Saint Mazie Study Guide

Saint Mazie by Jami Attenberg

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Plot Summary

Saint Mazie is a historical novel employing techniques traditional to oral storytelling. A present-day documentarian acquires a 90-year-old diary, and is absorbed by the life of Mazie Phillips-Gordon—Jazz Age party girl, ticket-taker, and champion to addicts and bums on New York City's Lower East Side. Mazie's seeming fearlessness and zest are haunted by childhood abuse, and when the Great Depression surges through the Bowery like a black wave, she welcomes anguished friends and strangers—many homeless—into the Venice Theater's comforting fantasies. Despite frequent back-room boozing and romantic flings, Mazie becomes a "saint" to the suffering locals, chronicling in her secret diary hope, horror, and adventure. These entries are accompanied by interviews with people who either knew Mazie, or became fascinated after hearing accounts of her bawdy, spirited life, and of her openhearted support of the Bowery's downtrodden.

Mazie Phillips and sisters Rosie and Jeanie lead a troubled life in pre-World War One Boston. Horvath, their father, is a violent wife-beater; mother Ada cares for her children and is succumbing to abuse. Rosie moves to New York City, and several years later returns with husband Louis to take away her sisters. The unlikely new family lives in a small, but mostly happy, apartment. For her tenth birthday, Mazie is gifted with a brown leather diary, and slowly begins the secret chronicles of her life. Rebellious and willful, Mazie fights off bullies, plays with young sister Jeanie, and spares no one—including herself—from brutally honest treatment in her journal. After a few years, Mazie works in her brother-in-law Louis's ("the Quiet Giant") candy shop, loathes it, and discovers what becomes a life-long love for the streets and their often destitute denizens.

Nearing 20, Mazie meets two sailors, and has a fling with one while the other watches. She drinks nightly, and older sister Rosie warns her against carousing and pregnancy. In a dusty gypsy parlor, the sisters have their fortunes told, and Mazie realizes Rosie is trying (and failing) to have a baby with Louis. A gypsy potion, and depression, sicken Rosie; Louis demands Mazie take over her sister's ticket-tearing job at his theater: the Venice. This is also his way of keeping an eye on Mazie, and protecting her from her wildness.

Mazie declares the ticket booth a cage—she'll miss out on life and die there. Instead, she masters the 12-hour days and thrives, meeting Nance (a ragged addict), whose starving children spark Mazie's passion to help the Bowery's bums and homeless. Saddled with a job, Mazie no longer visits the race track, but Jeanie does, meeting a horse doctor: Ethan Fallow. A young nun, Sister Tee, castigates Mazie's drinking on the job, and they somehow become friends. Mazie gets the nun to intervene on behalf of Nance's malnourished Marie and Rufus, but Marie dies and Nance is arrested. Mazie despairs. News of her mother being gravely ill with a bleeding brain sends Rosie (Mazie is refused) to Boston. In a bar, Mazie meets Captain Benjamin Hazzard, and begins a decades-long sexual tryst. Mazie learns that movie-watching nauseates her, and manager Rudy Wallach hints at morning sickness or "something." Mazie is pregnant

from Hazzard, and Rosie asks if she and Louis can have the infant—Mazie agrees, but loses the baby.

The war ends to parades and home-coming soldiers. Absurdly, Prohibition is passed, to little effect. Despairing over her loss, Mazie drinks heavily. Jeanie begs to join fellow street-dancer Belle Barker, a Thalia Theater headliner, but Rosie is against this. Louis plans on moving the family to Coney Island, telling Jeanie she can work his newly purchased bumper cars. Hazzard returns for more, but Mazie says nothing about losing their baby—she's powerless against his charm. Jeanie vanishes, but Mazie knows where she's gone. Six months later, living in Coney Island, Mazie laments over losing the diary— then finds it in Rosie's closet. Louis must now drive Mazie to work, and she hates the loss of freedom. Jeanie, at last, writes from Cleveland where the dance/acrobatics group is selling out shows. Mazie teases Sister Tee about Prohibition halting the soul-saving business. Ada Phillips dies, and Rosie takes a trunk to Boston and gathers her mother's pitiful belongings, including a diary Mazie seizes. This proves an unreadable mess of broken English. Mazie wanted only to know whether she and Jeanie, after "escaping," had been missed.

Rosie compulsively cleans the kitchen. Police shut down Finny's speakeasy, where Mazie drinks, and overhears old neighbor Al Flicker accused of being an anarchist. Louis starts using the ticket booth's safe to stash bags of money, and Mazie wonders if he's a criminal. Jeanie writes from Chicago. A Wall Street building is bombed; Mazie and Sister Tee save a man's bleeding leg. Hazzard visits, and Mazie wishes they could be a normal couple. Rosie's obsessive cleaning escalates, and when Mazie tries to stop her she is slapped away. Jeanie shows up in a Rolls-Royce, her leg in a cast. Mazie suggests Jeanie write of her time with the dance group, and she does, describing catching a venereal disease and spreading it through the other performers. When she broke her leg on stage, they asked her to leave. Mazie does nothing but work, pinches money from Louis's sacks for Sister Tee's homeless bums. Hazzard's Valentine card arrives late, but Mazie hangs it in the booth with those from Jeanie. A drunken date with policeman Mack Walters ends badly for Mazie, and Mack says the cops suspect Al Flicker planted the Morgan building bomb. Ethan courts Jeanie again who, weeks later, disappears. Finally she writes: "I'm not done yet." Mazie, now 24, feels 100, and Louis adopts her: she becomes Mazie Phillips-Gordon. Louis signs over the Venice Theater to her; she practically lives there and runs it, so why not? Captain Hazzard proposes, and Mazie declines. In the morning, Hazzard seems relieved. Mazie returns home to find Rosie sobbing, who thought Mazie abandoned her just like Jeanie did. Six weeks later, Louis dies from a heart seizure, and Rosie begins stealing money-stuffed envelopes given to Mazie from Louis old "business" partners. Jeanie writes from Los Angeles. Mazie gives the money to fund a church charity in her mother's name, and Rosie explodes—leaving the house for a long time. Mazie learns Rosie is collecting rent money from properties once owned by Louis, so she decides to give all the money envelopes to a church, establishing a fund in her mother's name and managed by Sister Tee.

Mazie one night finds now-gray Rosie sleeping on the couch and decides to forgive her; if only Rosie can forgive herself. Later, Mazie pulls Rosie from the freezing ocean and

they hug, Mazie promising never to abandon her crazy sister. They move back into the city, very close to Louis's original house on Grand Street. Rosie's shouting bothers the neighbors, and it seems she cannot bear any address for longer than six months.

Mack Walters dies. At the boozing cop's funeral, Mazie wonders if any of Mack's pals had a hand in beating Al Flicker. Mazie tells Captain Hazzard they will be friends and nothing more. Sister Tee invites Mazie up to her tiny room, and they embrace in her bed, but not in a sexual manner (though Mazie senses erotic attraction). Tee then vanishes for six weeks, and when they meet again Mazie sees how ill her dear friend appears. Tee later dies from breast cancer, and Mazie tells Hazzard about Tee, losing the baby, everything. Hazzard weeps. Mazie evolves, and buys twelve beds for the homeless, and other items. Grown-up Rufus (Nance's surviving child) who Mazie helped get an apple-picking job, sends a crate of them to the booth. Mazie hands them out, reserving but one for herself. Mazie walks in on Al Flicker (now possibly brain-damaged from police beatings) with Rosie in his lap. They are in love.

Mazie gets pregnant after a night with Al's nephew George, and apparently (this isn't revealed) doesn't have the baby. A five-year gap in Mazie's journaling, and she comes back vowing to devote what's left of her life to serving the downtrodden of New York City. It cannot be forgotten that someone once loved them, and Mazie is their champion: Saint Mazie, queen of the Bowery.

Section 1, Prologue—Chapters 1—2

Summary

Saint Mazie by Jami Attenberg begins with a prologue set in 1939. Mazie Phillips, approaching 45, is still working in the Venice Theater's ticket booth. Her friend Fannie Hurst—a bestselling novelist—bribes Mazie with beer to loosen her up for a meeting with someone intrigued by her adventures. A handsome young man arrives, his suit and manners displaying an aura of professionalism. He offers a cigarette, and even though Mazie's doctor forced her to quit weeks ago, she accepts. The dapper fellow wants Mazie to write an autobiography, and he won't take "no" for an answer. Mazie tells him no one cares about her life; she sits in the ticket booth all day. He says plenty of people care, that she runs these streets. Mazie insists she's not as interesting as the local bums, but the other won't relent, dismissively states that they're interesting only because of her. Angered, Mazie counts ticket money, hopes the pushy fellow will take the hint and leave. Instead, he takes her hand, assures Mazie he knows she has a story to tell, and that he's never wrong. She's the queen of her kingdom. Mazie considers herself an old lady, a fool; but the other urges her to think about his offer. The next morning, she digs out her dusty diary: she's thinking about it.

Chapter 1 takes readers back decades, when Mazie—not yet 10 years old—is leading a much harder life than many adults in pre-World War One Boston. Her parents, Horvath and Ada, are exemplars of what today is termed dysfunctional. One day, Mazie and her sister Jeanie are visited by their older sibling Rosie and husband Louis, who claim to be on the "honeymoon they never had." When the couple take the girls back to New York City, their lives are transformed, for good and ill. On her tenth birthday (November 1, 1907), Mazie is gifted with a diary, and slowly begins to record events in her life and those of others on the Lower East Side. Mazie is willful and rebellious, and more than capable of defending herself with words and fists, as several neighborhood bullies soon learn. The unusual "family" resides in a box-like apartment, and is the focus of gossipers and rumormongers alike. No one—not even Rosie—seems to know exactly what Louis "the Quiet Giant" Gordon does to earn his living, nor feel brave enough to ask. The few who have visited the apartment wonder, when only four people live there, at the necessity for its massive dining table.

George Flicker, a downstairs neighbor, is amazed by Rosie's ability to provide pretty dresses for the girls, and even send Jeanie to ballet lessons. Mazie's journaling, at first scattershot, becomes both historical record and exceedingly private confessional. She helps out in Louis's candy shop, and grows to loathe the work, while Jeanie and her friend Bella Barker earn pennies as street dancers. As Mazie matures, so does the diary's content, displaying a playful nature as open to risk as that present in her future nightly aid missions. She meets two sailors from San Francisco, and has a fling with one of them while the other watches. Rosie warns Mazie to be careful: she might get pregnant. Mazie labors in Louis's candy shop, drinks at night, and ponders whether true freedom is even possible. One evening, a very drunk Rosie brings up Horvath and Ada

—Father and Mother, still living in Boston. Rosie recalls the years-ago "family" outing to Topsfield, and her discovery of Horvath dancing with a strange woman to Cajun music behind a circus tent. Mazie too remembers, and retains the image of their usually furious father with bliss in his expression. When the family returned home from their day, Horvath took Rosie outdoors and beat her.

Rosie, strangely sad, takes Mazie and Jeanie to a sitting in a dusty parlor with a fortune-telling gypsy. When the black-haired woman reads Mazie's palm, and tells her there will be no love in her life, Mazie senses a scam and blurts out that she has company whenever she likes. Jeanie is seemingly entranced with the dramatic fortune teller, while Rosie appears tormented by some inner turmoil. Mazie determines Rosie is trying to have a baby, and the gypsy gives Rosie a potion that makes her ill. Soon Mazie is spending most nights caring for her older sister, and misses the streets and bars and alleys. Rosie gets pregnant, and loses the baby. After a second loss she is inconsolable, and rarely leaves the couch.

The now 20-year-old Mazie, fearing loss of control, takes whiskey breaks in the bedroom. Her behavior grows wilder still. She also has no qualms about drinking with strangers, and watches a bloody bar-fight. Drinking with a bum in the street, Mazie boasts that she could survive without a home, and the broken man advises that if someone loves you, you go home to them. Rosie, sharp and fierce in the wake of loss and sickness, warns Mazie against coming home late, and tells Jeanie there will be no more street-dancing or ballet classes. The next day, Mazie avoids the candy shop and newly established routine of visiting the horse track. After staying out all day and night, she wakes in the afternoon and encounters in the kitchen Rosie and Louis.

