

Sellelevision Study Guide

Sellelevision by Augusten Burroughs

(c)2015 BookRags, Inc. All rights reserved.



Contents

Sellevison Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	3
Chapters One through Three.....	4
Chapters Four through Six.....	7
Chapters Seven through Nine.....	9
Chapters Ten through Twelve.....	11
Chapters Thirteen through Fifteen.....	13
Chapters Sixteen through Eighteen.....	17
One Year Later - the Epilogue.....	20
Characters.....	22
Objects/Places.....	25
Themes.....	27
Style.....	29
Quotes.....	31
Topics for Discussion.....	33

Plot Summary

Sellelevision is a home-shopping network that has several popular hosts and a great deal of drama. The hosts seem to be under a tremendous amount of pressure to sell items while keeping their lives on an even keel.

As the story opens, Max Andrews is being fired after an incident in which he "exposed" his penis during a broadcast. Max objects that he didn't "expose" himself, but that it "peeked" out. When Max later goes to a nearby mall in search of a specific gift for his niece, a child recognizes him from the "penis incident" and cries out that Max had shown her his "thingy." Security is called and Max barely escapes arrest. Over the coming weeks, Max tries out for several jobs but the circumstances of his being fired from Sellelevision follow him. It's by chance that Max sees a daytime talk show interview with a porn star. Max looks up the company and a year later is awarded the industry's top recognition for new star in a gay movie.

Peggy Jean Smythe, another of the show's most popular hosts, is often the host for the segments involving faith-based jewelry and items. Peggy Jean claims three boys and often says there are "four if you count my hubby." The family attends church regularly and Peggy Jean touts her ability to have a career, remain active in things such as her sponsorship of two AIDS babies. When a stalker begins to terrorize Peggy Jean, she uses the excuse to turn more frequently to Valium and alcohol. The stalker turns out to be her oldest son, angry because of Peggy's treatment of him, but Peggy Jean doesn't learn this until after she's sent to a rehab to face her addiction. While there, her husband becomes sexual with a sixteen-year-old neighbor and Peggy Jean's arrival from the rehab one day early allows her to catch the two in the act. She's fired from Sellelevision and writes a book, taking to the home-shopping circuit to sell the book.

Another of the hosts is Bebe who meets the man of her dreams, Eliot, only to fear briefly that Eliot is actually her own brother, given up for adoption as a baby. When this proves untrue, Bebe and Eliot marry and have a son, though their duplex burns to the ground while Bebe is in the hospital, the fire started because of Bebe's compulsive shopping which means there are too many items plugged into a single outlet.

Others on the show include Howard Toast, married producer who has an affair with Sellelevision host Leigh, until Leigh figures out that Howard is never going to leave his wife. Leigh's announcement on the air that Howard is having an affair and that she's ending it now prompts both to be dismissed from the show though Leigh finds the strength to truly end the affair though Howard's marriage is now truly over. As the show goes on and hosts settle down to new roles, Trish Mission - an up-and-coming star on the network - has an accident in which a chocolate milkshake is spilled on her blouse. She trades blouses with a co-worker but goes on the air without a bra. During her segment, she leans forward and her left breast falls out of the shirt.



Chapters One through Three

Chapters One through Three Summary

As the story opens, Max Andrews is being fired after an incident in which he "exposed" his penis during a broadcast on Sellelevision. Max objects that he didn't "expose" himself, but that it "peeked" out. Max says that everyone was wearing bathrobes because the show was "Slumber Sunday Sundown." According to Max, Miguel had knocked over Max's latte, spilling it on Max's underwear. With only four minutes before he had to be on the air, Max didn't have time to dry his underwear and went on without any. Howard Toast, executive producer of the show, says that Max should have worn Miguel's underwear. Max says that Miguel is Spanish and that he doesn't wear underwear, and then adds that the thought of wearing Miguel's underwear is disgusting anyway. Howard says there have to be consequences, that Max has "crossed a line," and Max is escorted from the building.

Peggy Jean Smythe is among the show's most popular hosts. Peggy Jean's popularity is credited largely to her ability to connect with viewers. She says she has three boys and often adds the phrase, "four if you count my hubby." Peggy Jean is in her dressing room when the show's associate producer, Amanda, asks if Peggy has heard about Max. Peggy is rather abrupt and when Amanda leaves Peggy Jean returns to her computer screen where she is reading an email from Zoe, a fan who is pointing out that Peggy Jean has hairy earlobes though claiming to be only telling her this as a devoted fan. Peggy Jean immediately goes to the makeup mirror to look at her earlobes and thinks that one of the up-and-coming hosts, Trish Mission, took a look at Peggy Jean's earlobes when they meet in the hall. Peggy Jean finds that she does have tiny hairs on her earlobes that would be visible when there are close-ups of her ears.

