

Patty Jane's House of Curl Study Guide

Patty Jane's House of Curl by Lorna Landvik

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Plot Summary

Patty Jane's House of Curl is the first novel by acclaimed writer Lorna Landvik. Patty Jane's House of Curl tells the story of two sisters from Minnesota. Patty Jane is nine months pregnant with her first child when her husband suddenly disappears. Patty Jane falls into a dark depression for months, frightened her husband has met with some terrible accident. At the same time, Harriet, Patty Jane's sister, has fallen in love with the heir to a cereal company. Unfortunately, Harriet's fiancé is killed the day of their wedding in a plane crash. Patty Jane's House of Curl is a novel about how these two women not only survive these tragedies, but rise up to make a good lives for themselves, surrounded by people they love, creating a unique family within which Patty Jane's daughter will grow and thrive.

Patty Jane Dobbin married the man of her dreams just a few years after having to take custody of her sister and provide a home after their parents died. On her wedding night to the beautiful Thor Rolvaag, Patty Jane becomes convinced that she has conceived their first child. No one believes Patty Jane, insisting she could not possibly know something like that. However, as the months pass, Patty Jane's condition becomes obvious. Thor is not happy with the idea of impending fatherhood. Thor becomes less affectionate with Patty Jane, pulling away the more obvious her pregnancy becomes. Finally, a few days before Patty Jane is due to deliver, Thor argues with her and leaves her alone in the supermarket. Thor never comes home.

At the same time, Harriet, Patty Jane's sister, meets and falls in love with Avel Ames III, the male heir to the popular Ames Grains, a cereal company. Avel is a small man, but he has a huge heart and he uses this heart to give Harriet everything her heart desires. This includes allowing Harriet to quit her job and begin taking music lessons. Avel's sister's do not approve of his impending wedding, so they send him off on a business trip through the spring and summer leading up to his wedding date. However, Avel insists on coming home in time to marry Harriet on their chosen date. On this day, Harriet is preparing to meet Avel at the airport when she learns that his plane has crashed.

Both Harriet and Patty Jane settle into a deep depression following their tragedies. However, Patty Jane needs Harriet, forcing Harriet to bury her feelings and ignore her own pain. Eventually Patty Jane receives a note from Thor informing her that he has left her voluntarily. Patty Jane is devastated, but eventually pulls herself together to provide for her infant daughter, Nora.

With lone, her mother-in-law's help, Patty Jane becomes a hairstylist. Patty Jane opens a hair salon, the House of Curl, in the front room of a house she shares with her sister, lone, and Nora. Everyone has a job at the hair salon, including Nora. Life seems happy until Harriet begins to drink. At first it was just for fun, but soon Harriet realizes that drinking makes the pain of losing Avel disappear. In time, Harriet's drinking becomes so bad that she begins missing work. Patty Jane throws Harriet out of the house and she



ends up living on the street, or sharing hotel rooms with any guy willing to buy her a drink.

After a year on the street, Harriet meets Reese Brown, a beat cop with a history of alcoholism. Reese gives Harriet clothes, money, and the address of an AA meeting. After seeing Nora on a passing bus, Harriet goes to the meeting and vows to clean herself up. Reese helps Harriet and eventually returns her to her family. In time, Harriet and Reese get married and settle into a happy life. At the same time, Patty Jane has begun a relationship with her manicurist, Clyde Chuka. Shortly into this relationship, however, Thor is discovered to have been living with a local dentist. Thor was injured the night he disappeared and this dentist, a mentally deranged woman, has been hiding him in her house.

Thor moves back in with Patty Jane, who decides to care for him even as she continues her relationship with Clyde. Harriet begins suffering from exhaustion and believes she is pregnant. Unfortunately, it turns out Harriet has lung cancer. Harriet continues to work at the House of Curl during her illness, and dies there in her old bedroom with her family around her.

Life goes on at the House of Curl. Nora goes to college and becomes a lawyer. Patty Jane and Clyde have a son. Lone begins traveling with friends and eventually retires to Arizona. Nora comes home and opens a law practice out of Thor's house in Minneapolis.



Prologue and Part 1: Chapters 1-2

Prologue and Part 1: Chapters 1-2 Summary

The novel is set in Minneapolis, Minnesota. The setting is a small community where many of the residents are immigrants from Norway or the children of these immigrants, creating the sense of a small town in the center of a large metropolis. This setting is echoed in Patty Jane's home over the years, beginning with her marriage to Thor Rolvaag, the son of Norwegian immigrants.

In the prologue, Nora relates a scene in which her mother is sitting with her at a drug store counter, flirting with a man behind them. This man comes to give Patty Jane his number, announcing that he is married but likes to wander. Patty Jane rips up his number and returns her attention to her daughter. This leads to twelve-year-old Nora thinking about her father, a man who disappeared before she was born. One, Nora's grandmother, has told her many stories about her father and she imagines often what it will be like when he comes back into her life.

In chapter 1, Patty Jane Dobbin marries Thor Rolvaag. Thor is the son of Norwegian immigrants. Thor's father died in an accident when he was a small boy, leaving his mother to raise him on her own. Patty Jane is the daughter of two alcoholics who died in a car accident when she was a teenager. This even left Patty Jane and her sister, Harriet, in the care of an indifferent aunt, spurring Patty Jane to leave school early and provide a home for her sister on her own. On the morning after their wedding, Patty Jane announces to Thor that she has just conceived their first child even though she was using protection. Thor believes Patty Jane is wrong, as does most everyone else, including Harriet.

In chapter 2, Harriet is walking on the street down from Patty Jane's apartment when a man in a brand new Packard pulls over. The man wants Harriet to go on a picnic with him. Harriet resists briefly, but the man is nice and his car is expensive. They drive around for a little while before going to the lake for a picnic. When they arrive the man, Avel Ames, gives the keys of his car to a homeless man who admires it. Avel insists that the man will return, but Harriet does not believe it. They make a bet and Harriet wins when the homeless man fails to return on time. Harriet goes out with Avel several more times before introducing him to her sister. Avel tells Patty Jane that he is the male heir to Ames Grains, maker of breakfast cereal. Patty Jane is impressed and tells Avel that one of his company's cereals is her husband's favorite. Avel promises to send a case to them the following day. A short time later, Avel proposes to Harriet. As an engagement gift, Avel pays Harriet's tuition to a music school where she will learn the trumpet and harp as well as take singing lessons.



Prologue and Part 1: Chapters 1-2 Analysis

The novel begins with a prologue that is written in the first person point of view. This prologue introduces Patty Jane, an attractive woman to whom men are drawn. Patty Jane clearly has a sense of morals as she refuses to go out with a man who is married. However, her beauty and the fact that men are attracted to her causes Patty Jane to overshadow her daughter, Nora, the narrator. This introduces an interesting mother-daughter dynamic that the reader expects to see throughout the novel. However, the first chapter begins before Nora's conception, bringing the reader back in time to Patty Jane's wedding day. This is a different Patty Jane, one just as confident, but a woman who is clearly content to be with the man she will love for the rest of her life.

