

# **The Paper Magician Study Guide**

**The Paper Magician by Charlie N. Holmberg**

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# Contents

<a href="#">The Paper Magician Study Guide.....</a>	<a href="#">1</a>
<a href="#">Contents.....</a>	<a href="#">2</a>
<a href="#">Plot Summary.....</a>	<a href="#">3</a>
<a href="#">Chapters 1 – 4.....</a>	<a href="#">5</a>
<a href="#">Chapters 5 – 8.....</a>	<a href="#">9</a>
<a href="#">Chapters 9 – 12.....</a>	<a href="#">13</a>
<a href="#">Chapters 13 – 15.....</a>	<a href="#">16</a>
<a href="#">Chapters 16 – 17.....</a>	<a href="#">19</a>
<a href="#">Characters.....</a>	<a href="#">21</a>
<a href="#">Symbols and Symbolism.....</a>	<a href="#">24</a>
<a href="#">Settings.....</a>	<a href="#">27</a>
<a href="#">Themes and Motifs.....</a>	<a href="#">29</a>
<a href="#">Styles.....</a>	<a href="#">34</a>
<a href="#">Quotes.....</a>	<a href="#">35</a>



# Plot Summary

“The Paper Magician” is a new adult historical fantasy novel by Charlie N. Holmberg which recounts the efforts of nineteen year-old paper magician Ceony Twill to save the life of her teacher and love interest, Emery Thane. When the novel begins, Ceony has just graduated from the Tagis Praff School for the Magically Inclined in London. Magicians primarily work with whatever material they are assigned and bonded to, such as metal or paper. Ceony, hoping to be bonded to metals, is instead bonded to paper because there so few paper magicians, or Folders. She is then assigned to apprentice to thirty year-old Emery Thane.

Within a day, Ceony realizes that Thane has impressive powers and much to teach, but she still considers Folding to be a form of magic intended for mere entertainment. As she comes to learn over the next few weeks, that is not the case. Thane teaches her to breathe paper animals into life, and cast spells using paper chains and other assemblages. He also teaches her to generate imagery based on the things she reads from paper. Thane even goes so far as to create a dog companion for Ceony, since her own real dog is at home. Ceony is delighted, and names the dog Fennel. Thane also has Ceony read books on subjects as diverse as anatomy and astrology but for what purposes, Ceony does not know.

Ceony warms up to Thane, cooking for him and tending to household chores. When Thane suddenly leaves for a six-day period, Ceony feels empty and alone without him. When Thane returns with a bandaged arm, he avoids questions about where he has been. Later that day, a mysterious woman named Lira appears in the house, throwing Ceony to the side and using blood to cast a magic spell on Thane. Ceony realizes Lira is an Excisioner, a magician of the flesh, a dark and evil form of magic. Lira uses a spell to extract Thane’s heart before disappearing.

In tears, Ceony rushes about, crafting a paper heart which she puts into Thane’s chest. Miraculously, he manages to survive. He instructs her to bind him with a magical vitality chain, which will give him one or two days at most to live. Thane is consigned to his fate, but Ceony is not. She begs him to hold on. She alerts the magical authorities, then crafts a number of paper birds whom she instructs to track down Lira. One bird is successful.

Using an enchanted paper glider, Ceony and Fennel follow the bird to Foulness Island in the English Channel. There, Ceony and Fennel discover Thane’s heart in a cave, and are confronted by Lira. Lira reveals the heart to be a trap, for the cave in which they now stand is actually Thane’s heart. Ceony and Fennel narrowly manage to avoid being killed by Lira by stepping back, and the world around them transitioning into a series of memories from Thane’s past.

Traveling through his heart, Ceony learns that Thane was orphaned at the age of three, that he was once married to Lira, and that he divorced her when he learned that she was practicing the dark magic of Excision. She also learns that he sheltered Lira one



night when Lira was on the run –something for which Thane blames himself as dozens of other innocent people end up dying at her hand. Ceony also sees that Thane has hopes for a future, a wife and children. This makes Ceony happy, and helps her to realize that she is falling in love with Thane.

She urges Thane to fight the spell on his heart, and prepares for a final confrontation with Lira. Thane successfully frees Ceony, who battles Lira for Thane's heart. Using spells Thane taught her, Ceony successfully throws Lira off. Using Lira's own knife against her, Ceony slashes Lira's face and uses her blood to write down a spell into existence, in which Lira is turned to stone. With Thane's real heart in hand, Ceony and Fennel race back to Thane's house, and restore him to life. The authorities are dispatched to the scene of Lira's last location, but do not find her.

Thane takes several days to recover. Ceony watches over him all the time, aware that she is indeed in love with him. When Thane awakens, he tells Ceony she saved his life, and speaks of the guilt he feels for having once sheltered Lira. Ceony explains that the past makes people who they are. As the novel ends, Thane tells Ceony that he never wanted to be a Folder, either, so he and Ceony have more in common than she may think. This causes Ceony great happiness.



# Chapters 1 – 4

## Summary

Chapter 1 – Nineteen year-old Ceony Twill, graduate of the Tagis Praff School for the Magically Inclined, is disappointed to learn that the material she has been assigned to use for her magical practice is paper. She had hoped to be a Smelter, using metals instead. Magician Patrice Aviosky at Tagis explains that with only 12 working in paper in England, there aren't enough Folders. Ceony is then sent to study with Magician Emery Thane on the River Thames. He lives on the outskirts of London in a dilapidated mansion. Avisoky tells Ceony not to trust her eyes. Touching the front gate, the house is transformed into a beautiful smaller home with beautiful gardens with paper flowers. A paper skeleton named Jonto greets them at the door, scaring Ceony. Thane then makes his appearance. He is about thirty, is very plain, but has green eyes. He is not unkind but he is not warm in welcoming her.

As Thane gives her a tour, she notes that paper creations of all kinds are everywhere, and wonders if she is to spend her life as nothing more than a decorator. Ceony is given a small but cozy guestroom where she leaves her bag as the tour continues. Thane explains the third floor is for big spells but does not take them there. Instead, he brings them to the library for the bonding. Ceony does not look forward to the material bonding, which will determine her magical area of expertise forever. It will mean she can only cast spells using paper. Taking a sheet of paper between her hands, Ceony speaks the bonding spell.

Chapter 2 – Thane asks if Ceony wishes to keep the bonding paper. She says she does not. Aviosky takes out traditional apprentice attire—a red apron and black top hat—and hands it to Ceony, who dutifully accepts it. Nevertheless, Ceony is a little happy because the apron is proof of her having earned her way into the magical world. As Thane escorts Avisoky out, he hands Ceony the bonding paper. The paper now feels different, but Ceony can't figure out how, imagining it has to do with bonding. Ceony makes her way to Thane's study, which is full of paper and paper creations. Thane joins her.

Thane tells her that Folding might not be as exciting or innovative as other disciplines, but it has its uses and creative outlets. Thane reveals himself as Ceony's anonymous tuition sponsor at Tagis. Ceony, a from a poor Whitechapel's Mill Squats family, would not have been able to afford it otherwise. Instead of explaining why he sponsored her, Ceony says they should begin. He sits on the floor, explaining her never likes to fold on his lap. He goes on to explain that Folding magic will not work unless everything is Folded and aligned perfectly. As he speaks, he creates a small bird and frog, commanding them to breathe. They leap to life, behaving as real animals. Ceony is impressed. Thane explains Jonto took months to create, since Jonto was an entirely new spell. Paper snowflakes fall from the ceiling.



He then has Ceony read from the book “Pip’s Daring Escape,” urging her to put some life into the reading. As she does, an image of the written words appears. Ceony is impressed, but dismisses it as entertainment. Thane says that even entertainment has value. He folds a paper fortune teller, and predicts Ceony will have adventure in the future. He then has Ceony read his fortune. She sees a woman named Lira, who Thane dismisses as an acquaintance. His eyes appear darker. He tells Ceony he would like to see a full illusion by Saturday.

Chapter 3 – Ceony takes along some paper snowflakes as well as “Pip’s Daring Escape” to her room. As Ceony unpacks, she reflects on the fifteen-thousand-pound tuition paid by Thane. She wonders why he would finance an unknown student and then not specifically request her as an apprentice. She thinks about how much she misses her Jack Russell Terrier, Bizzy. Thane pays Ceony a visit in her room, bringing along a stack of books including works on anatomy, flight, astrology, pyrotechnics, and the Tao. He explains they will all benefit her. As Ceony skims the books, she falls asleep.