Max goes to a mall in search of a specific gift for his niece and is recognized by a young girl who says that Max "showed his thingy." The girl remembers Max from the television show incident but a security guard believes Max had just exposed himself to the girl at the store. Max finally talks his way out of being arrested and vows never to go to that mall again.

Peggy Jean is doing a live show when a woman calls in and says that she needs to purchase a particular pair of earrings to wear to her son's funeral. Peggy Jean, without missing a beat, says that the earrings will make a "beautiful tribute" the woman's son. Bebe Friedman is watching Peggy Jean's broadcast and says that Peggy Jean is shameless. Peggy Jean is second in popularity only to Bebe who spends a great deal of her on-air time talking about her mother in Needles, California, her dog Pepper and other details of her life. After Bebe watches a few more minutes of Peggy's Jean's show, she turns off the television and reviews the orders she's about to place from an array of catalogs. She notes that she sees "absolutely nothing" in one of them and so orders a travel alarm clock.



In chapter two, Peggy Jean goes to the doctor who assures her that the hairs on her earlobes are normal. That night, she asks her husband if they should consider having another baby "while she still can," though she fears it's already too late. Max wakes beside a man who resembles a "yard gnome" though Max remembers that the man looked like Mel Gibson the previous evening.

At a meeting of the crew of Sellelevision, Leigh Bushmore is told that she'll be taking on some of Max's hours while Bob, the newest host, will take on Leigh's overnight slot until a new host can be found. Adele Oswald Crawley is not at the meeting. At that moment, she is "stroking the cotton crotch" of panties being offered for sale and discussing with a buyer the comfort of the material and elastic. At the end of a scene, there's a montage of Princess Diana intercut with various pieces of jewelry being offered for sale as the "England's Rose" jewelry line.

Bebe is having lunch with a friend and explaining why she ran a personal ad on the Internet. At the CVS Pharmacy, John Smythe is waiting in the car with his and Peggy Jean's three sons. Peggy Jean buys a homeopathic cure she's interested in for "female troubles." Meanwhile, Max receives word from his agent regarding a possible job audition and grabs onto the hope that she can find something for him.

In chapter three, Leigh Bushmore arrives in Howard's office, locks the door and the two have sex. Howard says that he's going to file for divorce and Leigh says that she wants to believe him. Peggy Jean gets another email from Zoe saying that it's been noted that Peggy Jean had taken care of the hairy earlobes and suggesting that Peggy Jean use nicotine gum to help her stop smoking. Peggy Jean replies, pretending to be someone else answering "fan mail" for Peggy Jean. Peggy Jean then prepares for her next segment with singer Debby Boone.

Bebe has had several replies to her personal ad, including a man named Eliot. Max hears from his agent that he is featured in the National Enquirer, complete with a photo of Max with a black box over his penis. Max travels for an interview and is recognized by the flight crew.

Peggy Jean gets another email from "Zoe," indicating disapproval that Peggy Jean couldn't take time for a personal email despite the fact that Zoe had tried to help. Peggy sends back a standard reply with no personal note and turns her attention to a new casserole she wants to try for dinner.

Chapters One through Three Analysis

Sellelevision is a home shopping network and the hosts and hostesses are competitive and serious about their jobs.

Innuendos are a part of the story from the very beginning. Howard tells Max that he can't possibly overlook an incident of this "magnitude," and Max sarcastically says that he could take that as a compliment, obviously pretending that Howard is referring to the size of Max's penis.



The email from Zoe to Peggy Jean is the first of many, all aimed at making Peggy Jean feel insecure though Zoe claims to be a devoted fan who loves Peggy Jean's show. It will later be revealed that "Zoe" is really Peggy Jean's oldest son who is angry at his mother for her attitudes toward him. Peggy Jean's control over her children is seen while she is in the pharmacy. The three boys are waiting in the car with their father, John. The boys are all dressed alike, including thirteen-year-old Ricky, the oldest of the three. The children don't directly speak out against their mother's control but as it will soon be seen, Ricky does act out in his own way.



