

Rabbit, Run Study Guide

Rabbit, Run by John Updike

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Contents

Rabbit, Run Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	4
Chapter 1.....	6
Chapter 2.....	8
Chapter 3.....	10
Chapter 4.....	12
Chapter 5.....	14
Chapter 6.....	15
Chapter 7.....	16
Chapter 8.....	18
Chapter 9.....	19
Chapter 10.....	20
Chapter 11.....	21
Chapters 12-13.....	22
Chapter 14.....	24
Chapter 15.....	25
Chapter 16.....	27
Chapter 17.....	28
Chapter 18.....	30
Chapters 19-20.....	31
Chapter 21.....	33
Characters.....	35
Objects/Places.....	38
Themes.....	40



Style.....42

Quotes.....44

Topics for Discussion.....45



Plot Summary

Rabbit, Run is a novel written by John Updike. In the novel, Harry "Rabbit" Angstrom is a young man in his twenties who feels trapped in his marriage. He married young because his girlfriend was pregnant. Now more than two years into the marriage, his wife is once again pregnant. Harry - not happy in his marriage or his job - abandons both, hence the title Rabbit, Run. It is the story of how one man's struggle with life and responsibilities can affect everyone in his life.

Harry was given the nickname Rabbit when he played high school basketball. He was the star of the team and the memories of his glory days are rekindled when he plays a game of pickup with some neighborhood boys on his way home from work. It makes him question the direction of his life. He is not happy with how his life has turned out. His job is menial, his wife is becoming an alcoholic, and they live in a tiny, shabby apartment.

Feeling overwhelmed by this life, Harry runs away from his family. He goes out to pick up his son at his mother's house, but instead gets in his car and just starts driving. He ends up in West Virginia before he turns around and heads back to his hometown of Mt. Judge, Pennsylvania. He does not go home, however. He goes in search of his old high school basketball coach. Coach Tothero tells him to go home to his wife. When Harry is resistant to do this, he takes him on a double date in Brewer, a nearby town. The date is with prostitutes and Harry spends the evening with his date, Ruth. This one night leads to him living with Ruth.

Meantime in Mt. Judge, Harry's wife, Janice, has moved back in with her parents and is having to deal with the embarrassment of her husband abandoning her to live with a prostitute. The family's minister takes on the task of trying to get Harry to rejoin his family. Harry is reluctant to do this as he is enjoying his new life with Ruth. What he does not know is that Ruth is pregnant with his child and refuses to tell him, because she knows he will eventually go back to his wife.

When Janice gives birth, Harry returns to her and, after a rough beginning, everyone seems to forgive his leaving. Janice's father gives Harry a job, and Harry tries to be a good father and husband. After a fight with Janice, Harry leaves again. Janice, who had controlled her drinking and was getting better, goes on a binge and accidentally drowns their newborn baby in the bathtub. Harry is upset by this and comes back to support his wife and son. The guilt, however, weighs on him and he has a breakdown at his daughter's funeral and once again runs away.

Harry goes to see Ruth. She wants nothing to do with him. He realizes she is pregnant and pleads with her to keep the baby. He says he will marry her and she questions his

ability to provide for anyone. She eventually agrees if he works out his life she will marry him. Harry tells her he will go out to get them something to eat, but instead of

going to the store he runs, leaving all his responsibilities behind him.



Chapter 1

Summary

The novel begins with Harry Angstrom stopping to watch a pickup basketball game, while on his way home from work in the small town of Mt. Judge, Pennsylvania. Harry, nicknamed Rabbit by his friends in school, used to be a star player in high school. He asks the boys if he can join their game. They reluctantly agree. He runs home exuberant after the game.

Harry's happiness vanishes when he makes it home to his shabby apartment. Janice, his pregnant wife, sits in front of the television with a drink. They argue about money and her drinking. He then goes to pick up their son at his parents' house and their car, which Janice left at her parents' house after a day of shopping.

Harry goes to his parents' house and watches through the window how his family interacts with his son. It makes him think of his own childhood. He leaves without letting anyone know he is there. Instead, he walks to Mrs. Springer's house to collect his car. Once in the car, he just starts driving. His only thought is to head south.

Harry makes it as far as West Virginia before he turns around and heads back to Mt. Judge. He, however, does not go home, but searches out his old high school basketball coach, Marty Tothero. Tothero lost his coaching job due to a scandal. He now lives over a bar. Tothero tells Harry to go home, but agrees to let him rest in his room for the day.

Analysis

This section introduces the reader to Harry Angstrom and gives them a glimpse into his life. He does not have a happy marriage. He is happiest playing basketball, which was part of his past. Harry enjoys his past more than his present. He likes to linger on the past rather than focus on what is happening now.

Harry is feeling overwhelmed by his life. He thinks of the success of his life in high school compared to his mediocre life at present and he feels trapped and useless. This leads him to get in his car and just drive. He discovers, however, he cannot escape his life in this way and returns to his hometown.

Harry seeks advice from the one man he could always count on in high school, Coach Tothero. Tothero is not a man to be looked up to. A scandal is mentioned, but the details are not told, so the reader has to guess what the scandal might be. Seeing as he no longer lives with his wife, it is safe to assume it had to do with his having an affair. That Harry would come to this man for advice shows Harry is not the best judge of character or the most responsible person.



Tothero does try to convince Harry to return to his wife, perhaps giving a sense of how he feels about his own wife. By allowing him to stay, Tothero is unconsciously giving his approval to Harry's actions. Harry looked up to him when he was younger, but now he sees him as a shadow of his former self. This is not the man he admired before.

Vocabulary

delegate, vestibule, imperceptibly, infuriates, repentance, indignation, incompetent, ominous, equinox, indefinite, stealthily, intervening, indifferent, whorly, foreshorten, synthetic, desultory, infallibly, beguile, elephantine, incessant, pliant



Chapter 2

Summary

Once Harry is rested, Tothero asks him to take him to Brewer, a nearby town, for a date. He says the woman has a friend for Harry as well. Harry is hesitant at first, but agrees to go after thinking of his wife and tiny apartment. Tothero tells Harry if he would drink with Janice perhaps she would not drink so much. He tells Harry to follow his heart.

The men go to Brewer to meet their dates. Harry tries to talk about Janice on the way, but Tothero interrupts him saying they are going to meet real women and have no time for Janice. Margaret and Ruth are the two women the men meet for dinner. Margaret knows Tothero well and Ruth is her friend. Ruth and Harry are the same age and she remembers him playing basketball, as her school played against his team. They have dinner at a Chinese restaurant and Harry talks about his high school days. He and Coach Tothero praise one another to the girls about their basketball and coaching abilities.