Having regained much of her health, Rosie tells Mazie enough is enough: something must change. Louis, usually adept at avoiding these angry encounters, for once speaks his mind. Agreeing with his wife, he insists that Mazie take over Rosie's job tearing tickets at Venice Theater (acquired by Louis in 1915). Mazie asserts that he's putting her in prison, and that she'll grow old in the tiny booth and die there. Her sister and brother-in-law laugh, and Mazie is poised for her first taste of the necessity for repetition and mundane chores.

In Chapter 2, Mazie is dumbfounded at the reality of the tiny ticket booth, and laments she'll be cut-off from the world. Rosie tells her not to worry: with all the patrons—mothers with children, soldiers, sailors, bums—she won't be alone. Mazie laughs, and Rosie says that's good. She'll need to keep that sense of humor. The Venice's manager, Rudy Wallach, is a tiny gentle man, and Mazie is forced to handle security when the need arises. Not only does Mazie adapt to this new role, she thrives, and incorporates the theater into her solo campaign of relief for the needy. The confining booth, instead of a cage, becomes a privileged space offering a view of the sky accessible by Mazie alone. Unfortunately, she cannot tolerate watching any of the cinematic offerings, as the flickering screen and constant movement of actors and animals make her queasy, which on one unfortunate night she proves. Now working 13-hour days, Mazie drinks herself to sleep, but Rosie claims the job will get easier. Jeanie is now going to the track, and is enamored of a horse doctor, Ethan Fallow.

The elevated train's clang and thunder rattles Mazie's nerves, as does manager Rudy's lingering late at the theater. Shouldn't he be home with his large family? Mazie makes the sudden (while drinking on the job) acquaintance of a nun—Sister Tee, who castigates her for drinking. Angry at first, Mazie wonders how the nun would look "all dolled up," and warms to her. A line forms and Sister Tee must leave, but not before Mazie invites her back.

World War One is ending, with parades and soldiers returning home. Jeanie, younger and once well-behaved, assumes Mazie's former lifestyle and spends most of her time with Ethan, earning the envy of her working sister. Nance, a tattered young woman who Mazie has earlier waved away for begging, pleads for food. Mazie senses a con, until Nance produces a rusty locket containing pictures of two children, and is reminded of Rosie's lost babies. Nance explains that her husband got her hooked on drugs, went to war, and met a girl in France. Demanding she be taken to Nance's place, Mazie gathers a bag of chocolates, half a sandwich, and locks the ticket booth. Nance's room, bereft of even a sink, is a reeking cave. Mazie gives the little girl and boy candy and milk, and when she steps outside to share a cigarette with Nance the woman makes a sexual offer. Mazie shoves her against the wall, tells her to stop being so selfish—and immediately regrets it. The next day Jeanie works the booth, while Mazie takes food to Nance and the malnourished children. Offering to move them (Marie and Rufus, she learns) to Louis's apartment, Mazie is rejected—accused by Nance of playing "Saint Mazie." Mazie's vow to return with food is met with a locked door.

When she goes back to work Mazie offers another nun free tickets if she'll locate and summon Sister Tee. The other turns down the bribe but does send the Sister, who promises to check in on Nance. Days elapse, and Mazie surges with anxiety. Finally, Sister Tee appears at the booth and informs Mazie that the starving family was found in a terrible state—Marie the worst. Enraged, Mazie pounds her fists against the counter and threatens to kill Nance. Later, Marie dies, and the nun tells Mazie Nance will be arrested. Rufus still fights to live. Sister Tee isn't around for a while, then shows up with a blue-bead rosary for Mazie. She's not concerned about Mazie's soul, but that she's sad. Mazie accepts. Rufus is released from the hospital, but Sister Tee cannot find him, telling Mazie he's lost in the system. The two women become unlikely friends.

Analysis

The brief Prologue introduces a mature Mazie Phillips-Gordon, haunted yet strong after the events she chronicles in the book. The reader gets a potent taste of her take-no-prisoners personality, ticket-tearing job, and why so many others (evidenced by novelist Fannie Hurst bribing Mazie into meeting the suited man who wants her to pen an autobiography) are fascinated with her life.

Author Attenberg then takes readers back over three decades to Mazie's tenth birthday, and her receiving as a gift the diary destined to become famous. The diary serves as both main perspective and keeper of secrets Mazie rarely shares, and then only under duress. Like many in real life, she doesn't immediately savor journaling, so the reader is

subjected to narrative gaps (which, later in the book, widen) of varying duration. But with poetic economy and grit, what Mazie writes is emotionally charged, funny, intimate, and sometimes shocking. Through the years runs a thread of melancholy yearning, tragedy, and a sense of wrenching loneliness Mazie barely acknowledges—but is obvious to the reader. Scattered through the story are a present-day filmmaker's capsule profiles/interviews with those who either knew Mazie, or someone very close to her, which perhaps will strike the reader as variously intrusive and revealing, though the novel would function as well without these. The period detail and authentic jargon infuse the novel with day-to-day realism, and seemingly trivial actions (Rosie's compulsive cleaning, for one) and objects function symbolically and/or as simply what they are.

Early on, the lingering trauma of Mazie's (and siblings Jeanie and Rosie) Boston childhood manifests in her behavior and decisions, exemplified in her "hard shell" and blunted emotions; Jeanie's dreamy wanderlust; Rosie's consuming guilt and dread over being left alone. Their New York home is ruled by Rosie's husband, Louis "the Quiet Giant" Gordon, who probably earns much of his money in criminal activity, though is nothing like the women's violent father Horvath, but emanates at times cold, intelligent menace. Mazie is at all times rebellious and independent, heart as open as her mind, and charismatic—though not wholly aware of this quality in her teens. She draws men and women to her, dazzling a few, particularly navy captain Benjamin Hazzard, who symbolizes to Mazie the physical aspect of her ticket booth-caged spirit, and meets her over many years for sex. Jeanie and Rosie, in these opening chapters, try to handle life with so-called magical thinking: Rosie buying gypsy "cures" and rituals; Jeanie street-dancing and passively equating thoughts with deeds (eventually overcoming this, at some price).

The unlikely "family," crammed into their Grand Street rooms, is a microcosm for post-World War One civilization struggling to adapt to ever-quickening industry and an economy poised for collapse. The resonance with early twenty-first century America is sobering.

Discussion Question 1

"Rosie doesn’t understand what it’s like to love the streets," writes Mazie. While her sister has no affection for, nor fascination with, the streets and those who inhabit them, Mazie clearly does. But this love has no basis in sentimentalism or romantic illusion, and takes human foibles, dirt and noise, at face value. A highly unusual sensibility for anyone, let alone a 19-year-old woman in early twentieth century America. What has likley contributed to Mazie's positive philosophy? What might Mazie symbolize in this story?

Discussion Question 2

Years after the fact, Rosie recalls to Mazie how their father, Horvath, once "...took me out back."—referring to a beating. This, apparently, is provoked by Rosie's discovering

him dancing with a strange woman during a "family" outing. Mazie muses: "He looked happy, is what I remember thinking. . ." What do these contrary actions reveal about Horvath Phillips' essential character?

Discussion Question 3

Women are not very well treated in this novel, and Mazie Phillips (based on a real person) made some waves that very probably influenced feminism. Constrast how women were portrayed and treated at the time of the novel versus now. Have things improved for women, or merely changed with new challenges? What types of challenges to women face today?

Vocabulary

bribery, bespoke, ruddy, oppressive, tenement, cobblestone, legitimate, hypocrisy, lore, floozy, vaudeville, propriety, chutzpah, barker, sashay, ornate, haughty, velour, gypsy, persecution, immaculate, hustler, intellectual, anarchist

Section 2, Chapters 3—4

Summary

Chapter 3 begins with Rosie receiving word from Boston: Mother is very sick. Mazie and Jeanie, scared when Louis and Rosie took them away from that city 10 years ago, haven't seen their parents since. Rosie and Louis debate whether she ought to travel alone to see her mother, and when Mazie offers to go she is turned down. After this, with Rosie out of town, Mazie goes out drinking in order to forget about all the recent sadness and troubles, and meets a brawny sailor: Captain Benjamin Hazzard. They end up having wild sex on the night-cloaked Brooklyn Bridge, and the captain returns to his ship. Mazie is smitten, and when Sister Tee visits the ticket booth asking for help with a war widow and her three babies, Mazie wants no part, but gives everything in her purse, imagining the nun as a con artist. A telegram from Rosie gives no details on their mother's health, but Mazie thinks only of the captain. Manager Rudy and his late-night friends gather and watch some odd movie featuring colored circles and squiggles—Mazie vomits. Rudy wonders aloud if "something" might be wrong with her, hinting of pregnancy without actually saying as much. He hands over a letter the captain sent Mazie in care of the Venice Theater, and she reads Hazzard's romantic words. He'll think of her, he writes, every time he sees a bridge. Mazie goes home, taking the letter with her to bed.

An anguished Rosie returns from Boston: Mother's brain is bleeding, her "mashed up" face hardly recognizable. Everyone has no doubt that Horvath (who claims Ada had a bad fall) is responsible, and Mazie recalls the windy night she and Jeanie were taken away from that awful house and its dirt floor, Louis putting money into their father's hand—Mother not present. Mazie drinks daily; queasiness is constant. She tells herself she can't bear the loneliness. Rosie argues with Jeanie, who wants to go on tour with Belle (formerly Bella) Barker, now headlining at the Thalia Theater. Rosie bends, says she'll talk to Louis. At work, Rudy tells Mazie influenza is spreading throughout New York City, and gives her a surgical mask to wear. The public health department shuts down the Venice's daily shows, allowing only staggered openings on week-nights. Smoking, coughing, and sneezing are not permitted! In the middle of the day Mazie retches in front of Rudy, who this time directly refers to "morning sickness." Mazie simply is happy not to have influenza, for which people all over are being quarantined. She learns two types of doctor exist: one will guarantee a baby for life; the other nothing in her belly but room for the next drink.

Mazie now hates the captain for getting her pregnant. Returning home one evening, Mazie finds Rosie, Louis, Jeanie, and Ethan sharing a bottle and reminiscing. Tired and vaguely ill, Mazie turns down the couples' invitation to join them. Rosie asks her if she's sick, and Mazie replies she's exhausted from work. Louis ignores the exchange and begins telling the others how he met Rosie, then asks Mazie whether she's sick. Defeated, she flatly admits her pregnancy and marches off to bed. Following this, Rosie softens in her treatment of Mazie, even bringing hot beef stew for lunch in the booth.

Rosie (knowing her sister has no interest in babies) asks if Mazie will carry out the pregnancy, and give the infant to she and Louis. Mazie agrees, happy to do something that will please her sister and brother-in-law, despairing for want of a child. Thrilled, Rosie advises Mazie on how to conceal the fact of her pregnancy. Mazie turns 21; Louis and Rosie discuss moving to a larger home in Coney Island. Mazie is forbidden to smoke, and Rosie enjoys placing cold hands on her sister's warm belly. The war officially ends, and New York celebrates—even Mazie, her sisters, and Louis. Mazie loses the baby. Profoundly upset, she vows never to discuss it. While she's at work, the mattress is removed; no one can bear its presence. Louis, devastated, openly weeps and is comforted by Rosie and Mazie.

Prohibition is passed, but Mazie knows nothing will stop her—and most of the city—from drinking. The move to Coney Island looks to be imminent, and Louis suddenly has business there. Jeanie rails against moving, but Rosie tells her to quit putting on airs, that she's not too good to run Louis's newly purchased bumper cars at Luna Park. Captain Hazzard unexpectedly appears at the ticket booth, and talks Mazie into going out for dinner and a show. Despite her lingering anger and hurt, Mazie cannot control herself. After an Italian meal, they attend a show where Belle and Jeanie perform. Mazie is amazed at her sister's acrobatics, and is convinced that Jeanie is now forever free—she'll never give up on the act. Mazie's despair and horror over losing the baby crashes down on her, and she is unable to do anything beyond kiss Hazzard's (who knows nothing about the pregnancy) cheek. Jeanie isn't seen for three days, with Rosie, Ethan, and Louis asking where she could be. Only Mazie knows.