Chapters Four through Six

Chapters Four through Six Summary

Trish Mission shows off her engagement ring and the others are amazed at the size of the diamond. Trish says that her finance hadn't paid anything for the ring, which is true because the ring her finance bought her was much smaller. When Trish had shown that engagement ring to her father, he'd taken her to Tiffany's though it meant waking a manager in the middle of the night. Her father had then demanded the largest ring in the store and had written a check for more than a million dollars while warning Trish's boyfriend, Steve, that he should never go shopping "in a Cracker Jack box" for Trish.

Peggy Jean has her husband wear a red tie, just like those worn by the three boys, and the family goes to Divinity Center, a contemporary church. On the way, Peggy Jean quizzes the boys on the sermon from the previous week. This week's sermon is about the difference between wants and needs.

Bebe's ten to twelve p.m. show is a huge hit, as always. She doesn't reveal the truth of her excited mood as being her impending date with a man she's never met who has never heard of Sellelevision, business owner Michael Eliot Klein. They are meeting at a bar named Changes.

In chapter five, Max has an interview with E-Z Shop. He's asked how his parents took the "penis incident" and Max says that his father is dead and his mother wishes she were. The interview doesn't go well with Max soon feeling he has annoying traits and "tics," and eventually sitting on his hands. Later Max sees a segment based on an idea he'd had of selling a sponsorship of an animal, only with callers given the option to sponsor children. One caller believes the children are for sale and argues that they shouldn't have been assigned an item number if they aren't for sale.

Peggy is at work when John sees Nikki in her yard, sunning. John asks Nikki if she would be able to babysit on Thursday night and when she agrees, he calls Peggy Jean, asking if she can take the boys to a movie on Thursday as a special treat, thereby arranging to be alone with Nikki. Peggy Jean then receives another email from "Zoe," this one pointing out Peggy's Jean's voice which sounds like a "logger" that indicates that she smokes and her mustache. Peggy Jean immediately takes out a mirror and notes the tiny hairs on her upper lip, then calls her doctor who says Peggy Jean is worried about nothing.

Leigh learns that Howard is going on vacation with his wife though he promises that he's going to ask for a divorce as soon as they return. Peggy Jean encounters a host named Don who tells of a problem during a morning show in which food stuck to a non-stick skillet. Peggy says that it's happened to everyone but silently notes that it has never happened to her personally. Don says the scene will be used by his mother as proof that Don is incapable of caring for his daughter. Peggy Jean feels good about her



reassurance to Don but that good feeling flies away when she finds another email from Zoe, this one calling Peggy Jean a "moustache cunt." Peggy Jean hurries to the pharmacy where she buys bleach for the hairs on her upper lip. In chapter six, Peggy Jean has an appointment with a hair stylist who says that they must bleach the hairs on Peggy Jean's lip. The comment upsets her so much that she takes a Valium.

Max learns that the shopping networks are all looking for hosts with different ethnic backgrounds which might eliminate Max from consideration by E-Z Shop. Bebe meets Eliot and the two are immediately attracted to each other. Leigh tries to write Howard a letter expressing her feelings and berates herself for falling for a married man, then loses herself in a television drama. When the epiphany ending occurs, Leigh begins to cry uncontrollably.

Chapters Four through Six Analysis

After church, Peggy Jean and her family eat at McDonald's where all three boys get a Happy Meal, despite the fact that Ricky is thirteen years old. This level of control seems a compulsion in Peggy Jean, and this is a compulsion that will be tested when she finds herself in a rehabilitation setting while her family is being cared for by the teenage girl next door. While the family is in church, John is looking at the girl from next door, a teenager named Nikki. This is a foreshadowing of what will become a major problem for Peggy Jean. An interesting point of this scene is seen when Peggy Jean tries to give a homeless man some change and incurs his wrath at the tiny amount of her donation. Peggy Jean then tells the boys that they will no longer "see" the homeless people they encounter. This declaration of what they as a family will do when the situation arises again is an example of Peggy Jean's belief that she can control these situations.

Peggy Jean immediately picks up on any criticism offered by "Zoe," a fact that her son Ricky is no doubt counting on. Although she seems to believe the criticisms warrant examinations, she also seems to realize that these could be the ranting of someone who knows her personally and is angry at her. What's interesting about this point is that Peggy Jean's insecurities are not so deep that she can't rationally examine the situation. The problem is that even then, she is not able to overlook the possibility that she is less than perfect. This goes directly to a self-esteem issue, a problem that is shared by almost everyone involved with the show.