Harry asks Ruth what she does and she answers nothing. Tothero leaves with Margaret for the evening leaving Harry and Ruth together. Harry pays for the meal and he and Ruth leave the restaurant. Harry discovers Ruth is a prostitute and pays for her services. He will not allow Ruth to use birth control and refuses to use a condom. She very reluctantly agrees. Unlike Janice, she is not ashamed of her body and he finds this refreshing.

Analysis

Harry wants to talk to someone about Janice, but he chooses the wrong people with whom to talk. Tothero acts as if he wants to help Harry, but instead leads him to temptation with the prostitutes. He walked out on his family on a whim without thinking about it, only thinking that he wanted freedom. Unfortunately for him, the man he goes to for advice is not of good character and seems only interested in sex.

Harry is naïve in a way since it takes him awhile to figure out that Ruth and Margaret are prostitutes. His irresponsibility is shown when he will not let Ruth use protection and refuses to wear any himself. Everything is about him. He talks about himself all night then he brushes aside Ruth's concerns about unprotected sex. It shows his immaturity and lack of concern for others. He does not think how his actions affect anyone around him.



Vocabulary

furtive, bulbous, leaden, befuddle, juncture, abhorred, sallow, composure, complacent, dexterous, ambiguous, vulgarity, enormity, tentatively, instinctively, luminous, transparence, incongruous, exasperation, symmetrical, distorted, amiable



Chapter 3

Summary

Harry wakes up in Ruth's apartment. He watches the people go to the church across the street and talks to Ruth about her beliefs. She does not believe in God and this worries him. He does not go to church frequently, but he believes in God. Harry goes to the store to get food for their lunch. He is happy Ruth can cook because Janice is not a good cook. He compares Janice to Ruth in many ways.

Harry decides to take the car back to Mt. Judge to Janice, since her father sold it to them cheaply. He doesn't feel right keeping it. He also needs to pick up clothes from their apartment. Ruth says she wants to see his wife, but Harry insists he does not and that she will be at her mother's, anyway. Harry is scared of Janice. He calls her a menace. Ruth does not like it that he just assumes he can move in with her. He claims it will just be for the night. She is not convinced of this, but does not press the matter.

Harry drives to Mt. Judge to leave the car and collect his clothes. When leaving the apartment, he is spotted by the Reverend Eccles, the Springer family's minister. He tells Harry what happened the night he left. Janice waited for him to return and after half an hour called his parents and Harry's father brought their son, Nelson, home. He reassured Janice Harry had just gotten sidetracked and would be home. She didn't call her father until two in the morning when she had given up hope of Harry returning.

Janice's mother called Reverend Eccles because Janice was drunk and upset and needed counseling. Harry apologizes to him for causing all of the trouble. He refuses, however, to return to his wife. Eccles questions why he was not a thousand miles away, but just in the next town. Harry says it feels safer to be in a place he knows. Eccles drives Harry back to Brewer, while they talk.

Harry claims he does not know Janice and has not known her for years. Eccles invites Harry to golf with him so that they may talk some more. Harry agrees to go to his house on Tuesday. When he returns to Ruth's apartment, he finds her reading. He makes her take a walk with him as his family used to do when he was younger. She breaks the heel on her shoe and Harry shows little compassion. His only thought is to walk up the hill that borders Brewer and Mt. Judge. Once there, he does not know why he has come. He questions why he is not home and this thought frightens him. He clings to Ruth for support.

Analysis

Watching the people go to church makes Harry think about what he has done and how he has treated Janice. This leads him to take the car back to Mt. Judge. He is also bothered by his talk with Ruth about her religious beliefs. The fact she believes the people on their way to church are hypocrites because they feel they can do whatever



they want any other day of the week as long as they are at church on Sunday upsets him.

Harry's run in with the Reverend Eccles also upsets him. Hearing how Janice did not call anyone for help until two in the morning, makes him feel guilty for running out on her. He is upset he was not there to comfort her. He is bothered by Eccles attitude toward him, but agrees to play golf with him.

The walk up the hill bordering Mt. Judge and Brewer shows Harry's uncertainty of what he has done. He feels the need to be in Mt. Judge and Brewer. He thinks of his wife, but clings to Ruth. He is torn between duty and freedom.

Vocabulary

partition, refraction, continuous, giddily, gamely, self-effacing, nubly, symmetrical, enraptured, calibrate, desertion, essence, diluted, blasphemous, inconsequently, tenacity, distention, impudence, demure, prolonged, derelict, macadam, foreshortened, concavely, ingenious



Chapter 4

Summary

Harry goes to Mt. Judge on Tuesday, as he's promised Reverend Eccles he will meet to play golf. He is content with his living arrangements with Ruth. He and Ruth have gone bowling and to the movies and he has discovered she has money in a checking account. Harry goes to the rectory in a good mood.

Mrs. Eccles opens the door to Harry and he immediately feels a connection to her. He feels that she likes him. He is surprised she does not like her children. She is not what he believes a minister's wife should be like. She quotes Freud and is not personable. She informs him Eccles is asleep. He had a late evening and is sleeping in.

Once learning who Harry is Mrs. Eccles turns her back on him and he slaps her butt. She is shocked by this, but Harry enjoys it. He expects her to tell her husband, yet she does not. Mr. and Mrs. Eccles have an argument about her not being religious. Eccles takes his faith and his congregation very seriously and she does not have his faith or care for the congregation. They also argue about Harry. She does not like it that her husband is trying to get Harry and Janice back together. She feels Janice will be better off without him.

Harry feels if he tells Eccles too much he will be able to manipulate him so he is reluctant to talk to him about how he feels. He asks about Janice to deflect from himself and is told she is receiving support from her friends. Eccles tells him of a job that one of his parishioners has. Mrs. Horace Smith needs someone to tend to her garden of rhododendrons.

Eccles asks Harry why he left Janice. He feels they have quite a connection. Harry says there was something that was not there. Eccles questions what this thing is and if he knows that it exists. Confronted by Eccles about his selfishness, he feels trapped and wants only to run away.

Analysis

Harry feels everyone likes him. He seems to need for everyone to like him and is annoyed when they do not. He is content with his situation with Ruth for he has no responsibilities. Eccles is trying to make him return to Janice and take up all his responsibilities as father and husband. Harry feels trapped by him because he is trying to take away his freedom.

Harry wants to anger Eccles to make him give up on him and let him live his life the way he wants with no responsibility. The offer of a job is another responsibility. He is reluctant to talk to Eccles because he feels he can talk him into returning to Janice and this is the last thing he wants.

