was, or know anything about her deformity, this chapter establishes that he will be accepting of her difference. Unlike other members of the public who gawp at the performers from the museum and, in the case of Mr. Morris, physically attack them, Eddie was fascinated by the beauty of the performers. Eddie's tenderness towards Maureen, Coralie's only friend, showed that Coralie had not been mistaken in having feelings for him.

The chapter ended on a cliffhanger when the Professor discovered Eddie on the property. It is clear to the reader that the Professor will disapprove of Coralie talking to a member of the public and that this will only be heightened by the person being an attractive young man. The structure of the novel means that the following section jumps back to an earlier time, building suspense for when the narrative will return to this point and the reader can discover what is to become of Eddie.

Discussion Question 1

Why did Eddie and his father have to leave Ukraine?

Discussion Question 2

How did Beck the hermit feel about Eddie?



Discussion Question 3

Why did the liveryman continue to work for Professor Sardie?

Vocabulary

tubular, predators, prey, realist, deplorable, tannic, rumble, tuberculosis, contempt, timidity



Chapter 7

Summary

In the first section of Chapter 7 – The Wolf’s House – Coralie wanted to tell Maureen about the degrading performances she’d been required to do in her tank, but she knew that telling her would bring Maureen too much pain. Coralie met Mr. Morris and Maureen on their way to attend the wedding of one of the other museum employees. Coralie had not been invited because her father would have disapproved of the wedding. Coralie snuck into the wedding and watched without revealing she was there, mortified that she had been left out of the celebrations because of her father.

In the second section of Chapter 7 – May 1911 – the police arrived at the museum and removed Eddie from the grounds before severely beating him. His camera was thrown into the bushes at the museum: Coralie retrieved it and hid it beneath the porch.

Coralie told the liveryman she knew it was him who had brought Eddie to the museum and demanded that he take her to see Eddie. When Coralie arrived at Eddie’s home he was badly injured from the assault by the policeman. She gave him back his camera and Hannah Weiss’s possessions, including her gold locket and her blue coat. Coralie took off her gloves and revealed her webbed hands. The liveryman took Coralie back to the museum and she left Eddie with her spare set of keys for the basement.

Analysis

In Chapter 7, Coralie became more and more isolated. The nude performances in the tank became an even greater burden for Coralie because she felt too ashamed to tell anyone about what had been happening. She didn’t reach out for help from Maureen because she feared doing so would cause Maureen suffering. Professor Sardie’s abuse and manipulation has succeeded in making Coralie feel as if she has no choice and no one to turn to for help.

When Coralie discovered that she has not been invited to the wedding of Malia the Butterfly Girl it revealed to her for the first time how absolute her isolation had become. Although Coralie had always been kept separate from the rest of society by her father, who refused to allow her to attend school or speak to anyone in Brooklyn, Coralie had always felt a kinship with the other performers and employees at the museum, especially Maureen and Mr. Morris. When Coralie discovered that Maureen and Mr. Morris had been lying to her, it was a huge blow. They explained to her that the other performers didn’t want to tell her about the wedding because they feared how the Professor would respond. This incident taught Coralie that she will not be able to form any open, honest, close relationships until she breaks free from the Professor’s dominance.



In the second section of Chapter 7, Coralie and Eddie were finally united and able to declare their love for each other. However, this creates a sense of foreboding as it implies that the lovers will be separated again before the novel comes to its conclusion.

Discussion Question 1

Why didn't Coralie tell Maureen the truth about the performances in the tank?

Discussion Question 2

Why wasn't Coralie invited to Malia's wedding?

Discussion Question 3

Why did Eddie and Coralie care about each other?

Vocabulary

brutal, comprehended, repent, aspect, tarry, naive, damask, meticulous, tinctures, decanter

Chapter 8

Summary

In the first section of Chapter 8 – The Blue Thread – Eddie couldn't stop thinking about Coralie. He was unable to take photographs while he waited for his broken hand to heal after the police assault. Eddie visited the hermit again who told him that he'd moved into his shack in the woods because he was heartbroken after his wife died. The next day, Eddie returned to see the hermit and discovered he had been murdered. His mouth had been sewn shut, just as had happened to Hannah Weiss. Eddie buried the hermit before fulfilling his wishes by releasing the wolf and burning down the shack. The wolf did not want to return to the wild and followed Eddie home.

In the second section of Chapter 8 – May 1911 – Eddie and the liveryman returned to the Museum of Extraordinary Things to recover the body of Hannah Weiss. They carried the box containing the body out of the basement. They took the box to an undertaker's before Eddie and the liveryman parted ways.

Eddie attended the funeral of Hannah Weiss where he met his childhood friend Isaac Rosenfeld, who had once spat at Eddie for trying to escape his past. Isaac thanked Eddie for what he'd done for the Weiss family. When Eddie left the funeral, a young man started following him. It turned out to be Hannah's boyfriend, who told Eddie that Hannah had been meeting with a representative of the factory owners the morning she disappeared.

Eddie tried to discover who had murdered Hannah by studying her possessions, which included two black buttons. Looking through the photographs of the night he photographed the party at the Block family mansion, Eddie noticed that the man who had beaten him up in the alleyway had two buttons missing from his coat.

Eddie stood watching the Block mansion from across the street, where he met Harry's sister Juliet and told her that he thought that a man who worked for Harry was responsible for Hannah's murder. Juliet agreed to help him catch the employee, Frank Herbert, as long as Eddie promised to leave Harry out of it.

Ella dressed in her sister Hannah's clothes and tricked Frank Herbert into confessing in front of numerous witnesses that he had killed Hannah and the hermit.

Analysis

The hermit represents the wild and rural past of New York City and his death in Chapter 8 symbolized the forward march of time and urbanization which will eventually lead to the entirely urban New York that exists today. Like Beck the hermit, the wolf was trapped between two worlds: neither civilized enough to join polite society nor wild enough to exist alone in the wilderness with no human connections. The wolf followed



Eddie back to the city, but it will not be able to survive the destruction of the old New York or thrive in a world meant for domesticated animals.

The hermit's life serves as a cautionary tale for Eddie about the dangers of becoming too isolated and detached from society. However, there are positive lessons for Eddie to learn from Beck as well. Although Beck's grief over his wife's death drove him into solitude, he told Eddie his love for her was still worthwhile, tacitly encouraging Eddie not to regret his love for Coralie. Although there is a sadness attached to the end of the rural/agricultural past of New York, the death of Beck's wife reminds the reader of the medical progress and improved life expectancy that also came along as part of the massive social changes of the early twentieth century.

By helping solve the mystery of the murder of Hannah Weiss, Eddie was able to make amends with his community and reconnect with his roots, even if this was not his conscious aim when he decided to become involved. Eddie's re-acceptance into the Jewish community is symbolized by his childhood friend Isaac Rosenfeld. Isaac was the character who most harshly criticized Eddie for abandoning his community when he spat at Eddie during a labor rally that Eddie had been sent to photograph. When Isaac saw the great lengths Eddie had gone to in order to help the Weiss family, he saw that Eddie had changed and welcomed him back into the fold as one of their own.

The scene in which Frank Herbert was tricked into confessing to murder harks back to Chapter 3, in which Mr. Morris read the Edgar Allan Poe story "The Tell-Tale Heart" to Coralie and Maureen. In the story, a murderer is haunted by his guilt and it eventually tricks him into confessing his crimes when he would otherwise have gotten away with it.

Discussion Question 1

Why did Beck choose to live alone?

Discussion Question 2

Why did the wolf follow Eddie back to the city?

Discussion Question 3

In what ways are Eddie and the liveryman similar characters? In what ways are they different?