Waking up in the middle of the night, Ceony heads down to get some rice. As she returns, she notices light coming from Thane’s study. Peering in, she sees him working with white paper and wonders what is keeping him awake at such an hour. The next morning, a paper dog greets Ceony. Thane says that he hopes the dog will do in lieu of a real dog, for he is allergic to most animals except bees. Ceony gratefully thanks Thane, and makes him breakfast. She names the dog Fennel, and puts Bizzy’s old collar on Fennel.

Thane begins training Ceony, explaining he had had two and-a-half previous apprentices, the half being an uncompleted term. He speaks about the importance of paper thickness and grain, and begins to show her basic Folding patterns. Over dinner, Ceony learns she will be given a stipend, half of which she hopes to send home each month to her family. Thane will give her extra money as well. He compliments Ceony’s cooking, and describes grocery shopping as his most loathed chore.

Chapter 4 – The next morning, Thane quizzes Ceony on paper types. He compliments her for answering all questions correctly. As the days pass, Ceony folds and reads. Thane begins to teach her how to Cut paper. Ceony goes out grocery shopping when food runs low. Thane teaches her how to make a frog, and compliments her on her successes. They move on to birds and fish. A telegraph comes in from someone named Albert, with the words “found in solihull,” a town more than a hundred miles away. Ceony asks about what is in Solihull, and Thane says it is just a friend. Ceony is suspicious, but Thane moves on to a new lesson on paper fans. He tells her to practice it while he is gone on what he calls “Magician’s business, as usual.” Ceony is stunned and saddened. Thane tells her to keep up with her studies and to keep the doors locked.



## Analysis

“The Paper Magician” is a new adult historical fantasy novel by Charlie N. Holmberg which recounts the efforts of nineteen year-old paper magician Ceony Twill to save the life of her teacher and love interest, Emery Thane. When the novel begins, the theme of Magic is readily apparent, and will remain one of the two strongest, most overarching themes throughout (the other theme being Love). Ceony is a recent graduate from Tagis Praff School for the Magically Inclined. There are thousands of magicians throughout England, and Ceony is one of them. She has been assigned to apprentice with Emery Thane in the magic of paper Folding.

Thane is only one of twelve such Folders in England. Ceony herself is brokenhearted at the prospect of having to work with paper rather than metal. Indeed, the entire premise for magic in the novel is that a magician must work with one type of material, and is forever legally and physically bonded to that kind of material. When Ceony becomes a paper Folder, she may never again work with any other kind of material. Why this is the case is not explained, but it is in keeping with the theme of Magic.

Ceony's apprenticeship with Thane begins. It is wholly based on magic. Magic abounds in these chapters, as Thane teaches Ceony how to breathe life into paper animals and demonstrates many forms of magic, including cold paper snowflakes falling from the ceiling. Ceony is beyond impressed, and begins to see that paper magic may have its importance after all. Through Thane, Ceony realizes that magic isn't merely a question of practicality, but creativity as well. Here, the theme of creativity becomes important as Ceony recognizes the passion and love Thane has for creation.

As the days pass, and Ceony learns more and more magic, it is apparent that the student-teacher relationship between them is shifting as well. Ceony is not only carrying on with the duties of her apprenticeship, but she is taking on household chores. Ceony might be learning from Thane, but she is helping to take care of him in turn. This turn of events serves as a good omen for things to come, as Ceony herself is rapidly warming toward Thane in a direction that will become love. Love is especially important here.

Thane surprises Ceony in numerous ways, with each one of them unknowingly softening Ceony's heart toward him. Beyond teaching her the magic of paper—and being very straightforward with her about how other fields of magic may be more innovative—Thane creates a paper dog for Ceony, which delights Ceony. She names the dog "Fennel," which itself in nature is a tough, perennial herb. Fennel's name will symbolically come to be demonstrated in the future, as his courageous actions and loyalty prove invaluable to Ceony.

Early in the novel, the theme of mystery also makes a strong appearance. Several mysteries—not all of which are answered—come to light. Ceony is curious as to why Thane would conceal his house with an enchanted exterior. She is also curious as to why there are so few Folders in England, as well as why Thane ever would have bothered sponsoring her at school. Thane is not forthcoming with answers to any of these questions, and things only become more mysterious based on the telegraph he



receives from Hughes. The mystery deepens even further when Thane leaves for a town more than a hundred miles away without real explanation—only to leave Ceony in a state of confusion.

## Discussion Question 1

For what reasons is Ceony unhappy to become a paper magician? What had she hoped to do instead? Why?

## Discussion Question 2

What negative assumptions and beliefs does Ceony have toward Folding? How does Thane react to and counter these assumptions and beliefs?

## Discussion Question 3

As lessons progress and Ceony becomes more comfortable, she begins to handle some of the household chores. Why does she do this?

## Vocabulary

monstrosity, transformation, espionage, ornamentation, quipped, deft, countenance, reverence, astute, philanthropy, fortuity, retorted, subtle, nonchalant, inflections





## Chapters 5 – 8

### Summary

Chapter 5 – The following day, Ceony already hopes that Thane will return. The house seems lifeless without him. Ceony finds Fennel scratching at Thane’s study door, so she goes in. She begins going through his desk in curiosity. There is no family correspondence, but there is a Christmas card from Alfred Hughes. She finds an 1888-1889 Granger Academy yearbook. It is the same school Ceony attended twelve years after Thane. When Thane does not return home the next day, she begins to worry and goes into his bedroom. She cleans his clothes. The next day, Ceony finds a book in Thane’s bedroom entitled “The Thanes.” Inside are hymns and pressed wildflowers.

Six days after he leaves, Thane suddenly returns at six in the morning. He says his trip “went” and calls Ceony to the library to do paper boats. Ceony notices Thane’s right forearm is bandaged. He dismisses at a bump, but it makes Ceony suspicious. At dinner, Thane appears more rested. Suddenly, a woman enters the kitchen, dressed in all black. It is Lira. Thane tries to shield Ceony from the blood blast spell Lira casts at her, but is unable to do so. She is thrown aside, and realizes Lira is a Flesh-spell caster. Lira then plunges her hand into Thane’s heart, rips out his chest, and disappears in a cloud of smoke.

Chapter 6 – Ceony is in tears. She does her best to remember what she read in the human anatomy book, and all of the skills Thane has so far taught her. She fashions a paper heart, tells it to breathe, and puts it into Thane’s chest as it closes. She begs Thane to breathe, but he does not stir. She rushes to telegraph Aviosky. She then hears Thane coughing, and rushes to him. He instructs her to wrap a paper chain around his chest. It is a vitality chain. Ceony wants to know why Lira has taken Thane’s heart to stop him, but he will not say. Ceony informs him she has told Aviosky, which Thane says is good. Thane explains he has a day or two at best before he dies. This upsets Ceony to no end. She does her best to make Thane comfortable.

After sunset, Smelter John Katter, Siper Alfred Hughes, and Aviosky arrive. Katter and Hughes are members of the Magician’s Cabinet (Katter for Agriculture and Hughes for Criminal Affairs). Ceony recounts the events to them. Hughes announces it is powerful Excision work, and Ceony is ordered to bed by Aviosky. Instead, Ceony eavesdrops. She overhears a discussion about Thane being the one to tip them off for the Lillith capture; and that Magician Karl Tode has been killed in a similar manner to the attack on Thane. Lira and her group know that Thane is critical to the syndicate. Approval must be gained by the cabinet to go after Lira. All that can be done for Thane now is to make him comfortable. This terrifies Ceony, who hugs Fennel for comfort.

Ceony holds one of the snowflakes Thane made, and vows to save him. She breathes life into numerous paper birds. She tells them about Lira, and asks them to find Lira. She then packs her Tatham pistol, paper of various kinds, food, and two atlases. She



determines to find Lira. She touches Thane's hair, begs him to live, and tells him she won't mind being a paper magician if he is the one to teach her. A green paper bird returns, slightly injured. It knows where Lira is. Ceony repairs the bird. She then goes upstairs to the third floor, where she finds massive paper creations, including a glider. With the bird leading the way, Ceony and Fennel follow on the glider.

Chapter 7 – It takes Ceony a few minutes to handle the glider, but she manages to control it well. The bird leads the way to the English Channel and Foulness Island. Upon landing, Ceony is careful to walk, for the terrain is composed of cliffs. She watches, horrified, as a living dead seagull takes to the sky. She knows it is the work of an Excisioner like Lira. Ceony enters a cave, where she finds a pair of shoes and Thane's beating heart in a bowl of blood. Lira appears behind her. Ceony pulls out her pistol and shoots Lira as Lira advances, but Lira heals herself. She continues to advance on Ceony.