Chapter 4 picks up in November 1919—6 months after Mazie's last journal entry. During the move from Grand Street to Coney Island she misplaced her diary, and recovered it while digging through Rosie's closet for a pair of high heels. In the aftermath of Jeanie's departure, Mazie feels sorry for Rosie; Rosie pities Mazie's losing the baby. Louis and Rosie still have their claws in her: Louis drives Mazie every day to work, and picks her up. Mazie thinks: "No room to move. No shot at freedom." Not fond of Coney Island, Mazie nonetheless likes the new house on Surf Avenue, which Rosie compulsively cleans. Louis harshly squelches Mazie's questions about what he actually does for a living. She walks to the cold beach and watches distant winter lightning, convinced she's exiled from life. Jeanie sends a postcard from Cleveland, where she and Belle are performing to sell-out audiences. Mazie displays this, and cards from the captain, in her ticket booth. Rosie refuses to read her sister's postcards, and again scrubs the kitchen sink. Long-absent Sister Tee visits Mazie's cage, and is teased about Prohibition hurting the soul-saving business. The Sister replies that people always find a way to trouble, and says she heard Mazie had been sick. Angered, Mazie keeps her secret and locks the booth without saying good-bye.

Riding to work, she asks Louis to teach her about gambling, and he says she's too hotheaded to be effective. Mazie cannot help feeling things. Louis admits that's why he keeps her around, and that winning doesn't matter so much as how one handles life's bad turns. His (usually) quiet wisdom, as ever, is both impressive and infuriating. One month later—February—Ada Phillips dies. Mazie barely knew her, and will not miss her long-suffering mother. Rosie and Mazie cry anyway; Mazie sends a letter to Jeanie's

last known address in Chicago. Rosie drags an empty trunk out to the car, and drives to Boston to gather whatever meager possessions might be found. At Finny's speakeasy ("Knock twice, then knock three times, and then you're in."), Mazie gets drunk and fools around with a young banker she labels Hungry William. With Rosie gone, Louis isn't much at home but leaves cash on the old wooden table brought from Grand Street. Mazie must rely on taxi cabs. Back at Finny's, she hears George Flicker's Uncle Al (who once slept under the stairs on Grand Street) branded an anarchist, and blurts out that politics are only a pose. No one dares respond. Rosie returns, Louis dragging in the trunk, and declares the kitchen a mess. Boston was a nightmare: Mother's body already had been removed from the hospital to the funeral parlor, and buried with but a number to mark her grave. Rosie braved icy weather to lay flowers there. The widower—Rosie's father—Horvath behaved like a sociopath, sitting drunk outdoors in funeral clothes while men bought and hauled away the house's items. When he threatened Rosie she pulled Louis's handgun. Realizing she was serious, Horvath soiled himself. Rosie, for all her troubles, comes home bearing a stinking trunk of stained clothing, junk, mismatched shoes and—Mazie notes—a diary.

Rosie sleeps an entire day. Mazie opens the diary to her mother's broken English, scrawled in shaky cursive—damned unfair. She desired only to know whether Ada missed her and Jeanie and Rosie. Thinking about her family becomes unbearable, so Mazie asks Louis about his. He reports a surprisingly normal childhood, but that his father died when Louis was very young; his mother lived until Louis's thirteenth year. She would write a letter listing everything he'd done, her wishes for his future, and present it on Louis's birthday. Mazie asks whether Louis still has the letters, and if so may she read them. With no small ambivalence, he says she may. After work, Mazie prays Rosie is out of bed and in the kitchen, but finds only the reeking trunk of her mother's belongings. Louis helps carry it out back. Out of sight, out of mind. Finally, Rosie wakes; resumes her cleaning. A postcard from the captain arrives, begging Mazie not to change anything about herself before he can again see her. She thinks that she will in fact stay the same—in her changeless cage. The police shut down Finny's place and arrest him. Mazie accuses a local cop of hypocrisy regarding illegal alcohol, and he makes a lewd pass at her. Next morning across the street, Mazie sees Sister Tee and her flock, but garners no nod or wave.

Louis stops by and locks a mysterious bag in the safe, but Mazie knows better than to question its contents. She does ask whether he is worried about his wife Rosie's compulsive cleaning, and Louis huffs: Does Mazie want to clean the kitchen? Because he sure doesn't. That's it for Louis, Mazie thinks. He won't—or can't—admit the situation's disturbing reality. At least they'll have the shiniest kitchen in Brooklyn. Mazie rides the third train ever from Coney Island into the city, overjoyed to be free of Louis's drop-offs and pickups and schedule. Time is back in her control. Jeanie sends a postcard from White City, Chicago, bragging about the thrills of performance and staying up late like Mazie was wont to do. Mazie simply is glad someone's having fun. Sister Tee makes a peace offering: a bag of sweets and strong peppermint candies. She did nothing wrong, so why the hostility? Mazie says she resented being told how to care for herself by someone her own age and with little experience in life. They rekindle the friendship, Mazie inwardly grateful. Who else can she tease but little Tee? Another

postcard from Jeanie reads "I'm in love with love," and pictures Chicago's Michigan Boulevard. Mazie is unimpressed.

On the morning train she spies aspiring anarchist Al Flicker, whose eye is plumply bruised. Mazie's joke about hating to see the other guy is met with cold silence. September 5th, the captain writes that he'll be in New York in a month, and invites Mazie to join him for dinner. A week and a half later a bomb explodes on Wall Street one mile from Mazie and the Venice Theater. Screaming crowds covered in dust and blood flee the blast zone, and curious Mazie runs down Pearl Street to see if she can help. The Morgan building is ruined; body parts and wounded lay scattered in the street among teeming police. Mazie aids Sister Tee in applying a makeshift tourniquet to a man's leg, and they stay until the last bodies and wounded are gone.

Later at Finny's—inexplicably reopened—Mazie and everyone else (police included) needs a drink. Anarchists planted the bomb, say the police. At home, Rosie tells Mazie that Louis will drive her to work in the morning, but Mazie rises before dawn and avoids this by taking the train. The other passengers sit solemn in their dark clothes, until a man offers green apples from his crate. Glad to be alive, everyone accepts and crunches away while rocked by the train. Following Mazie's "escape," Louis and Rosie demand that from now on she be driven to work as before. From cage to cage, Mazie thinks, and says she'll be taking the train. Rosie turns back to her scrubbing.

When the captain appears in uniform at Mazie's booth, she nearly swoons and realizes she's forgotten about his September postcard. They walk up the Bowery to a park and share a flask, then retire to Captain Hazzard's hotel room for prolonged sex. Mazie wishes they could hang out with Rosie and Louis like normal people, but understands the captain has his own life and she isn't a part of it. Later, Louis offers to buy Mazie a car, but she's not interested and considers running away in the night to rent an apartment. Exasperated, Mazie gets down on the floor beside Rosie and says the kitchen's clean—can't she see that? Rosie slaps her away, and Louis must physically remove Mazie from the house. She dashes through a storm for the train and ruins her new hat. In the morning, during yet another argument with Rosie, a silver Rolls-Royce pulls up before the house. Her leg in a cast, Jeanie is carried out by the driver.

Analysis

The family moves to Coney Island, Mazie misplaces her diary, and there are no other entries for six months. This resonates sadly with Mazie losing the baby, who never has a chance to form memories, and losing an object full of them. Her confinement grows when Louis starts driving her to work, thus taking away Mazie's control of her time and schedule. Resentful, she attempts to pry a few secrets from Louis, among them how to be a successful gambler. Louis balks, telling Mazie she's too hotheaded to keep a poker face. She is hurt and angry. The passing of Prohibition seems to symbolize both Mazie's increasing sense of imprisonment by others and circumstance, and Authority strengthening societal control by outlawing alcohol. Both of these impositions ultimately fail, revealing the true spirit (at least when tested by adversity) of the culture.

The nun Sister Tee entering Mazie's life seems a genuine godsend. The two women have nothing whatsoever in common, except a love for the downtrodden and needy of New York City. This bonds them, and they become unlikely friends, both capable of braving brutal treatment and scenarios in order to help others. This can be said to foreshadow Mazie's later title: Saint Mazie, even though she's first given this by the hostile, manipulative addict Nance. When Ada, Mazie's mother, dies in Boston and Rosie drives out with a trunk to collect the dead woman's belongings, Mazie lets herself feel love and guilt over her for the first time. With Rosie and runaway Jeanie gone, and no car, Mazie regains some freedom by taking the train into work. Sealed off there like her diary secrets, she thoroughly enjoys mingling with the other passengers, and taking in the sights of looming New York City from this new perspective.

Rosie's return from Boston is marked by pain and anguish, and she sleeps an entire day, escaping even her cleaning compulsion. When Mazie finds among Ada's pathetic last possessions a diary, she is dizzy with hope. Will it tell her what she most desires to hear? But poor Ada's broken English and shaky scrawl are unreadable, and Mazie will never know whether her abused mother missed Mazie and Jeanie after they were taken away from the awful house in Boston. Maturing, Mazie struggles with life's horror and unfairness, where too often the gentle caring soul is beaten, just like Ada, and harmless Al Flicker accused of an anarchist bombing. Even getting a postcard from Jeanie in Chicago can't ease the minds of Mazie and Rosie, and their dancing sister becomes for them a symbol of vitality and escape—a fairy capable of entering other worlds, so long as they are exotic and not heavy with reality.

Discussion Question 1

The author shows Mazie and Sister Tee becoming closer and closer, with Mazie even tickling the nun's stomach. Could this be intended to symbolize some far deeper process? If you think so, explain why.

Discussion Question 2

Jeanie found a way to live her dream of being a dancer, but returns to her family in section with a broken leg. What might be the author’s message regarding Jeanie’s story?

Discussion Question 3

Louis's death is abrupt and shocking, with no prior warning in the way of poor health. Why do you think the author chose this fate for Mazie's brother-in-law?

Vocabulary

lech, anarchy, postmark, lusty, parchment, gloom, wretched, prohibition, bamboozle, chivalry, notion, kippah, challah

Section 3, Chapters 5—6

Summary

In Chapter 5, Mazie suggests Jeanie write her story—beginning to end. It'll be good for her. Jeanie does this, telling about skipping town (NYC) a year and a half ago to pursue her passion of dancing; nothing against boyfriend Ethan and conventionality. She had to do it. Joining the Folsom brothers—Skip and Felix—and Belle Barker (whose hairdresser, Elizabeth, married Felix) to tour Philadelphia, Cleveland, and Chicago was thrilling. Belle ran the show. Jeanie loved the road life, and sneaking around in Chicago with handsome Paul, one of the Mayor's special assistants. Admitting herself a liar and cheat on new love Skip, Jeanie discloses that she caught from Paul a venereal disease, and it spread through the group because Skip and Elizabeth too were lovers. That night, during an acrobatic performance, Jeanie falls and breaks her leg. No one visits her in the hospital until Belle arrives and tells Jeanie she's out of the group for the betterment of all—no grudges or ill will, so long as they both agree never to talk about the disease. Belle's dark hooded eyes tell Jeanie that Belle too has the clap. Finally Paul arrives, kisses Jeanie, and offers to kill someone for her. She declines, but accepts money and the loan of his Rolls-Royce and driver, Mauro. During the long ride back to New York, Jeanie confides in the gentle Italian Mauro, who advises her to stop lying and to be good and nice. But that already feels like a lie, so Jeanie decides to be good and bad, right and wrong, just like everyone else in the world.

Mazie's life is nothing but work, no free moments now that Jeanie begs her presence and to not leave her alone with Rosie. In six weeks the cast can come off, but Jeanie will need help getting around. Each night Mazie returns home and shares a bed with Jeanie, who wants always to hear about her busy sister's day. Now that the bars are closed, Mazie says, nothing much is interesting except people. Desperate for attention, Jeanie asks Mazie to please tell her people are still having a good time out there. Mazie wouldn't know; she's right there with Jeanie every night. Sister Tee one morning visits Mazie's cage, and Mazie's glad to see her despite Sister's desire to help a few more suffering women. Mazie plucks a fistful of bills from the bag Louis dropped off only hours before, and hands them over. She failed to help her poor mother, and this drives her decision to pinch from Louis. Mazie grows intolerant of Rosie's doling out some pain-killing drug to Jeanie, who sleeps too much and is dreamy enough on her own.