Vocabulary

remorse, burdens, hardships, capacity, yearned, churlish, longings, intoxication, befallen, misshapen



Chapter 9

Summary

In the first section of Chapter 9 – The Girl Who Could Fly – Coralie was locked in her room when Professor Sardie discovered that the body had been stolen from his basement. The Professor got Coralie to confess that she had travelled to Manhattan without his permission and accused her of no longer being a virgin, which was untrue. He brought a man who claimed to be a doctor to examine Coralie and decide whether or not she was still a virgin. The doctor had attended some of Coralie's nighttime performances in the tanks and threatened to rape her and tell her father that she had already lost her virginity before he had examined her. Coralie attacked the man with a scalpel and forced him to write a note to her father declaring that she was a virgin.

In the second section of Chapter 9 – May 1911 – Coralie confessed everything to Maureen about the night viewings in the tank and the doctor her father had sent to examine her.

The museum remained closed in the Spring because Professor Sardie had failed to reveal the sea monster from the Hudson. The Professor fired all of the performers as well as Maureen. As Maureen prepared to leave the museum, Coralie started packing her things in an attempt to leave with her but the Professor caught her and locked her in the basement. Maureen got away. Eddie came to the museum to get Coralie but the Professor gave him a forged note in which Coralie told Eddie to forget about her. While reading the Professor's notebooks in the basement, Coralie discovered that she was not really his daughter and that she had been found by the Professor after she had been abandoned at birth.

Analysis

In Chapter 9, Coralie's sexual abuse became more severe and the full implications of the danger she was being exposed to by her father became apparent. However, she had built up more inner resistance since making the spare set of keys and helping Eddie and the liveryman to steal the body from the basement. Her reserves of courage, which began to grow after her encounter with the lion tamer, are essential in the later stages in the novel in which the threat of physical harm becomes greater and greater.

When Coralie confessed to Maureen about the nighttime performances in the tank she admitted that she feared her past will mean that no man can ever love her. Maureen, as another character who has been violently harmed by the men in her life, served as an example to Coralie that this wasn't true because she herself had found love with Mr. Morris. The love between Maureen and Mr. Morris served as a beacon of hope for Coralie by suggesting that she could one day escape her abusive upbringing.



When Professor Sardie managed to send Eddie away without letting him see Coralie, it was a demonstration of how complete his control was over Coralie's life. Because Coralie never attended school under the Professor's orders, she was unable to write for herself. The Professor took control of her self-expression when he wrote for her, forging a note lying to Eddie. When Coralie discovered that the Professor was not really her father, it was the final act of betrayal. Coralie had remained loyal to this man despite years of abuse, before discovering that they were not even related and that he had raised her with the specific intent of turning her into a curiosity for his museum.

Discussion Question 1

Why did Coralie lay down beside the tortoise after she had been attacked by the doctor?

Discussion Question 2

Why did Professor Sardie pretend that Coralie was his daughter?

Discussion Question 3

Why did Eddie believe the Professor when he told him that Coralie wasn't there?

Vocabulary

deceit, urgency, privy, ascertain, immensely, wretched, scalpel, degradation, inquisitor, sturgeon



Chapter 10 and The World Begins Again

Summary

In the first section of Chapter 10 – The Rules of Love – Hochman explained to Eddie that he had been mistaken to think that his father had tried to commit suicide the day all the workers were fired from the factory. His father hadn't thrown himself into the river: he was pushed in by anti-union men. Eddie felt guilty about all the misplaced hatred he had directed towards his father over the years. The next day he went to his father's apartment but couldn't bring himself to knock on the door. Instead he pushed an envelope containing all of his savings under the door and left.

Eddie went back to the Block family mansion where he discovered that Juliet had run away because her family had been planning to commit her into a mental asylum because of her feminist views. He went into the house and confronted Harry Block about his involvement with the murder of Hannah Weiss. Eddie gave Harry the watch he had stolen from him when both of them were eleven years old.

In the second section of Chapter 10 – May 1911 – Eddie struggled with the heartbreak of believing that Coralie didn't love him. Mr. Morris tracked down Eddie and told him the truth and the two men went to Coney Island to rescue Coralie, along with Eddie's two dogs Mitts and the wolf he had named North. They expected to meet Maureen when they arrived, but she was nowhere to be seen.

A huge fire broke out at the Dreamland resort, destroying everything in its path and killing the animals on display there. The fire began to spread towards the Museum of Extraordinary Things. Smoke began to fill the museum and Eddie and Mr. Morris freed Coralie from the basement. Coralie refused to leave the building until she'd freed all the animals which had been held captive there. Eddie helped her.

They noticed that Maureen was being held hostage on the roof of the museum by Professor Sardie, who had insisted she help him try to prevent the museum from burning down. Mr. Morris rescued Maureen and locked the window so that Professor Sardie could not get back inside. Mr. Morris and Maureen left Eddie and Coralie at the museum. The Professor was confronted by the wolf on the roof. As he tried to escape, he fell to his death.

To escape the fire, Coralie took Eddie and Mitts inside the museum where they climbed into Coralie's tank and stayed underwater using the breathing tube until the fire burned out.

Later, Eddie thought he saw a trout he'd once caught in the river. He went into the water after it and when he turned around he saw his father on the shoreline waiting for him.

In the final section – The World Begins Again – Coralie writes a letter to Maureen about her new life being married to Eddie and living in a valley by the Hudson. Coralie tells



Maureen that she suspects that Maureen is her mother and that it had been Professor Sardie who had disfigured Maureen in a jealous rage. Coralie thanks Maureen for taking care of her for so many years. Coralie continues to swim in the Hudson.

Analysis

At the end of Chapter 9, Coralie discovered that she had been mistaken and that her father was not really her father, just a lying manipulative abuser who had exploited her for her entire life. At the start of Chapter 10, Eddie also discovered that he had been wrong about his father and that he was not the man Eddie thought he was. But rather than discovering something harrowing or unpleasant about his father, Eddie discovered that his father was not guilty of all the acts that Eddie had assumed: being consumed by grief, trying to commit suicide and leaving Eddie all alone, refusing to fight for a better life. This revelation was just as hard for Eddie as the revelation about the Professor was for Coralie, perhaps even harder, because Eddie knew that he was in the wrong. His behavior towards, and resentment of, his father over the previous years had been completely unjustified.

Juliet Block's character reflects a growing interest in feminism at the turn of the century as well as the dire consequences facing women who were outspoken and refused to fit in. Juliet was politically active with a social conscience that made her sympathize with the workers in the factories that her brother helped to oppress and exploit. Because of her refusal to tow the family line, Juliet's relatives planned to have her committed to an insane asylum. This reflects the novel's theme of Difference. Although Juliet has no physical disfigurement which makes her unusual in the same way as the performers at the Museum of Extraordinary Things, she has a personality which is so different from the expected norms for women at the time that she was treated as an outcast and a freak. The family intended to imprison her as an embarrassment because of her feminism, just as Mr. Morris's family had hidden him behind closed doors because he looked like a wolf.

Like the death of the hermit, the destruction of Dreamland symbolizes the end of an era in New York. Unlike the rural, simpler past that the hermit represented, Dreamland and the other attractions on Coney Island represented the cruelty and lack of compassion of the past through the mistreatment of the freak show performers. The wolf and Professor Sardie symbolize these twin sides of the past: the simpler wilder times represented by the wolf and the crueler darker times represented by the Professor. Both sides are literally destroyed by the fire and figuratively destroyed by the social and industrial progress of New York City in the early twentieth century.

The fire further linked Coralie with the character of Mrs. Rochester from *Jane Eyre*. Like Mrs. Rochester, Coralie could not escape from her upbringing until all the structures of her oppression on Coney Island were burned to the ground.