Chapter 8 – Ceony realizes she is not inside a cave at all, but inside Thane's heart. The heart in the bowl was a decoy. Continuing to step back, things morph around Ceony into a honeybee farm in broad daylight. Lira is nowhere to be seen. Children play about. They cannot hear or see Ceony. The youngest child is a six year-old version of Thane. The scene morphs again to Thane's magical graduation at the Royal Albert Hall Auditorium in West London. Ceony folds a bird, and then finds herself in an old room where a pregnant woman named Mrs. Letta Tork is in labor. Thane is assisting in the birth. Letta wears a vitality chain. Ceony wonders if she is seeing all of Thane's good deeds and good memories.

The scene morphs again. She finds Thane having just completed his own book, "A Reverse Perception of Paper Animation". She then recalls a biology assignment about how the heart has four chambers. She realizes the first chamber of Thane's heart is the warmest. She then sees a scene of beautiful flowers--the same kind as from the hymnal--on a summer afternoon in North Downs. There, a younger Thane and Lira lay in the grass. She realizes that Thane loved Lira once, and had been his wife, a revelation that sickens Ceony.

The scene fades. Thane is working on Jonto, while a fat man named Langston brings in new paper. Langston appears to be an apprentice. The scene shifts to luxurious Draper's Hall in Throgmorton Avenue in London to an event Ceony had helped to cater one week before school began at Tagis Praff. She finds a bored Thane conversing with a bald man, and sees herself waiting tables. A middle-aged man puts his hand on Ceony's younger self's thigh, causing her younger self to scream, pour water on the man, and Thane to laugh. The middle-aged man is Sinad Mueller, of the Mueller Academic Scholarship program.

A second Thane appears, explaining to Ceony that it was Mueller who revoked her scholarship, and Thane who stepped in. He says Mueller got what he deserved, and is a horrible person besides. Thane vanishes. She then sees Lira looking for her. Putting Fennel into her bag, Ceony pushes through the wall of Thane's heart.



## Analysis

In this section of the novel, Love becomes an important theme. It is clear that Ceony is unexpectedly falling for Thane, for his several-day trip leaves her feeling restless and as if the house has no life. She realizes how alone she is without him being around. At first, she ascribes this to merely being used to him, but as time passes, she realizes it is romantic instead. There is great symbolic evidence of this, of love, in that Ceony will be trying to find and repair Thane's heart. Thane is not complete without his heart, and it is Ceony who will be seeking and later protecting Thane's heart. The scene where Ceony holds one of Thane's snowflakes is a further demonstration of how the simple things he has done have touched her deeply.

Magic remains a dominant theme as well in this section of the novel. Ceony has her first personal encounter with an Excisioner through the form of Lira, who appears without warning to literally steal Thane's heart from his chest. It is a cruel and hideous act of hatred and destruction, a complete antithesis to Thane and the paper magic of creation. Lira's stealing of Thane's heart underscores the past, in which Lira had symbolically stolen Thane's heart as a matter of love. Lira's current reason for stealing Thane's heart is a mystery, but it is suspected that it has to do with Thane's own recent trip, and his previous conversation with Aviosky.

Thane's heart itself becomes symbolic of human life—of everything that makes a human life. Each chamber of his heart contains memories of different events in his life and everything a human life contains. The presence of Ceony and Lira in his heart should not be missed by the reader. Both are clearly instrumental and important in his life, though they are instrumental and important in different ways. Lira is more a figment of the past, while Ceony is very much important in the present.

That Ceony and Lira should be wandering through the annals of Thane's heart is itself another illustration of the theme of magic. Indeed, the idea that Ceony should be experiencing and watching Thane's memories is evidence of magic at work. Ceony sees Thane's own magical graduation, and his work as a magician in practice, such as helping to save the life of a mother giving birth.

It is through the theme of magic that the theme of love also reemerges. Ceony comes to discover that Lira and Thane were in love many years before. This makes Ceony feel sick to her stomach—not merely because Thane was in love with a woman who would later try to kill him, but because Ceony's own feelings for Thane are far stronger than she had realized. Her physical reaction to the idea that Thane was once in love with Lira is proof that her feelings are growing. It also summons the mystery as to how a woman who was clearly so in love with Thane could come to want to kill him.

Interestingly enough, one of the mysteries from earlier is finally solved. Why Ceony should have been the beneficiary of a scholarship from Thane has long been a question to Ceony, but through Thane's memories, it is clear why. The memory which reveals the truth to Ceony is in the warmest part of Thane's heart (evidence that Thane's own feelings may be perhaps romantically inclined toward Ceony). Thane decided to



sponsor Ceony after Ceony stood up to Mueller for his obviously sexual intentions toward her. It is clear he saw something special in Ceony. It is also clear that his belief in Ceony is now paying off, as Ceony is fighting to save his life.

## Discussion Question 1

How does Ceony manage to handle the six days that Thane is away? What are those six days like for her emotionally? Why does she believe this is?

## Discussion Question 2

What is most stunning to Ceony about Thane's past regarding Lira in this section of the novel? What is Ceony's reaction to this revelation? Why?

## Discussion Question 3

What is the truth behind Thane's sponsoring of Ceony in school? How does Ceony react to this? Why? What implications might this particular memory have for Ceony and Thane? Why?

## Vocabulary

hydrophobic, bribery, famished, syndicate, sober, adequately, reanimate, bliss, serenity, tedium, blathering, reverberated



## Chapters 9 – 12

### Summary

Chapter 9 – Ceony nearly drowns in blood, but she begs Thane to make it stop. It does. She thanks both God and Thane for it. She lets Fennel out of her bag when she appears in Thane's library. She examines a book about chain spells, realizing that Thane is still trying to teach her. She begins to work on a chain, puts it across her shoulder and breast, and then creates a paper fan. The scene then returns to Ceony's own graduation, and she is enchanted by the look of pride on Thane's face in the audience. The scene then shifts to prison, where Ceony sees Lira in a cell. This makes Ceony think of Grath Cobalt, the most dangerous Excisioner of all. She realizes that this is Thane's hope, to hunt down the Excisioners, and that he wants to train Ceony to help him.

Suddenly, the real Lira appears. Ceony demands to know what Lira wants. Lira calls Ceony Thane's whore. Ceony says it is not true. Lira responds that Thane's heart is hers, even if it doesn't believe in the same things. She says a heart that has known love is strong. She then sends out severed hands after Ceony's heart. Ceony counteracts two of them with enchanted paper animals, but has nothing to use against the other four. She uses her paper fan to drive back three hands, and manages to get through a door as another hand grabs her about the throat. Fennel attacks the hand and dislodges it. It is a small victory over Lira, but a victory nonetheless.

Ceony then comes upon a scene of Thane lying in the grass with a woman without a face and two children. Ceony realizes that Thane hopes to fall in love again, marry, and have a family. Ceony wants the same thing. She takes the time to rework her paper chain to make sure it is a proper shield to protect her. She then touches Thane's hand, telling him she will protect him, and that he will have the day he dreams of now.

Chapter 10 – Ceony appears in Parliament Square on a Sunday. Ceony loves Sundays, and wonders if Thane does, too. She then folds a jay to keep watch for Lira. She goes into the Collegiate Church of Saint Peter at Westminster, where she finds Thane worshipping. A form of a second Thane appears, explaining he longs for the happiness of faith. Ceony says she believes, and tells Thane it is a question of finding the goodness in things one believes to be right. She returns to Parliament Square. She is panicked because time is running out, and she doesn't want to lose Thane. She is then slammed against a wall in a dark office by Thane himself.

Chapter 11 – Ceony realizes that she is seeing another memory, that she herself has not been slammed. Thane is yelling at Lira, saying she has been gone for three days and is now a suspect in the Fraulein's disappearance. He asks if Grath Cobalt has anything to do with it, and Ceony sees the emotional pain in Thane's eyes. He tells Lira that he knows she is dabbling in Excision, an evil and dangerous thing. Lira slaps him, and Ceony rushes into another scene. It is a cemetery during a funeral for both of



Thane's parents. Thane is three. Ceony kisses his forehead and promises him everything will be alright. She realizes she is in the part of Thane's heart that contains bad memories.

The scene switches to Parliament. Thane is speaking to Hughes about transferring his apprentice due to his marriage falling apart. He tells Hughes he believes his wife is an Excisioner. The scene shifts to Ceony's secondary school, Granger Academy. There, she learns that Thane was a bully to a Folder named Prit. In a new scene, she sees Thane signing divorce papers when Lira enters, begging him for a place to stay for the night, attempting to use sex to her advantage. Thane is unmoved. Lira begs for forgiveness, for a new start. Thane still loves her, and covers for her for the night.