The first chapter of the novel gives some background on Patty Jane, talking about her alcoholic parents and how their behavior affected herself and her sister Harriet. These two women grew very close because of a need to take care of each other throughout their childhood and after the death of their parents. Both girls are now young adults, beginning their lives. Both fall in love with men they believe will always be there for them and who will always care for them. Their futures look bright, suggesting to the reader that something dramatic is about to happen in their lives. One of these dramatic events, the reader already knows because of the prologue, is that Patty Jane is going to get pregnant and her husband will disappear from her life at some point.



Part 1: Chapters 3-5

Part 1: Chapters 3-5 Summary

In chapter 3, no one is thrilled with Patty Jane's pregnancy. Thor, who lost his father at a young age, is not ready to be a father. Harriet believes that Patty Jane has been caring for people all her life and should have some time to herself before taking on a child. However, Patty Jane is awed by her changing body and excited about impending motherhood. Ione visits the newlyweds often and is pleased with their open affection for one another. However, as Patty Jane's pregnancy becomes obvious, Ione begins to notice her son is not as affectionate with Patty Jane as he was before. Patty Jane and Ione have never been close, but Ione feels closer to Patty Jane during her pregnancy, especially when Patty Jane agrees to go to church with her on Christmas Eve.

In chapter 4, Patty Jane is sick on New Year's Eve, so she and Harriet stay home, sending the men out to party on their own. The original plan had been to take a limo to Avel's country club, but without the girls Avel decides they should go to a bar instead. At the bar, Avel and Thor meet two unattractive women with whom they have several drinks. When Avel learns the girls are getting paid to take off their clothes at midnight, Avel pays them over twice as much to keep their clothes on. This upsets some of the other bar patrons and a fight ensues.

In chapter 5, Avel is happy about the fight, feeling as though it proves how much of a man he is despite his size. To thank Thor for placing him in that situation, he offers him a modeling job. Thor will be the new face of Mighty Bites, an Ames Grain cereal. Thor jumps at the chance because it pays a couple hundred dollars. The photo shoot is difficult for Thor, but Avel is able to help him relax and imagine being on a beach with Patty Jane.

Part 1: Chapters 3-5 Analysis

As Patty Jane's pregnancy progresses, Thor begins to pull away. Harriet too is not terribly excited for her sister, wishing she had more time to concentrate on herself rather than someone else. Ione, on the other hand, grows closer to Patty Jane during her pregnancy, happy to see her family increasing and looking forward to being a grandmother. Thor's unhappiness with the pregnancy grows everyday. Patty Jane notices that he is not affectionate with her anymore, but feels that this is part of marriage. However, Thor's behavior suggests to the reader that he might be pulling away from more than Patty Jane's affections.

Avel is a tiny man, smaller even than his fiancée. Therefore, when Avel is in a bar fight, he suddenly feels more manly than he has ever felt before. Avel wants to thank Thor for this, so he gives him a modeling job to be on a box of Ames Grain's Mighty Bites. This seems like just a fun, well paying job. However, the boxes will come out eventually and

Thor's face will be on breakfast tables all over the United States. The reader can only wonder what this will mean for Patty Jane and her marriage.



Part 1: Chapters 6-7

Part 1: Chapters 6-7 Summary

In chapter 6, Thor and Patty Jane have an argument in the grocery store just days before Patty Jane is due to give birth. Patty Jane has grown tired of Thor refusing to talk about the baby, so she tries to force him into it. Finally Thor gets fed up with Patty Jane's argument and he leaves her in the store. Thor goes to the home of an English professor and sleeps with her before going to the home of a cheerleader and spending the rest of the night with her. Thor walks home at dawn the next morning, thinking about the freedom he would have if he left Patty Jane. Thor then begins to think how much he loves Patty Jane, and even finds himself thinking of the names he has been writing down for the baby. Thor wants to go home and take Patty Jane to buy a bassinet for the baby. However, Thor slips on some ice and hits his head on the trunk of an oak tree.

Patty Jane calls Harriet that morning and tells her Thor is missing. Harriet and Avel rush to her side. During the day, Avel hires a private detective to find Thor. Two days later, Patty Jane gives birth to a baby girl she names Nora. Avel is out of town when the baby is born, but comes back with stacks of presents. During a moment alone, Harriet shows him a letter written by an anonymous college professor that tells them Thor spent the night with her the day he disappeared.

In chapter 7, a month passes and there is still no word about Thor. Patty Jane will not leave the apartment and only gets out of bed to care for the baby. Lone and Avel are constantly at the apartment, helping Harriet care for Patty Jane and Nora. One night, Harriet takes Lone with her when she goes to get cigarettes. When they reach the store, a crazy woman is arguing with the clerk over whether or not he will extend her credit. The woman becomes irrational and pushes her groceries onto the floor before walking away. Harriet and Lone help the clerk clean up the mess for which he gives them each a free item from the store.

Avel takes Harriet to meet his elder sisters. Avel's sisters are not friendly and Avel dislikes them, but continues to communicate with them because they are also on the board of Ames Grains. Upon meeting Harriet, Avel's sisters announce they have to put off their wedding because they need Avel to go to South America on business. Avel argues that someone else could go, but his sisters are unwilling to bend. Avel promises to make it work anyway. A week later, Avel visits the private detective who tells him he cannot find anything on Thor Rolvaag.

Part 1: Chapters 6-7 Analysis

Thor and Patty Jane argue, causing Thor to act out against his marriage vows. However, he decides he loves his wife and wants to return to her. It seems that Thor is more mature and has a better sense of responsibility than the reader at first believes



due to his immature reaction to Patty Jane's pregnancy. However, something happens that causes him to not return home. The reader is not clear at this point what has happened, except for the fact that Thor hit his head. Patty Jane does not know either, and finds herself caught between anger at Thor for leaving her and fear that he may be lying dead somewhere. Avel and Harriet try to help her, but their efforts through a private detective turns up nothing except the fact that Thor spent the night with a professor from his university the night he disappeared.

Avel and Harriet want to marry, but Avel's controlling sisters have decided Harriet is not good enough for their brother, so they have arranged for him to go to South America the weeks before and after his chosen wedding date. Harriet stands up for Avel and in turn he promises to make sure they marry on their chosen date, even if he has to go to South America.