Vocabulary

snippets, pendulum, antagonism, penitence, guffaw, conspiratorially, impudence, guttural, enunciation, manipulated, theology, multitudes, pagan, ineptitude, irreducible, glottal, explanatorily, heresies, lunarly, aggrandizement



Chapter 5

Summary

Harry has taken the job tending Mrs. Horace Smith's garden. He likes the simplicity of planting the seeds and flowers. Mrs. Smith hates her husband's garden. She does not like rhododendrons and feels her husband wasted his time planting his garden. She feels it could have been used for a more useful purpose such as growing vegetables.

Mrs. Smith likes Harry because she believes she and Harry think alike. She also does not think of others feelings, but does and says what she wants. By sending Harry to Mrs. Smith, Eccles is attempting to show him the type of person he is and how he could end up alone and bitter.

Analysis

This section shows a simpler side of Harry. His taking of the job Eccles offered him shows Harry is taking on some responsibility. The fact he does not see how alike he and Mrs. Smith are shows he does not see how people view him. She says and does what she pleases and seeing this in someone else he does not like it. Harry does not seem to realize this is what he does and is how people view him.

Vocabulary

narcissi, infuriating, adamant, breadth, profusion, porous, mealy-mouthed, frantically, addlement, invariably, acuteness, flirtatious



Chapter 6

Summary

Ruth and Harry are spending the day at the pool. While she swims, he sits by the edge of the pool admiring her and believing the high school girls are admiring him. Ruth questions why he is so special. She is upset because she is pregnant with his child and does not want to admit it. Harry does not notice, because he is only concerned with himself. Ruth has taken on a job as a stenographer because Harry is worried how she spends her afternoons. He is worried she will return to being a prostitute.

Harry does not realize the changes in Ruth or her body and she is scared to tell him. If she tells him it makes it real, and she is not sure if he will stay if she tells him.

Analysis

Ruth is scared. She is pregnant by a man who runs from responsibility and does not have the means to support her and her baby. The fact that he does not see the changes in her shows how self-centered and clueless Harry is. He says he loves her, but he only sees what he wants to see. Ruth's fears that he will leave are well-founded as he did leave his pregnant wife when the responsibilities became too much.

Vocabulary

blooey, burnish, refracting, crystalline, porous, quarries, monumental, injustice, buoyancy, dabbling, contentment, consequences



Chapter 7

Summary

Reverend Eccles takes caring for his congregation seriously. He goes to check on Janice to see how she is handling the separation from her husband. He finds she has gone to the movies with a friend leaving her son with her mother. Mrs. Springer resents that Eccles plays golf with Harry. She thinks the police should be called on him and that he does not deserve the compassion everyone is showing.

Eccles explains by golfing with Harry he is getting to know him and by doing this he can reason with him to return to his wife. Eccles sees good in Harry. Mrs. Springer does not. She believes people should stand up for themselves and do what is expected. One does not run away from problems, but faces them head on. Mrs. Springer has to deal with the people who blame her daughter for Harry's actions. Eccles does not see this part of the situation and is surprised by it.

Eccles honestly believes Harry will come back and wants Mrs. Springer to believe it also. She does not see the goodness that he sees in Harry and does not believe he will be back. Eccles leaves her with her grandson and goes to see Harry's parents.

Eccles finds only Mrs. Angstrom at home. Harry has not contacted his family at all since he left Janice. Mrs. Angstrom does not like Janice. She did not want Harry to marry her and feels Janice got pregnant to trap her son into marrying her. She does not want Harry to return to her.

When Mr. Angstrom returns home, he is embarrassed about what his son has done. He claims the Army changed his son. Mrs. Angstrom feels no one believes her son tries at anything. She feels they misjudge him. Mr. Angstrom would like to thrash his son for his behavior. So Mr. and Mrs. Angstrom are at odds on what their son should do. Mrs. Angstrom does not want him with Janice and Mr. Angstrom believes it is his duty to return to his wife.

Eccles goes to see the Reverend Fritz Kruppenbach, the minister to Mr. and Mrs. Angstrom. Kruppenbach believes Eccles is meddling into things that are none of his business. He believes what Eccles is doing is the devil's work. Eccles is only stirring up trouble. Kruppenbach questions Eccles' choice of profession. He does not think Eccles is suited to being a minister.

Analysis

Eccles is trying very hard to unite everyone to support him in getting Harry and Janice back together. He does not realize each person has their own views of how the situation should play out. Mrs. Springer sees how her daughter is persecuted when Harry is the



one who left. She does not see the goodness in a man who can leave his young son and pregnant wife.

Mrs. Angstrom believes Harry was trapped into marrying Janice and is happy he left her. She does not care about his duty to his wife. Mr. Angstrom is ashamed of his son. He saw Janice the night Harry left and saw the anguish she felt. Mr. Angstrom cannot readily forgive his son for causing such pain to another person.

Reverend Kruppenbach puts Eccles in his place for questioning why he is going to so much trouble to reunite Harry and Janice. He does not see it is his job and he is causing more trouble by making these people believe Harry will return. Eccles tries to put Harry on a pedestal by telling everyone how special he is. Eccles seems to want to make Harry right in what he is doing when the reverend knows he is wrong. Kruppenbach calls him out on this and questions his motives.

Vocabulary

strategies, uneasiness, humiliated, invulnerability, incoherent, propulsive, futile, indeterminately, persistently, liverish, lacquered, abrades, translucent, sullen, pantomime, vigorous, formidable, self-deprecatorily, vehement, barbaric, prominent, incongruous, benevolent, petitionary, finagling



Chapter 8

Summary

Harry and Ruth go to Club Castanet for a night out with Margaret. Harry is not happy going out with Margaret, but Ruth is excited about going. Margaret brings Ronnie Harrison an old classmate of Harry's to the club with her. Ruth and Harrison had a past relationship together and Harry is jealous of this. He does not like Harrison and this puts him in a bad mood.

Harry's sister, Miriam, comes into the club and Harry goes to talk to her and her boyfriend. Harry tries to get her to leave the club because he does not think it is the proper place for her. Miriam tells him their parents fight about him all the time. Harry goes back to his own table and makes Ruth leave the club with him. She is reluctant to leave because she is having a good time. Ruth thinks his behavior is ridiculous.

The night ends up with Harry asking Ruth about her days as a hooker. He feels jealous of those times. Harry does not like it that she was with guys like Harrison before him and questions what Ruth did with these men. He sees her for what she used to be and as punishment for that asks her to do with him what she did with Harrison.

Analysis

Harry is not happy to go to the club and he takes his unhappiness out on the people around him. It does not help the situation that Margaret brings with her a man that Harry knows from his high school days, but also one who has dated Ruth. Harry sees Margaret doing this as a way to get to him and is on the offensive.