Chapter 12 – Ceony finds herself in another remembered scene in an unknown city. Police whistles sound all around her. Policemen rush all around her. Ceony realizes that Thane is leading the search. She enters a meat warehouse. Butchered human bodies litter the warehouse. A vision of Thane appears, relating that the dead were his fault because he let Lira go. The real Lira appears, coming after Ceony. She manages to escape through another door, but ends up back in the dark office where she began.

## Analysis

Magic continues to be the dominant theme as the novel continues. As Ceony travels through Thane's heart, it is apparent that Thane has at least some control over what is being seen and understood. Thane is able to transition Ceony to a library where she is able to learn more advanced spells in the art of paper chain making. Ceony realizes that, even while he is fighting for his life, Thane is trying to teach her things, and to help protect her in turn. It is a touching and romantic moment for Ceony, and gives her greater strength.

Ceony transitions into scenes of future hope, including one where Lira is in jail. Ceony realizes that Thane's mysterious disappearance was in conjunction with helping to hunt down Excisioners. It becomes apparent later, in Thane's darkest memories, that not only did Lira become an Excisioner, but had cheated on Thane as well. Ceony is brokenhearted for what Thane has had to endure but does take comfort in the scene where he signs divorce papers. This is further evidence that Ceony's feelings for Thane are growing and underscores the subtle theme of Love that is slowly becomes stronger.

The magic that Ceony is taught in transition in the heart helps to save her life as she battles Lira once more. Indeed, Thane's gift, Fennel, loyally defends Ceony against one of Lira's bloody hands, saving Ceony's life. Likewise, some of the magic that Thane has taught Ceony helps to protect her, such as when she sends out birds to keep a watch for Lira. The struggle for Thane's heart, and paper magic, are slowly binding Thane and Ceony together.

There are a number of quiet moments that Thane and Ceony share together in his heart as well which continue to bring on the theme of love. One such moment is when Thane



and Ceony are in church. Thane makes a heartfelt admission that he wishes he had the happiness of faith. Ceony, who is herself a believer, more or less tells Thane that it will come. Ceony is quickly becoming not merely a protector of Thane's heart, but a guide for it as well: a clear indication of love.

Magic also continues to hold sway, as Ceony comes across Thane's darkest memories as well. These include the funeral of his parents, and Thane's own bullying of a younger boy in school. Ceony also comes across Thane's future hopes and dreams, including a wife and children. This enchants Ceony, causing her feelings for Thane to grow even further. The reader should note the poignant scene where Ceony promises Thane he'll have his dreams come true, and that she will protect him.

Ceony also comes to discover what Thane holds himself most accountable for, which is the night he gave shelter to Lira. Allowing her to escape ultimately leads to the deaths of countless good and innocent people. It is the worst memory that Thane carries with him, and is clearly what drives him in his work to capture or kill the remaining Excisioners, including Lira.

## Discussion Question 1

Despite Ceony's hatred of Lira, the scenes in which Thane confronts Lira about Excision and in which Thane signs divorce papers are hard for Ceony to bear. Why?

## Discussion Question 2

Why does the scene in which Thane appears with a faceless woman and children seem to strike Ceony so deeply? What does this cause Ceony to promise? Why do you believe this is?

## Discussion Question 3

What is Thane's worst memory of all? Why? What does this help inspire him to do? Why?

## Vocabulary

infinitesimal, allotted, frenzied, flabbergasted, infidelity, interjected, nostalgia





# Chapters 13 – 15

## Summary

Chapter 13 – The shadow version of Thane slams Ceony into a wall, telling her she has no business being there. She tells him she is trying to save him. Shadow-Thane says no one can save him. He blames himself for the people who died at the hands of the Excisioners. Ceony insists that Thane was manipulated by Lira. Shadow-Thane then destroys Fennel, which breaks Ceony's heart. She says this isn't Thane, but then Lira begins speaking from all around. She says that no man can harm his true love in his own heart. Shadow-Thane harming Ceony means he doesn't love her, but Ceony realizes that her love for Thane could make him love her, that he simply doesn't love her yet. This motivates her to fight back.

She tells Shadow-Thane she has made her own mistakes, but they have helped to make her who she is, from making her sister wait in the cold and catching pneumonia to stealing. When she was twelve, she cost her father his job by driving the prime minister's car into a wall, plunging her family into difficult economic times. She also recalls the suicide of her best friend, Anise Hatter which happened when Ceony was late in meeting up with Anise. It was not Ceony's fault, but it made her feel horrible. She tells Thane she forgives him for everything. She tells him people have a dark side, but they can fight it or exploit it like Lira. Ceony tells Thane he is a good man. She tells him to let go of the anger and the hate so she can help him. She then collects the pieces of Fennel and goes into the last heart chamber.

Chapter 14 – The chamber into which Ceony is not memory, but something which exists only in Thane's heart. It is an empty land with no smells or sounds, except for a giant crack. The real Emery Thane appears, and knows he is dying. He believes he will never be able to overcome the Excisioners. Ceony says it can be done if they work together. Thane asks to see Fennel, and reconstructs him. Ceony happily breathes life back into Fennel, who is as good as new. Ceony reminds Thane they are in his heart, and he has more control over it than Lira. He decides to try to break the spell holding his heart.

He asks why Ceony has come so far to help him. She says she believes it is because she is falling in love with him, because she feels like she has known him forever and walked his heart, and because she likes the dog. He decides to teach her an advanced form of paper magic, having to do with paper vibrating very fast.

Chapter 15 – Ceony carefully packs all the spells she has created into her bag, along with Fennel. Thane wishes her good luck. Thane then battles the spell, releasing Ceony from his heart. Nothing sounds or feels right, however. She worries about a world without Thane in it. She hopes she will be in time to save him. She positions herself between Thane's heart and Lira, who now approaches. As Lira sends bloody hands at Ceony, Ceony counters with birds. Lira launches more spells against Ceony, who is





protected by her chain shield. Red-veined waves crash against Ceony, weakening her chain.

Ceony tells Lira that Thane signed the divorce papers the night he hid her, that she hasn't been in control like she thought. Ceony sees that this stings Lira, who she realizes must somehow still have some feelings for Thane. But to Lira, Thane's heart is nothing more than a prize. As Lira gains the upper hand, Lira uses her last spell, a rhombus-shaped paper that explodes from vibration causing Lira to fly back. Taking Lira's dagger, Ceony cuts her face. Lira reels back and becomes a statue as Ceony writes it into existence using Lira's blood. She can see two men in a rowboat out on the water, and the dead seagull nearby. Borrowing a few pieces from Fennel, Ceony fashions a chain to encircle Fennel's heart, and returns to London.

## Analysis

The theme of magic remains strong through this section of the novel, with the theme of love coming fully into being. Thane's shadow-self continues to expound the fact that he is responsible for the deaths of so many innocent people. Here, his heart –thanks to magic –is fully on display. This bearing of his soul, essentially, is met with a baring of Ceony's own heart and soul as well –from the suicide of her best friend to the car crash that put her family in poverty. Destruction is not the sum of their pasts, but creation is the sum of their future. Creation and love are intrinsic to one another –and Ceony realizes her love for Thane could be reciprocated.

Ceony later admits to Thane that she is falling in love with him. Love becomes the dominant theme at this point in the novel, overcoming even the theme of magic. Love, which inspires, is strong enough to overcome the hatred of Lira's dark magic. Lira's dark magic is an agent of destruction, but Ceony's love is an agent of creation –just like her paper magic. Love in and of itself is more powerful than hate –and with both Thane's life and potential future love for Ceony on the line, Ceony will not back down. She ultimately emerges victorious against Lira.

Love also serves as a guiding force for Ceony to want to save Thane not only physically, but emotionally as well. She expounds upon the fact that people make their own choices, that it is not Thane's fault that more were murdered after he was used by Lira. Ceony's love will be healing for Thane –and Thane's slowly blossoming love for Ceony will empower her. Ceony's insistence that people have the free will to fight or exploit their dark side can be compared to love: it is up to people to fully embrace love, or use it for ill. Ceony's love is pure and for good, while Lira used Thane's love for her to exploit him.

The most touching thing that Thane has done for Ceony ends up helping to save Thane's life. Lovingly using pieces from Fennel, a gift which Ceony loves dearly, Ceony forms a chain of vitality to preserve Thane's heart while she returns it to him. Here, love and magic work hand-in-hand in order to bring about a positive and beneficial conclusion, provided Ceony gets back to Thane in time.