Part 1: Chapters 8-10

Part 1: Chapters 8-10 Summary

In chapter 8, the longer Thor is gone, the meaner Patty Jane grows until she begins to lash out at Harriet and Avel. Avel brings in a college roommate who is a successful therapist, but Patty Jane shames him before sending him away. Patty Jane tells everyone she might be depressed, but she does not need to talk to a therapist about it. At the same time, Harriet and Avel go forward with their wedding plans, purchasing a wedding dress and planning their honeymoon. The night before Avel is due to go to South America, lone throws a combination bridal party and going away party for them. When it is over, Patty Jane tells Avel to sleep with Harriet that night. Avel takes Harriet to the lake where he proposed and they make love on a blanket. The following day, Harriet takes Avel to the airport where they have a tearful goodbye.

In chapter 9, Avel sends Patty Jane a thank you letter and some money. Patty Jane takes the money and deposits it into two different accounts. After that, Patty Jane begins taking walks every day. One day Patty Jane comes home and discovers that lone has washed Thor's bathrobe, which Patty Jane has been wearing since his disappearance. Patty Jane becomes angry. At the same time, Harriet continues to plan her wedding. Harriet is writing a song to sing to Avel at the wedding. Harriet is excited about the wedding, counting the days off on a calendar. During this time, Harriet is also growing closer to lone, who has practically moved in with Patty Jane.

In chapter 10, Avel is having a wonderful time in South America, but he is looking forward to returning to Minnesota to marry Harriet. On the day he is to arrive home and marry Harriet, Patty Jane receives a typewritten note from Thor letting her know he is alive and well. At the same time, Harriet picks up the paper and reads that Avel's plane crashed in Port-au-Prince.

Part 1: Chapters 8-10 Analysis

Patty Jane becomes angry in her grief, attempting to push away the people who love her. However, they refuse to be pushed away, awakening Patty Jane to the reality that she is still alive and she has people who rely on her. Patty Jane begins taking walks everyday, a habit that will stay with her for the rest of her life.

Harriet and Avel are planning their wedding, happier than either has ever been. While Avel is in South America, Harriet continues to plan the wedding, picking up her wedding dress and dreaming of the future. This overwhelming happiness is a deep contrast to Patty Jane's grief, creating a comparison that shows the reader the differences in their personalities and the depth of their separate emotional health. However, the reader can see that things are changing for these two and it seems they will soon be changing

places as Patty Jane learns that Thor left her of his own accord and Harriet learns Avel has died.



Part 2: Chapters 11-13

Part 2: Chapters 11-13 Summary

In chapter 11, Harriet sings the song she intended for the wedding at Avel's memorial service. Not long after this, Patty Jane is shopping in the local grocery store and she finds herself staring at her husband's face on dozens of Mighty Bites cereal boxes. Patty Jane writes to Avel's sisters, hoping they will remove his face, but they refuse because sales of the cereal have doubled since they released the ones with Thor's face. Around this same time, Patty Jane comes home and finds Harriet unconscious and bleeding in the bathroom. Harriet swears it was an accident, but Patty Jane and Lone worry that she might have been thinking about suicide.

When Patty Jane finds Lone writing checks for her bills, she is ashamed. Patty Jane begins looking for a job that will support herself and her daughter, but does not qualify for anything suitable. Patty Jane decides to go to beauty school and become a hair stylist. Eventually Patty Jane will move into a house with Lone and Harriet, opening the House of Curl in the front room. Clyde Chuka, a local artist, comes in one day to apply for the manicurist job. Patty Jane hires him after he proves he can do a good job.

In chapter 12, Patty Jane decides to start holding lectures at the House of Curl. Patty Jane cannot decide what these lectures should be about, so she decides to let the customers choose. The first lecture is presented by an film maker, a friend of Clyde Chuka's. The women are shocked when he shows two films that contain nudity.

In chapter 13, Clyde Chuka begins to join Patty Jane on her daily walks. One day they slide down some steps that have iced over and find themselves rolling in the snow. They share a kiss, but Clyde tells Patty Jane it cannot happen again. Clyde tells Patty Jane she is his boss and she is still in love with her husband, therefore any relationship between them would not work.

Part 2: Chapters 11-13 Analysis

Tragedy has struck the Dobbin sisters again when Avel is killed. Harriet falls into a deeper depression than the one Patty Jane has suffered and this helps Patty Jane regain some of her strength now that she must care for her sister. Patty Jane begins to take notice of what is happening around her and realizes she must find a way to support herself and her child. Patty Jane wants a good job, but most of these jobs are male oriented and Patty Jane is not welcome to apply. Instead, Patty Jane goes to beauty school and becomes a beautician, opening the beauty parlor that is also the title of the book.

Patty Jane shows the reader the depth of her character when she pulls herself together and makes a life for herself and her family, including Lone and Harriet. Patty Jane is a strong woman, the kind that finds a way to survive. The reader feels confident she will



survive. Harriet, however, appears to be somewhat weaker. Harriet claims that she did not try to kill herself, but there is an episode in which Patty Jane became convinced that she had, suggesting to the reader that perhaps she is not handling Avel's death as well as she could. Finally, these chapters introduce Clyde Chuka. Clyde Chuka is an artist who comes to work at the House of Curl in order to pay the bills. Patty Jane is attracted to Clyde Chuka and is interested in entering a relationship with him, but Clyde is one of a few men who has turned her down, suggesting a challenge Patty Jane will not be able to pass up.



Part 2: Chapters 14-17

Part 2: Chapters 14-17 Summary

In chapter 14, Nora becomes a teenager and her relationship with her mother begins to become tense. Around this same time, Harriet has a panic attack while riding on a bus. Harriet stops at a bar and has a few drinks. Within a few hours, Harriet realizes that she feels better than she has since Avel's death when she is drinking. When Harriet comes home drunk, Patty Jane is unhappy with her behavior, but Harriet refuses to react.

In chapter 15, Harriet continues to drink, beginning earlier and earlier in the day until she begins leaving work minutes after arriving. Harriet and Patty Jane argue about Harriet's drinking until finally Patty Jane tells Harriet not to come home again.

In chapter 16, Harriet moves in with a friend, but is quickly asked to leave. Patty Jane thinks of Harriet on Thanksgiving. Harriet spends the day with some man who picked her up in a bar. Harriet quickly realizes that she will not have to sleep on the streets as long as she is willing to share a bed with whatever man offers to buy the drinks. As Harriet's absence stretches longer and longer, Patty Jane begins to dwell on the idea that everyone she loves eventually leaves. Patty Jane turns to Clyde Chuka for comfort and they begin a sexual affair.

In chapter 17, Nora wonders if her mother and Clyde will get married. Across town, Harriet wakes in a hotel room and has a vague memory of someone in blue bringing her there. A note sits with a new dress and a ten dollar bill, telling Harriet that a cop named Reese Brown brought her here. Then Harriet notices the date on a newspaper and realizes this should have been her fourteenth wedding anniversary with Avel.