Ethan comes courting again, as if nothing has changed over the past year and a half. Mazie tells Rosie that Ethan is a fool, and steps out to the porch for a cigarette—one of her few joys, even though she can't stop smoking to save her life. The Venice Theater is closed for New Years; Louis gifts the employees with bottles of liquor and hundred-dollar bills, and an usher hugs him. The Phillips later laze at home picking at a lavish selection of foods. Mazie flips through her diary, reviewing the mostly bad year. She and Jeanie admit they missed each other, but Mazie doubts her sister's honesty. Jeanie oddly remarks that 1921 will be Mazie's year. For what? she says. As though in

response, fate sends boozing law officer Mack Walters to Mazie's cage: will she go out with him? Maybe; but Mazie fears he isn't trustworthy.

Several days later, crutch-supported Jeanie returns from having her cast removed, melancholy over not being immediately able to dance. Too, she is thin, her once-black hair gone brown. Ethan tries consoling her, but she weeps. Mazie turns away and heads for work. Following a six-week gap in her diary, Mazie calls Captain Hazzard a "lousy skunk" when his Valentine's Day postcard arrives four days late. She hangs it in her cage anyway, its photo of distant mountains soothing. Jeanie exercises to strengthen her leg and body. Mazie admits her jealousy of Jeanie's brief success, promises to assist her recovery.

After mulling it over, Mazie agrees to a date with Mack Walters, whose abrupt nervousness results in him showing up very drunk. The disastrous night is capped when Mack breaks down sobbing in public, and Mazie guides him into Finny's. After more drinks, Mack tells Mazie the police are nearly certain Al Flicker bombed the Morgan building. Dismissive, she says Al's an intellectual who wouldn't hurt a fly. Mack calls a cab for Mazie, kisses her hand, and she leaves.

Jeanie's health improves, and Rosie's dining table is tea-stained from a gypsy visit of which Mazie disapproves—you can't buy good luck. A week later, Sister Tee walks a severely beaten Al Flicker out of an alley. Seeing this, Mazie runs to help, shouting that she knows the man. Weeping with pain and fright, Al manages to say that the police assaulted him, and he had no part in the bombing. Home, Mazie finds Jeanie and clumsy Ethan dancing with Rosie and Louis. Two weeks later Al Flicker is beaten again, and Mazie confronts Mack Walters, who tells her to mind her own business. She thinks: These streets ARE my business. George Flicker laments his uncle's newly careless reaction to the attacks, suspecting brain damage. Mazie relents, allows Louis to drive her to work, when he tells her Ethan has proposed to Jeanie. Mazie is agreeable to this, but says there's no husband in her particular future. Louis pleasantly shocks her by saying Mazie's better than all that. In July, Jeanie peeks into Mazie's diary, and writes her own blurred memories of life with Ada and Horvath Phillips. How happy her father looked dancing with a strange woman at Topsfield. Jeanie disappears once more, and Mazie writes: "Walking wounded, and we never even went to war." How could Jeanie throw away Ethan's love? That October, Jeanie sends a postcard: "I'm not done yet."

Chapter 6, and Mazie turns 24, but feels 100. Louis takes her into the car; not for a drive, but to tell Mazie he wants to make her a Gordon—by adoption. Overwhelmed, Mazie agrees, but wishes to keep her original family name (despite her father's status as a "violent rat bastard"). The two embrace and cry; Mazie becomes Mazie Phillips-Gordon. Five months pass, when Louis consults Mazie about signing over to her the Venice Theater, where she practically lives and runs everything. Mazie asks for a pen. Weeks later, she watches Louis chat with a well-dressed Jew, and asks about the man. Louis says he's no one Mazie need worry about, but his casual smile chills her. In mid-June Jeanie sends a postcard from California, but with no return address. Mazie again sees Louis's dapper friend down the block, and reminds herself that no one knows what Louis actually does for a living.

One August day Captain Hazzard jolts Mazie when he appears and smacks a hand against the cage's window. She feels foolish hugging him, but pretends he's hers to keep. They spend two days in a hotel loving and talking; Hazzard proposes marriage and a move to California where the skyscraper redwoods grow. Mazie gently declines, and in the morning Hazzard seems relieved. At home, Mazie finds Rosie sobbing on the kitchen floor, and must slap her to break the hysteria. Rosie says she thought Mazie, like Jeanie, had left her. Louis arrives, helps them up, and carries on as usual. Mazie and Louis walk to the ocean, and he unexpectedly brings up Rosie and her cleaning compulsion. They can't be sure whether she's textbook "crazy," but certainly something is wrong. Louis tells Mazie to look after her, abide her schedules and patterns. What about my life? says Mazie. Don't I do enough? Louis merely shrugs, and walks away.

Six weeks later, Louis suffers a heart seizure at the horse track. Mazie forces every detail from the trainer who at the time was conversing with Louis. At the hospital, Rosie and Mazie clasp Louis's hands while he passes away. Jeanie cannot be located. Rosie spends the next anguished days slumped on the couch and nearly misses the funeral. Louis's aunts and their husbands visit bearing walls of smoked fish, and Rosie must be moved from couch to armchair. Mazie can think of no other words for her sister than "You'll be all right."

Menacing men in dark suits approach Mazie with cash-stuffed envelopes, and claim they did business with Louis. Mazie asks the nature of these, and each man returns a cold stare. Numb to all fear, Mazie accepts the envelopes, saying she has no method to determine whether she's being cheated, threatened, or honored—and frankly doesn't care. Later in the empty house, she and Rosie eat what's left of the fish. George Flicker reports that when Louis's death was announced at the race track a cheer went up, because half of the men attending had their debts wiped out. Rosie and Mazie meet with a lawyer, and Rosie soon owns the house, two apartment buildings, half of four race horses, one-quarter of a dozen more, and a bumper car ride. She and her sister suspect that Louis stashed other riches elsewhere, as he rarely used banks. Back home, Rosie demands the money envelopes be taken from her sight, so Mazie hides them under Jeanie's old mattress, markedly elevating it. Feeling responsibility for her own business, and despite Rudy's offer to handle ticket-tearing for a while, Mazie returns to the booth.

Seeing her back at work, numerous patrons give condolence and even small gifts. Mazie can't suppress her tears. Sister Tee is allowed into the cage, and gifts Mazie with a medallion of Saint John the Evangelist—patron saint of grief. Two months later, Rosie leaves the neighborhood with Mazie for the first time since Louis's death, and they inspect their Chinatown properties after hearing rumors of poor repair. Mazie notes Rosie's healthy glow. In February Sister Tee needs winter coats for the poor, and Mazie donates money from one of the envelopes, thinking this perfectly suited to help others. Rosie takes the train with Mazie one day, using the transparent cover story of needing her hair styled. Worse, some of the money-stuffed envelopes are missing—Mazie notes their number has gone from 46 to 39.

Jeanie sends a postcard picturing the hill-top HOLLYWOODLAND sign, with a cryptic message telling of losing a baby. Mazie throws the card away. Meanwhile, the house falls into sloth and dirt, dishes in the sink and evidence of gypsy rituals: incense smearing the air, and saucers dark with tea leaves. Rosie is absent. Mazie despairs; she alone can't take care of everything. Confiding for once in Sister Tee, Mazie learns the nun views gypsies as godless thieves, and Rosie ought not have any dealings with them. This stress continues for a month, when Mazie takes all the envelopes and establishes a fund in honor of her mother at Chinatown's Church of the Transfiguration. Rosie explodes—tears apart the house in search of the money, even clawing at Mazie's booth where Rudy tries to pull her away. Rosie runs off, and Mazie doesn't see her for a month, but discovers her sister is showing up early at their properties and collecting rent money—probably giving it to the gypsies.

November 1, 1923, Mazie is 26 and living in chaos. Several weeks later, she comes home and finds gray, ragged Rosie sleeping on the couch. Mazie will forgive her anything, if only Rosie will forgive herself. Weeks go by. One night Mazie returns to find the front door standing open, and cries out for Rosie. Searching outside, Mazie sees her sister is waist-deep in the freezing ocean. Rosie moans: A dead husband. No baby. What do I have left? Mazie says: You have me. I'll never leave you. And, that if Rosie dies, she'll kill her. Blue-skinned Rosie collapses into her sister's warmth. In April Mazie receives a postcard from Captain Hazzard: Niagara Falls. A train ride away. She displays it in the cage along with the others. Another month, and Mazie convinces Rosie to forget about Louis's possessions, leave the mournful house for someone else to clean. They're moving back into the city.

Analysis

Tired of her own family, Mazie asks Louis about his childhood, and is shocked to hear how "normal" and mundane it was. Louis has as many, if not more, interesting secrets as Mazie's diary. Captain Hazzard's visit and attendant sexual romp with Mazie, leaves her empty and wishing she could bring him to the house and visit with Rosie and Louis like a conventional couple, but her own fear of settling rules this out, and she can't imagine traveling the world like Hazzard. New York is enough, symbol for all civilization, dreams and dirt and death. And if you're lucky, a friend like Sister Tee.

When Jeanie returns from touring as a dancer/acrobat, one leg in a cast, Mazie suggests it would be "good for her" if Jeanie writes of her experience, beginning with running away from the family home, and ending after the troupes' asking her to leave. Mazie knows the value, or "catharsis," that will result from this simple practice—she does it practically every day. Mazie is of course unshockable, but her young sister's account seems to awaken in Mazie a latent guilt from not being very useful to their now-deceased mother. Regardless, Mazie grows to resent Jeanie's weening demands during the six-week recovery, and her dread of being left alone with Rosie. Jeanie is depressed, listless, and being fed some unnamed pain-killing medication. This aspect of the narrative subliminally relays Mazie's own fear of another sister sinking into emotional illness. It seems odd that Mazie, with her penchant for blunt observations,

does not share this fear with Jeanie. Perhaps Mazie worries that to acknowledge the possibility of severe depression might actually induce it. Her life becomes nothing but work—back and forth from the Venice Theater's ticket booth, and helping Jeanie back on her feet.

At bedtime, Jeanie repeatedly asks Mazie to tell her about the workday, and to reassure her that "people are still having a good time out there." Mazie says she wouldn't know, because work siphons away her time—as does caring for Jeanie. The author here reveals Mazie's complicated relationship with Jeanie: unselfish caring and nurturing mingled with resentment and fear for Jeanie's emotional health. This is how real-world people behave, and such verisimilitude is a crucial element of the book's value. But Jeanie, once recovered, again abandons love and family for Hollywoodland (the town's original moniker). Her flight back to "freedom" seems to foreshadow Louis' death.

Louis's death is a shock to the reader, as both his quiet loyalty and unspoken menace invest him with power, and we assume he can survive anything. Again, whether the author intended this effect isn't important: the reader senses the loss of Louis' steadfast presence, and how it further tears away whatever remains of Rosie's sanity. When Louis' relatives and "business partners" arrive at the house to give their respects, Mazie receives a number of envelopes stuffed with cash. True to her nature, these dark-suited figures don't frighten her, and she dares ask the nature of their dealings with her too-soon deceased brother-in-law. These queries are met with silent—but obvious—menace: Take the money, and be quiet. Perhaps when cheers among Louis' debtors break out at the horse track, his "business" is revealed (at least in part) as loan-sharking.

After Mazie returns to work, she notices several of the money envelopes are missing. This goes on, until Rosie is found to be the culprit. She no longer can have Louis in body, so hordes the symbol of his comfort. Mazie cannot tolerate this, so gives the remaining money to Sister Tee, who opens a fund for the destitute in memory of Ada Phillips. Rosie explodes, and leaves the house for an extended period. Mazie learns her manic sister is covertly collecting rent from boarders in properties once owned by Louis, and fears the money is going straight to gypsy fortune-tellers.

One night, Mazie returns from work to find Rosie—unclean and ragged—asleep on the couch. Later, Mazie prevents her grief-lacerated sister from drowning herself in the freezing ocean, and vows never to stop loving and caring for her. Mazie has burst from her own work-centered absorption into the ocean of Rosie's fathomless grief. Mazie determines to leave the house behind, and the two sisters move back into the city.