Discovering that the Professor wasn't really her father and that she was just one of his exhibits gave Coralie an even greater sense of connection to the other creatures that



had been held captive in the museum for so long. This sense of belonging motivated Coralie to help all the birds and animals escape from captivity before she escaped herself.

Coralie's tank and her training as a swimmer have been the symbols of the Professor's abuse and control. But by the end of the novel, they have become symbols of Coralie's strength. Although the swimming and the performances in the tank had been designed by the Professor as a way of exploiting Coralie, through her bond with the water she was able to discover her inner strength, saving her own life, as well as Eddie and Mitts in the process.

When Coralie continues to swim in the Hudson during her new life with Eddie it shows that she has taken full control of her life. She no longer swims on command or because of manipulation or abuse. She swims for herself.

Discussion Question 1

Did Hochman have a positive or negative influence on Eddie's life?

Discussion Question 2

Why did Coralie release the animals and birds from the museum?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Coralie think that Maureen is her mother?

Vocabulary

luncheon, psychic, divined, henchmen, tempered, preside, spirited, throngs, beseechingly, insinuating



Characters

Coralie Sardie

Coralie Sardie is one of the two central characters/protagonists in the novel. Born and raised at the Museum of Extraordinary Things (or so she is led to believe) Coralie had very little contact with the outside world when she was growing up because her father didn't allow her to attend school or talk to any strangers she met on the streets of Brooklyn. Before her tenth birthday, Coralie was not allowed to interact with any of the workers at the museum except for the housekeeper Maureen. Coralie's sheltered upbringing makes her incapable of recognizing or escaping the abuse and manipulation she suffers at the hands of her father, Professor Sardie. Coralie's emotional journey in the novel charts her growing levels of disobedience and her eventual escape from the Museum of Extraordinary Things and the influence of her father.

Coralie's life started to change when she encountered a young man in the woods by the banks of the Hudson River, who the reader will later discover was Eddie Cohen. Eddie is the only person Coralie has ever encountered who has no connection to her father's museum and the allure of the outside world represented by Eddie has a profound effect on Coralie, even though it won't be until much later in the novel when they actually meet.

The Museum of Extraordinary Things is the only world that Coralie knows, so when her father requires her to start performing as The Human Mermaid on her tenth birthday she has no sense that there is anything unusual or exploitative in the way she is being treated. Coralie's doubts about her father's moral character begin to surface not because of her own mistreatment, but because of the mistreatment of other workers at the museum, notably the firing of Mr. Morris. After Coralie turns 18, she is required to perform nude shows in her mermaid tank for groups of drunken men. Even with her sheltered upbringing, Coralie can feel how wrong it is that she is subjected to such treatment. The increasing shame and degradation that Coralie feels whilst doing this work for her father helps motivate Coralie to break free from his influence.

Coralie's growth as a character is symbolized by her relationship to water. The abusive upbringing which Coralie endured involved her father training her to endure extreme conditions underwater. The Professor exploits Coralie's underwater abilities to make money for his museum, in increasingly invasive and upsetting ways. However Coralie's relationship with water also brings about her salvation: it is her swims in the Hudson which first bring her into contact with Eddie and her experiences in the tank which allow her to save her own and Eddie's lives. The marital bliss between Coralie and Eddie at the novel's close is symbolized by Coralie swimming in the Hudson of her own free will while Eddie stays in a boat nearby.



Eddie (Ezekiel) Cohen

Eddie Cohen (born Ezekiel Cohen) is one of the novel's two central characters/protagonists. Eddie was born in Ukraine but was forced to leave his home country with his father Joseph when his village was attacked and most of the people there, including Eddie's mother, were murdered. Eddie and his father eventually made their way to New York where Joseph was employed in a series of low-paying and physically exhausting manual labor jobs. Eddie believed he saw his father try to commit suicide at the docks one day after all of the factory workers had been fired. This belief fueled Eddie to disobey his father and start working for criminals, eventually leaving his entire community and history behind him and changing his name from Ezekiel to Eddie in order to hide his Jewish roots.

Eddie's life after parting ways with his biological father involved him pursuing relationships with a series of surrogate fathers. The first surrogate father is Hochman, a man who claims to be a psychic capable of finding missing people. Hochman teaches Eddie a valuable skill by training him in the ability to hunt down missing people. This skill will eventually allow Eddie to reintegrate with his community when he tracks down the murderer of Hannah Weiss. Eddie's next surrogate father is the photographer Moses Levy who taught Eddie everything he knew about photography and left his equipment, business, and home to Eddie when he died. Eddie's photographs are often vital clues in the search for Hannah Weiss, meaning that his second surrogate father also assists Eddie on his path to reintegrate with his people. Eddie's third surrogate father is Beck, the hermit, who also provides Eddie with information which will help him find out what happened to Hannah Weiss. But Beck has an arguably even more profound effect on Eddie by demonstrating the dangers of allowing oneself to become cut off from society. When Beck tells Eddie about his grief over his wife's death before concluding that he doesn't regret their relationship even though it caused him so much pain, it encourages Eddie to stop isolating himself and to take a risk by having a relationship with Coralie.

The path of Eddie's character in the novel is the opposite of Coralie's path. Whereas Coralie cannot break free and overcome her problems until she escapes her father, Eddie cannot become whole again until he reconciles with his father. When Eddie discovers that his father didn't try to commit suicide, as Eddie had always believed, Eddie discovered that he was the one who had been in the wrong all along. Despite this, Eddie's father never lost faith in him, recommending his services to Samuel Weiss. When Eddie reunites with his father at the river banks, his character's journey has come to an end.

Maureen

Maureen is the housekeeper at the Museum of Extraordinary Things. Maureen's face and body is covered in scars as the result of an attack by a jealous man who threw sulfuric acid on her. Later in the novel, it is implied that it was the Professor himself who



was responsible for Maureen's disfigurement. Her character plays the role of surrogate mother to Coralie, who lost her real mother when she was too young to remember. In the final section of the novel, Coralie reveals that she suspects Maureen is her biological mother.

Maureen fears that no man will ever love her because of what has been done to her face, but she finds love again with Mr. Morris, the wolfman, when he comes to work at the museum. Their relationship is a symbol of hope for Coralie that she too can form loving relationships despite her birth defect and abusive past.

Professor Sardie

Professor Sardie is described as Coralie's father for the majority of the novel but it is revealed in Chapter 10 that he is no biological relation to Coralie and that he found her abandoned outside of his home when she was a baby. The Professor was forced to flee from his home country of France to escape accusations of the criminal abuse and neglect of one of the performers in his magic shows.

The Professor's only interest in life is his museum and he is willing to do anything to protect it. He especially fears the exhibits being destroyed in a fire. His mistreatment of others and his lack of empathy bring about his downfall. No one who worked or lived at the museum feels any loyalty towards the Professor because he treated them so badly. He is especially unkind to Mr. Morris, continually reminding him that Mr. Morris would be nothing without the Professor's help. Because of his abusive behavior, there is no one willing to help him save the museum from the fire. The Professor's desperate attempts to save his museum ultimately kill him.

Joseph Cohen

Joseph Cohen is Eddie's father. His character doesn't appear directly in the novel on many occasions but his presence (or lack thereof) infuses all of the chapters devoted to Eddie. Joseph was a member of the labor movement and was attacked by anti-labor thugs one day and thrown into the river by the docks. A young Eddie misinterpreted this incident as his father trying to commit suicide, a misunderstanding which kept father and son apart for many years. Despite Eddie's turn towards criminality, his refusal to acknowledge his Jewish roots, and his complete abandonment of his father, Joseph still has faith enough in Eddie to tell Samuel Weiss that he will be able to track down his daughter. Joseph's love for Eddie endures even during the many years that Eddie refused all contact with him.