Part 2: Chapters 14-17 Analysis

At the same time Patty Jane's daughter becomes a teenager, Harriet falls apart under the pressure of her grief. It is thought that alcoholism can be hereditary. As Harriet turns to alcohol to rid herself of the pain left from Avel's passing, it appears that this thought has come true in her case when the reader remembers that Harriet and Patty Jane's parents were both alcoholics. Harriet falls hard with the alcohol, prostituting herself in order to have a clean place to sleep and someone to buy the next drink. This goes on for nearly a year before a cop picks Harriet up off the street and gets her a hotel room.

At the same time Harriet is falling apart, Patty Jane finds herself falling into a relationship with her manicurist, Clyde Chuka. Like before, whenever one sister falls into darkness, the other seems to find the light. Patty Jane has found a future and happiness in Clyde Chuka despite her depression over her sister's alcoholism. This suggests to the reader that there might be darkness around the corner for Patty Jane as well.



Part 2: Chapters 18-22

Part 2: Chapters 18-22 Summary

In chapter 18, Patty Jane attends an art show for Clyde Chuka and cannot understand why people pay so much for his sculptures. The following day, Harriet is in a store buying as much booze as Reese's ten dollars will buy when he comes upon her. Reese gives Harriet the address of an AA meeting before watching her walk away with several bottles of cheap wine. A few days later, Harriet is panhandling, trying to get up some more money for booze, when a school bus passes. Harriet recognizes her niece, Nora, in the bus. Harriet surprises Reese that night by showing up to the AA meeting. Reese takes Harriet home, giving her a place to stay while she sobers up.

In chapter 19, Reese calls Patty Jane and arranges for Harriet to come for a visit. Patty Jane welcomes her sister home with open arms.

In chapter 20, Ione worries about Nora living in a home with two couples, while Harriet works hard on her sobriety. Harriet takes Patty Jane to a meeting and Patty Jane is shocked to see how hard keeping sober is for Harriet.

In chapter 21, it is a rainy afternoon and Harriet and Clyde are the only ones on duty at the House of Curl. Harriet suggests they close up and go for a walk. This walk takes them to a local bar where Harriet hopes to find Clyde's mother, Merry, and talk her into an AA meeting. Merry gets into an argument with a local crazy woman Harriet has seen multiple times around town. As Harriet watches the crazy woman leave with her male companion, she realizes the man is Thor. Clyde calls Reese and Harriet explains what happened. Reese asks around and learns the woman's name is Temple Curry. They decide to go to her house.

In chapter 22, Reese, Clyde, and Harriet go to Temple Curry's large house. Temple seems to be expecting them. The house is cluttered and filthy. Harriet and Clyde find Thor in the basement where he is building birdhouses. Temple Curry insists on accompanying them to Patty Jane's house. Ione is thrilled to see her son, but Patty Jane is angry. Temple Curry explains that she was once a dentist but lost her license when she was caught purposely injuring patients. A few years after that, Temple Curry saw Thor fall and hit his head on the trunk of a tree. Temple took him home and hid him all these years. It was also Temple Curry who sent the notes to Patty Jane.

Part 2: Chapters 18-22 Analysis

As Patty Jane's relationship with Clyde Chuka continues to grow, Harriet discovers what she has become and reaches out for help. Harriet's lifeline is Reese, a cop who has a history with alcohol problems of his own. Reese takes Harriet in and helps her to find recovery, filling a hole in Harriet's heart that goes deeper than alcohol addiction. When



Harriet returns home, her recovery helps both her and Patty Jane learn what alcohol addiction is all about and how to forgive their parents.

Harriet is in recovery, so now she wants to help the whole world find recovery. Harriet reaches out to Clyde's mother, Merry, who has been an alcoholic most of her adult life. However, Harriet runs into the local crazy woman and suddenly realizes her silent companion is Patty Jane's long lost husband. Now Patty Jane knows that her husband did not abandon her as she had believed for almost fifteen years. Instead, Thor has brain damage that has left him unable to interact on an adult level. This leaves the reader wondering what will happen with Patty Jane now, if she will remain with Clyde, if she will divorce Thor, or if she will remain a devoted wife.



Part 2: Chapters 23-25

Part 2: Chapters 23-25 Summary

In chapter 23, the doctors tell Ione and Patty Jane that Thor might have recovered most of his mental faculties had he had treatment when the injury occurred, but now it is too late to do anything. Clyde asks Patty Jane what this means for them and she tells him she sees no reason for anything to change. Nora is unsure how to handle her father's return at first, so as a coping mechanism she throws herself into caring for him.

In chapter 24, Clyde throws a stag party for Reese and Harriet the night before their wedding. Clyde and Patty Jane spend the night together afterward. The wedding is beautiful. Harriet and Nora play a trumpet duet together during the ceremony, surprising everyone present. They play *What a Wonderful World*, and Harriet sings her favorite verse.

In chapter 25, Ione is packing for a trip. Ione has always wanted to travel, so when a couple of friends ask her to go on a cross country trip in their RV, she cannot pass it up. However, Ione is concerned about leaving Thor so soon after his return. Patty Jane talks her into going and soon Ione is sending everyone at the House of Curl postcards. Harriet has begun to feel tired and Patty Jane urges her to see a doctor, both of them thinking she might be pregnant. After five months, they get word that Ione is returning home. Patty Jane gets a ton of business on prom night, so she does not notice that Harriet has failed to come down from a nap. When Patty Jane and Nora go to check on Harriet, they find she has been coughing up blood.

Ione returns home to an empty house. When everyone arrives, Thor is the first to greet her. In their native language, Thor tells Ione about Harriet's illness. It turns out Harriet has lung cancer. Ione insists on going to see Harriet immediately. Harriet has lost her hair from chemotherapy. Ione give Harriet a music box from Vermont with the promise that she will help her in any way necessary.

Part 2: Chapters 23-25 Analysis

Thor has returned home, but he is only a child in man's body now. Patty Jane takes him in and cares for him, but she also continues her relationship with Clyde. Patty Jane has two loves in her life now, and she is committed to both in her own way. Patty Jane is simply content to have all those she loves around her, no matter how odd it might seem to an outsider. At the same time, Harriet marries Reese. It is a romantic wedding that the reader can imagine is everything Harriet's wedding to Avel would have been. It seems happiness has once again found both Dobbin girls.

Ione gets on with her life now that Thor has returned, going on the sightseeing trip she has always wanted to take. Ione has been Patty Jane and Harriet's silent rock for many years, so her leaving shows the reader that she feels the girls are finally in a position to



care for themselves. However, while she is gone, tragedy once again strikes. Harriet, a lifelong smoker, has lung cancer. Ione returns and does not make a big deal of the situation, simply promising to do all she can to help. This sets the tone for Harriet's illness, suggesting to the reader the silent strength that will surround Harriet throughout her struggle.