Discussion Question 1

Isolation can cause the human mind to fragment, and after Jeanie leaves to pursue dancing Rosie spends most of her time alone, and the obsessive cleaning worsens. What do you think is responsible for driving this behavior? Is isolation the sole culprit?

Discussion Question 2

To appease Sister Tee, Mazie goes to confession, but fights laughter (much to the priest's dismay). The scene—perhaps too flippantly—reveals Mazie's "take" on religious belief and faith. Later, she feels differently about the church. What causes this major shift?

Discussion Question 3

Mazie is not always a likable character. For a novelist, this is risky, as many readers favor a protagonist with whom they can identify. Though possessing a number of admirable traits, and a genuine caring soul, what is it about her that drew you into the story?

Vocabulary

polaroids, coddle, titter, riddance, mourn, defer, plush, flophouse, streetwalker, riffraff, akita, shiva, medallion, grifter, evangelist, transfiguration

Section 4, Chapters 7—8

Summary

Chapter 7 starts on October 1, 1924. Mazie and Rosie find a two-bedroom flat on Grand Street six doors down from where they once originally lived with Louis and Jeanie. They have only the massive old table and couch ("A table to eat on and a couch to faint on."). Mazie once more walks to work. They have given up on Jeanie. Rosie soon hates the kitchen, complains of indelible mold invisible to her sister. Mazie's quiet 27th birthday is spent enjoying ice cream with raspberries and chocolate sauce. Mazie finds a chocolate bar on her bed. Two weeks late, Jeanie's birthday greetings arrive: she hears Mazie in her head when she least expects it. As if, Mazie thinks, she'd listen to anything I say. Within two months they're moving again, because Rosie's compulsions (and shouting) are consuming her and alarming the neighbors. The new kitchen on Elizabeth Street sparkles, and Rosie admits to liking it. After five months, though, she hates all the neighbors. In August Mack Walters—Mazie's drunken date—dies. With Sister Tee Mazie attends the funeral. An orphan, poor Mack didn't even have a lunatic sister. His police comrades recognize Mazie and mob her as if she's a celebrity, saying Mack talked about her all the time: a real heart-breaker. Mazie wonders if any of them are responsible for beating Al Flicker.

Another postcard from the captain arrives: the Washington Monument. A giant prick, Mazie jokes. Rosie seems incapable of enduring more than six months at one address, so they move to a Delancey Street building occupied by elderly women who every sunset hold a knitting circle. Sister Tee's favorites. No street noise. Mazie forces Rosie to run a finger across the counter and show it to her. George Flicker, now moving real estate, comments that the ever-relocating Gordon girls have become gypsies. Mazie, now 28, complains about her still-growing breasts being responsible for her bad posture and aching back. Unannounced as usual, the captain appears, and Mazie joins him in a sexual marathon. She knows he has a wife in Connecticut, and he doesn't hide his ring. Mazie tells herself she never will know such intimacy with another. The following February he sends a postcard picturing a sailboat in water, and his name with love—nothing more.

Sister Tee becomes Mazie's best friend, stopping daily by the cage, having after-work tea. Mazie teases her, even tickles her belly. When Mazie asks if she can visit Sister in her place, she is told their isn't room for two. April 1926, Rosie and Mazie move to Mulberry Street, their neighbors young single ladies, many of whom attend nursing school. Inside one month, Rosie wants to kill them. Sister Tee finally is visited, and her top-floor room is as tiny as described: a bed, hot plate, framed photo of her with her parents, and a small card table. Without her headpiece she is simply a young smiling blonde. Mazie brought bread, and the Sister cooks beef stew. Mazie questions the nun's life: doesn't she pine for a man? Sister is interested only in God and Jesus. Mazie gives her a stack of TRUE ROMANCE magazines, in case Sister gets bored with Jesus.

Jeanie sends a card from the Bay Area, where she'll be staying for the foreseeable future. Mazie wishes she would call on the telephone. George Flicker's cousin Morrie tells him he saw Jeanie performing as an exotic dancer in a raunchy San Francisco club. In July, Mazie goes to confession in order to appease Sister Tee, and shares a few secrets through restrained laughter. The Father isn't amused. In truth, Mazie doesn't know whether these secrets are burdens or comforts.

Months pass, and Mazie turns 29 at yet another address, noting there's nothing new about a new home. What would be new is if they actually stayed put. A full six-month gap in the diary, then on April 4th, 1927, Mazie writes from a Clinton Street address, a quiet married couple living beneath them. Kind people. The next-door bakery sends wonderful warm aromas through the windows each morning.

Sister Tee comes to the cage late, sad, and invites Mazie home for chocolate. The two hold each other in bed, comforting, not as lovers but not as sisters either. Mazie senses erotic attraction, but knows Sister never will act out. When Mazie whispers that Tee is divine, the nun weeps out of love for her. Four months after Mazie's 30th birthday, Rosie complains of abnormal breathing brought on by the bakery's wheat-laced aroma. Mazie calls her a liar, pleads against another move, but Rosie is no longer rational—if she ever was. Two months later, they're living over Louis's aunt Josie's dress shop on Division Street—the building's only apartment. A kitchen "cut from diamonds." New dresses for each woman. We will stay here, declares Mazie. Rosie says: We'll see.

On Mazie's birthday Jeanie calls and both loudly cry. Jeanie says life in California is "dreamy and easy." She asks after Rosie, and Mazie tells her to call and ask, knowing Jeanie is afraid because she's twice broken Rosie's heart by leaving her. On the New Year, Mazie can't find Sister Tee. Six weeks later they bump into each other during the snowy Chinese New Year parade. Tee is run-down looking, and laments tearfully she has only so many prayers in her. The captain sends a postcard: he's now a father. Sister Tee isn't seen for two months, and Mazie is drinking heavily again, finally lumbering up to Tee's room only to encounter a huddle of nuns outside her door. They tell Mazie the Sister has breast cancer, and told no one how ill she was. Mazie is shattered at the sight of her beloved friend withered down to bones and skin. You're drunk, says Tee. Mazie stays all night, then argues with Rosie about her insane desire to move again. Wall Street falls in October, and Mazie visits Tee, holding her through the final night. Captain Hazzard, now a business man in the automobile industry, returns in January. After dinner he and Mazie retire to a lavish hotel room, and Mazie finally tells him about losing their baby, Louis, Sister Tee, and all her troubles. He breaks down over the baby, and they make distracted, useless love. Mazie walks home through freezing night, finds a bleeding man shivering on the sidewalk, and gives him three quarters: one for a bed, one for a meal, and another for a drink. Sister Tee, Mazie thinks, wouldn't have approved of the last quarter. But Tee never knew how to have a good time.

In Chapter 8, Mazie states her belief that the younger bums still have a chance at changing their lives, and she'll lend a hand. Sadly, older ones have made discomfort a way of life, and wouldn't know what to do with a proper home. The Depression hits, and Mazie vows to pessimistic Rudy that she'll sell her jewelry and everything else to keep

the Venice open. The patrons are her family. Even Rosie agrees the employees must not be abandoned to the streets, but the theater will continue regardless of some business loss. Mazie notices the banker Hungry William (who once savaged her breasts) as he stands in line at the Bowery Mission, and tearfully he says he's lost everything. Mazie offers her flask, and invites the line to a free movie. Manager Rudy fights this, and Mazie reminds him she owns the theater. The city soon is teeming with once-prosperous people newly homeless, and William filches cigarettes from his one-time date. Two weeks later she finds him bleeding in an alley, and calls an ambulance. Next morning, thinking of Sister Tee, Mazie attends confession and mass, then is faced again with Rosie's plea to move out. Worse, Rosie criticizes her sister for needing solace in drink.

Jeanie, back in Chicago, calls complaining about her leg, but Mazie sharply tells her this is nothing but a pathetic ploy for money, yet sends one hundred dollars. The lads in Finny's, believing her a street-walker, tease Mazie and she twists one of their ears, declaring she's a queen and not to forget that. Rosie gifts her with a walking stick for birthday number 33. Mazie notes her voice has deepened from smoking and shouting, and chastises ill-behaved ambulance attendants' handling of an injured bum. Be humane, she pleads.

In April 1931, Mazie and Rosie move to Chinatown's Mott Street, mere blocks from the Venice. Rosie loves chow mein. Mazie defends one bum against another's attempted theft, and gets spat upon. She hits the offender with her cane. Later, Mazie acquires beds for 12 of the homeless, and hands out soap. She'll clean up one bum at a time. Two months later, she holds the hand of a dying man, and Rosie complains that she can smell death. Mazie meets Ray, a sketch artist, who trades art for change. Mazie is 34, and shops for dresses on Division Street. Overweight Rosie balks at her sister's suggestion she dye her gray hair. For who? Mazie replies: For you. Hungry William passes away, and Mazie hears of this from Gerard, another bum. This escalates her summoning of ambulances for the injured, and checking a few into flophouses. On May 8 the captain visits, and he and Mazie have their first sober conversation, wherein she sees a photo of Ben's namesake son. Telling Ben about her campaign to aid the needy alarms him, and he warns her to be careful. They agree to meet for coffee—nothing else—whenever Ben returns. Mazie is 35, and meets George Flicker at Finny's. He walks her home, and they kiss. George proves his humanity by suggesting Rosie can be helped if only she has someone who needs her, such as his damaged uncle Al. George will put up a building, and they all can live together. He urges Mazie to hold on. This is the genesis of Knickerbocker Village.

Mazie reports finding a frozen body, and learns that the ambulance drivers are sick of her voice and face. She remains undaunted. By summer 1933 the needy line up at the cage waiting for Mazie. She can't help Rosie, but she can help them. A ragged blond boy appears, and Mazie is shocked to learn this is Nance's son, Rufus, who long ago nearly died in the hospital. She hands him a few big bills after he tells her he wants to be an apple-picker in New Jersey. Mazie reminds Rosie of George Flicker's new building in Chinatown, and Rosie fears it will stink like a cemetery. Mazie only can promise this will be a fresh start. Ethan Fallow, Jeanie's old boyfriend, comes to the

ticket booth saying Jeanie is worrying him, and she might need a new home. Exasperated, Mazie tells him to handle the situation and, failing that, Jeanie is always assured of a home. In November a truck delivers an apple sack from Rufus, and Mazie hands them out, reserving but one for herself. Prohibition ends, but no one at Finny's seems to care. Finally, George Flicker moves Al, Mazie, and Rosie into a twelfth-floor apartment in the new building. Jeanie comes home from Chicago; Mazie and Rosie meet her at a diner for coffee, noting her yellow skin. Mazie offers her a job. One day in 1934, Mazie returns to the apartment and finds Rosie sitting on Al Flicker's lap—two loons singing their love. Mazie cackles at this absurd good fortune.

Analysis

Rosie's cleaning compulsion escalates into what is probably clinical psychosis, the frequent moving to new addresses every six months a literal externalization of of her fragmented, manic thoughts. The sisters reside on Grand Street, only six doors down from the first home they once occupied with Jeanie and Louis. Aside from Mazie, the only stable artifacts in Rosie's life are Louis's massive old dining table ("A table to eat on..."), and couch ("A couch to faint on...") . The iconic table stands mostly empty of the goods he used so faithfully (illegally?) to provide. Mazie and Rosie's quiet ice cream treat on Mazie's 27th birthday poignantly strikes the reader as more a celebration of future hope and potential than of any "return"—no matter how strongly desired—to stable circumstances. This moment is charged with emotion, only amplified by the author's deadpan rendering of the scene. Jeanie's two-weeks-late birthday greeting sadly confirms she has yet to reach maturity, and the wayward sister claims to hear Mazie's voice in her head at unexpected moments, which sounds ingenuous (although might not be). Aside from the accumulative effects of Rosie-driven changes of address, Mazie is pleased to again have the freedom to walk to work at the Venice's ticket booth.