Indeed, the scene where Ceony physically places herself between Thane's heart and Lira is of great symbolic importance. It is clear to Ceony that Lira's desire for Thane's heart is a combination of some sick form of love and hatred, and is nothing more than a prize trophy for her. At the same time, that Ceony should have come into possession of Thane's heart is symbolic for the love that is growing between them. Ceony wants Thane's heart not as a trophy, but to restore him to life, because she loves him. Love is not taking, but giving. Lira wants to take Thane's heart, Ceony wants to protect and give Thane's heart to Thane.

The reader should also note the scene there Ceony defeats Lira. In this scene, Ceony not only uses paper magic against Lira, but some new form of magic as well: using blood to spell out Lira's fate. It is a creative act of destruction of which its consequences are as of yet unclear. This kind of magic comes to represent yet another mystery.

## Discussion Question 1

How do Ceony and Lira see Thane's heart differently? What do Lira and Ceony want Thane's heart for? Why?

## Discussion Question 2

Why does Ceony insist that Thane cannot blame himself for the actions of Lira? Do you believe Ceony is correct? Why or why not?

## Discussion Question 3

What is the symbolic importance of Ceony positioning herself between Thane's heart and Lira? What greater implications does this have, especially for Ceony and Thane?

## Vocabulary

conjuring, encompassing, bizarre, symmetrical, smugness, nemesis



## Chapters 16 – 17

### Summary

Chapter 16 – Ceony returns to Thane’s house. Aviosky is relieved to see her. Ceony immediately goes to Thane and places his heart on his chest. His chest opens to receive it. She exchanges the paper heart for the real heart. She realizes Thane will be alright, and tells Aviosky to call a doctor. Dr. Newbold arrives to tend to Thane as well as Ceony’s injuries. Newbold reports that Thane is stable, and will wake on his own when his body is ready. Ceony promises to keep a watch over Thane and to notify Aviosky and Newbold of Thane’s condition. She also condenses the story of her travels, saying that she merely found Thane’s heart left behind by Lira. Aviosky tells Ceony to mark down the coordinates on a map. After Aviosky leaves, Ceony checks in on Thane, and then makes marks on an atlas map.

Chapter 17 – The next morning, Ceony makes herself as pretty as possible before checking in on Thane. Two days pass. A telegraph comes in from Aviosky that Lira has not been found. This can only mean that the two people in the boat were accomplices and brought Lira away. That afternoon, she discovers Fennel has been remade by Thane. Thane is fully aware of all that has happened, for it is most of his heart at least. This causes Ceony to blush. She is worried, telling Thane about Lira being cut and turning into a statue. Ceony says she is not an Excisioner. Thane replies that he knows she is not, that she has done nothing illegal. He tells her she saved his life. Comforted, she retrieves a fortune-teller. Reading Thane’s fortune, she sees him with a wife and two children, but doesn’t tell him. It makes her happy. She asks Thane why he ever chose Folding. Thane says he was forced into it, like she was. He says it makes them more alike than she thinks, which makes her grin happily.

### Analysis

Magic and Love remain dominant themes as the novel comes to a close. Ceony’s masterful command of magic has enabled Thane not only to survive, but to recover as well. The magical paper heart that Ceony crafted for Thane, the reader should note, was a creation of love. Love was what sustained Thane: Ceony’s love for Thane, and Thane’s unfolding love for Ceony. Love is stronger than hate, and stronger than death.

Despite the survival of Thane, other darker mysteries now emerge. Lira’s statue has disappeared by the time the authorities arrive. It is likely the two men in the boat are responsible for moving Lira, and their identities likewise remain unknown. Terrified, Ceony herself believes she may have performed a feat of magic from Excision, but Thane gently assures her that this is not so. Nothing Ceony did was illegal or immoral, but what she did actually do remains a mystery. Nevertheless, it speaks of tremendous power that Ceony possesses.



The novel ends on a very positive note, however, according to the theme of Love and its potential for creation. By now, Ceony is fully aware that she is in love with Thane, and it is apparent that Thane has growing romantic feelings for Ceony as well. Two important events related to love occur here that the reader should pay particular attention to. First, Thane's foretold future involves a wife and children, which thrills Ceony. Secondly, Thane himself comments that he and Ceony have more in common than she may think, which also thrills Ceony. The potential for love, marriage, and family is real and apparent as the novel ends.

## **Discussion Question 1**

Why is Ceony so terrified of her use of blood to cast a spell on Lira? What is Thane's response to Ceony's worries? Does this calm Ceony? Why or why not?

## **Discussion Question 2**

What scenes at the end of the novel continue to deepen Ceony's love for, and hope for love in return from, Thane? Why?

## **Discussion Question 3**

Do you believe that Thane is growing romantic feelings for Ceony? If so, why? If not, why not?

## **Vocabulary**

premises, objectives, aromas, forbidden, contentment



# Characters

## Ceony

Ceony Twill is the main character of the novel “The Paper Magician” by Charlie N. Holmberg. Ceony is a nineteen year-old red-haired young woman and graduate student of the Tagis Praff School for the Magically Inclined. Incredibly talented and beautiful, Ceony is devastated to learn that her dream of Smelting—magic with melting—will not come true as she has been assigned to apprentice with Emery Thane in Folding: magic with paper. Upon meeting Thane, she is smitten with his kindness and his talent, and ultimately begins developing romantic feelings for him as she trains alongside him. When Thane goes away for six days, she feels lonely without him.

When Lira appears and steals Thane’s heart, Ceony immediately saves Thane’s life by fashioning a paper heart for him to keep him alive, which she secures with a vitality chain. Ceony then tracks down Lira, ending up inside Thane’s heart thanks to a spell cast by Lira. Ceony then travels the chambers of Thane’s heart, both fleeing from, and battling Lira. She learns more and more about Thane’s life as she journeys, and falls in love with him in the process. She vows to save his life and restore his heart. Along the way, Thane manages to continue to train Ceony so that Ceony is prepared for a final confrontation with Lira.

In a final battle with Lira, Ceony manages to overcome Lira with the skills learned from Thane, and with a spell written in blood which turns Lira to stone. Ceony then rushes back to London to restore Thane’s heart. To her delight, Thane lives. She watches over him as he recovers, a genuine act of love. Concerned about the blood-related spell she cast on Lira, Thane assures her that she did nothing wrong. This comforts Ceony greatly. As the novel ends, she reads Thane’s fortune and discovers it includes a wife and two children. This, in conjunction with Thane’s assertion that he and Ceony are more alike than she thinks, elates Ceony and gives her hope for love in the future.

## Thane

Emery Thane is a thirty-year old magician who serves as Ceony’s master tutor and love interest. Thane is common in appearance, except for his green eyes which stand out to Ceony. Thane is a powerful magician, one of only twelve Folders in England. His craft is not merely the practice of paper magic, but the love of creation. While he trains Ceony, he also helps law enforcement to hunt down Excisioners, something he has been doing for years.

When Lira suddenly appears and steals Thane’s heart, Ceony saves Thane’s life by tracking down his heart and battling Lira for it. In the past, Lira had been married to Thane, but had betrayed him for Excision and Grath Cobalt. Thane came to divorce Lira, but due to residual love for her, sheltered her when the police nearly caught her. As



a result, Thane blames himself for all her successive victims. Ceony assures him this is not the case. When she saves Thane's life, Thane reveals to her that his heart is not wholly his anymore, and that he never wanted to be a Folder either. He explains that he and Ceony have more in common than she previously considered. It is clear that Thane is slowly developing romantic feelings for Ceony.

## Fennel

Fennel is a paper Jack Russell Terrier dog constructed as a gift and given life by Thane for Ceony, who misses her dog Bizzy. Fennel becomes Ceony's constant companion, loyal and courageous to no end. Fennel is a gift of kindness, a creation of love, and comes to serve Ceony well. Fennel saves Ceony's life and proves invaluable and resilient on more than one occasion, symbolic of the name "Fennel," a kind of hardy herb able to survive difficult conditions. Ceony later uses paper from Fennel out of love to fashion a vitality chain to protect Thane's heart as she returns it to him. When the novel ends, Fennel is returned to life by Thane.

## Aviosky

Patrice Aviosky is a friend and magical associate of Emery Thane. A smelter, Aviosky is an official at the Tagis Praff School for the Magically Inclined, and places Ceony in an apprenticeship with Thane to study paper Folding since there are so few Folders in England. In addition to her duties in education, Aviosky also actively lends a hand in hunting down Excisioners.