Part 2: Chapters 26-28 and Epilogue

Part 2: Chapters 26-28 and Epilogue Summary

In chapter 26, all the regular costumers, except one, rally around Harriet as she struggles with her illness. This one, Evelyn Bright, is badgered by Patty Jane until she too begins appearing at the House of Curl once again. When Harriet learns that her cancer is not responding to treatment, she takes Patty Jane to a department store to help pick out a wig.

In chapter 27, Reese has taken a leave of absence from work and moved into Patty Jane's with Harriet. Harriet is concerned that Nora is avoiding her, so she makes Reese take her to the hamburger restaurant where Nora works. They pick Nora up and go for a drive, talking honestly about her illness.

In chapter 28, everyone seems to sense when Harriet is ready to go. They all gather in her room and say their goodbyes. All the regulars show up to the funeral, but Patty Jane finds herself unable to concentrate on their fond memories of Harriet, thinking instead of walking through the city and remembering her sister through the landmarks that have touched their lives.

In the epilogue, twenty years have passed since Harriet's death. Reese is still a part of the family. Lone continued to travel and has settled in Arizona with her traveling companions. Patty Jane has closed the House of Curl and turned it into a shop for Thor's birdhouses. The beauty salon has moved to Temple Curry's house, her family home that she left Thor in her will. Patty Jane and Clyde are still together, raising their son, Harry. Nora has become a lawyer and after several years of practicing entertainment law in Los Angeles, she has come home. Nora now practices law out of Temple Curry's old dentist office and lives in her childhood bedroom.

Part 2: Chapters 26-28 and Epilogue Analysis

Everyone rallies around Harriet as she dies of cancer, speaking volumes about her character and the character of her sister. These two women have been through terrible events together and this is the worse yet. However, Harriet faces it with courage because she has a family around her that loves her and she is confident in their love. It is unique family, but it is theirs. When she dies, Patty Jane is hit hard by the loss of her sister. However, instead of falling into a depression as she did as a young mother, she embraces her memories and returns home to those who love her.

The epilogue is a satisfying story of where everyone ended up in the twenty years after Harriet's death. It is amusing to see that Patty Jane had the baby Harriet thought she would have, and with a man she still has not married because she never divorced her first husband. This says a great deal about Patty Jane and her personality, her loyalty,

and her love. Patty Jane is as unique a woman as the family she has surrounded herself with.



Characters

Patty Jane Dobbin Rolvaag

Patty Jane Dobbin is the daughter of a couple of alcoholics. When she was young, Patty Jane would have to fight to care for herself and her sister in a household where violence and verbal abuse was an everyday occurrence. Patty Jane's parents died when she was still a teenager, forcing her and her sister to live with a relative who resented having to take on two more children. As a result, Patty Jane worked until she had the money to get herself and her sister a place of their own, where they would live together until the day Patty Jane got married.

Patty Jane is highly in tune with her body. Patty Jane knows that she has conceived a child on her wedding night despite the precautions she and her new husband take. Patty Jane tells everyone she is pregnant, but no one takes her seriously until her body begins to change. Patty Jane's husband is distant, unhappy with the prospect of impending fatherhood. When they have a fight late in Patty Jane's pregnancy, her husband fails to come home. Patty Jane has the baby alone, unsure if her husband has left her or if he has suffered some terrible accident. After a few months, Patty Jane receives a letter telling her that her husband has left of his own free will, unable to accept fatherhood.

Patty Jane falls into a depression with the loss of her husband. However, her mother-in-law and sister rally around her, helping her through this difficult time. After a while, Patty Jane pulls herself together and enrolls in beauty school, eventually opening her own beauty salon. In this salon, Patty Jane surrounds herself with intelligent women and raises her daughter. Patty Jane also falls in love again with an artist who does nails to pay the bills. Eventually Patty Jane will learn that her husband did not leave her, but was in a terrible accident and taken in by a mentally ill dentist. With her husband back, Patty Jane creates a unique family and grows old happily surrounded by that family.

Harriet Dobbin Brown

Harriet Dobbin is Patty Jane's sister. At the same time as Patty Jane is settling down in her marriage, Harriet falls in love with a cereal business tycoon. This relationship happens quickly and leaves Harriet feeling on top of the world. Unfortunately, Harriet's fiancé is killed flying home for their wedding. Harriet pushes aside her grief, however, to help her sister begin anew after the disappearance of her husband.

Harriet struggles for years with her grief over the loss of her fiancé. Eventually Harriet turns to alcohol, liking the way it feels when she is able to drink away her dark emotions. In time, Harriet spends more of her days drinking than working or doing anything else. Patty Jane confronts her and asks her to stop drinking. Harriet refuses, and moves out of the house she shares with Patty Jane. From there, Harriet finds herself on the streets



or sharing a bed with the next man offering to buy her a drink. Harriet spends nearly a year on the streets before she meets a beat cop with a history of alcoholism. This man offers to help Harriet. Harriet takes him up on this offer after she catches sight of her niece, Nora, going by in a bus.

Harriet cleans up with the help of the beat cop and joins Alcoholics Anonymous. Eventually Harriet returns to Patty Jane's home until she marries the cop. Times pass and it seems everything is back to normal. However, Harriet becomes ill and believes she might be pregnant. Rather than being pregnant, it turns out that Harriet has lung cancer. Harriet lingers for more than a year before dying in the company of all the people who care most about her.

Thor Rolvaag

Thor Rolvaag is Patty Jane's husband. Thor is a young, good-looking man who wants to be an architect one day. Thor lost his own father when he was young, so when he learns that Patty Jane is pregnant, he worries that he will not be able to be the kind of dad he should be. Thor is also concerned that a child will change his life in ways he is not ready for. Thor pulls away from Patty Jane during the pregnancy as he struggles with these ideas, fighting his own fear and panic. A few days before Patty Jane is due to give birth, she and Thor argue in the grocery store. Thor goes out and spends the night with two different women, telling himself he could be free to be with any woman he wants. However, deep down Thor wants Patty Jane.

As Thor is rushing home to tell Patty Jane he is sorry and he loves her, he slips on some ice and hits his head on the trunk of an oak tree. Thor is rescued by a mentally ill dentist, who takes him into her home and cares for him. The damage to Thor's head is so bad that he does not know who he is and he behaves as though he is a child. When Thor is eventually returned to his family, he cannot communicate with them except through his native tongue. However, his family welcomes Thor home with open arms.