It isn't long before the two must move, this time to Elizabeth street, where Rosie claims to love the kitchen. The reader can only guess at the chaos of dread and optimism this longstanding syndrome must provoke in Mazie, as she does genuinely love (and fear for) Rosie. Policeman Mack Walters (Mazie's one-time drunken date) dies, and with Sister Tee at the funeral Mazie is mobbed like a celebrity by Walters' fellow officers. This gives her a skewed take on others' perceptions of her. Sister Tee is now such a loving presence in Mazie's life the two occasionally hold each other in Tee's utilitarian bed, although do not act on a hazy sexual attraction. This growing intimacy (beyond its simple humanity) appears to be the author's way of showing readers that Mazie is transforming into "sainthood" by joining spirits with the nun. Mazie's empathy and affection for the bums and homeless becomes a substitute for the religion she cannot take seriously, and her sexual trysts with Captain Hazzard a mock-up of a genuine husband-and-wife union about which she fantasizes, but with no real desire.

When Jeanie telephones Mazie from "dreamy and easy" California, Mazie can hear in that voice a new fear. Jeanie asks about Rosie, but Mazie tells her simply to ask Rosie herself. But Jeanie is afraid of that, because by twice leaving Rosie and the others she has broken her sister's troubled heart. The fairy's magic no longer works its charms. The

reader already knows (via George Flicker's cousin, Morrie) that Jeanie is an exotic dancer—a stripper. Jeanie keeps this secret from Mazie, evidence of some maturity, however said she has resorted to loss of dignity to earn a living. But she has not given up and returned to the home nest, such as it is.

Despite the joy found in helping the needy, Mazie's lonely life darkens. Sister Tee is nowhere to be found, and when Mazie has a random encounter at a snowy parade, she finds her beloved run down and nearly out of prayers. Mazie's return to heavy drinking signals a descent into the animal instincts, away from Tee's soon-to-expire higher realm. With Captain Hazzard again, Mazie finally opens up about being pregnant with their baby, and losing it. This brings him to tears, and the two default to sex, mechanical this time and loveless.

Sister Tee is not seen for two months, and when Mazie drunkenly ventures up to the tiny room she is met with nuns grouped before the door. Told the sister has breast cancer (a symbolic "failure of heart"?), Mazie enters and is berated for being intoxicated. Showing her genuine love, she stays the night. After another tryst with Captain Hazzard, Mazie walks through the icy night and encounters a man bleeding on the sidewalk. Perhaps from guilt, and even some anger over losing Tee, Mazie gives the man three quarters—one of which is for a drink.

The Depression hits, and Mazie's perspective toward relief efforts alters. She realizes now that only young bums have any chance at changing their lives. Older ones, despite earnest-sounding vows, are both insincere and perhaps incapable of separating from their miserable ways. Mazie declares to manager Rudy that she'll sell her jewelry—anything to keep the theater open. Again, the reader sees Mazie's authentic heart, and disregard for "vanity." Like everyone, she enjoys comfort and fine belongings, but is not defined by them. The patrons are her family, and this notion is displayed when Mazie (despite Rudy's protests) lets them into the Venice for free. New York is teeming with the newly homeless, including Hungry William, a banker who once "dated" Mazie. She offers her flask, and he filches cigarettes. Two weeks later Mazie finds him bleeding in an alley, and calls an ambulance. The once mighty truly have fallen.

After yet another move (to Chinatown), this time mere blocks from the Venice, Mazie uses her recently acquired cane to defend a theft-accused bum. Hearing of Hungry William's death changes Mazie's perspective again, and she obtains a dozen beds, and soap, for the destitute. Rosie complains of smelling death on her sister, evidence that Rosie's serious neuroses are developing into full-blown insanity. She criticizes Mazie's drinking, and this makes clear Rosie has become capable of only two emotional responses: anxiety and rage. The few lucid moments linking these incidents dwindle. Hazzard returns, bearing a photograph of his namesake son, Ben. This is he and Mazie's first sober meeting, and she alarms him by sharing details of her campaign to help the needy. They end by agreeing to meet upon Hazzard's return, but on a platonic basis. Aged 35 now, Mazie encounters George Flicker at Finny's bar, and during the walk home they kiss. Surprisingly, George presents a way to help Rosie: she needs to find someone who needs HER—someone like brain-damaged Al, George's uncle, survivor of police beatings. Here the author gives a seemingly spontaneous goodwill

moment that also carries dense emotion, and a so-called minor character comes into sharp focus. George expands on this, and promises to build a place where they all can live. He does this, and Knickerbocker Village becomes a literal symbol of new beginning and hope.

In winter 1932, Mazie makes two unsettling discoveries: a frozen body; and that the ambulance crews are sick of her repeated summons. Mazie remains undaunted, and the reader might imagine Sister Tee's beaming approval. As the novel approaches denouement, a rough-looking blond boy materializes at Mazie's ticket booth, and she is shocked to learn he is Rufus—dead Nance's son, who long ago nearly perished in the hospital after being retrieved from his mother's horrifying room. Rufus wants to become an apple-picker, and Mazie hands him several big bills to cover expenses. Jeanie's old boyfriend, Ethan, comes to the booth with worries that she might need a new home. Fed up with her youngest sister's antics, Mazie advises Ethan himself to handle the problem. In November a sack laden with Rufus's apples arrives, and a happy Mazie distributes them—saving one for herself. Another fresh symbol of hope's rebirth. George moves his uncle Al, Mazie, and Rosie into a twelfth-floor apartment in the new building. From Chicago, Jeanie comes home and meets her sisters at a diner. Noting Jeanie's jaundiced-appearing skin, Mazie offers a job. The most uplifting event transpires when she returns to the apartment and finds Rosie sitting on Al's lap.

Discussion Question 1

Why isn't Rosie's Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder taken more seriously?

Discussion Question 2

Why do you suppose Captain Hazzard's womanizing doesn't appear to bother Mazie? Obviously, she does very much care for him. List reasons.

Discussion Question 3

Mazie writes that she is only concerned about helping the downtrodden men, and that the children can have lollies and candy. What brought her to this philosophy?

Vocabulary

freud, whack, bowler, cherub, bosom, compulsion, smug, tuberculosis

Section 5, Chapter 9

Summary

Chapter 9 begins with Mazie's heart-breaking observance that bums—like everyone else—live and die, and are forgotten. She knew all their names. She will remember. On May 12, 1934, Mazie meets Ben at a no-name diner near the Brooklyn Bridge. He says he could never endure helping the bums. Helping people, Mazie replies, is the easy part. The rest of life is hard.

George Flicker injures a hand, and meets Alice, a nurse—his future wife. Later that night he visits Mazie, and they go to bed. She notes his unusual glow, and they end up having a two-month fling until George stops coming by. Stoic Mazie won't chase after a man, no matter she's closer to 40 than 30. She wonders what comes after. In November Jeanie helps Mazie hand out wool blankets to the needy. Mazie notes Jeanie's restored health, and her repetition that "life is great," despite having to help faithful Ethan clean up horse dung. Jeanie claims to not miss dancing, and Mazie wonders why the moon no longer works any romantic magic. Just another light. George finally tells Mazie about nurse Alice, and Mazie advises he take love wherever he can find it. December, and Mazie writes that she's pregnant from George. She's been with no other, and wonders whether she could keep the baby with George none the wiser. But what if her mattress turns red again?

Mazie sees George and Alice, real people in love. Not like the horizontal frenzy of their fling. Mazie meets George in the hallway, and they exchange chaste good-nights. No glances over the shoulder. Ex-captain Ben, now gray, visits. Mazie admits she's pregnant, and that the world is all messed up. Ben says she'll be a great mother, but should realize that raising children will be harder than she can imagine. Kids simply won't shut up when you want them to. Mazie wonders what she needs a baby for, when so many men desire her. Ben hugs her, says Mazie will always have his utmost love and respect. Later, Mazie records that Ben might be her best friend in the world.

February 1935 brings yet another move, and the Salvation Army is coming for the trusty old dining table, Louis's mysterious prize. Rosie asks why Mazie wants to let go of the table, and she replies that using it would be like dining with ghosts. Everyone alive is haunted by the past. Mazie's diary entries vanish for five years, and she does not write until March 13, 1939. She takes no pleasure reading, but vows to continue chronicling the lives of the downtrodden so they won't be forgotten. Two nights later she walks out to the foot of the Brooklyn Bridge, where destitute men warm themselves over an oil-barrel fire. One man calls her name, and Mazie slips him a dime and a soap bar, listens to his story of love, loss, and ruin, like so many through the decades. If only Sister Tee could be there, she might offer comfort that Mazie cannot. The homeless man blesses her, and she him. The most fragile hope, but better than none at all. Mazie empties her pockets of change, wanting nothing left at night's end. After all, she needs nothing beyond her walking-stick and flashlight. No one can trouble her; every anguished soul

knows her name, and that she is there to help always. Someone, Mazie writes, once loved these broken people, and that's all anyone needs to know.

Analysis

Mazie, at least outwardly, does not indulge in fantasizing and self-pity. The author provides minimal glimpses of Mazie musing over postcard images (distant mountains, a sailboat, Niagara Falls, Chicago, and others), and silently imagining what it might be like to physically experience them.

Mazie's second pregnancy seems to announce a return to hope, but her chaste meeting with Hazzard apparently changes this attitude (the reader cannot be sure what comes of the pregnancy, and the five-year gap in Mazie's diary doesn't help). After Sister Tee's death, Mazie carries on in her spirit, a fusion of the sacred and profane, like the events set down in the diary.

Discussion Question 1

Mazie observes George Flicker with Alice and refers to them as "...real people in love." A confusing statement from a usually assertive, confident woman. Why does she write this?

Discussion Question 2

Pregnant from George, Mazie decides not to confront him. Why?

Discussion Question 3

Mazie claims she won't chase after a man, yet she goes out of her way (to say the least) always to meet with Captain Hazzard. How do you account for this?

Vocabulary

cultivate, elusiveness, albeit, chandelier, knickerbocker, derriere, compassion, musk, privilege, affluent

Characters

Mazie Phillips-Gordon

Protagonist, and main viewpoint character, Mazie becomes an official New Yorker at age nine, when older sister Rosie and brother-in-law Louis take her and sister Jeanie away from an abusive father in Boston.

Mazie, outwardly coarse from trauma, is independent and rebellious, taking nothing from bullies or anyone else. She starts drinking and smoking in her early teens, and grows to enjoy self-indulgence, though not (like most others) necessarily for escape. This lifestyle exposes her to life's night-side, and introduces her to sexuality and, unfortunately, two pregnancies. At 20, she takes over her sister's job in the Venice Theater's ticket booth, and encounters people from literally all walks.

Mazie acquires a love for the bums, addicts, and homeless, and suffers much to help them. She becomes a sort of celebrity, and even a saint to some who have benefited from her aide.

Rosie Gordon

Rosie is Mazie's older sister, wife of Louis, whose troubled presence informs much of Mazie's experience. The first to move to New York, Rosie met Louis at a race track, and was taken with his tall, quiet form.

Through failed pregnancies and past emotional scars, Rosie's personality begins to fragment, and this manifests by way of compulsive cleaning. When Louis dies this gets much worse, with an added layer of paranoia, and Rosie cannot stand living in one place longer than six months.

Rosie is further troubled by dread of abandonment, brought on by younger sister Jeanie running away twice, and by losing Louis. She breaks down one morning when Mazie returns from a two-day sexual tryst, fearing her gone forever, and has to be prevented from drowning herself. Ultimately, she is redeemed when she falls in love with old neighbor Al Flicker.

Jeanie Phillips

Youngest of the Phillips sisters, Jeanie has lived in a passive inner world of fantasy and desire. She loves dancing, and yearns to do so for a living.

The family moves to Coney Island, and teen-aged Jeanie runs away to join a friend's performance group with some success, proving she can realize her dreams. But a reckless lifestyle gets her in trouble, she breaks a leg, and the group kicks her out. She

returns to Coney Island depressed, and takes months to recover, and is courted again by a former boyfriend.

Recovered, Jeanie runs away, throwing out love and family. On tour once more, she is reduced to stripping, and eventually comes home.

Louis Gordon

Boston-born to "normal" parents, Louis is an ambitious businessman from an early age. He meets Rosie Phillips at a race track and later marries her. Hearing of her terrible father who rains down abuse on Rosie's younger sisters, Louis drives from New York to Boston, and hands over money to take away the two girls.