Harrison does not like Harry and tries to bring him down in the women's eyes. In school, Harry was the star of the basketball team and Harrison was obviously envious of this. Harrison sees the situation Harry is in now and is happy to gloat. The situation makes Harry upset and he takes this out on Miriam and Ruth. Seeing Miriam in the club brings out his protective side. Harry does not like seeing her in this place because he does not want her to become like him.

Seeing Harrison makes Ruth's prior occupation more real to Harry. To hear Harrison talk of their trip to Atlantic City, makes Harry visualize her life before him. He does not like to think of her with anyone else let alone Ronnie Harrison. To punish her, Harry treats her like a prostitute.

Vocabulary

sauntering, distorted, staccato, accustomed, confirmation, diffidently, smirched, fastidious, emboldens, secretive, embalmed, fluctuation, gratitude, plaintive



Chapter 9

Summary

Mrs. Eccles takes a call from Mrs. Springer saying Janice is in labor. She attempts to track her husband down by telephone to tell him so he can inform Harry. She feels embarrassed as the hours tick past and she cannot find him and she wonders what made her fall in love with her husband. Mrs. Eccles does not like his profession and especially does not like the congregation, which she feels takes up too much of her husband's time.

When Eccles comes home he sees his wife is angry. He enjoys spending time with his parishioners and forgets about the time. He does not acknowledge his wife's anger, however, upon hearing the news of Janice, Eccles hurries to the phone to call Harry. He tells him Janice is in labor and is glad he agrees to go to the hospital. Eccles offers to pick him up, but Harry prefers to walk. Eccles is very proud of him.

Analysis

Mrs. Eccles hates her husband's job and wonders why she married him. Their personalities are very different and it is odd for a woman who has no faith to be married to a man whose job is to expound on faith everyday. She feels deserted by her husband because he prefers to be out with others rather than home with her and their daughters. In a way Mrs. Eccles has a connection to Janice. Her husband has not run away to live with a prostitute, but instead runs to his congregation whenever they call, deserting his wife and family in the process.

Eccles' dismissal of his wife's anger when he hears the news shows his connection with Harry. His only thought is to call Harry and get him to the hospital for Janice. Eccles thinks only of them and not of his own wife, who has been worried for the last several hours. He has a sense of cluelessness and perhaps a bit of self-centeredness when it comes to his congregation and doing his best for them. Eccles thinks more of others than he does for his own family whereas Harry thinks more of himself than for others.

Vocabulary

forsaken, exegetical, sufficient, superimpose, impenetrable, inviolable, gaiety, sexton, intangible, quavering, titillate, superimpose



Chapter 10

Summary

Harry does not know what to do. He knows he must go to the hospital to be with Janice, while she has their baby, but he does not want to leave Ruth. He tries to tell Ruth he has to go be with Janice, but she pretends to be asleep and will not talk to him. He tries to explain to her he must go, but he will be back because he loves her.

Ruth's refusal to acknowledge him makes him angry and Harry tells her he is not coming back unless she says something to him. When she still does not answer he feels she is trying to manipulate him and will not allow himself to be manipulated. He leaves without another word.

Analysis

Harry wants to be with Janice while she is in labor because he knows how hard the labor was when she had their son. This shows he still loves Janice and wants to be there to comfort her. He also loves Ruth and wants to come back to her. Her refusal to talk to him, however, makes him angry and when he does not get his way his habit is to leave.

Harry is not a supportive person. He does not take into account how Ruth must feel knowing he is leaving to be with his wife during a very emotional time. She knows he will not return to her after such an experience and makes it easier on him by letting him walk away.

Vocabulary

gullet, manipulated, tarpaulin, burden, fumbles, illusion, crescent, plunged, paralyzes, sullen

Chapter 11

Summary

Ruth wants Harry to stay because he made her feel good about herself. She knew, however, he would always go back to his wife. Ruth knew he was not hers, but knowing this does not change how she feels about him.

Analysis

Ruth realizes she is in love with Harry, but that he is not hers. He has his good qualities and when he shows these qualities she feels his love for her. She knows though his wife has a firmer hold on Harry and she was always there in his mind. Ruth knows she has lost Harry and she is upset by the loss.

Vocabulary

superstitious, dissolve, dense, lousy, kneels, porcelain, faint, mounts, still, state



Chapters 12-13

Summary

Section 12. Harry runs to the hospital. He waits in the waiting room for word of how Janice is doing. Eccles comes in and assures Harry he will let Janice know he is there. Harry is nervous as he sits with Eccles in the waiting room. Mrs. Springer passes through the waiting room nodding at Eccles, but ignoring Harry. Mr. Springer says hello to Harry making Mrs. Springer tell him Janice is fine without him. Eccles and Mr. Springer move her quickly through the waiting room.

The doctor comes to congratulate Harry on the birth of his daughter. He asks if he may see Janice, but allows Mrs. Springer to see her before him. Janice is happy to see him. She is still woozy from the drugs they gave her for the labor. Harry asks her about Nelson and is informed he asks about him all the time.

Janice wants him to stay with her, but he says he will be back tomorrow. They proclaim their love for one another before he leaves her. Eccles offers him a place to stay and he accepts.

Section 13. Mrs. Eccles wakes Harry up so he does not miss visiting hours at the hospital. She makes him breakfast and they talk about Eccles and his sometimes inappropriate behavior. Eccles and his daughters have private names for the parishioners, such as Woman Who Calls Up in the Night, and sometimes use these names at the church where they can be overheard by the parishioners.

Mrs. Eccles tells him Eccles is overjoyed that Harry has returned to his family. She claims not to know why her husband is so fond of Harry. He claims he is lovable, but she says she does not see it. Harry says he feels he is now on the right path. Mrs. Eccles winks at him before he leaves.

Analysis

Harry finds his way back to his life with Janice. By going to the hospital, he takes back the responsibilities of his past life. Mr. Springer wants him to rejoin the family so he greets him, while Mrs. Springer is still upset for what he has done to her daughter. Janice is happy to see him. She is not happy at her parents' house and their son misses his father.

Mrs. Eccles tells Harry she does not know why he is loved by so many. Yet she seems to find him rather fascinating. Her words are in contrast to her actions. Winking at him as he is leaving makes one think Mrs. Eccles sees more in him than she is admitting.



Vocabulary

tenements, secretively, tropically, scrabbled, scalloped, imitation, furtive, confiscate, guffaw, retracted, repentance, conglomerate, entrails, spritz, contortions, grotesque, timidity, eroded, tenacity, enormity, reprimand, homeopathic, infinitely, gratitude, inebriated, delinquent, celluloid, sluffing



Chapter 14

Summary

Harry sees Tothero's wife at the hospital and she tells him Tothero has had two strokes and cannot talk. He goes to see him and tells him Janice had her baby and they are back together. Tothero tries to say something, but cannot speak or be understood.