Ione Rolvaag

Ione Rolvaag is Thor's mother. When Patty Jane first marries Thor, Ione is distant, a cold mother-in-law who has a habit of making her daughter-in-law feel as though she can do nothing right. However, when Thor disappears, Ione is one of the first to come to Patty Jane's aid. When Patty Jane falls into a depression and stops taking care of her bills, Ione takes care of them for her. When Patty Jane decides it is time to get a job, Ione offers to help pay for career education. It is Ione who helps Patty Jane open her beauty salon and it is Ione who moves in with Patty Jane and helps run the salon.

Ione is an immigrant from Norway who lost her husband at a very young age. Ione has had to take care of herself and her son, becoming a working mother at a time when it was uncommon for a woman to do such a thing. Ione is strong and she helps Patty Jane and Harriet both remain strong after each suffers a devastating event. In the end, Ione becomes part of Patty Jane's family.



Nora Rolvaag

Nora is Patty Jane's daughter. Nora is a typical teenager in a home that is as far from typical as it can get. Nora does not know her father as he left the family days before she was born. Nora has been raised by her mother, her maternal aunt, and her paternal grandmother. Nora works in her mother's beauty salon, listening to gossip all day. Nora is aware of her mother's great beauty and is overshadowed by it as she grows into womanhood through the awkward stages of adolescence. Despite that, Nora grows up to be a bright, intelligent woman who practices law out of her father's home.

Clyde Chuka

Clyde Chuka is an artist who also does manicures in order to pay his bills. Clyde comes to work at Patty Jane's beauty salon, doing nails, during a time when Patty Jane is dealing with the alcoholism of her sister and feeling as though everyone she loves leaves her. Clyde falls deeply in love with Patty Jane, but puts off beginning a relationship with her because he is afraid that she is not serious about a commitment to him. Patty Jane and Clyde do begin a relationship that brings happiness to both of them. However, not long after this relationship begins, Clyde and Harriet accidentally locate Thor, Patty Jane's husband. Clyde is instrumental in returning Thor to Patty Jane. However, because of Thor's mental condition, he is not a rival for Patty Jane's affections. Clyde and Patty Jane live together for many years, bringing a son into the unique family Patty Jane has created for herself.

Avel Ames III

Avel Ames III is the male heir to a large cereal company. Avel is a tiny man with a large heart. From the moment Avel sees Harriet, he knows that she is the woman for him. Avel makes it possible for Harriet to quit her job and concentrate on music, something for which she is highly gifted. Avel cares deeply for Harriet and chooses her over all else, including his own sisters. Theirs is a love affair meant to last a lifetime. However, Avel is killed while flying home from a business trip the day of their intended wedding.

Reese Brown

Reese Brown is a beat cop who has battled alcoholism and won sobriety through the Alcoholics Anonymous program. Reese comes across Harriet sleeping on the ground one night and he takes her to a hotel room, leaving her clean clothes and money. Harriet immediately sets out to use the money to buy more alcohol. However, after seeing her niece on a passing bus, Harriet once again turns to Reese for help. Reese gets Harriet into AA and gives her a place to live until she can get back on her feet. Eventually Reese helps Harriet return to her sister and the other members of their unique family. In the end, Reese and Harriet are married. Reese is at Harriet's side



when she dies of lung cancer and continues to be a member of Patty Jane's unique family.

Temple Curry

Temple Curry is a dentist who is the surviving member of a wealthy family. Temple has a mental illness that causes her to not understand the difference between right and wrong. One morning Temple sees Thor Rolvaag fall and hit his head. Instead of getting him help, Temple believes that Thor has been sent to her as a companion. Temple does not seek medical care for Thor, but keeps him alive and hidden in her house for more than ten years. Eventually Temple is found out and she returns Thor to his family. That night, Temple kills herself and leaves everything she has to Thor.

Elmo and Anna Dobbin

Anna and Elmo Dobbin are Patty Jane and Harriet's parents. Anna and Elmo were alcoholics that spent most of their time either drinking or abusing one another. There were many times in Patty Jane and Harriet's childhood that Anna and Elmo would become violent, causing their daughters to be placed in a position to care for them, rather than allowing them to remain children and grow up in a safe environment. Anna and Elmo eventually died in a car accident, leaving their teenage daughters on their own.



Objects/Places

Trumpet

Harriet once wanted to learn to play the trumpet as a young girl. After meeting Avel, he agrees to pay for her to go to music school where she will learn to play the trumpet as well as the harp and take singing lessons. Later, Harriet will play the trumpet with Nora at her own wedding.

Harp

Harriet learns to play the harp in music school. Later, Harriet will play the harp as part of her job at the House of Curl.

Perfumed Bandanas and Monogrammed Aprons

Patty Jane insists that what makes her beauty salon different from others are the monogrammed aprons she uses for all her customers and the perfumed bandanas that are wrapped around the noses of the customers when fumes from perms or coloring smell up the shop.

Birdhouses

Thor wants to be an architect. Thor builds a model home for Patty Jane that represents their first home he plans to build. Patty Jane believes it looks like a birdhouse. Later, after Thor has his accident, he begins building birdhouses by the hundreds.

Clyde Chuka's Art

Clyde Chuka is an artist. Most of his art is sculptures that make little sense to Patty Jane, but they sell for thousands when Clyde has his art shows.

Mighty Bites

Thor becomes a model for Ames' Grains breakfast cereal, Mighty Bites, at the request of Avel. However, the boxes do not come out until months after both Thor has disappeared and Avel has died, causing great amounts of grief to Patty Jane.



Dessert

Ione is a great cook and she often makes great desserts for Patty Jane and Harriet. When Patty Jane opens her salon, Ione often brings desserts in for the customers to eat.

Letters from Thor

After his disappearance, Patty Jane begins receiving periodic letters from Thor that often include small amounts of money. Patty Jane takes this as proof that Thor ran away from impending fatherhood.

Letter from College Professor

After Thor disappears, Patty Jane receives a letter from an anonymous college professor at the school Thor attended telling her that Thor spent the night with this mysterious professor the night he disappeared.

Oyster-colored Packard

Avel first sees Harriet from the driver's seat of his brand new oyster-colored Packard. Later, while picnicking with Harriet on the beach, Avel gives the keys to his car to a homeless man who admires it, trusting the man will return. The man does not return.

Newspaper

Harriet learns of Avel's death from the local newspaper.

House of Curl

Patty Jane becomes a hair stylist after the birth of her daughter, Nora, and opens a beauty salon called the House of Curl. This salon not only offers hair styling and manicures, but also provides desserts and classes on everything from art to financial advice.

Temple Curry's House

Temple Curry lives in her parents' mansion. When she dies, Temple leaves this large house, including her old dentist's office, to Thor. It is in Temple's old office where Nora eventually practices law.

Ibsen's A Doll's House

A Doll's House is a play by Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen about a woman who discovers her husband is not the man she once believed him to be. Patty Jane names her daughter after the heroine in this story who is courageous enough to provide for her family in a time of need and leave her husband when she realizes they will never have the marriage she once dreamed they would.