He leads a somewhat enigmatic life, and not even his wife is certain where most of his money originates. Louis owns the Venice Theater, bumper cars, a candy shop, and race-horse interests. But something else goes on unseen, with hints of far darker dealings.

His abrupt death from heart seizure brings out "business" partners bearing cash-stuffed envelopes, which Mazie accepts from these menacing strangers. In life, Louis is a quiet generous man with his own black secrets.

Sister Tee

Sister Tee meets Mazie at the ticket booth, and becomes over the years a beloved friend and ally in the relief missions for the downtrodden. Sister Tee and Mazie develop genuine love for each other, and Tee's quiet suffering is testament to her brave campaign which Mazie joins and later assumes.

George Flicker

George is the downstairs neighbor to Louis, Rosie, Mazie, and Jeanie. He is the constant observer of the unlikely family, who in the future has a fling with Mazie that gets her pregnant.

Captain Benjamin Hazzard

Mazie's lover for decades, Captain Hazzard is a navy man who travels the world for sexual dalliances, whether married or not. He gets Mazie pregnant, which she keeps secret from him for years, then weeps at the news. He becomes one of her closest (chaste) friends.

Al Flicker

Al is George's uncle, and suspected anarchist. Beaten by police (twice) after being accused of bombing a Wall Street building. Much later falls in love with Rosie, to the benefit of both.

Nance

Nance is a drug addict who claims her husband got her hooked, and left for the war where he met a French girl. Begs from Mazie, who tries to help Nance's starving children, Marie and Rufus. When Marie dies, Nance is arrested. Rufus, with Mazie's help, gets an apple-picking job and sends a crate full which Mazie gives away to the needy.

Rudy Wallach

Rudy is the manager of the Venice Theater. A gentle, "small-handed" man who must rely on Mazie for theater security when drunks get rowdy. He has a family, but lingers at the theater to flirt with Mazie. He approves of her mission to help the poor, and first notices Mazie might be pregnant.

Symbols and Symbolism

Mazie's Diary

Mazie's diary was a brown leather journal, both keeper and symbol of secrecy. Mazie's one true confessor and confidant.

The Venice Theater Ticket Booth

The ticket booth was Mazie's literal and symbolic cage.

Rosie's Compulsive Cleaning

This obsessive activity symbolizes Rosie's frenzy against chronic anxiety and dread of abandonment.

Louis's Car

Louis's car is a potent symbol of success (especially so long ago), upward mobility, and freedom. Mazie thinks otherwise, as the car takes away her independence.

Alcohol

Alcohol was used by multiple characters, in particular Mazie, as a magic elixir, granting access to the land of fun and forgetting. At least for a while.

Prohibition

Prohibition was authority's heavy-handed symbol of control over the unwashed masses and immorality (from which said Authority was exempt).

Louis's Massive Wooden Dining Table

Like nothing in any of their homes, the table is a symbol of family, stability, and plenty, with a nod perhaps to Louis's ego. None of the neighbor's can comprehend its necessity in the Gordon residence.

Sister Tee

Sister Tee is an obvious symbol of Christ's life, suffering, and death, embodied in a sweet strong woman. Impossible for any author to obscure when working with such an emotionally charged character.

Captain Hazzard's Postcards to Mazie

The Cpatain's postcards became Mazie's symbols of transcendence, and escape into other places and experiences - mountains, a sailboat, Niagara Falls, the Washington Monument, and others.

Mazie's Diary 2

To present-day shop-owner Pete Sorensen, who finds Mazie's diary and wants to give it to his film-making girlfriend Nadine, the journal is a doorway to an entrancing woman from another time less complicated than our own, and something to keep alive his own failing relationship.

Settings

Boston, 1907

Boston was Mazie, Rosie, and Jeanie's birthplace, a house of dysfunction and trauma punctuated by very few good moments.

The New York City Home on Grand Street (1907—1919)

This was the first home for Mazie and Jeanie after being taken out of Horvath and Ada's Boston nightmare by Rosie and Louis. Mazie grows up here, and the house's comfort steels her through bad times and good.

Coney Island Home on Surf Avenue (1919—1924)

This home, near the ocean, was a large house with a yard. Here Mazie is adopted by Louis, commutes by car and train to work, sees Rosie lose both sanity and Louis, and prevents Rosie's suicide in the freezing ocean.

The Venice Theater Ticket Booth

A main setting, this is where Mazie spends almost all of her days from age 20 till the end, and encounters most of the characters in the novel.

New York City (1907—1939)

New York City is the novel's constant, churning setting, and character in its own right. This NYC is stripped of all mystique, most hopes, and seethes with excess and poverty and progress. Beyond very early childhood, this is where Mazie explores existence, and it her.

Themes and Motifs

Confinement

Confinement, however subtly woven throughout the novel, is a recurring theme. While it cannot be known (unless publicly stated) whether author Attenberg consciously intended this, Mazie's experiences nonetheless reflect feelings of being caged—literally, however temporary, in the Venice Theater's ticket booth. This is not even symbolic, although can be compared to demands for societal conformity as evoking a sense of imprisonment to free-spirited Mazie Phillips and those like her.

This even extends to Mazie's confining her secrets in the pages of a diary, and of course within her mind. In the whole of her life, she shares these with only a few people (Sister Tee, Captain Hazzard, Jeanie), and those very selectively. Like Captain Benjamin Hazzard, though without his personality-warping obsessions, Mazie is confined/limited by how she sees herself as fearless, self-defined, able to control men, and as an eternal rebel. This seemingly extroverted openness often blinds her to vulnerability—hers and others'. Much to her credit, Mazie does want the best for everyone, despite that her own shield against harsh reality frequently prevents her from realizing many other people don't have this same capacity.

Ironically, Captain Hazzard, who seems most free of all, is a prisoner to sexual compulsion. His seafaring is little more than a transport system to deliver him to "ports of call," all of which are women. Like a true romantic, he never learns from his mistakes, nor how much suffering he causes (except for Mazie's telling him about their lost baby). Hazzard does appear to evolve, though the reader doesn't actually glimpse this until very late in the novel, after Mazie meets him during one of his New York visits and lets out that she's pregnant again. Now a civilian businessman, Hazzard remarks that Mazie will make a wonderful mother (and neither he nor the reader can be certain whether she'll carry the baby to term), and that she is assured of his continuing love and respect. When Mazie tells readers she shares these feelings, it's believable.

Mazie's older sister, Rosie, is as caged by compulsive behavior as pre-civilian-life Benjamin Hazzard. Sadly, Rosie's cleaning obsession (aside from its single practical benefit) is wholly negative—even, at times, terrifying. Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder is confinement doubled: inside a repetitive act; and inside the social stigma projected by outside observers. Like Hazzard, Rosie is mostly redeemed by the healing power of love when she becomes intimate with Al Flicker, and their apartment becomes a bohemian parlor for intellectuals, artists, and like-minded spirits.

Jeanie, the dancing, youngest Phillips sister, is self-exiled from the domestic life she covertly desires by running away from loved ones who offer exactly that. The author frankly illustrates the difficulty of balancing creative impulses with practicality, but allows Jeanie to learn from the experience and to accept long-jilted boyfriend Ethan's love.

Surrounding these individual cages is the worst prison of all: poverty, and all it ruins and denies us from acquiring.

Poverty

Given the Depression-era/Prohibition setting, poverty probably can be considered Saint Mazie's primary theme. No chapter is free of its influence, no character unaffected, even the "rich" who at best are subjected to panhandlers and, at worst, muggings and murder.

Aside from spiritual/emotional drives, poverty charges Mazie's mission of relief for those who need it: the bums, addicts, and otherwise homeless. Oddly (and somewhat contradictory to an early scene), Mazie is interested only in helping the men, whose needs are simple. For children she has lollies and candy. Perhaps the horror and tragedy she experiences when trying to help Nance (a drug addict) and her children, Marie and Rufus, forever traumatizes Mazie. Nance's locking her out, and through neglect causing Marie's death, might have forced Mazie to harden herself against the sufferings of children.

After Wall Street crashes, people formerly well-off land on the streets, and see what horrible conditions exist for those already there. But class distinctions are powerful, and once the fallen mighty are standing again they find it easy to ignore their former street-mates. A sad aspect of humanity. Author Attenberg's ability to contrast—without moralizing—the harrowing conditions of Depression-era New York and environs with those of the present day, lends the narrative a sense of ever-present danger and loss waiting around every corner. When a Wall Street business is bombed by supposed anarchists, Rosie's future love Al Flicker is a police suspect due to "loose talk" in Finny's speakeasy, and readers are reminded of the post-9/11 atmosphere of grief and conspiracy theories.

The poverty theme in Saint Mazie further resonates with current times, in showing the closing gap between the poor and middle-class in the wake of post-war optimism and excess, followed by a crashing economy. The novel, whether intentionally or not, becomes a chronicle of a specific period, akin to the work of Charles Dickens. A few scenes among the New York City destitute are every bit as sad and shocking as those portrayed in Oliver Twist. Alternately, Mazie is a living example of the notion that virtue looks as well in rags as in fine linens. The book also gives a subtle nod to the idea that poverty can inspire literal feats of imagination and invention, both of which are capable of transcending and, to some degree, exploring solutions.

Poverty as a theme in works of fictive literature rarely is found before the mid-1800s, probably because it didn't become a contributing factor to political concerns until the Industrial revolution. The author, through her dramatization, reveals the apparent paradox and its social effects. Readers come away from this potent novel with a sense of horror and hope, because Mazie Phillips proves it isn't necessary to be a saint in

order to suffer and help the downtrodden—anyone can. What haunts society is that so few are willing.

Loneliness

Loneliness variously divides and unites the characters, because no two persons similarly react to it. Sister Tee, whose sense of purpose is highest, appears immune. Mazie, who grows equally charged, is still lonely because religious belief to her is useless, and that vacuum (as for everyone of this sensibility) must be filled with emotionally nurturing activity or—failing that—alcohol, drugs, risky sex, and escapist entertainment.

Rosie's loneliness, especially after Louis dies, manifests in chronic anxiety; she fights by obsessive cleaning and forcing Mazie to move from place to place roughly every six months. A so-called proverbial saying claims people are most lonely when surrounded by others and, among New York City's millions, Rosie drowns. While she does once in a while play on others' emotions, she wears loneliness like a scar. Whether this is a product of childhood abuse, or some chemical imbalance, isn't entirely relevant. Rosie's effect on others, and what they see in her of themselves, is what stands out. She is everything (or becomes that) Mazie is not, despite their mutual recognition that they are lonely. Mazie's unswerving family loyalty is displayed many times in the narrative through her refusal to treat Rosie as emotional wreckage. Their arguments frequently end in laughter—but not always.

The frequent moves from address to address, by authorial intent or not, mirror the unstable inner states of the main characters, even Louis', whose outer generosity hides fear, and who might have more tangible reasons for taking his non-conventional family out of certain neighborhoods. Not everything an author creates comes from "plotting" and conscious thought, and Attenberg's emotional but focused prose reflects this intuitive edge.

There are scenes whose visceral intensity far surpass any accepted definition of loneliness: Nance's starving children dying of malnutrition in a filthy, unfurnished hovel; suspected bomber Al Flicker as he's beaten by police; Mazie's mechanical sex with Captain Hazard after her abortion; the entire life, and death, of Ada Phillips (Mazie's mother); Sister Tee's life of servitude to the downtrodden ending with a lingering death from cancer; even if she appears "immune" to loneliness, readers absorbing her suffering are not. As testament to Attenberg's empathy, the various unnamed men and women freezing in black alleys and on sidewalks never are depicted as ciphers, or mere casualties of poverty.

Essential aloneness (and loneliness) are part of existential philosophy, which claims to approach the facts of day-to-day life: religion, politics, etc., are simply ways to think about life, illusions of order and control, while at the basic level we're on our own in an indifferent, or at best mysterious, universe. A stark philosophy, and one understandably not very popular. Saint Mazie, through dead-pan frankness, does seem to inhabit this

harshest philosophical realm, but the author's humanity shows readers there are ways—loyalty to family, love, service to others, creativity—to reside there with dignity.