Moses Levy

Moses Levy is a photographer who takes Eddie on as an apprentice, eventually bequeathing his equipment, studio, and business to Eddie when he died. Levy was a respected artist in his home country but ended up taking photographs of weddings to



make a living in New York. Although Eddie finds this offensive, Levy said that weddings were joyful occasions and that he felt honored to be part of recording such happiness. Levy's involvement in Eddie's life rescued him from the life of underworld crime which he was exposed to while working for Hochman.

Monk Eastman the Liveryman (aka Edward Osterman)

Monk Eastman/Edward Osterman, known throughout the novel as the liveryman, is an ex-con and an opium addict. The liveryman's desire to avoid going back to jail, as well as his addiction to opium, keeps him under Professor Sardie's control and leads him to become involved in things which he finds morally repugnant. The liveryman is opposed to eating animals and has a very close relationship with the horses in the stable near Eddie's home. The liveryman has a love of birds and it is this character detail that allows Eddie to track him down and discover the whereabouts of Hannah Weiss. Although the liveryman has done a lot of bad things in the past, his actions in the novel are all warmhearted and kind. He is one of the only characters who looks out for Coralie's wellbeing by trying to convince her not to swim in the Hudson when the current was especially strong. The author based this character on a real life gangster called Monk Eastman.

Hochman

Hochman is a fraudulent psychic who claims to be able to find missing people with the power of his mind but who actually employs lots of young boys to scour the city looking for clues which will uncover the missing person's whereabouts. He serves as a surrogate father figure for Eddie and later helps Eddie reunite with his real father by telling Eddie the truth about his father's supposed suicide attempt. The author based this character on a real person: a Jewish mystic called Abraham Hochman.

Samuel, Hannah, and Ella Weis

The Weiss family serves the function of a catalyst in Eddie's life. Once he becomes involved in their family's tragedy it pulls him towards meeting Coralie and reconnecting with his own family. Samuel hires Eddie to track down his daughter, Hannah, who went missing after the Triangle Factory Fire, which her younger sister Ella managed to escape from. The two sisters looked so alike that Ella was able to pretend to be Hannah, entrapping Frank Herbert into confessing to her murder. Samuel has complete faith that Eddie will find out what happened to Hannah, but Ella has her doubts claiming that her sister came to her in a dream and told her that she was already dead.

Beck the Hermit

Beck the Hermit lives in a shack in the woods on the banks of the river Hudson. Eddie is scared of Beck but the hermit always helps Eddie, offering him advice and information



in exchange for a promise that Eddie will release his wolf and burn down his shack when he dies. His character symbolizes the downsides of social progress as the rural/agricultural New York that once existed is slowly destroyed by the forward march of industrialization.

Mr. Raymond Morris

Raymond Morris is one of the performers at the Museum of Extraordinary Things, hired because his entire body including his face is covered in thick black hair which gives him the appearance of a wolf. He was raised in a wealthy family and was well educated but hidden away from society so as not to bring shame onto his relatives. He escaped from his family after reading the novel “Jane Eyre” and discovering the character Mrs. Rochester who burnt down the house rather than continue to endure a life of captivity. Mr. Morris serves as a positive example to Coralie that life is possible outside the confines of her childhood isolation and abuse.

Harry Block

Harry Block is the son of the owner of the factory where Eddie and his father worked when they first arrived in New York. One day when both boys were eleven years old, Eddie, bitter about the differences between their lives, robbed Harry and took his watch which Eddie returned to Harry when they were both adults after discovering that Harry was implicated in the murder of Hannah Weiss. Harry’s character is a symbol of the unfairness of the class system. He is provided with a life of ease and luxury simply through being born into the right family, whereas Eddie must suffer and work long hours as a child laborer.

Juliet Block

Juliet Block is Harry Block’s sister and an outspoken feminist. Her views embarrass her family who try to have Juliet committed into a mental asylum. Juliet helps Eddie to bring Frank Herbert to justice when Eddie explains that he murdered Hannah Weiss.

Frank Herbert

Frank Herbert is an employee of Harry Block who murdered Hannah Weiss and Beck the hermit before sewing their mouths closed with blue thread as a warning to others about not speaking out. Herbert assaulted Eddie after Eddie attended a party at the Block mansion. Herbert’s confession of the murder echoed the Edgar Allen Poe story “The Tell-Tale Heart”.

Bonavita

Bonavita is a lion tamer who works at Dreamland. He teaches Coralie that any animal in captivity which has been abused or mistreated will eventually turn on its owner. This foreshadows the moment when Coralie turns against her father who has mistreated and abused her.



Symbols and Symbolism

Water

Water symbolizes to opposing forces in the novel: freedom and oppression. Coralie's webbed hands give her the appearance of a mermaid so the Professor enforces a life spent swimming in various bodies of water on Coralie in order to exploit her unusual physical attribute. The Professor forces her to swim in the sea every night as a child as well as taking long ice baths. This prepares Coralie to become an exhibit in The Museum of Extraordinary Things when she starts performing as The Human Mermaid when she is 10 years old. Once Coralie reaches adulthood the performances become sexual in nature further emphasizing how trapped she is by her tank and the water. However, Coralie also finds freedom in the water and continues to swim in the Hudson even after she has escaped from the museum and the Professor has been killed. Coralie's underwater abilities ultimately save her and Eddie's lives and allow her to gain her freedom.

Fire

Like Water, Fire in the novel also symbolizes opposing forces: destruction and progress. The novel revolves around three main instances of fire, two of which are factual historical events, the other of which is fictional. The real-life fires in the novel are the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire and the Dreamland Fire on Coney Island. Both fires symbolize death and destruction, with many people killed and many homes destroyed. However, in each instance, progress rises from the ashes of the fire. The Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire inspired greater protest and progress for the labor movement eventually leading to better working conditions for factory employees; the destruction of Dreamland (and the fictional Museum of Extraordinary Things) represented the destruction of the cruelty and exploitation of "freak shows" of the past and a move towards a more compassionate future. The fictional fire at the heart of the narrative is the fire which destroyed Mr. Rochester's home in the novel "Jane Eyre". This fire represents freedom and escape from imprisonment as the fire was started by Mrs. Rochester who was attempting to escape imprisonment in the attic of the house.

Trout

The trout that Eddie catches in the river is a symbol of fate. Beck warns Eddie that when Eddie took a photograph of the trout he became responsible for his soul and that unless Eddie puts the trout back in the river the trout might lead Eddie down a path in life that he doesn't like. Beck's prediction comes true in the sense that the trout leads Eddie down a new path in life, but was inaccurate in the sense that the trout brings good things into Eddie's life. The trout establishes Eddie's connection with the river which is what brings him into contact with Coralie, the love of his life. Towards the end of the



novel, after Eddie has cast the trout back into the river, he thinks he sees it in the river and wades into the water to see if it's the same trout. When he turns around, he sees that his father is waiting for him on the shore. The trout guides Eddie back towards family and community.

Cereus Plant

The Cereus Plant is a symbol of Coralie's lack of faith in her father as well as a symbol of her lack of faith in herself. The plant only blooms at night but the Professor tells Coralie that when it does bloom it is beautiful. Coralie's growing lack of faith in her father is symbolized by her belief that the Cereus Plant won't ever bloom. On the night the Professor first forced Coralie to perform nude in her tank, she commented on the fact she had never seen the plant bloom in her entire life, saying that she sympathized with the "wretched" plant. When the plant finally does bloom it does so on the night of the fire, when Coralie also blooms into a full-grown woman capable of making her own decisions and escaping from the abuse and oppression of her upbringing.