## Lira

Lira is the primary antagonist of the novel "The Paper Magician" by Charlie N. Holmberg. The former wife of Thane, Lira is determined to destroy him. Originally a nurse without magical abilities, Lira became exposed to magic through Thane, and dark magic through Grath Cobalt. She later had an affair with Grath Cobalt, becoming a full-fledged and powerful Excisioner. She is responsible for innumerable murders, and still loves Thane in a sick and twisted fashion. When she learns about Ceony, jealousy and hatred consume Lira, who fails to kill Ceony. Lira is turned to a statue by Ceony, but her ultimate fate is unknown by the end of the novel.

## Grath Cobalt

Grath Cobalt appears vaguely in the novel in reference, but never in person. He is the most powerful and evil of the Excisioners and appears to be their leader. He has an adulterous affair with Lira, and is responsible for growing her power in the dark arts of Excision.



## **Alfred Hughes**

Alfred Hughes is a Siper and a Criminal Affairs member of the Magician's Cabinet. A friend of Thane's, the two often work in concert hunting down Excisioners. It was to Hughes that Thane first revealed Lira was dabbling in Excision. When Thane's heart is stolen, Hughes is among those who responds.

## **John Katter**

John Katter is a Smelter and member of the Magician's Cabinet for Agriculture. He is a friend and magical associate of Thane's, and is among those who respond after Thane's heart is stolen.

## **Jonto**

Jonto is a paper skeleton created and given life by Thane to serve the household. While Thane is quite fond of Jonto, Jonto often scares Ceony when she unexpectedly runs into Jonto.

## **Ansil Hatter**

Ansil Hatter is Ceony's best friend in secondary school. Ansil requested Ceony's company one night, but Ceony was late in arriving. When Ceony arrived, she discovered that Ansil had committed suicide in her bathtub. Ceony blames herself for Ansil's death for years, but comes to realize that Ansil made her own choices, like all people do.



# Symbols and Symbolism

## Paper

Paper is the material to which Folders are magically bonded, and use in the practice of their magic. Paper of various weights, grains, thickness, and styles is kept in great mounts by Thane. Thane uses the paper to fashion everything from vitality chains to snowflakes to birds to Fennel and Jonto. The paper here becomes symbolic not only of magic, but of passion and creation. When Ceony sets out to save Thane, she fashions a paper heart for him and uses all of her magical training with Thane to battle Lira and return Thane's heart.

## Fennel

Fennel is a paper Jack Russell Terrier dog constructed as a gift for Ceony by Thane. Fennel is given to Ceony because she misses her dog, Bizzy. Fennel becomes Ceony's constant companion, loyal and courageous to no end. Fennel is a gift of kindness, a creation of love, and comes to serve Ceony well. Fennel thus becomes symbolic of love and creation. Fennel saves Ceony's life and proves invaluable and resilient on more than one occasion, symbolic of the name "Fennel", a kind of hardy herb able to survive difficult conditions. Ceony later uses paper from Fennel out of love in order to fashion a vitality chain to protect Thane's heart as she returns it to him. The love extended by Thane to Ceony is returned to Thane by Ceony, out of love. When the novel ends, Fennel is returned to life by Thane.

## Thane's heart

Thane's heart becomes not only a setting for the novel (see Settings section), but a symbol as well. Thane's heart becomes symbolic of love and creation, and everything that makes up a human life in terms of memories, hopes, fears, dreams, and darkness. Thane's heart is also representative of his love of creation. Thane's heart becomes contested by Ceony and Lira. Lira first steals Thane's heart metaphorically, falling in love with him years before the events of the novel. She later physically steals his heart in order to claim it as a prize out of some sick, twisted conception of love. As Ceony navigates Thane's heart, she falls in love with him and sparks romantic feelings for her in Thane. That Ceony ultimately comes into possession of Thane's heart is symbolic for the love that is growing between them. Ceony wants Thane's heart not as a trophy, but to restore him to life because she is in love with him. Love is not taking, but giving. Lira wants to take Thane's heart, Ceony wants to protect and give Thane's heart to Thane.





## Paper birds

Paper birds are among the first, simplest, and most useful creations that Ceony learns how to Fold in lessons from Thane. The paper birds become brave little companions to Ceony, helping her to track down Lira, keep a watch out for Lira, and to fight Lira.

## Paper heart

A paper heart is fashioned for Thane by Ceony when Lira steals Thane's real heart. The magical paper heart that Ceony crafts for Thane is a creation of love and evidence of Ceony's love for Thane. Love through Ceony's paper heart was what sustained Thane: Ceony's love for Thane, and Thane's unfolding love for Ceony. Love is stronger than hate, and stronger than death. Love is enough to live for.

## Paper glider

A magical paper glider is constructed by Thane and kept in the third floor of his house. It is one of the most major creations Thane has. The glider is used by Ceony to track down Lira to Foulness Island on the English Channel. The glider is later used by Ceony to return home with Thane's heart.

## Divorce papers

Divorce papers are granted to Thane for a divorce from Lira following Thane's discovery that Lira is not only an Excisioner, but an adulterer as well. Ceony watches the heartbroken Thane sign divorce papers in one of the memories of his heart. Ceony later uses this information against Lira to throw her off balance.

## Bloody hands

Bloody hands are kept by Lira in her bag for use as weapons against Ceony. The bloody hands attempt to strangle Ceony and are barely overcome. The bloody hands themselves become symbolic metaphorically of all the blood that Lira has on her hands by way of all of the people she has killed in Excision.

## Blood

Blood is the primary material that Excisioners work with. It is used for a host of different magic spells, including explosions, appearing and disappearing, and is ultimately used by Ceony to turn Lira into a statue. Blood becomes symbolic of evil, cruelty, and guilt when it pertains to Lira's use of bloody hands.



## Bag

A bag is kept and carried by Ceony during her journey to find and return Thane's heart. Ceony's bag contains papers of various kinds, a pistol, food, and atlases. Ceony uses the bag as well to shelter Fennel to prevent Fennel from getting wet and ruined at several points through her journey. She likewise Folds and keeps numerous paper spells at the ready for quick use from her bag.



# Settings

## London

London is the capital city of England, and the capital of Great Britain. It is home to the Tagis Praff School for the Magically Inclined, the governing Magician's Cabinet, and is home to Whitechapel's Mill Squats where Ceony and her family live. The outskirts of London is where Thane lives and is where Ceony goes to study with him. London is also host to many memories for Thane, including a poignant scene in church in which he wishes for the faith that other people have and the unveiling of the fact that Ceony will be his guide.

## Thane's Estate

Thane's Estate is located on the outskirts of London. It is disguised as an abandoned, run-down and overgrown manor, but is in reality a beautiful and stately home. The gardens and house consist of countless paper decorations, all with a magical purpose. The estate is tended to by Jonto, and becomes a second home for Ceony as she studies with Thane. Ceony's growing love for Thane is reflected in the duties she assumes around the house, from cooking to cleaning. Thane's estate is where Thane has his heart stolen by Lira, restored by Ceony, and is where Ceony cares for Thane as he recovers.

## The Third Floor

The Third Floor is the uppermost floor of Thane's estate house. It has high ceilings, and is where Thane works on his biggest projects and spells. Among them is a massive paper glider that Ceony uses to track down Lira and reclaim Thane's heart. Ceony only ventures onto the Third Floor when Thane is in need, for he has not previously expanded the scope of Ceony's lessons to include Third Floor spells.

## Foulness Island

Foulness Island is located off the coast of England in the English Channel. It is where Lira has escaped with Thane's heart, and where Ceony travels to win back Thane's heart. Ceony notes that Foulness Island is well-named for the foulness that Lira has brought to it. It is on Foulness Island that Lira casts a spell, entrapping Ceony in Thane's heart.

## Thane's Heart

Thane's heart is both a symbol and a location in the novel. Thane's heart in terms of location becomes a place where Ceony is entrapped by Lira, who has disguised the heart as a cave. Thane's heart has four chambers. Each chamber is devoted to a specific kind of memory or situation, including warm and happy memories, sad and bitter memories, future hopes, and a place of uncertainty. As Ceony navigates the different areas of Thane's heart, and learns more about who he is as a man, she falls in love with him.



# Themes and Motifs

## Love

Love is an important theme in the novel “The Paper Magician” by Charlie N. Homberg. Love appears in the novel in two distinct ways. There is romantic love, and there is the love of creation. Both forms of love are incredibly important to the plot of the novel.

Romantic love is seen primarily through Ceony’s falling in love with Thane throughout the novel. When the novel begins, Ceony dreads even having to apprentice with Thane, but within days, she has warmed up to him. Within a few weeks, she has romantic feelings for him that she doesn’t realize as such yet. These are expressed in the care she gives him, helping to tend to household chores. When Thane goes away for a week, Ceony feels lonely without him, and eagerly waits for his return. When Thane’s heart is stolen, Ceony sustains him by creating a paper heart for him until he can return the real one.