Chapters Seven through Nine

Chapters Seven through Nine Summary

Peggy Jean travels to Milan to host a segment. On the way home, she takes the air travel sickness bags from her seat and that of her neighbor to use later for carrying her shoes. Peggy Jean is then brought a Kosher meal which makes her angry. She says that she isn't Jewish, whispering the word "Jewish" and hissing at the flight attendant who brings her another meal. The incident with the meal upsets her so badly that she takes a Valium from her vitamin bottle and swallows it. Peggy Jean later heads to the restroom and finds the liquor cart unsupervised. She fills her cosmetic bag with tiny bottles of liquor, going so far as to leave behind her hair spray to make more room for the liquor.

Max turns on Sellelevision to find Bebe hosting a show in mid-afternoon, not typically her time to host. Max then sees that there's a celebrity appearing to promote a product, which explains Bebe's presence.

Trish tells Peggy Jean that she's gotten a strange email from a woman named Zonda, but Peggy Jean says her strange emails have been from Zoe. Trish says that she'd forgotten the name but remembered that it started with a "z." After the conversation, Peggy Jean wonders if Trish could be Zoe. During a jewelry segment, Peggy Jean gets word that they have a caller named Zoe that they're going to put on the air live to talk to Peggy Jean. The call goes smoothly for a moment until Zoe says that unlike Peggy Jean, she is not a "bitch with big, hairy knuckles," before being cut off in mid-sentence.

In chapter eight, Peggy Jean gets an email just a short time later with the words "cut, cut" at the end which Peggy Jean takes as a threat. Meanwhile, Bebe's budding relationship with Eliot is going well. He owns a chain of dry cleaning stores, sends flowers and Bebe calls her mother to say that she's met someone very special.

Max goes to a bookstore to look for a date. He encounters Leigh who has a self-help for someone who has fallen in love with "selfish bastards." Max says he's read the book and Leigh lies, saying it's to help her understand her sister's situation. They agree to meet up sometime soon.

In chapter nine, Eliot and Bebe are on their second date and Eliot invites Bebe to take the Concord to Paris for their third date. Though she has some misgivings, she agrees. Meanwhile, Adele Oswald Crawley is hosting some Indian-themed segments based on a tiny percentage of Indian heritage that she is willing to play on. On Thursday, Peggy Jean prepares to take the boys out for a movie, eliminating their choices and selecting *Gone with the Wind*. In the car, all three sit in the back seat and Ricky holds his hand as if the first finger were a gun, pretending to shoot his mother in the back while the other two boys try not to laugh out loud. They have gone when Nikki shows up and John says



there was a change of plan. The two flirt with John impressing Nikki with his knowledge of young stars and models.

Leigh and Howard check into a Ramada Inn where they have sex though Leigh is angry that Howard still hasn't told his wife he's leaving her. Max tries out for a news anchor job but admits he has no idea what the director wants when he says to "put a wink" in the newscast. Outside the audition, Max finds a fifty-dollar bill and notes that much of life is luck.

Chapters Seven through Nine Analysis

When one of the flight attendants asks Peggy Jean if she wants anything, Peggy Jean makes a point of saying that she has to be careful what she eats because "television adds ten pounds." Peggy Jean obviously hasn't been recognized up to this point and this seems a ploy to ensure that she is noticed. The flight attendant immediately mistakes Peggy Jean for a news anchor and then for an actress in a sitcom, which seems to aggravate Peggy Jean. The flight attendant continues to ask about Peggy Jean until she says that she's a host on Sellevision and the flight attendant immediately asks about Max's incident. Peggy seems somewhat repulsed by the fact that the flight attendant wears clear varnish and had noted that she wasn't pleased with Max's presence on the show either. Peggy Jean then launches into thoughts of touching and how touching can spread diseases. She notes that she seldom touches her sons and that she has defended that to a neighbor recently. The interesting thing is that Peggy Jean's desire that no one touch goes so deeply that she thinks pay phones should be banned. This near-phobia is never explained.

Roses are important to Bebe because her father had sent roses to Bebe's mother, whose name is Rose, on the night he was killed. As Bebe relates the story, her father had been a police officer, had arranged for roses to be delivered and then had died. Bebe isn't certain whether her father had some sort of premonition but notes that roses are never "just roses" to her, that they always have a deeper message. When Eliot sends Bebe roses, there seems to be some sort of foreshadowing attached though the reader will not get the full impact for several chapters.