Harry and Janice have an argument when he goes to see her. She brings up his being gone for two months and living with a prostitute. Janice asks where he will stay until she gets out of the hospital and he tells her their apartment, expecting her to have been paying rent on it for the last two months. She tells him she has no money to pay rent.

Harry sees his baby before he leaves. He wants to name their baby June and Janice wants to name her Rebecca after her mother. They compromise and name the baby Rebecca June.

Analysis

Harry sees how Tothero has fallen since he last saw him. Tothero wants to say something when Harry tells him about returning to Janice. It is obviously something he believes to be important for he attempts to get his message across. Harry, however, does not understand.

Janice is back to herself when Harry goes to see her so they get into an argument. They just seem to rub each other the wrong way. Her whining get on his nerves and she does not like his self-absorption and lack of consideration for others.

Vocabulary

martyr, speechifier, momentum, enunciation, protrusive, decipher, coherent, disciplinarian, cancerous, repentance, tragedy, distinctly, haunchy, miraculously, tranquil, swatches, mollifies



Chapter 15

Summary

Mr. Springer was paying the rent on Harry and Janice's apartment without Janice's knowledge, while Harry was gone. He believed Harry would return. Harry and Nelson clean up the apartment to get it ready for Janice, when she leaves the hospital. Nelson is happy that his father is home.

Harry takes Nelson with him when he goes to tell Mrs. Smith he can no longer work for her. He needs a job to support his family and Mr. Springer has offered him a job at one of his car lots. She is sad to see him go and says he has kept her alive, without his presence she says she would have died during the winter. They also visit Mrs. Springer. This is an awkward visit for Harry because she does not like him. Their visit to the Angstrom house is much worse. His mother is angry with him and will not say why. He and Nelson both feel uncomfortable. Mrs. Angstrom asks what will happen to the girl he lived with in Brewer. He claims she will be fine and does not like to hear his mother mention Ruth. It upsets him that she ignores Nelson and does not believe a grandmother should act this way. His father ignores Harry when he comes home, but he is nice to Nelson.

Harry enjoys spending time with Nelson, but at night he is lonely. His thoughts turn to Ruth and Mrs. Eccles. He believes Mrs. Eccles secretly likes him, but just will not admit it.

Janice comes home with the baby. She moves gingerly due to her stitches and spends most of her time tending to the baby. When Eccles calls and invites the family to church on Sunday, Harry is excited to go, but Janice is not up to going. Harry sits behind Mrs. Eccles in the church. She invites him to walk home with her and her daughters after church.

Harry and Mrs. Eccles talk about her husband and how she believes Harry is a lot like him. Harry takes this as flirting, but he does not know if it is intentional or unintentional on her part. When Mrs. Eccles invites him in for coffee, he takes this as a proposition and declines saying he has a wife now. She becomes angry and walks away from him slamming the door of the rectory. Harry wonders if she is upset because he declined her proposition or because he had thought she had made one.

Analysis

Harry is trying to become a responsible person. He is taking care of Nelson and taking him to see his grandparents. Mrs. Springer is very nice to Nelson, while his mother treats him with indifference. Mrs. Angstrom is upset with Harry for going back to his wife. She ventures her concern for Ruth because she feels more compassion for this woman



than she does for Janice. She sees Janice as trapping her son into marriage. Mrs. Angstrom feels her son deserves a better life.

Harry likes to think everyone likes him so he believes Mrs. Eccles is secretly in love with him. Telling him he is like her husband makes him believe she likes him, what he does not understand is that the similarities are not the good qualities her husband possesses. He does not see how Mrs. Eccles feels for he sees only what he wants to see.

Vocabulary

aerials, tenements, derelicts, primitive, concept, competence, mullions, translucent, wagging, immaculate, gaudy, quaver, dismantlable, pavilion, humiliatingly, fussiness, resurrected, oppressive, trundle, eddies, inquisitive, relevance, initiation, proposition, receptive



Chapter 16

Summary

Harry wants to make love to his wife. The baby takes up all of her time with the feedings and her constant crying. Janice rebuffs his touches and tells him to do something useful. Harry tries to make her drink. He even fixes her a drink of whiskey and soda.

In bed, he rubs her back and attempts to have sex. Janice does not feel like it. She has bandages and stitches from just having had the baby. Harry becomes upset, gets dressed and walks out. Janice pleads with him to stay. She tries to explain she just had a baby. Harry is only worried about himself and does not take into account how she feels. He leaves her crying into her pillow.

Analysis

Harry is still the same man he was when he first left Janice. He has not changed, therefore when he does not get his way he runs away. He knows he did wrong by trying to have sex, but he cannot take responsibility for his actions so he blames her reaction to him for his leaving. Harry is immature and believes he should always have his way.

Janice stepping up for herself shows she has changed. At first, she lets Harry do what he wants, but when he starts hurting her stitches, she stops him. She tries to explain herself to him, but he will not listen. Harry thinks only of himself.

Vocabulary

impoverished, tantalizing, filament, ominous, opaque, muddle, infuriate, persistent, membrane, burble, soused, inability



Chapter 17

Summary

Janice falls asleep after he leaves. She is used to sleeping alone. The baby wakes her at four in the morning for a feeding and changing. The whole time she is thinking of Harry wishing he would return. She hates what he did to her, but she loves him. She makes herself a drink to calm her nerves and as the hours pass she keeps drinking. She had been proud of herself for not drinking while Harry had been gone those two months.

Nelson wakes and asks if Daddy has gone away. Janice tells him he left early for work, and then distracts him by coloring with him. She is so happy with her picture until she realizes she has not stayed within the lines. Janice begins to cry and Nelson attempts to comfort her.

Mr. Springer calls asking why Harry is not at work. Janice lies telling him Harry went out early to show someone a car. Mr. Springer senses something is wrong and asks about the children. Janice, feeling dizzy, hangs up on him.

Mrs. Springer calls to check on Janice after talking to her husband. She asks Janice if she has been drinking. Janice acts innocent and tells her nothing is wrong. Her mother does not believe her and tell her she is coming over. Janice looks at the mess the apartment is in and starts to clean.

When checking on Rebecca, she finds her a mess and decides to give her a bath. Janice runs the bath, while she continues to clean. When she remembers the bath is running, the water is nearing the top of the tub. Janice puts Rebecca into the tub and the baby slides from her hands. She tries to get hold of her, but the baby keeps slipping away. When she finally retrieves her, Rebecca is dead.