Pocket Watch

The Pocket Watch symbolizes Eddie's resentment towards the rich in general and the Block family in particular. When Eddie was 11 years old and working full-time at a textiles factory he became enraged by the discovery that the children of the factory's owner had such easier lives than he did. His resentment motivated him to steal a pocket watch from the young Harry Block. Eddie carried it with him until adulthood and it became a symbol of his betrayal of his father, who was deeply disappointed with Eddie when he turned to a life in the criminal underworld. When Eddie returns the watch to Harry Block it symbolizes Eddie's return to the community he abandoned as a child.

Gloves

Gloves are a symbol of Coralie's difference and her oppression. The Professor forces Coralie to wear gloves in public regardless of the weather so that members of the public will not gawk at her webbed hands. Coralie herself never expresses any discomfort with the appearance of her hands and responds with dismay when the doctor threatens to cut the webbing away. The gloves show how the Professor completely controls Coralie's life because it is his opinion about her hands that results in her wearing the gloves rather than her own feelings about her body. The moment when Coralie takes off her gloves and reveals her webbed hands to Eddie signifies the growing bond of trust and comfort between the couple.

Coralie's Tank

Coralie's Tank symbolizes exploitation and abuse but also the power to break free from a difficult past and forge a new life. Coralie's tank is another type of cage, just like the



ones used to keep the lions in captivity at Dreamland. When Coralie is first told by the Professor to perform in the tank she is only 10 years old and is unable to refuse. The shame she feels as a result of the overtly sexual performances she is required to do in the tank once she becomes an adult isolate Coralie from Maureen and prevent her from expressing her dissatisfaction with what is happening to her. However, Coralie eventually uses her tank to save her own life as well as Eddie's life. She takes back control of her own destiny when she uses her underwater abilities for her own ends, rather than for one of the Professor's schemes.

Eddie's Camera

Eddie's camera is a symbol of his emotional detachment from the world around him. His role as a photographer keeps him separate from the people he encounters, marking him out as an observer of events rather than a participant. When he photographs the scenes of tragedy and grief during the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire and afterwards at the many funerals and memorial processions, the presence of his camera marks Eddie out as a target of the mourners' scorn. They suspect Eddie of trying to exploit their grief for profit, the way the Professor exploits the abnormalities of his performers. Eddie abandoned his old life to become a photographer and adopted Moses Levy as a surrogate father in replacement of his biological father. Because of this his camera symbolizes his disconnection from his birth family and the Jewish community. However, Eddie's camera eventually plays a vital role in his reintegration into the community because a number of his photographs provide important clues in the mystery of the disappearance of Hannah Weiss.

Jane Eyre

The novel "Jane Eyre" by Charlotte Brontë is used as a symbol of captivity and the potential for escape. In the novel the character Mr. Rochester keeps his wife locked in the attic of their home because he believes her to be a madwoman. In protest against her mistreatment and desperation to escape captivity, Mrs. Rochester sets fire to the house, destroying the building and disfiguring Mr. Rochester. This foreshadows what will occur in The Museum of Extraordinary Things when the Professor's mistreatment of Coralie and others leads to the destruction of his museum by fire and his own death in the flames. When Mr. Morris read "Jane Eyre" it made him realize that he had also been living in captivity, like the character of Mrs. Rochester, and it inspired him to run away from home and go to New York. Mrs. Rochester's captivity reflects the captivity of Coralie's childhood and her need to escape from the oppression of a domineering family member.

Blue Thread

Blue thread is used as a symbol of attempts by the rich to silence the voices of the poor. When Hannah Weiss tries to speak out about the exploitation and mistreatment of



workers at the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory she is murdered by a Frank Herbert, a henchman of Harry Block who doesn't want her opinions causing trouble or damaging the company's profits. As a warning against speaking out about the mistreatment of the poor, Herbert sews Hannah's lips shut with blue thread after he murdered her. Herbert does the same thing to Beck the hermit after he murders him as punishment for Beck giving Eddie information about the murder of Hannah.

Settings

New York

New York City in the early twentieth century is the overarching setting for all of the action of the novel. The factual history of New York itself (most notably the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire and the Dreamland fire on Coney Island) is intricately connected with the fictional lives of the characters and the fate of the city is reflected in the various fates of the characters. As the city became more urban and more industrialized, people like Beck the hermit were forced out of the city, no longer belonging. But with urbanization came the community spirit of the labor movement which pulls Eddie back into the city and indirectly leads to his relationship with Coralie.

Coney Island

Coney Island is the location most strongly associated with Coralie. Coney Island is her home and for much of her childhood it is the only place that Coralie has ever been. Even venturing to other parts of New York is forbidden by the Professor who responds with outrage when he discovers that Coralie has visited Manhattan without his permission. Coney Island is home to the “freak shows” and carnivals in which unusual people can make a living out of physical differences which prevent them from living a normal life. Coney Island is both a sanctuary and a prison offering the closest possible thing to a normal life for the performers, whilst exploiting them and holding them captive.

The Museum of Extraordinary Things

The Museum of Extraordinary Things is one of the smaller-scale attractions on Coney Island. It is owned by the Professor and is the sole source of his income. It is also Coralie’s childhood home, although she was never allowed to enter the museum itself until she reached her tenth birthday. The museum is a kind of prison for Coralie. She has been kept so isolated from the outside world that she has no concept of what the world is like beyond the museum or any idea of how she could escape.

The Museum Basement

The basement in the museum is the location where the Professor carries out his most disturbing tasks. It is a location associated with danger and betrayal. Coralie’s growing disobedience is symbolized by her increasing incursions into the basement: first she reads her father’s journal, then she has her own set of keys made, and eventually she lets Eddie and the liveryman into the basement to reclaim the body of Hannah Weiss. Coralie is locked in the basement when she discovers that the Professor is not really her father, which motivates her to make her final break away from him and the museum.



The Museum Kitchen

The museum kitchen is the location most strongly associated with Maureen the housekeeper, who is often depicted cooking and cleaning in the kitchen. Because it is Maureen's space, the kitchen functions as a sanctuary for Coralie away from her father and her work in the museum. Coralie and Maureen are cooking together in the kitchen on the day that Eddie first arrives at the museum, extending the association of the kitchen with all that is good and positive in Coralie's life.

Dreamland

Dreamland is one of the more expensive and extravagant attractions on Coney Island, and the Professor regards it as the chief competitor to The Museum of Extraordinary Things. Involvement of anyone from the museum with Dreamland is an act of betrayal in the Professor's eyes, so he is especially displeased when Raymond Morris starts working as a performer there. Coralie's growing rebellion is symbolized by her secret visits to Dreamland. The expansion of Dreamland leads to the fire which destroys the resort along with the museum and brings about the end of an era on Coney Island.

The Hudson

The Hudson River is the location that brings Coralie and Eddie together. Eddie likes to go down by the banks of the river to fish and Coralie loves to swim in the Hudson (although she dislikes the Professor's motivations for telling her to do so, which is to create a media sensation surrounding a fake sea creature). The river brings them Coralie and Eddie together and their wedded bliss is symbolized at the end of the novel by Coralie swimming in the Hudson with Eddie sailing in a boat alongside her.

The Woods

The Woods are Beck's domain. They are a location associated with danger. Eddie fears for his life when Beck approaches him but the two later become friends. The body of Hannah Weiss is discovered in the woods and it is in the woods that Beck is murdered. It is a location removed from the law and order of the city in which wilderness reigns supreme. As the industrialization of New York continues, the woods eventually disappear entirely.

Eddie's Apartment

Eddie inherited his apartment from the photographer Moses Levy. This location is a symbol of Eddie's isolation from the rest of the world because he lives there alone with Mitts. As Eddie is gradually lured back into society his apartment becomes less and less



of a private space: first through the visit of Samuel Weiss asking for help locating his missing daughter, and then through Coralie's visit to return his camera.