Ceony’s creation of the paper heart is in itself an act of love. Ceony has come to love creating things from paper, and the love of creation is apparent in the creation of the paper heart. The love that Ceony has for Thane is also apparent in the paper heart, and that love helps to sustain Thane’s life. It is through the Folding of the paper heart, and Ceony’s training with Thane, that the love of creation in and of itself is found.

When Ceony arrives, she sees innumerable beautiful paper creations in and around Thane’s estate house. Each has a magical possibility. The paper creations are not just notable for their magical aspects, but for their aesthetic beauty. This comes about by way of passion being the guiding force behind these creations –passion for the craft, and passion for the creation of the objects of the craft. This love is passed along to Ceony, who comes to love the creative aspect of paper magic, just as much as its magical aspect. It shows in the heart she crafts for Thane.

Ceony’s determination to save Thane increases with every single moment spent in his heart. The more she learns about him and his past, the more and more she falls in love with him. However, she comes to learn that Thane once loved Lira, which sickens Ceony, evidence of Ceony’s love for Thane. Yet, she is relieved to see that Thane divorced Lira, and that Thane no longer loves her. Ceony also comes across the future hopes of Thane, which include love, a wife, and children: all things which Ceony aspires to do for Thane.

As the novel ends, three specific things give Ceony hope that Thane is developing romantic feelings for her, and may even come to love her. These include when Thane says that his heart is now only mostly his (meaning that some part of it belongs to Ceony); when Ceony sees that a wife and children are indeed part of Thane’s future; and when Thane tells her that they are more alike than she may think.



## Magic

Magic is an important theme in the novel “The Paper Magician” by Charlie N. Homborg. Magic is the use of words, crafting, or gestures to create supernatural responses, incidents, and actions. The world of magic in the novel involves not merely the practice of magic itself, but individuals, places, and incidents associated with magic.

Magic is apparent not merely from the title, but from the very first page of the novel. The reader learns immediately that magic is real, and that Ceony Twill, nineteen, has just graduated from London’s Tagis Praff School for the Magically Inclined. With Ceony is an official and magician of the school, Patrice Aviosky. The school produces magical students of high caliber, who then proceed to train as apprentices with masters.

The master-apprentice tradition comes from the rules of the magical world. Each magician trains in the art of magic with one medium. For example, Smelters train with metals, while Folders train with paper. Once a magician is bonded to a material, that magician cannot physically use anything else to conduct magic. Ceony is heartbroken to learn that she is to be apprenticed to magician Emery Thane, a Folder. Ceony herself had long hoped to be Smelter.

Getting to work with Thane, Ceony reveals she considers Folding to be little more than entertainment or decoration. Thane is not put off by this, but merely says that entertaining and decoration have their purposes as well. He instructs her in the art of Folding and Cutting, in which Ceony is able to create numerous creatures and bring them to life. Thane himself is a master of such practices: his butler is a paper skeleton named Jonto, and Thane creates a paper Terrier dog for companionship for Ceony.

The magic that Thane does is magic done out of love, both for the act of magic, and for the act of creation. This is why Thane’s creations are so beautiful. Ceony comes around to his way of thinking, and begins to invest love and passion in the things which she creates. However, not all magic is love, as demonstrated by Lira and the Excisioners. They are magicians of the flesh, murdering people and using their body parts for dark magic. Lira herself casts a spell to steal Thane’s heart, while Ceony uses paper magic to create a paper heart to sustain Thane.

Ceony’s pursuit of Thane’s heart leads her to the very interior of his heart, indeed to his soul. There, she magically encounters all aspects of Thane’s life, including his happy and sad memories, as well as his future hopes. She relies on magic to stop and defeat Lira. Surprisingly, using blood and paper, Ceony is able to create a spell that turns Lira into a statue. This comes to worry Ceony, but Thane reassures her she did nothing wrong. Whatever kind of magic Ceony used is as of yet unknown.

## Creation

Creation is an important theme in the novel “The Paper Magician” by Charlie N. Homborg. Creation is the act of bringing something into existence which did not exist



before. Destruction, which serves as a counter to creation, is the act of eliminating or wrecking something which currently exists. Creation, and its counter-aspect of destruction, bear significant weight on the plot as a theme.

Creation is first seen at the home of Emery Thane, and is experienced by Ceony Twill. Ceony is amazed to find all kinds of beautiful magical paper creations in and around Thane's house. It is apparent that Thane's magic is not merely a love of paper magic, but of actually creating things which will become magical. His love of creation is clearly visible in the utter beauty of that which he creates. Ceony quickly comes to feel the same way. She comes to love Folding not merely due to its magical quality, but due to its creative aspect as well.

On the other hand, creativity is confronted by destruction in the form of the Excisioners, including Lira. Excisioners rely on destruction, cruelty, and hatred for the practice of their craft. The blood and body parts they use for their magic come from murdered people. Hundreds, perhaps thousands, are victims of the Excisioners. Their intent is to destroy and manipulate.

Lira is contrasted with Ceony. Whereas Lira seeks to destroy and kill, Ceony seeks to create and give life. This becomes apparent with the struggle between Lira and Ceony for Thane's heart. Whereas Lira seeks to kill Thane, Ceony seeks to save Thane's life. Whereas Lira is driven to kill Thane by a mixture of twisted love and hate, Ceony is motivated to save Thane purely out of love. This shows in the beautiful paper heart that she creates for him, sustaining his life while she goes after his real heart. Ceony's love for Thane, as well as her love for creation, are apparent in the paper heart.

## The heart

The Heart is an important theme in the novel "The Paper Magician" by Charlie N. Homberg. In the novel, Ceony's struggle to restore Thane's heart becomes a deeper reflection on love, memory, the soul, identity, and creation. The heart becomes central to the plot of the novel, because Ceony must navigate the heart to save Thane. It acts as a motif, coming up again and again in important ways both to the greater theme and the plot.

The heart has long been considered a place where love and the soul reside. Love—familial, romantic, and creative—and the soul, the spirit of a person, including his or her memories, hopes, fears, dreams, and loves—are integral elements of the human heart, and especially of Thane's heart as Ceony comes to discover. The battle for Thane's heart essentially becomes a battle between good and evil, creation and destruction, and love and hate. Whereas Lira, driven by hatred and evil seeks to destroy Thane's heart, Ceony, driven by love and good, seeks to preserve and restore Thane's heart. Indeed, her temporary saving of Thane comes about by love of creation, the creation of a beautiful paper heart which temporarily works in place of Thane's real heart.



As the novel unfolds, Thane's heart itself becomes a battleground between good and evil, love and hate, light and dark. Ceony herself mentions that all people have good and bad sides, and it is up to the individual which side is used. Ceony and Lira thus metaphorically come to represent the good and evil in Thane's heart, and it is clear that Ceony and the good hold the upper hand. Though Thane has struggled at times with being good (as as being a bully in school and sheltering Lira for a night) ,Thane has always either returned to doing the right thing, or has deviated it from the beginning. Ceony is motivated by, and helps to motive Thane with, the love that she has for him. Lira caustically says that hearts that have known love are stronger, but she doesn't realize that the love Thane carries in his heart is stronger because of Ceony, not her.

Thane's heart is also seen as a mirror to the soul. With four chambers, Thane's heart plays host to an array of memories—good and bad—as well as uncertainties and future hopes. Thane's heart is thus reflective of the human soul, which itself is a harbor for such memories. Some have even contended that the soul rests within the human heart. In this novel, that assertion is made true as the exploration of Thane's heart is not merely understanding the man due to his past, but due to everything that he is. With his heart and soul laid bare, Thane admits he wishes he had the happiness of faith, and Ceony here emerges as a guide by which Thane may one day better understand the soul and God.

As the novel concludes, Ceony manages to restore Thane's real heart, the paper heart having done its work. The restoration of the heart in Thane is also the restoration of love. That Ceony should protect and return Thane's heart is a demonstration of her love for him. It is further a demonstration of the idea that love is not an act of taking (as was the case with Lira stealing Thane's heart) but giving: giving of oneself to another. In this case, Ceony has given her love to Thane through the restoration of his heart.

## Mystery

Mystery is an important theme in the novel "The Paper Magician" by Charlie N. Homberg. In the novel, mystery involves that which is unknown and that which is never truly revealed. There are multiple instances of mystery in the novel, with each one of them adding to, or fueling the plot in some way.