Analysis

Janice has not been drinking, but Harry's fixing her a drink earlier leads her to start drinking again. She becomes drunk, which makes her dangerous to the children. She slaps Nelson for not eating his breakfast and ends up drowning her daughter.

Janice lies to her father about Harry because she is embarrassed he has run off again and knows she will be the one blamed for his leaving. Janice took the brunt of the gossip the last time and knows this time it will be even worse. According to this philosophy, Harry can do what he pleases, but she must do what ever she can to keep him.

Vocabulary

partition, circumcised, squall, brimful, composure, opacity, contorted, monotonous, impatient, refuge, precious, wobbly, membranous, whorl, wavery



Chapter 18

Summary

Eccles gets the call that Janice has accidentally drowned her baby. No one knows where Harry is and the family has asked Eccles to find him. Lucy questions why he must be the one to look after Harry. Eccles says he loves him. Lucy is appalled by his answer. She feels he loves him more than he loves her and their daughters.

Lucy blames Harry for the death of Rebecca. She chastises Eccles for bringing the two back together. She feels they were better apart. Eccles feels if Harry is to blame for the death than so is he responsible for bringing them back together.

Eccles tries Ruth's number, but no one answers. Harry calls the rectory because he tries to call his apartment, but no one answers. He is at a drugstore in Brewer and does not know what has happened. Eccles tells him Rebecca is dead.

Analysis

Lucy Eccles cannot understand why her husband is so obsessed with keeping Harry and Janice together. The two are obviously not happy together, but everyone keeps trying to make them resolve their differences. Lucy is scared by how much her husband feels for this man. If he can think there is good in him, how safe is her marriage and her family?

Vocabulary

analytic, predecessor, unconscious, resentment, reconstructed, vengeful, martyr, sacrament, earnest, numbly, prickly, conflict



Chapters 19-20

Summary

Section 19. Harry has spent the night in Brewer. He went to Ruth's apartment, but she was not there. He ended up staying in a hotel. He spent the day wondering around Brewer, something keeping him from going home. Harry realizes it is a feeling that somewhere there is something better for him.

Harry returns to Mt. Judge in a daze. Mrs. Springer shuts the door in his face when he knocks at the Springers' door. Eccles comes to the door and lets him in. Janice has been given a sedative and is asleep.

Mr. Springer tells Harry they blame him for the baby's death, but he is not the only one to blame. However, life must go on and they consider him family. Harry appreciates this offer after everything he has done.

Harry puts Nelson to bed and goes to the apartment by himself. The water is still in the tub. He lets it out and watches it drain away questioning how this could happen. In the morning, he returns to the Springer house. Harry lies with Janice comforting her. They cling together for support.

Tothero comes to see Harry. Harry is amazed this man is still alive, while his baby is dead. Tothero reminds him he told him to go back to Janice the day he came to him. He seems to want Harry to see what happened is his fault. His actions have consequences. If you do wrong, there is a price to pay.

Eccles comes to tell the family the funeral arrangements are set. The funeral will be the next day. Harry asks Eccles what he should do and he tells him to be a good husband and father and to love what he has left.

The next morning Harry, Janice and Nelson walk to their apartment to get clothes for the funeral. Janice is reluctant to enter the apartment. She becomes frantic when the outfit she was going to wear to the funeral does not fit. She has nothing else to wear. They go back to her parents' house to escape the desolation of the apartment.

Section 20. Janice and her mother find Janice a dress to wear to the funeral. It is a dress of her mother's that they take in to fit her. She asks Harry how she looks and he questions if she thinks it is a fashion show. She runs to her mother for support.

Harry puts Nelson down for a nap. Mr. Springer tells Harry the coroner has ruled Rebecca's death an accidental drowning. Harry sees himself as distasteful and wonders why he is still alive. The family dresses for the funeral and waits for the car to arrive.



Analysis

Harry spent the night and day in Brewer trying to understand how he felt. His feelings that there is a better life for him somewhere else shows he does not want to be married to Janice. Harry feels trapped. He was not ready for marriage. He needed to mature before he started a family.

The death of his daughter brings him back to his family, but more out of a sense of duty rather than wanting to be there. Harry feels he must be there for his wife and son especially after all the pain he has put them through.

Vocabulary

congeals, conspiratorially, indecent, erratic, etiquette, mottled, indistinct, invariably, tranquil, intoned, intonation, revelation, curtly, liability, insistence, unaccustomed, immaculately, contagion



Chapter 21

Summary

The funeral of Rebecca June Angstrom is a small one. There are only seven people there when the family arrives. The funeral director comments that he hopes the minister has not forgotten. Eccles has a reputation for forgetting things.

The Angstroms arrival at the funeral causes tension. Mrs. Angstrom sees her son standing with the Springers and is distressed. She questions what they have done to him. Harry is embarrassed by this after all the Springers have done for him. The tension is released, however, when she hugs Janice and calls her "my daughter."

Eccles arrives and the service begins. At the cemetery, Harry has a sense of healing. He begins to see brightness past all of the dark. The light is blocked, however, when he turns to look at Janice.

Harry tells her he did not kill the baby. The people at the funeral look at him in disbelief. He tries to explain himself. He tells them he was not there, that Janice was the one. She did not mean to. He tries to take Janice's hand, but she snatches it away and backs away from him.

Harry's forgiveness turns to hate. Everyone stares at him in horror. He feels trapped so he runs. Eccles follows him for awhile, but he cannot keep up. Harry runs through the woods eventually making it to the hotel that borders Mt. Judge and Brewer.

He calls the rectory and asks for Eccles, but Mrs. Eccles hangs up on him. Harry goes to Brewer, to Ruth's apartment. She tells him to go away. He looks at her guessing she is pregnant. Ruth insists that he go away. He asks if she needs him. She says she needed him the night he walked out. Harry insists he had to go to the hospital.

Harry asks why she did not tell him she was pregnant. Ruth did not because she thought he would leave. He is happy she is pregnant. He says he will marry her and she wants to believe he will divorce his wife and marry her, but Ruth is skeptical.

Harry offers to go get them some food so they can discuss their life together. Walking to the delicatessen, he has a choice to go for the food or go in the opposite direction and run away. Harry chooses to run.

Analysis

Harry ends his story the way he began it - by running away. The responsibilities are too much for him. The death of his daughter coupled with Ruth's pregnancy leads him to run again. Harry comes to terms with his daughter's death, but thinks only of explaining



himself not how it will affect Janice or those around him. He still thinks just of himself and does not consider the feeling of others. This is a sign of his immaturity.