Block Family Home

The Block Family Home is a symbol of the injustices of the class system in turn of the century New York. Whereas Ukrainian immigrants like Eddie and his father can only afford to live in cramped, unpleasant dwellings, which are always cold, the Blocks live in an extravagant mansion paid for by the profits made by companies who rely on the labor of people like Eddie and his father. The injustice enrages Eddie and causes him to develop an obsession with the Block mansion which he enters unauthorized on two separate occasions to confront Harry Block.



Themes and Motifs

Family Loyalty

The Central theme of the novel is Family Loyalty. The theme is explored from two opposing perspectives through the characters of Coralie and Eddie and their respective relationships with their fathers. Coralie is loyal to her father despite his awful mistreatment of her whereas Eddie is disloyal to his father despite the fact his father has done nothing wrong. Each character follows the opposite path to the other throughout the novel: Coralie must gradually learn to betray her father and break free from his influence and Eddie must learn to forgive his father and return to his family and community roots. The perspective of both characters is influenced by the fact they have been raised in a tight-knit community with limited interactions with the outside world. Coralie cannot fully understand how abusive the Professor is because she has nothing to compare him to, just as Eddie cannot understand how loving his father is until he has seen how brutal and unforgiving the outside world can be.

Coralie's main reason for loyalty towards the Professor is their familial bond and her final break away from the Professor is only made when she discovers that he is not really related to her. Eddie's path back towards his father is not a matter of one-on-one discussion, but instead involves the entire community. The needs of the Weiss family, the urgings of Moses Levy that Eddie should find joy in photographing family celebrations, the criticisms of Isaac Rosenfeld, and the revelations of Hochman, are all essential elements in Eddie's eventual reunion with his father.

There are two different types of family presented in the novel: close immediate relatives such as Eddie and his father, Coralie and her father, and the Weiss family and wider extended families most notably the staff and performers of the Museum of Extraordinary Things and the Ukrainian Jewish community of New York. Coralie is torn between loyalty to her father and loyalty to the extended family of the museum, whereas for Eddie his close family relationships and the Jewish community at large are both something he betrays when he tries to escape from his past.

Professor Sardie commands family loyalty by reminding Coralie how much she owes him, often telling her that other men might have abandoned her as a baby due to her deformed hands. This treatment makes Coralie believe that she is lucky to have the Professor as a father, masking the fact that he mistreats her. The Professor uses this tactic with other performers at the museum in an attempt to secure their loyalty too: whenever the Professor became intimidated by Mr. Morris's intelligence he would remind the wolfman that if it was for the Professor, he would be rotting away in prison. Mr. Morris resents the cruelty of this insinuation and it is one of the factors that motivates his disloyalty towards the Professor later in the novel when he goes to work for Dreamland, the Professor's main competitor. Mr. Morris's disloyalty towards the extended family of the museum foreshadows Coralie's disloyalty towards her immediate relative later in the novel.



Difference

The theme of Difference is central to the novel, both in the community of performers on Coney Island and in the immigrant communities of Manhattan. The theme is most explicitly explored through the various deformities, birth defects, and disabilities of the performers who are employed at the Museum of Extraordinary Things and Dreamland. The novel seeks to humanize the performers who worked at these so-called “freak shows” at the turn of the century, by presenting much of the narrative from Coralie’s perspective. The Museum of Extraordinary Things is the only world Coralie has ever known and as a result of this, the differences and unusual appearances of the people around her do not seem unusual or unsettling. However, outside the world of the museum, the performers are treated as freaks and monsters, often being attacked or arrested as a result of their obvious differences to the rest of society. The Professor ruthlessly exploits anyone who is different from the rest of society, trawling the city looking for abnormalities and deformities which he can put on display in his museum. Although the cruelty in the Professor’s behavior is clear, it is the cruelty of society at large which really causes the suffering of those who are different. When the Professor refuses to take in a young girl born with no arms and no legs, the reader is left with the impression that as bad as life would be for this girl in the museum, the fate that awaits her in the outside world is much worse.

Although the performers are able to form a community amongst themselves on Coney Island it comes at the price of allowing their own exploitation by the Professor or the owners of Dreamland. The twin freedom and imprisonment offered by the world of Coney Island is symbolized by the town of Lilliputia in Dreamland. Lilliputia is a community of people who were born with a condition called dwarfism which means they are much smaller than most people. The residents of Lilliputia were able to live a normal life at Dreamland in a town built to scale specifically for them, with all of its own amenities such as a fire department. However the price the residents pay for the relative normality that Lilliputia affords them is that they must live their lives on show for the entertainment of people who have paid to gawk at them due to their fascination with Difference. Mr. Morris is displayed because his appearance makes him look more like a wolf than a man. Maureen claims that the reason people are fascinated with him is not because he looks like an animal, but because when people look in his eyes he appears so human. This is the heart of the theme of Difference in the novel: the things that set people apart from each other are superficial, whereas when it comes to the things that matter the most such as community, family, and romance, we are all the same.

Eddie’s community and background also explore the theme of Difference. What makes the immigrant Ukrainian Jews of New York different is also what makes them strong. The community bands together to help each other and, even when facing desperate poverty, those already resident in New York make sure to support and take care of new immigrants who have only just arrived.



Dogs

Dogs are a recurring motif in the novel. Dogs are used as a way to reflect the personalities of their owners and the author uses the treatment and mistreatment of dogs as a way of differentiating different personalities. Although Eddie is often aloof and emotionally cold towards other human beings, the truth of his character, and his ability to be loving and caring, is revealed through his relationship with his dog Mitts. Eddie rescued Mitts from a bundle of rags floating in the river when Mitts was just a puppy. Mitts was a pit bull who had been intended as a fighting dog but his sweet nature and friendly manner made him unsuitable for the work he was expected to do, so he was abandoned. The story of Mitts reflects the story of Eddie. Although Eddie sets out to do work which requires a cold-heart and detached attitude (such as searching for men who have abandoned their families and photographing various catastrophes and disasters for the New York newspapers) Eddie's sweetness and loyalty mean that he is not really cut out for the life he has designed for himself.

Beck the hermit's dog – who Eddie later names North – is more wolf than he is dog. Much like his owner Beck, North is caught between two worlds. He is too wild to be a pet to Eddie in the city, but too domesticated to be left on his own in the woods after Beck's death. North can't adjust to urban life but also can't live without the human interaction and affection that he has become accustomed to through living at Beck's shack. This reflects the nature of Beck's character. He can't adjust to the urban world of New York which is so different to the agricultural life that he had previously led with his wife before she died. Nor can he entirely do without human bonds and emotional connection, which is why he befriends Eddie and entrust him with carrying out his dying wishes.

Both Eddie and Beck adopt their dogs, but Juliet Block's poodles are forced on her by her family. Poodles are an especially upper-class breed of dog, bred for their looks rather than for a specific purpose like sheepdogs or pit-bulls. Juliet detests her dogs but is forced to take them outside with her because her brother believes they will be able to protect her (a rather preposterous claim for a couple of poodles). This symbolizes Juliet's family's attempts to control her life and limit her self-expression. She is forced to spend time with animals who reflect her family's vision of who Juliet should be, rather than her own self-conception. The poodles reappear at the end of the novel when Eddie adopts them and takes them home to live with him, Coralie, and Mitts. When the dogs are taken in somewhere where they are loved rather than somewhere where they are ignored or resented, their symbolic significance shifts from oppression to love, which is the path that both Coralie and Eddie have followed during the course of the novel.