When the novel begins, small mysteries perforate the work and are quickly solved. Ceony's wondering why she should be forced into Folding is explained as the fact that there are too few Folders in England. The mystery of who financed Ceony through school is likewise revealed to be Thane. Why he should choose to finance her is a mystery not revealed until much later in the novel. Ceony's rejection of Mueller's sexual advances earned the respect and admiration of Thane. The rejection cost Ceony Mueller's scholarship, but earned her Thane's financial support.

Thane himself is a mysterious character. He is kind, but aloof. Early on in the novel Thane is working late at night. Thane's objective is unclear and mysterious until the next morning when Fennel comes into Ceony's life. Likewise, Thane's sudden trip, as well as





the hushed voices used to speak about Thane after his injury, all add to the mystery that is Thane. This includes why Lira would want to steal Thane's heart. It is later learned that Thane, once married to Lira, divorced her for her practicing of Excision, and her sexual affair with Grath Cobalt. Lira is seeking revenge, and is motivated out of hate and some twisted understanding of love.

Other mysteries are confronted. Why Thane should be willing to risk his life to track down Excisioners finds its roots in sheltering Lira from justice and her subsequent killing of dozens of innocent people. Thane is seeking redemption and forgiveness. Likewise, the spell that Ceony uses to turn Lira into a statue is also a mystery to both her and Thane. It is a mystery not solved in this book. Ceony's use of paper and blood seems to defy the idea that a magician may use only one material, but Thane reassures Ceony she did nothing illegal, and did not engage in dark magic. Whatever the truth is, it has yet to be discovered.



# Styles

## Point of View

Charlie N. Holmberg tells her novel “The Paper Magician” in the third-person limited-omniscient perspective. The third-person narrative mode allows the author to describe contextual events of the novel in detail where needed (such as at the beginning of the novel, where recent background information on Ceony’s apprenticing is given in conjunction with her arriving at her apprenticeship for the first time). It is also reflective of the third-person perspective that Ceony maintains while traveling through the memories of Thane’s heart. Like the narrator and reader of the novel, Ceony is a passive observer, watching past memories unfold. The limited-omniscient aspect of the narration adds both a sense of realism (as readers do not know everything going on in their lives or in the world around them at all times) and a sense of suspense. Mysteries and dramatic turns of events, such as the stealing of Thane’s heart and whether he will live or die are only solved as the novel unfolds, and as Ceony manages to tackle them.

## Language and Meaning

Charlie N. Holmberg tells her novel “The Paper Magician” in language that is simple and straightforward. This is done for at least two primary reasons. First, the target audience of the novel is new adults. The language employed in the novel is reflective of both their age, casualness, and level of education. Secondly, the main character of the novel, Ceony, is nineteen years old. It is only fitting that the language employed reflect Ceony’s age and education as well, for the plot of the novel revolves around, and depends upon, Ceony.

## Structure

Charlie N. Holmberg divides her novel “The Paper Magician” into seventeen chronological, linear, numbered chapters, from 1 to 17. Each chapter builds upon the events of the last, and each chapter itself contains a specific portion of the plot. For example, Chapter 9 deals with Ceony exploring the hopes and dreams of Thane’s heart, including his desire to see Lira in jail, and to get married and have children with someone else. Ceony hopes this will be her. This simple and straightforward construction of the novel can be considered reflective of the steps it takes to become a Folder: each lesson in Folding brings Ceony closer to becoming a master magician and each chapter brings the reader closer toward the novel’s climax.



## Quotes

Her heart had broken at these words, and now, standing before the gate of Magician Emery Thane's lair, she wished it had stopped beating altogether.

-- Narrator (Chapter 1 paragraph 4)

**Importance:** When the novel begins, Ceony feels as if her life has ended before it has even begun. Having graduated from college, Ceony hopes to become a Smelter—her dream—but is stunned to learn she will be a paper magician instead. Ceony's dismay will not last long, but underscores her absolute dislike of Folding and initial wariness of Thane. Additionally, this quote touches on the theme of the Heart.

The trick is getting the Folds right. Everything must be aligned just so, or the spells won't work.

-- Thane (Chapter 2 paragraph 57)

**Importance:** Despite the seeming unappealing nature of folding, Ceony slowly becomes enchanted with it in no small part because of Thane and the magic itself. Thane here explains that Folding isn't merely throwing together some papers, but is actually a precise and exacting craft. Folding must be perfect, or the spells will not work. It is a form of magic that requires finesse.

What sort of man was Magician Emery Thane, to donate such a large sum to a complete stranger, and one he didn't even request for apprenticeship?

-- Narrator (Chapter 3 paragraph 7)

**Importance:** One of the mysteries that Ceony confronts early on is why Thane would have been willing to finance her school tuition costs. While the mystery is later revealed, the mystery in the present is one of the many things that causes Ceony to begin to develop romantic feelings for Thane. The kindness that Thane has shown her is something surprising and endearing.

Lira... took my heart.

-- Thane (Chapter 6 paragraph 34)

**Importance:** Here, Thane explains much more than the obvious. His statement that Lira took his heart is a reflection of Lira having once romantically stolen his heart, as well as having now stolen it with the intent to kill him. This is a subtle first glimpse into Thane's personal history, and it also references the theme of the Heart.

Emery's heart is mine—it always has been, my dear. Even if the rest of him defies everything I believe in.... His heart is still worth something to me. A heart that's known love is stronger than one that hasn't, did you know that?

-- Lira (Chapter 9 paragraph 66)

**Importance:** Lira, mocking Ceony over her pursuit of Thane's heart, makes one



erroneous statement, and one ironic statement. First, Lira wrongly believes that Thane somehow still has feelings for her, even after everything she has put him through. Secondly, Lira's contention that hearts that have known love are stronger is true—as will be revealed through Thane's survival by way of the paper heart made from love given to Thane by Ceony.

If Ceony lost Emery now, she'd never forgive herself. She had invested in this too deeply to go back.

-- Narrator (Chapter 10 paragraph 38)

**Importance:** As Ceony begins moving through Thane's heart, she begins to fall more and more deeply in love with him. However, Ceony comes to understand that she is risking her own life as well by trying to save Thane's. Yet, she has invested too much to give up on Thane. What she has invested is her own heart.

Because of me, they said. Because I let her go. They died because my heart was too weak.

-- Thane (Chapter 12 paragraph 39)

**Importance:** Thane, sheltering rather than turning in Lira, is stunned to learn that Lira had gone on to murder countless more innocent people. The authorities and others blame Thane. Thane, though his heart has known love and is strong, considers his heart to be Cerowek because he could not be morally strong against Lira due to residual emotional feelings for her.

I know you don't love me. Not yet.

-- Ceony (Chapter 13 paragraph 42)

**Importance:** Ceony reflects on Thane's life, and all that he has suffered through. She is especially enchanted by the idea that he someday hopes to fall in love again, marry, and have children. Ceony imagines that she could be a wife and mother, and her reflection that she knows Thane doesn't love her is tempered by the condition, yet. It means that Ceony hopes to win Thane's heart and this inspires her to keep going, to succeed.

Because I think I'm falling in love with you.

-- Ceony (Chapter 14 paragraph 50)

**Importance:** Confronted by a shadow-version of Thane, Ceony is asked why she would be risking her life for his. Ceony, rather than hiding the truth, is beautifully honest and upfront about everything. She says, quite clearly, that she believes she is falling in love with him. It is apparent to the reader, though, that she clearly is in love with him. Love compels people to do extraordinary things.

A world without Emery Thane. Her entire world up until a month ago had existed without him, but to go back to it now... The thought made Ceony sick. It crushed her.

-- Narrator (Chapter 15 paragraph 20)



**Importance:** Imagining a world without Thane is terrifying to Ceony. When the novel began, she hadn't even wanted to be his apprentice. Now, she imagines loving him, marrying him, and having children with him.

Her paper heart still beat within his chest.  
-- Narrator (Chapter 16 paragraph 18)

**Importance:** When Ceony returns with Thane's real heart, she gratefully sees her paper heart is still working. The paper heart is here symbolic of the love that Ceony has for Thane, poured into the paper heart's creation and the reason for its creation--to save Thane. The paper heart, like Thane's real heart, has known love and is therefore strong. This sustains Thane.

You see, Ceony, we're more alike than you may think.  
-- Thane (Chapter 17 paragraph 93)

**Importance:** As the novel ends, Thane explains that he, like Ceony, did not originally want to become a Folder. He uses this to make the point that he and Ceony are more alike than Ceony may think. This is thrilling to Ceony, who happily realizes that there is indeed the potential for love between them.