Harry's relationship with Ruth is the same as his relationship with Janice. If he marries her, he will be repeating what he did in his previous relationship. He will eventually feel trapped in the marriage and run away so he instead runs away sparing her the eventual heartbreak and years of an unhappy marriage. Harry will not find peace until he learns to accept responsibility for his actions and is mature enough for a stable relationship.

Vocabulary

suppresses, relevance, resonant, exultantly resilience, cessation, conspicuous, defiance, incessantly, clangorous, intrusion, sincerity, diluted, distinction, infinitely



Characters

Harry Angstrom

Harry Angstrom is in his early twenties. He was a star basketball player in high school. He is now married with a two-year-old son and a pregnant wife. Harry is an irresponsible young man who runs out on his family because he feels trapped in his marriage. He is selfish and does not think of anyone, but himself.

Janice Angstrom

Janice Angstrom is the pregnant wife of Harry Angstrom. When he leaves her, she is the one who everyone blames for his leaving. It was her responsibility to keep him in the marriage. She has a drinking problem, which she brings under control after Harry leaves. She accidentally drowns their newborn daughter after a night of drinking when Harry once again leaves her.

Reverend Jack Eccles

Reverend Jack Eccles is the minister of Janice's family the Springers. They go to him for support when Harry leaves Janice. He takes it upon himself to bring Harry back to his family. Eccles finds Harry very charming. He believes there is good in him when no one else does.

Lucy Eccles

Lucy Eccles is the wife of Reverend Jack Eccles. She is not a religious woman so their union seems odd. She cannot understand why Eccles is so intent on reconciling the Angstroms. She feels that Janice is better off without Harry. She finds Harry to be immature and brings out unpleasant qualities in her husband.

Ruth Leonard

Ruth Leonard is a prostitute that Harry lives with after leaving his wife. Ruth did not like her previous life so is not unhappy about giving it up for Harry. She finds him to be overbearing, but loves him anyway. She sees how he treats people and knows he has no sense of others feelings, yet she is unhappy when he leaves to go to his wife. Ruth knows she is better off without him, but wants him nonetheless.



Coach Tothero

Coach Tothero was Harry's high school basketball coach. He lost his job due to a scandal and now lives in a shabby apartment above a bar. Harry goes to him for advice after leaving Janice. He tries to convince Harry to go back to her. Tothero introduces Harry to Ruth.

Mr. Springer

Mr. Springer is Janice's father. He owns car lots in the area and is wealthy. He offers Harry a job when he returns to Janice to help him provide for his family. Mr. Springer does not like Harry, but he does what is best for his family by forgiving him and making him a part of their family.

Mrs. Springer

Mrs. Springer is Janice's mother. She wishes her daughter was more assertive so that she would stand up for herself. Mrs. Springer does not like Harry and does not readily accept him back when he returns after the birth of his daughter. She thinks he should be arrested for running out on his family.

Mr. Angstrom

Mr. Angstrom is Harry's father. He is embarrassed by Harry's actions and believes he should be a dutiful husband and father and return to his family.

Mrs. Angstrom

Mrs. Angstrom is Harry's mother. She believes that Janice trapped her son into marriage by getting pregnant. She does not want him to return to his family and believes him better off where he is, if that is what makes him happy.

Miriam Angstrom

Miriam is Harry's sister. He feels protective of her. He does not want her to make the mistakes in her life that he did.

Mrs. Smith

Mrs. Smith is Harry's employer while he is living with Ruth. Harry tends to her late husband's garden. She likes Harry and claims that she would have died months earlier if he had not come into her life.



Nelson Angstrom

Nelson Angstrom is the two-year-old son of Harry and Janice. They got married when Janice became pregnant with him. He is a smart boy who understands that his father has left and that his sister has died.

Rebecca June Angstrom

Rebecca June Angstrom is the infant daughter of Harry and Janice Angstrom. Her mother accidentally drowns her in the bathtub.

Margaret Kosko

Margaret Kosko is a friend of Ruth's. She is a prostitute. Marty Tothoro see her often, but she does not like him.

Reverend Fritz Kruppenbach

Reverend Kruppenbach is the Angstrom's minister. Eccles goes to him to help him reconcile Harry and Janice. Kruppenbach refuses to help. He does not believe it is his business to help and he chastises Eccles for thinking it is his job.

Ronnie Harrison

Ronnie Harrison is an old basketball teammate of Harry Angstrom's. He has had a previous relationship with Ruth and Harry is jealous of that.



Objects/Places

Water

Water plays an important role in the novel. Water is a symbol of cleansing and rebirth. When Harry takes a wet washcloth to Ruth's made up face, he is washing away her past life as a prostitute. She gives up that life for him. Rebecca June's drowning leads to Harry's renewal of a quest for a better life.

Car

The car is a symbol of freedom. Harry Angstrom gets in the car and drives to get away from his life. He discovers that freedom is not in your location, but has a spiritual and mental association.

West Virginia

Harry claims that the only place he was ever happy was in West Virginia. The thought of the hills and sky made him feel free.

Church

The Church figures prominently in the novel. The Springers seek advice from Reverend Eccles because he is their spiritual advisor. Harry watches people go to church while sitting in Ruth's apartment. Going to church once he is back with Janice makes him feel exuberant and that his life will be better. It is place that is associated with healing and love.

Mt. Judge, Pennsylvania

Mt. Judge is the small town where Harry grew up. The people there are simple people who work hard and honor marriage and family.

Brewer, Pennsylvania

Brewer is the big city that borders Mt. Judge. The people there are seen as morally deficit. There are prostitutes and night clubs. It has all the temptations that big cities offer.



Clothing

Clean clothing is very important to Harry. He always has to have a clean shirt. He goes back to his apartment for clean clothes because he is very fastidious about what he wears. He borrows a clean shirt from Coach Tothero for his date with Ruth. Harry borrows a clean shirt from Mr. Springer for Rebecca June's funeral. He must also have clean nails and hands.

Harry and Janice's apartment

Harry is embarrassed by his apartment. He believes it to be shabby and cheap. The fact that the closet door hits the TV when he opens it irks him and is one of the things that sets him off at the beginning of the novel. The state of his apartment is a reflection of how his life is and he does not like it because it is not prosperous. Harry equates prosperity with a nice home and nice car.



Themes

Faith

Faith is important in the novel. The characters are divided by whether they have faith or not. The Springers turn to the church when Harry leaves his family. They look to their faith for answers. Ruth does not have faith. She believes the people who go to church are hypocrites for they feel they can do whatever they want as long as they are in church on Sunday. Reverend Eccles says he believes in faith, but when confronted he cannot defend his faith. Harry makes him question what he believes and why he is a minister. Lucy Eccles is not religious. She does not understand how her husband can have faith especially when dealing with people like Harry who leave their families.