Wilderness versus Civilization

The theme of Wilderness versus Civilization is explored through the changing nature of the city of New York in general and the character of Beck the hermit in particular. Both Beck and his wolf North are shown as creatures who are existing in the wrong time and



place, unable to fit in with the new society they find growing around them. It is no coincidence that neither of the figures most closely associated with the wilderness survive the novel. The course of the novel charts the industrialization of New York and the elements in the novel which are associated with the wilderness are destroyed just as the rural parts of New York City were eventually swallowed by the urban sprawl. Eddie, by contrast, is a social creature who attempts to force the isolation of the wilderness on himself despite being constitutionally better suited to the tight-knit communities brought about in urban areas by the close proximity of everyone to their colleagues and neighbors. Eddie creates an emotional wilderness for himself by abandoning his family and his community and living alone but the events in the novel pull him back towards the city and the masses of people who live there and who need Eddie's help.

The rural/agricultural past of New York is presented as both idyllic and brutal at different points during the novel. The forward march of industrial progress is depicted as dissolving social bonds and allowing families like the Blocks to turn a blind eye to the suffering of the poor people who work in their factories. However, the past of the city is presented as cruel too. The fire which destroys Dreamland and The Museum of Extraordinary Things at the end of the novel brings about a symbolic end of an era on Coney Island. The human exhibitions on Coney Island have been depicted as barbarous and cruel, so the progress of society beyond these kind of "freak shows" is depicted as a positive development, in direct contrast to the way progress is depicted in relation to the rise of industrialization and the mistreatment of factory workers. The cruelty of the past as well as the wildness and freedom of the past are both symbolically destroyed during the fire at The Museum of Extraordinary Things when the Professor (the symbol of cruelty of the past) and North the wolf (the symbol of wildness and freedom) are both killed in the blaze on the roof of the museum.

Progress from wilderness to civilization brings advantages to the world as well as disadvantages. The progress in medical science will eventually mean that many of the characters who become outcasts because of birth defects and other deformities would be able to have their differences surgically altered so that they would no longer need to deal with the stigma of difference. Likewise, although Beck is the character most attached to the wilderness, the medical advances brought about by the progress of civilization would have been able to prevent his wife's death.

Industrial Relations

The theme of Industrial Relations is explored through the historical aspects of the novel, most notably the Triangle Factory Fire of 1911 which galvanized the labor movement in New York. The novel takes a pro-labor stance throughout the story, with detailed descriptions of the appalling conditions which Eddie and his father were forced to endure while working in textile factories when they first arrived in New York as well as the graphic and extensive descriptions of the carnage at the Triangle Factory Fire itself.



When the workers at the factory where Eddie and his father work chose to go on strike, rather than seek to bargain with them or improve their working conditions, the owners of the factory immediately fired all of the striking workers and hired immigrants who had only just arrived in America and who were willing to work for lower wages without complaining about their working conditions. This demonstrates the downsides of a lack of solidarity among workers. The willingness of other men to put up with the conditions in the factory which Eddie's father and his colleagues wished to improve, meant that the conditions would remain poor for workers throughout the textiles industry. Because the workers' strike action had been ineffective, factory owners did not feel obligated to improve the conditions for their workers which led to greater abuses and eventually a tragedy in the form of the Triangle Factory Fire. Workers groups working at the Triangle Factory had complained multiple times to the owners about the conditions in the factory, including the fact that workers were locked into their workstations in order to prevent them from taking unauthorized breaks. This greatly increased the number of people killed in the fire who could not escape the building because the owners had locked them in.

The theme of Industrial Relations is also explored through the performers on Coney Island. Dreamland is owned and run by people with considerably more capital available than the amount of money that the Professor can invest in The Museum of Extraordinary Things. Because of this they are able to create flashier attractions and to pay their performers a much better wage than the Professor can. To get around this, the Professor must find potential exhibits in increasingly desperate circumstances so that they will agree to work for the very low pay and poor conditions that The Museum of Extraordinary Things can offer. This is very similar to the treatment of immigrant labor in the factories of Manhattan. In the novel, the rich exploit the desperation of the poor in order to increase their own profits whilst mistreating their workforce.

The character of Isaac Rosenfeld is the symbol of Industrial Relations in the novel. Unlike Eddie, Isaac remained close to his family and his community when he grew up and dedicated his life to collective action which would improve the lives of everyone. In contrast, Eddie abandoned the difficulties of his past in favor of making his own way and only worrying about his own needs. Eddie's behavior disgusted Isaac Rosenfeld, who spat at Eddie when he encountered him photographing a labor rally. When Rosenfeld forgives Eddie it symbolizes Eddie being welcomed back into his community and accepted as someone who has contributed to the welfare of the collective, just as Isaac has done through his involvement in the labor movement.

Styles

Point of View

The novel alternates between the point of view of Coralie Sardie and Eddie Cohen. Further to this, each chapter is split into two halves, the first half told in the first person from the perspective of either Coralie or Eddie and the second half told in the third person with an omniscient narrator. In the earlier parts of the novel the third person sections of each chapter tell the story from the point of view of whichever character was featured in the first half of the chapter but as the lives of Coralie and Eddie become intertwined the third person narration moves back and forth between both of their stories.

The third person sections of the novel deal with aspects of Coralie's and Eddie's lives that they would rather not dwell on in their first person narration or harrowing facts which they would struggle to articulate personally. In the Chapter 1, told from Coralie's perspective, the first person section informs the reader that the Professor demanded that Coralie wore gloves whenever she was in public, but does not reveal why this was the case. Coralie's webbed hands are a source of great shame, so she does not describe them in her first person narration. It is not until the second half of Chapter 1, written in the third person, that the reader is informed of the precise nature of Coralie's unusual appearance. Eddie's first person narration in the first half of Chapter 2 dwells on the traumatic events of his childhood in Ukraine, whereas the third person section gives a detailed account of the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire. This reflects Eddie's approach to life in which he focuses more on himself and his own experiences than the suffering and needs of others. The use of alternating points of view builds suspense as the reader anticipates the moment when both halves of the story will be brought together and allows the author to cut away from climactic moments (such as Eddie being discovered on the museum grounds by the Professor) to another part of the story.

Language and Meaning

Coralie's language reveals her sense of wonder and fascination with the extraordinary things that surround her in the museum. She describes the exhibitions and performers in terms that make them sound like rare beauties rather than abominations, observing their "luminous markings that glowed yellow in the dark," concluding that she "believed each remarkable creature had been touched by God's hand, and that anything singular was an amazement to humankind, a hymn to our maker." Coralie's sense of awe and appreciation of the unusual appears throughout her first person narration, especially when she describes the museum, Dreamland, and the experience of swimming in the Hudson River.

Eddie's language, by contrast, is often matter of fact and straight to the point. His language is clear and precise, painting a stark picture of the brutality he witnessed as a



child: “My mother died in that far-off place. She was alone in our small wooden house when the wild men on horseback came to burn our village to ashes. There was no one to bury and no body to mourn.” Although the ethnic and class differences between Eddie and Harry Block are of central importance to the novel, the author makes no distinction between the language choices of these two men from completely different backgrounds, emphasizing their equality. Both are articulate and formal when they speak to each other, Eddie saying to Harry of his sister Juliet: “Now she’s run away from your protection. For her sake I hope she’s found some freedom in doing so.” Eddie demonstrates no traces of the slang or dialect of his community of origin and speaks in a manner which is indistinguishable from the wealthy family he so despises.

The language in the third person narration is understandably less introspective than the first person narration of Eddie and Coralie but still has a tendency towards the poetic and the magical. The author described the way “Energy surged through the concrete and cobblestones the way mist rises in the woods.”