Chapters Ten through Twelve

Chapters Ten through Twelve Summary

Bebe and Eliot fly to Paris, teasing each other about being "normal." At one point, Eliot asks Bebe what normal people talk about. Eliot says that it's much too early to say anything about love but that he is very much "in like" with Bebe. She says that she is also very much "in like" with him. It's noted that Bebe earns more than \$600,000 a year as a host on Sellelevision and that she could easily have afforded to take Eliot to Paris, but the fact that he does invite her seems to make her slightly concerned that the relationship is moving too quickly. As they are on the way to Paris, Eliot gives her a beautiful jewelry box which further concerns Bebe. Then Bebe opens the case to find a candy bracelet inside.

Peggy Jean receives a package at Sellelevision. She signs for it, expecting that it might be chocolates from her husband. She is already planning to eat only two and put the rest in the break room for the others to enjoy with a note that says "Enjoy! God Bless, Peggy Jean." Instead of candy, there's a crucified rat in the box. Peggy Jean goes a little crazy. After the security guard arrives and takes the rat away, Peggy Jean has two Valium and washes it down with a little bottle of liquor. Trish shows up at Peggy Jean's dressing room soon after the incident and suggests that Peggy Jean "see someone." Peggy Jean perks up, apparently thinking Trish is suggesting some sort of physical protection, but is angry when Trish suggests mental help. Peggy insists that the pills Trish saw her take were homeopathic, "like vitamins." When Trish has gone, Peggy Jean calls her "secret doctor" for a refill of her Valium.

In chapter eleven, Max goes to an advertising agency to audition for radio "voice over" spots. Max's audition is over quickly with no feedback though one of the men is apparently attracted to Max. Max notes that there's "no way" he's going to have sex with the man in order to secure a job doing voice overs.

Peggy is especially moved by the Sunday sermon which reminds that family is a constant in the lives of a person in trouble. Peggy goes upstairs to Ricky's room to discover something she thinks is Silly Putty. When Ricky says it's plastic explosive, Peggy Jean tells him not to joke about that. She goes downstairs, planning to have a little liquor, just enough to "cut the Valium." Trish goes to Howard's office and tells him that she's worried about Peggy Jean who seems to have been taking a large number of pills recently and who has been slurring words. Trish says that Peggy Jean says she's taking Vallium, but that she isn't certain. In chapter twelve, Leigh tells Howard that she's happy with the change in her on-air hours, but that she's not happy with their relationship, which is moving much too slowly. Leigh asks Howard if he's given her more on-air hours to keep her occupied so that she doesn't have time to worry about whether he's filed for divorce.



Leigh later calls Max to ask if he'd like to share Chinese food for dinner at her place. When Leigh goes to Ming Ling's to pick up the food, she sees Howard there with his wife in an intimate position. When Max arrives, Leigh tells him the entire story and the two come up with a plan for Leigh to get even. After an on-air segment called Gifts for Guys, Peggy Jean has a single email, unsigned though obviously from Zoe, asking if Peggy Jean had liked the gift. Peggy Jean takes four Valium and three small bottles of peach schnapps "to even her out," though not before considering that she has already had some liquor prior to the show. Peggy Jean reassures herself that she's a good person — sponsoring two AIDS babies at St. Mercy and having even held one of them, just Like Princess Di — and that she wouldn't be taking the Valium if it weren't for Zoe. She calls Debby Boone, hoping for advice on how to handle the increasingly alarming attention of Zoe, who Peggy Jean now calls a stalker.

Chapters Ten through Twelve Analysis

Peggy Jean reassures herself that it's okay to wash the Valium down with the liquor after the rat incident because she doesn't like the taste of liquor. Though this doesn't really make sense as an excuse, it seems typical of an emerging alcoholic's effort to excuse the habit. She also has Tic Tacs handy, another habit of alcoholics who want to be certain the liquor can't be smelled on the breath. Trish's appearance at key times seems to point toward Trish as the culprit though it will later be revealed that it wasn't Trish at all. This misdirection is a common literary tool and is an effective method of suspense.

It's noted that Leigh goes on the air with a jewelry showcase — the newest of her on-air segments — worried about her relationship with Howard. Leigh questions Howard's motives for giving her the newest assignment. Howard says that both she and Trish had gotten some additional on-air hours, and that Leigh had gotten a few more than Trish because he felt she deserves it. Leigh isn't reassured. What's really interesting about the hosts is that they all seem to have low self-esteem, though they have all achieved the positions as on-air hosts for this large home shopping network. It seems that Howard was the only one who wasn't insecure though the reader can't know for certain whether he had moments of insecurity before being fired.