Love

Love is hard to find in this novel. The characters talk of love, but do not embrace it. Harry tells Janice that he loves her, but he leaves her three times. He tells Ruth that he loves her after just meeting her. Love is an idea he seems to want to possess, but does not understand. It is this that he is looking for in his life. It is what all the characters seem to want. Lucy wants Eccles to love her as much as he loves his job. Ruth wants someone to love her for her and not because of sex. Janice wants Harry to love her for who she is not what he wants her to be.

Death

The death of Rebecca June leads Harry to look at his life. At her funeral, he has redemption of his faith and tries to share it with everyone, but only ends up alienating those around him and running away. Rebecca June's death comes as a surprise. Harry comments when Tothero comes to see him after her death that he is surprised that he is alive, while his baby is dead. She was innocent and full of new promises, while Tothero lead a life of sin. He does not understand how she can be gone and he still lives.

Marriage

The novel allows the reader to see into several marriages. There is Harry and Janice, who are young and just a few years into their marriage. The Springers talk to one another about their problems and work together to solve them. The Angstroms fight a lot about Harry because they disagree about whether he should return to Janice. Their marriage is strained because of Harry's actions. Lucy Eccles feels that she takes the backseat to her husband's job. She is not happy that he does not treat his marriage as devoutly as he does trying to reconcile Harry and Janice. Updike shows the different aspects of each marriage and how they work or do not work.



Friendship

Friendship is a theme in the novel. Harry looks to Tothero for advice and he attempts to help him by telling him to return to his wife. Although being an unfaithful husband, his inclinations then lead Harry astray. He is not a good friend to Harry, but instead leads him into temptation.

Eccles, on the other hand, tries to lead Harry back onto the right path. It starts out as a job to him, but he eventually grows to like Harry. He tells Lucy Eccles that he loves him. Harry treats Eccles like a man not a man of the cloth and someone to confide in and this makes their relationship more of a friendship than a minister ministering to a member of his flock. Eccles is there for Harry through everything that happens to him and this forms a bond between them.



Style

Point of View

The narrative is third person omniscient. It allows the reader to see into the thoughts and feelings of the character that is narrating. The novel has several characters that it slips from one conscious to another. Updike starts the novel with the reader following Harry's thoughts then allows them to see into the thoughts of Ruth, Reverend Eccles, Janice, and Lucy Eccles. By following each of these characters' thoughts, it gives the reader a well-rounded view of how all of the characters think and feel.

Setting

The novel is set in the towns of Mt. Judge and Brewer, Pennsylvania in 1959. The main character is in his twenties and attempting to figure out his life. Mt. Judge is a small town and the characters there live their lives dutifully. Brewer is a large city and people do what they want there. The contrast of morals and duty are shown in these two towns. It is the perfect setting for the novel.

Language and Meaning

The language of the novel is simple. The people are from a small town with only high school educations so the language they use is simple. They are expressive and their language shows their inner thoughts and how they view the world and people around them. Harry uses a lot of sexual references as his thoughts are often about women and sex. Eccles' language is spiritual. He references the bible and poetry. Lucy Eccles likes to talk about psychology so she mentions Freud and psychological theories. So the language reflects the characters giving the reader an insight into the character and what they represent.

Structure

The book is broken into sections and multiple characters' viewpoints. The main characters of the book each have a chance to have their views presented to the reader giving a sense of the world Updike has created.

The main plot of the story is the relationship between Harry and Janice and whether they should be together. Each character has their views on this subject. Subplots include Harry's relationship with Ruth, his friendship with Eccles, and his flirtation with Lucy Eccles.

The relationship between Eccles and Lucy Eccles, the Springers, the Angstroms, and Tothero and his wife are a backdrop to the dramatics of Harry and Janice's relationship. These are all relationships with different dynamics and show how relationships vary.



Quotes

Do what the heart commands," Tothero says. "The heart is our only guide." He sounds weary and far away. (Chapter 2)

Cause you haven't given up. In your stupid way you're still fighting. (Chapter 3)

Do clean clothes mean so much to you? Why cling to that decency if trampling on others is so easy? (Chapter 3)

At once, absurdly, he feels in control of her, feels she likes him. (Chapter 4)

That was the thing about him, he just lived in his skin and didn't give a thought to the consequences of anything. (Chapter 6)

If you have the guts to be yourself," he says, "other people'll pay your price. (Chapter 6)

A man has duty too. It isn't all one way. It's women like her give men the ideas they have, that the world's just here for their pleasure. (Chapter 7)

The only thing special about him is he doesn't care who he hurts or how much. (Chapter 7)

Out of all his remembered life the one place that comes forward where he can stand without the ground turning into faces he is treading on is that lot outside the diner in West Virginia after he went in and had a cup of coffee the night he drove down there. He remembers the mountains around him like a ring of cutouts against the moon – bleached blue of the night sky. (Chapter 15)

Why can't you try to imagine how I feel? (Chapter 16)

He thinks, Mine, my woman, but then she turns and her smeared frantic face blots out his pride of possession. She becomes a liability that painfully weights the knot below his chest. (Chapter 19)

God, yes. Why don't you look outside your own pretty skin once in awhile?

Maybe once you could play basketball but you can't do anything now. What the hell do you think the world is? (Chapter 21)

His hands lift of their own and he feels the wind on his ears even before, his heels hitting heavily on the pavement at first but with an effortless gathering out of a kind of sweet panic growing lighter and quicker and quieter, he runs. Ah: runs. Runs. (Chapter 21)



Topics for Discussion

Topic 1

Why do you think Harry keeps running? Do you think that Rabbit is an appropriate nickname for him? Why? Can you think of any other nickname that would suit him better?

Topic 2

Is Janice better off with or without Harry in her life? Why or Why not?

Topic 3

Why is it so important to Reverend Eccles that Harry and Janice reconcile their marriage?

Topic 4

How are women treated in the novel? How are they viewed by the male characters? Is this a reflection of the attitudes of 1959?

Topic 5

Faith is mentioned often in the novel. Do you believe that any of the characters have complete belief in God? Who and Why?

Topic 6

Harry spends much of the novel looking for something better. Do you believe that there is something better out there for him? Will he find it? Why?

Topic 7

How do you think the lives of the characters would be different if Harry had returned to Ruth after the birth of Rebecca June? Would Harry have stayed with Ruth or do you think he would have run when he found out she was pregnant?



Topic 8

Do you think Lucy Eccles was flirting with Harry? Did she proposition him or was she just inviting him in for coffee? Why?

Topic 9

Janice and Ruth both drink while they are pregnant. Do you see any other cultural differences in the novel between the society of the 50's and today?