Themes

Family

Patty Jane is very close to her sister Harriet. When Patty Jane marries, it is still Harriet she turns to with all her secrets. Patty Jane and Harriet have grown close because they had alcoholic parents who were often violent and verbally abusive. This caused Patty Jane and Harriet to rely on one another in times of stress. Later, when their parents died, Patty Jane and Harriet moved in together and cared for one another even though they were still only teenagers. This created a bond that the girls hope nothing can break. However, it is tested over and over again. First, Patty Jane loses her husband. Patty Jane has no way of knowing if her husband's disappearance was voluntary or if he has come to harm, causing her to fall into a dark depression that leaves her barely able to function. Harriet is there for Patty Jane, sitting by her side and helping her through these dark moments.

Later, Harriet's fiancé, Avel, is killed in a plane crash on their wedding day. Harriet also falls into a depression, but she pulls herself out and hides her emotions in order to continue to help Patty Jane through her pain. Years pass and both women move forward. However, Harriet has never forgotten the grief of losing the only man she believes she will ever love. Harriet begins to drink and soon finds herself drinking all day, every day. Patty Jane confronts her, unwilling to watch her sister go down the same path their parents did. However, Harriet does not want to stop and she ends up living on the street. At this point, Patty Jane finds herself alone, without the two people she loves most in the world.

It is during Harriet's time on the streets as an alcoholic that Patty Jane discovers she has a unique family and she pulls them ever closer. Patty Jane has her daughter, Nora, and her mother-in-law Ione, both of whom have stood beside her through everything, good or bad. Patty Jane also begins a relationship with her manicurist, Clyde Chuka. Beyond these good people, Patty Jane also has her employees and her regular customers, all good people who are willing to stand beside her no matter what might happen. In the end, Harriet comes back to Patty Jane and she takes her in, enveloped in the unique family that formed almost without Patty Jane noticing, making family an important theme of the novel.

Loss

Loss is an important theme of the novel because it seems to be a theme of the lives of Patty Jane and Harriet Dobbin. Patty Jane and Harriet lost their parents at a young age and find themselves forced to stand on their own long before they should have. Patty Jane and Harriet handle this well, forging a bond that will get them through some very dark pages in their future. When Patty Jane marries and Harriet falls in love, it appears they are looking at a happy future. Unfortunately, this happy future begins to fall apart



when first Patty Jane's husband, Thor, disappears, and later when Harriet's fiancé is killed on what should have been their wedding day.

Patty Jane takes the loss of her husband hard, especially when it begins to look like he disappeared because he does not want to be a father. Patty Jane falls into a deep depression that is only elevated when she realizes that lone, her mother-in-law, has been forced to pay her bills for her. Patty Jane finally comes around, creating a business that employs not only herself, but lone and Harriet as well. For Patty Jane, this is how she copes with loss. Harriet, on the other hand, copes by burying her feelings until they become so overwhelming that she begins to drink. Harriet too disappears from Patty Jane's life by choice, not by abandoning Patty Jane but by abandoning herself in drink. Once again Patty Jane feels that she has lost someone she loves dearly, making loss an important theme in the novel.

Alcoholism

Alcoholism is an important theme in this novel because it is a disease that affects Patty Jane both as a child and later as an adult. Patty Jane's parents are both alcoholics. Rather than providing for their children both financially and emotionally, Patty Jane's parents spend all their time either getting drunk or finding the means to get drunk. Nothing Patty Jane can do will stop her parents from drinking. Patty Jane often finds herself having to clean up the messes left by her parents' drinking.

When Harriet discovers hard liquor, she discovers that it takes away the pain of losing Avel, her fiancé. Harriet begins to drink every night, enjoying the way it feels to be numb. As time passes, Harriet begins drinking during the day, often leaving work in order to go get drunk. Harriet becomes an alcoholic who cares more about getting that next drink than taking care of herself or those she loves. The disease gets so bad for Harriet that she begins sharing hotel rooms with men just because they are willing to buy her a drink.

Harriet is discovered sleeping on the street by a beat cop. This cop knows about alcoholism because he also drank too much after his wife abandoned him and his two children. This cop, Reese, turned to Alcoholics Anonymous and fixed what was wrong in his life. As a result, Reese finds himself wanting to help others who have found themselves in similar circumstances. Reese gives Harriet new clothes and some money, as well as the address of an AA meeting. It is this last that saves Harriet's life after she sees her niece on a bus and realizes what she has become. For these reasons, alcoholism is an important theme in the novel.

Style

Point of View

There are two distinct points of view in this novel. The prologue and epilogue are written in the first person point of view. The narrator of these parts of the novel is Nora Rolvaag, Patty Jane's daughter. In the prologue, Nora is just a teenager, watching her beautiful mother flirt with some stranger in a drug store. Nora discusses her mother in detail, including her beauty and her morals when she turns the guy down for being married. Nora also introduces her unusual family in this prologue, a family that consists of an absent father, a maternal aunt, and her paternal grandmother. In the epilogue, the first person narration is again Nora Rolvaag. However, this Nora is much older. Nora is now a woman in her forties, an accomplished attorney who has recently returned to her hometown to be near her family. The bulk of the novel is told in the third person point of view. This point of view does not remain with one particular character that can be characterized as the narrator, suggesting to the reader that Nora is telling the story herself, but refers to all the characters in the third person, including herself, for clarity.

The points of view of this novel are not unique, but are utilized in such a way as to make this novel's structure unique. The point of view at the beginning and end of the novel is first person, first introducing the characters and main plot points to the reader and then wrapping up the story in such a way that the reader is satisfied with the outcome of the lives of the characters they have come to know throughout the novel. The main body of the novel is told in the third person point of view in order to tell the story of people who existed before the main narrator and to keep the story concise, keeping the introduction of the narrating character simple to aid the reader's comprehension and to keep emphasis on the characters who are most important to the overall story. The points of view in this novel are unusual, but they work well within the structure of this novel.

Setting

The novel is set in Minneapolis, Minnesota in the 1950s through the '90s. Minneapolis is a large metropolis, but the section of the city in which the novel is set is a small community of Norwegian immigrants. This community gives the sense of a small town to the reader as the novel progresses, especially when Patty Jane opens her small beauty salon and its customers come from this exclusive community. Due to this setting, there is a great deal of Norwegian culture in the novel, mixed with the American culture of the young characters living in the 1950s.

The setting of this novel is unique in that it is centered around a culture that is unique to this location. This culture comes from the mixture of Norwegian immigrants with the American culture of Midwest America. Although this setting does not overwhelm the plot or become something of a character to the plot, it does introduce knowledge about the characters that helps get across to the reader the unique community ties a neighbor



such as this might have. This setting also helps to show the reader why such a unique family builds around Patty Jane through the course of the novel even as her own husband disappears and her sister struggles with her own demons.