Initiation

The theme of initiation is present in Attenberg's novel, Mazie's own being a good example, in several stages. Initiation into "civilized" New York City from a chaotic Boston home; from easy assisting in the candy shop to serious employment at the Venice; from reluctant aide to the needy, to Saint Mazie. The most obvious example, in the sense that so subtle a theme can be considered as such, is small-town child Mazie's initiation from microcosmic suburban Boston to New York's seething macrocosm. Mature by any standard, Mazie shows the least effect from the "rescue" and subsequent move carried out by brother-in-law Louis and older sister Rosie. In truth, Mazie implicitly understands that life anywhere but Boston must be better. New York has more secrets, on many levels, than Mazie is capable of imagining, and also marks entry into the so-called privileged perspective of adulthood. It can be said that by her late teens Mazie is as mature as anyone a decade or more older. Through accepting the money-fat envelopes from Louis's dark-suited cohorts, Mazie is an initiate, though isn't in the least fazed. Not so for Jeanie, who shows little sign of evolution until the novel's final section, and appears actively to fight against any conventional behavior or role.

Rosie, married to Louis, would appear mature and fully "initiated," but this is not at all the case. New York City works a dark, destabilizing spell on Rosie. Well before Louis' sudden death, Rosie's obsessive cleaning is a fact (though no one but Mazie expresses much concern). Rosie's sad initiation into the twilight realm of psychological and—later—domestic fracture, nearly ends her. Like youngest sister Jeanie, Rosie's "redemption" (by way of Al Flicker) occurs very late in the narrative, and we are happy for her when it does.

Louis's initiation is more covert: from (he claims) a childhood both comfortable and filled with love, to a secret cabal of crime, exclusively (in this period) male, with grim consequences for reporting insider wisdom to the uninitiated. Out of all Saint Mazie's characters (including Sister Tee), Louis Gordon appears most likely immune to so intangible a concept as initiation. Readers see Louis almost completely from the outside, like those with whom he interacts. There are glimpses of his love for family, generosity, and loyalty, however colored by vague menace and ultimate revelation of criminal and fringe activity. It is difficult to always like Louis, and equally difficult to dislike him.

Most tragic is Sister Tee's initiation. Her's is an outwardly gentle soul (except when it comes to feelings toward Gypsies), whose core might be even harder than Mazie's. The Sister spends most of her time in the dangerous back alleys and hovels of downtrodden types, and is rewarded for this service by suffering Christ-like trials, breast cancer crucifying her to the tiny bed, taking her to death and—in Mazie's eyes—sainthood.

Familial Loyalty

In Saint Mazie, the theme of familial loyalty is equal, if not more relevant, to that of poverty. Mazie's childhood trauma in Boston causes a hardening of character, and even as a young girl she is seemingly fearless and physically aggressive. Readers see the most change in her emotional core, especially when Mazie's dormant empathy shines and energizes her with purpose. Outwardly, she is fun-loving and often abrasive, but this is a shield to protect the sensitive soul within. Compared to the novel's other main characters—Rosie and Louis Gordon, Jeanie Phillips, Sister Tee (practically an honorary sibling)—Mazie's loyalty is profound.

This devotion, however, is not altruistic, and frequently colored by anger, resentment, frustration, and (when applied to Rosie) even a sense of exhausted futility. Nonetheless, these taints do not stay Mazie from her thorny path of love and loyalty.

Rosie, despite her emotional/psychological problems, is loyal to the non-conventional family, but displays this primarily in words. Readers believe she loves her husband and sisters, and clearly see that Rosie's worsening neuroses prevent her from physical displays of fealty. Very early in the narrative (and, accordingly, in Mazie and Jeanie's childhood), she accompanies Louis to Boston in order to rescue her young sisters, a mission fraught with real danger—Horvath Phillips. Only later is it revealed that Louis paid his wife's and sister-in-laws' father an undetermined amount of money in exchange.

Jeanie Phillips shows minimal loyalty, but the author's psychological insight into the unusual family dynamic informs readers that the youngest Phillips sister not only understands the concept, but manipulates it to soften backlash on return from her haphazard touring as a dancer/acrobat. Jeanie has no meanness or hatred toward her family, but is self-absorbed in fantasies of perpetual play and escape. To her credit, she transcends this behavior late in the novel.

Louis Gordon, who dies from a "seizure" (apparent heart-attack) in Chapter 6, from all external appearances is "the" loyal husband and provider. This is beyond argument, despite his engaging in illegal and/or ethically questionable activities. His anguish over Rosie's inability to carry a baby to term is palpable, magnified by readers heretofore perceiving Louis' quiet constancy of purpose and control. His emotional outburst shocks nearly as much as news of his sudden death. Louis' conversation with Mazie, when she asks what sort of family he came from, sounds almost too "good" to be true: father lost to early death, and mother not long after. But when Louis tells of the letters written by his mother for the boy's every birthday (summing his accomplishments, and stating her hopes for those yet to come), a door opens into his soul. Louis is loyal, because he never had much of a chance (both parents gone by his thirteenth year) to practice this as a youth. He tells Mazie he wants only the best for all of them.

Styles

Point of View

Author Attenberg employs techniques traditional in oral storytelling, or "spoken word." The narrative is a mosaic of Mazie's diary entries, interspersed occasionally with accounts from those who either knew her or, through others, heard about her life.

In her journaling, Mazie chronicles events in first-person—often shifting between past- and present-tense. The characters writing and/or discussing Mazie for the most part use these same viewpoints. Mazie does not open and close remembered dialogue with quotation marks, which takes an effort to get used to.

Present-day film-maker Nadine's questions to interviewees are never see, only the responses, rendered in first-person past tense.

As a whole, Attenberg's epistolary/historical format effectively brings alive Mazie's world. Had the novel been written from a third-person, past-tense perspective, there would be an undercutting of effect.

Language and Meaning

Author Attenberg deftly employs authentic speech patterns and period jargon in the narrative, without "showing off" or otherwise making obvious her extensive research. The novel in general, and Mazie's prose in particular, uses nouns, muscular verbs, and little else. This spareness mirrors Mazie's outward personality, and lends emotional charge to everything she writes.

Those living in the early twentieth century had practically no knowledge of technical terminology, simply because there was so little gadgetry in day-to-day life, and the narrative reflects this. Cars are cars; telephones are telephones; New York City was "the city" or "the town." As ever, how people talk about one another provides the most color and poetry, no matter how lewd or insulting.

The book is easily accessible to a range of readers, as the language "means what it says." Subtext here is deduced not by language, but by the context in which it's used.

Attenberg is not heavy-handed with period jargon, and current readers will understand the meaning of "scram," "hot-headed," and others.

Structure

Saint Mazie's structure, like the New York City setting, is a character in itself. Mazie shares diary entries and frequent one-liners exactly as today's Twitter users dole out moments from their days and nights.

The novel's clear narrative line at times reads like a screenplay, with physical descriptions acquired from dialogue and little else. Gaps in Mazie's diary signal gaps in her life, be they six weeks or—near the end—five years. The reader is kept in anticipatory mode, a not unpleasant experience.

Structure also adds resonance by way of Mazie and Rosie's constant moving from place to place, illustrating the instability of their time, personally and in the greater culture.

For a reasonably large novel, the Prologue and nine chapters are neither cluttered nor rushed, an impressive and difficult accomplishment.

Quotes

My father is a rat and my mother is a simp.
-- Mazie Phillips (chapter 1 paragraph 4)

Importance: This harsh, strangely mature statement, is 10-year-old Mazie's first diary entry. Its stark brevity reveals the emotional hardening forged from both poverty and dysfunctional parents, and foreshadows Mazie's adult persona—at least its external aspect.

Papa was not handsome. His eyes drooped, and his skin was the color of cold, watery soup. And those lines around his mouth and eyes made him always look furious, which he was. Lines don't lie. But he was tall and young and had so much hair, and I remember him as strong. That day, out in the world, he was our father.
-- Mazie Phillips (chapter 1 paragraph 101)

Importance: This diary entry, written by a 20-year-old Mazie, displays her spare, characteristic prose—and more. Though similar in its critical tone to her 1907 "My father is a rat. . ." note, this is tinged with empathy, even pride. Mazie might appear fearless and tough, but that is only a shield against the chaos of day-to-day survival.

One day that door won't be open.
-- Rosie (chapter 1 paragraph 46)

Importance: Mazie's older sister, Rosie, responds to yet another incidence of Mazie's returning home drunk at dawn. The scene (Rosie on the couch, Mazie guiltily washing breakfast dishes), and Rosie's potent declaration strike deeper, as though warning free-spirited Mazie that one day conventional society might exile her forever (whether Mazie cares about this possibility is questionable).

All day, hours and hours, the whole world going on around me.... The world will pass me by. I will grow old and then die in that cage.
-- Mazie Phillips (chapter 1 paragraph 253)

Importance: Mazie ponders her job as a ticket-taker at the Venice Theater, and makes a few sarcastic (and darkly humorous) remarks to her sister Rosie, who tells her she'd better keep that sense of humor. This is another example of author Attenberg using physical objects, thresholds (such as doors), and spaces as symbolizing Mazie's inner emotional states and—in this case—mounting fear of being "caged" by social conformity.

You know I think I was always fond of hearing these stories about Mazie in part because she went down an unconventional path. Marriage and children, they just weren't important to her. It's important to be exposed to alternate lifestyle possibilities, even if you don't embrace them for yourself. It's just good to know the possibility exists.
-- Lydia Wallach (chapter 2 paragraph 166)

Importance: Lydia Wallach, great granddaughter of Rudy Wallach (manager of the Venice Theater from 1916–1938), makes this present-day comment which shows how radically American attitudes toward so-called alternate lifestyles have evolved since Mazie's heyday. In her inimitable style, Mazie made a wave in the cultural pool.

I don't know if I ever need to see a mountain in person, but I like knowing they're out there.
-- Mazie Phillips (chapter 5 paragraph 122)

Importance: This quote, despite its brevity, resonates with haiku-like serenity, and is inspired by a postcard sent to Mazie by the captain, Benjamin Hazzard, Jr., with whom she had wild sex on a night-cloaked bridge. Another similarity to haiku is what the sentence reveals about Mazie: a reluctance to change, but the possibility quietly distant like the postcard mountain.

[Rosie] said: 'This is Mazie, and she’s in charge now.
-- Rosie Gordon (chapter 2 paragraph 25)

Importance: This lone sentence is laden with significance, not only foreshadowing future events, but announcing who will be in charge. Sadly ironic, as Rosie's star descends and Mazie's rises.

Goddamn that captain. Goddamn him to hell for showing up and screwing me and leaving. His postcards don’t mean a thing to me.
-- Mazie Phillips (chapter 3 paragraph 135)

Importance: This quote, perhaps more than anything Mazie writes about Benjamin Hazzard, reveals how deeply conflicted she is over the happenstance relationship. Too, it proves how helpless she is against his "charm." Simple biology, but complex emotions.

You’re the most precious thing I own. I didn’t know it till I lost you. I didn’t know it till I found you.
-- Mazie Phillips (chapter 4 paragraph 3)

Importance: Addressing her long-lost diary, Mazie leaves no doubt of its central importance. No person exists to whom she can say the same, nor so readily hold her deepest secrets.

[Louis] said: 'That wasn’t anyone you should be worried about.
-- Louis Gordon (chapter 6 paragraph 29)

Importance: Louis says this in response to Mazie, who asks about a sharp-suited man she sees him chatting with. Louis says the above line and coldly grins, creeping out Mazie for the first time in her life. The first instance where the reader is certain Louis is engaged in criminal activities.

Rosie said: 'Why are they having so much fun? Why are they so goddamned happy all the time? What's with the tittering?
-- Rosie Gordon (chapter 7 paragraph 90)

Importance: After yet another move, Rosie says this in response to frolicking young nursing students occupying the same building, thus displaying how emotionally ill she has become. As Mazie counters, this is normal behavior for young women enjoying life. Nothing to be disturbed by.

I knew all their names. Everyone's names. I knew them.
-- Mazie Phillips-Gordon (chapter 9 paragraph 1)

Importance: This quote sums up most of Mazie's New York life. Everything she cared about. In the end, all she cared for.