Structure

The structure of the novel jumps back and forth from different time periods, covering the stories of Coralie and Eddie’s childhood years in flashback-like sequences in their first person narration. The present-day story is told in chronological order in which Coralie begins impersonating a sea monster whilst swimming in the Hudson River, the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory burns down, Eddie is enlisted to search for Hannah Weiss, Coralie discovers Hannah’s body in the river, the Professor takes Hannah’s body back to the museum, Eddie traces the body to the museum where he meets Coralie, Coralie helps Eddie to recover the body, and Eddie returns to help Coralie escape from the Dreamland fire which burns down The Museum of Extraordinary Things.

Interspersed with the chronological present-day story are numerous recollections from different times in the characters’ pasts: Coralie recalls her early childhood when she was not allowed into the museum, the years during which Mr. Morris worked there as a performer, and her summer nights spent visiting Dreamland in secret. Eddie recalls his childhood escape from Ukraine, the day he stole Harry Block’s pocket watch, his time working as an investigator for Hochman, and his early apprenticeship with Moses Levy. Other characters also recall stories from their pasts, including Beck the hermit’s tale of how he lost his wife.

The two separate strands of the story – one belonging to Coralie and the other belonging to Eddie – are separated into different chapters until Chapter 9 when both of their stories collide with each other in the museum garden, after which all of the events involve and affect both characters. The final chapter of the novel - “The World Begins Again” - deals with the events that happened in the aftermath of the Dreamland fire, told in retrospect by Coralie, in the form of a letter to Maureen.



Quotes

There are men with such odd characteristics that they must hide their faces in order to pass through the streets unmolested, and women who have such peculiar features they live in rooms without mirrors.

-- Coralie (chapter 1 paragraph 1)

Importance: In her narration, Coralie introduces the heart of life amongst the “freak shows” of Coney Island. Although the differences of these people make their lives difficult and force them to behave in ways they wouldn’t usually have to, the author invests Coralie’s description with a sense of wonder and fascination which make these people seem like rare beauties rather than monstrosities.

I did not need further instructions. I understood that all of my life had been practice for this very moment. Without being asked, I slipped off my shoes. I knew how to swim.

-- Coralie (chapter 1 paragraph Final)

Importance: This is the moment in Coralie’s narration where she recalls the first time the Professor informed her that she was to become a performer in The Museum of Extraordinary Things by showing her the tank. The quotation emphasizes Coralie’s obedience and the Professor’s complete control over her life. Coralie has never known anything beyond the realms of the museum so doesn’t have the experience to understand that she is being exploited or the confidence she would need to protest.

Mine was a path of duty and faith set out before me in a straight line, and yet, without asking anyone or even discussing my plan, if that is what it was, I changed my life and walked away from the person I might have been and, most certainly in my father’s opinion, the man I should have been.

-- Eddie (chapter 2 paragraph 1)

Importance: This quotation from Eddie’s narration highlights the stark contrast between Coralie and Eddie. Whereas Coralie is trapped by her obedience to her father, Eddie defines his entire life by his disobedience towards his father. The tone here is resentful, but later in the novel Eddie will come to realize that he had misunderstood his father’s character.

As garment workers, we had no rights, but at least we earned enough to survive, until the bosses decided otherwise. They’d brought in new workers, cheaper labor, men just arrived from Russia and Italy who would toil eighteen hours a day for pennies and never complain when they were locked into workrooms to ensure they didn’t take time to eat or drink or even rest for a few moments.

-- Eddie (chapter 2 paragraph 6)

Importance: Eddie’s narration here focuses on the theme of Industrial Relations, informing the reader of the desperate conditions factory workers were forced to endure



in the past and the negative effect that a lack of solidarity amongst workers can have on the progress of workers' rights.

He was convinced that his world was enough, he told me, until he read Jane Eyre. Then his opinion changed. He could feel the world shifting as he devoured the story. He suddenly understood how a person could go mad if locked away from all others, and found himself half in love with the first Mrs. Rochester, the character other readers might consider the villainess of the book.

-- Coralie (chapter 3 paragraph 3)

Importance: Coralie recalls a conversation with Mr. Morris which she repeats in her narration. Like Coralie, Mr. Morris had a sheltered upbringing but through access to literature he was able to understand the world in new ways which extended beyond his own circumstances. Like Mrs. Rochester and Mr. Morris before her, Coralie will eventually become motivated to break free from her captivity.

I planned to sell the watch I'd stolen as a boy to pay for Moses Levy's funeral, but, as if it knew of my intent, it broke that very day.

-- Eddie (chapter 4 paragraph 1)

Importance: Eddie discusses his plan to get rid of the watch he stole from Harry Block as a child. The watch symbolizes the moment that Eddie abandoned his father and his community and he will not part with it until the course of events in the novel has reunited them. Eddie intends the watch as an offering towards his surrogate father, Moses Levy, but it is his real father to whom Eddie owes a gesture of love.

Perhaps my conversion from dutiful daughter had begun on the night I went into my father's workroom and read the first few pages of his handbook.

-- Coralie (chapter 5 paragraph 1)

Importance: Coralie begins her path towards disobedience when she sneaks into the Professor's basement and reads his handbook. Although her betrayals will become much bigger and more influential – making her own set of keys, secretly visiting Manhattan, helping Eddie reclaim the body of Hannah Weiss – this small gesture is the moment that sets the rest of her actions into motion.

He was a good worker and didn't complain, and I faulted him for that as well. The meeker he appeared to be, the more rebellious I became. I wished to be the opposite of all that he was, and hated every trait of his that I found in myself.

-- Eddie (chapter 6 paragraph 3)

Importance: This quotation from Eddie's narration reveals his lack of understanding of his father. Unlike Coralie's father, Eddie's father appears to the reader as a man with many positive qualities and Eddie's disobedience and betrayal seems willful and unfair. Eddie's character arc in the novel will see him slowly change the views expressed in this quotation.



If he wanted to know who she was, then she would reveal herself, though she wept as she did it. She showed him her hands, what she considered to her deformity, the flesh that separated her and made her different, but also made her herself.

-- Narration (chapter 7 paragraph Final)

Importance: This is the moment that Coralie and Eddie's bond is sealed. Although the Professor will later accuse Coralie of losing her virginity to Eddie, this moment between them constitutes an even greater intimacy because Coralie is sharing her most private self with Eddie. Coralie's hands are what have kept her trapped by the Professor and once she discovers that she can be accepted despite them in the outside world, she is one step closer to breaking free from her past.

You need to want the person that I am, she told me, not the one you capture. But I felt as though I was the one who had been captured.

-- Eddie (chapter 8 paragraph 8)

Importance: This quotation explores the suggestion that Eddie sees what he wants to see in his photographs rather than the truth of the matter, which is backed up in the narrative by the numerous times Eddie revisits old photographs and discovers details and clues which he failed to spot the first time he saw them. It also emphasizes the growing love between Coralie and Eddie.

The mother from France who dressed in black, who always wore gloves and was so beautiful and gracious and had left Coralie her pearls, had never existed. She was nothing more than an orphan abandoned on the porch.

-- Narration (chapter 9 paragraph Final)

Importance: This is the moment when Coralie discovers that everything she thought she knew about her life and her past has been a lie. She has not been able to truly break free from the Professor until this moment due to the ties of Family Loyalty. After she discovers that the Professor is not really her father, she no longer feels any sense of duty or obligation towards him.

At last he came upon the trout he had been searching for, a slice of living light, darting through the shallows. He walked into the water after it, unafraid, still wearing his shoes, his black coat flowing out around him. It was there he found his father, waiting for him on the shoreline, as if they'd never been apart.

-- Narration (chapter 10 paragraph Final)

Importance: Beck the hermit warned Eddie that when he took a photograph of the trout, he would become responsible for the trout's soul and that the trout might lead Eddie down a path in life which he didn't like. Beck's prophecy comes true in this quotation when the trout reveals to Eddie his desire to be reunited with his father.