Language and Meaning

The language of the novel is a simple English. The novel is written with the use of a common language that most readers, even the very youngest, will understand easily. However, the novel also contains many foreign phrases, many of these phrases stemming from the Norwegian heritage of the characters, especially Lone, who is an immigrant from Norway. These foreign words and phrases are minimal at the beginning of the novel and many of them are explained through context. Later in the novel, when Thor returns to his family, this familial language is the only one he speaks with any clarity. For this reason, the phrases become more common in the text. These phrases are not always clearly explained, but again the context in which they are used helps the reader understand the overall meaning.

The language of the novel works well because it is simple enough for the youngest readers to understand and it works to emphasize the backgrounds of the main characters. The setting of the novel is a community in Minnesota that is composed of a great many immigrants from Norway and similar countries. Lone, the mother-in-law of the title character, is an immigrant from Norway and she often reverts to her birth language when emotional. For this reason, it is important for the writer to include many of these foreign phrases to lend some authenticity to this character. For this reason, the language of this novel works well with the plot.

Structure

The novel is divided into a prologue, epilogue, and two parts that contain twenty-eight chapters. The prologue and epilogue are written in the first person point of view with Patty Jane's daughter, Nora, as the narrator. The bulk of the novel, however, is told in the third person point of view. The novel appears to be structured in this way in order to tell the story of Patty Jane, beginning before the narrator's birth. The novel is told in both exposition and dialogue, but the bulk of the novel is exposition.

The novel tells the story of two sisters; therefore, there are two distinct main plots. The first follows the life of Patty Jane Dobbin as she marries, becomes pregnant, and then is abandoned by her husband. The story follows Patty Jane through the pain of her husband's absence and into a life that Patty Jane builds for herself and her family. The second plot follows Patty Jane's sister, Harriet. Harriet falls in love with the heir to a cereal company, but is devastated when he dies in an accident the day of their wedding. In time this grief overwhelms Harriet and she falls into a cycle of alcoholism. Both these plots come to a satisfactory conclusion at the end of the novel, and any loose ends are tied up by the narrator in the epilogue.



Quotes

"I was my Grandma Ione's pet and, for years, the only one happy to listen to any conversation concerning her son, my father." Prologue, p. 3

"Patty Jane Dobbin's wedding dress was shell pink and of such a high-quality rayon that in the right light it looked like satin." Part 1: Chap. 1, p. 9

"Love bloomed in bunches for both Dobbin sisters that year." Part 1: Chap. 2, p. 23

"Despite Patty Jane's pronouncements from the beginning, it had been easy for Thor to ignore what seemed a nonexistent pregnancy." Part 1: Chap. 3, p. 38

"Patty Jane hugged her belly, imagining Mary's terror at laboring on a donkey, not knowing if she was going to give birth under a roof or a cold winter's moon." Part 1: Chap. 3, p. 46

"The plate rattled on the table as the waitress flung it in front of Patty Jane. Her movements slowed as she presented to Thor his tenderloin steak." Part 1: Chap. 6, p. 65

"'Her name is Nora,' said Patty Jane. 'After 'The Doll House.' When Elmo and Anna were sober enough to read, they held a special loyalty to the Norwegians." Part 1: Chap. 6, p. 77

"Thor's absence passed the one-month mark and Patty Jane's depression began to grow mean." Part 1: Chap. 8, p. 92

"In less than a month, tension between the two sisters rose as if fueled by yeast." Part 2: Chap. 15, p. 170

"Harriet was conscious of being moved by someone or something blue, but she accepted it in the matter-of-fact way of a person who's been drunk a long time." Part 2: Chap. 17, p. 189

"It had been a subdued household the morning after Thor's return. People spoke in hushed tones and moved quietly, as if they had gathered for a funeral, which in a way, Patty Jane pointed out to Clyde Chuka, they had." Part 2: Chap. 23, p. 233

"Home was always the place she went to when she had to start over." Part 2: Chap. 28, p. 279



Topics for Discussion

Who is Nora? Why is she embarrassed by her mother in the prologue? Why does Nora begin her story with this scene? What does this scene say about Nora's relationship with her mother? Why is the prologue and the epilogue told in the first person point of view? Why does the writer not use the first person point of view in the body of the novel? How would this change the focus of the story?

Who is Patty Jane? What is unique about Patty Jane? Why does Patty Jane become convinced she has conceived on her wedding night? Did she? Is it possible Patty Jane conceived later in her marriage? How does Patty Jane react to this pregnancy? Why does Patty Jane refuse to go to the doctor with this pregnancy? Why does Patty Jane refuse pain medication during the delivery of her child? What does this say about Patty Jane's personality? How does Patty Jane end up opening a beauty salon?

Who is Thor? How does Thor feel about his new wife? How does Thor react to Patty Jane's insistence that she is pregnant? How does Thor's behavior toward his wife change as her pregnancy progresses? Why? What does Thor study in college? What does Thor build for Patty Jane to represent their future? Why does Thor leave Patty Jane in a grocery store and spend the night with two different women? What does this say about Thor's sense of responsibility to his wife and child? What decision has Thor made the following morning? What stops Thor from returning home that morning?

Who is Harriet? What does Harriet think of Avel when she first meets him? Is Harriet in love with Avel for his money? What does this say about Harriet? How does Harriet react when she learns of Avel's death? What keeps Harriet from grieving properly? When does Harriet begin to grieve? How does she act out her grief? What does this do to Harriet's relationship with Patty Jane? How does this situation bring Harriet to the man she will eventually marry?

Who is Clyde Chuka? What is his relationship to Patty Jane? Why does Clyde come to work at the House of Curl? What does he do? What is unusual about this? What does Clyde want to do? Is he good at this career? Why does Clyde push Patty Jane away the first time she makes a pass at him? Why does he not push her away the second time? What is unusual about Clyde and Patty Jane's relationship? How does Thor's resurrection affect Clyde's relationship with Patty Jane?

Who is Ione? Why does Patty Jane believe Ione does not like her at first? How does Ione feel about Patty Jane? When Thor disappears, how does Ione react? Why does Ione begin paying Patty Jane's bills? Is it Ione's responsibility to care for Patty Jane? How does Patty Jane react when she learns what Ione has been doing for her? How does Patty Jane repay Ione?



Who is Temple Curry? Why did Temple rescue Thor? Why did Temple not get Thor medical attention? Why did Temple dye Thor's hair? Why did Temple keep Thor hidden for so long? Who sent Patty Jane the letters from Thor? Why? How did Thor eventually come home to Patty Jane? What was wrong with him when he returned? Why did Patty Jane take Thor back? Why does Patty Jane never divorce Thor?