Peggy Jean returns to her computer and finds a single email which seems unusual because the hosts seem typically to get larger numbers of emails. It seems possible that Peggy Jean's son has also managed somehow to erase the positive emails though this isn't suggested by the author. There is an important point of foreshadowing when Peggy Jean finds something she believes to be Silly Putty in her son's bedroom. He says the substance is actually an explosive and she believes him to be kidding, but she will later be called to the school because he created an explosion and is taken into custody by juvenile authorities.



Chapters Thirteen through Fifteen

Chapters Thirteen through Fifteen Summary

Eliot brings chicken soup to Bebe, who is sick, and questions her about the need for all the things she has, including a wet-vac and a drafting table. Eliot then flips on the television to the Sellelevision show where Leigh is preparing for her most memorable show ever. She's supposed to be presenting a ruby pendant but starts by asking how many women would like to have a man taken them to dinner and say that he loves her. She says then, "If you would like to have a man promise you the world, you're going to want to write this number down," making the crew believe she's about to give their number for purchasing the necklace. Instead, she gives Howard's number, name and position with the company, then says that she has come to realize that he's never going to divorce his wife as he had promised, that he's simply having sex with both, and that she's tired of her part in it. There's a moment of shocked silence on the set and Leigh takes the opportunity to give Howard's number again. The moment the show cuts to a promotional video for another upcoming show, Leigh jumps up and leaves the set.

Howard and his wife are watching the show at Howard's insistence. The couple is sitting on a white silk sofa and Howard's wife hits him with the first thing she finds, a solid-brass sculpture of a dolphin. Howard is stitched up at the hospital and fired, the story running in every newspaper in the country and on all the top television news programs. Howard calls Leigh the following day from a hotel room, having been terminated from Sellelevision.

Max auditions for another voice-over part, this time a cat food commercial, and feels better about it because he spends a great deal of time getting new instructions and tapes several takes. The crew make Max feel more professional and they seem excited about his ability to take direction.

Peggy Jean thinks back to her conversation with Debby Boone, who reveals that she had also had a stalker. With Debby's advice on her mind, Peggy Jean feels relaxed and makes herself a gin and tonic because she'd read that quinine in tonic water was healthy. Just then, she gets a phone call from a neighbor who says that Peggy Jean should look outside. She does, slams the door and calls 911.

Leigh and Max have dinner together and Leigh says she's had offers from literary agents and talk shows. At her house, Bebe opens her American Express bill to discover that she owes almost twenty thousand dollars. Realizing that there's not a mistake on the bill, she goes to Amazon and searches for books about compulsive shopping. She orders one, finds several that are also recommended, and orders them too. She also orders another book about Chinese artifacts as an investment, and feels much better.

In chapter fourteen, Max meets with his agent who says she doesn't know what else she can possibly do for him. She does reassure him that the cat food commercial wasn't



his fault because the product simply didn't get final approval for marketing. She says that it's time that they "part ways." Max realizes that the situation is more serious than he'd thought, then reassures himself by saying that perhaps he'd been aiming too low. He heads out to pick up a copy of "Backstage," feeling better for having decided to do something.

Peggy Jean tells police about the stalker, having called them when she saw that the neighbor was referring to the fact that someone had spread disposable razors all over her front lawn and had used hair removal foam to write several words, including "hairy," on the front of her house. The police leave with no clues and say that perhaps the stalker will make a mistake on her next attempt. Peggy Jean takes out an "emergency" bottle of potato vodka and downs Valium with the liquor.

Max is watching television and trying not to panic. He considers options, including that he might be able to get a sales job at Macy's, while thinking that he should accomplish some things while being unemployed - painting the bathroom and building a terrarium, for example. As he's flipping channels, he comes across Leza Gibbons' show. The guest is a porn star who is talking about making a career of pornography. He says that it takes someone who is good looking and willing to be an "exhibitionist" to succeed in the industry. Max immediately catches the word, realizing that "exhibitionist" had been used to describe his own incident. Max learns that the star on the Leza show makes up to eight thousand per movie and makes three or four movies each month. When the star mentions his own movie company, Max starts looking for the contact number.

Peggy Jean's husband John tries to coax her out of bed where she'd remained for the three days following the razor incident, getting up only to take a "vitamin." John has talked to a co-worker whose wife had undergone psychiatric treatment and heard about in-patient programs. On this morning, he starts his electric razor and Peggy Jean rushes into the room, grabs the razor and start running the razor over her own arms. Later, John describes the incident to a psychiatrist at the Anne Sexton Center who takes it to mean that Peggy Jean had had the intention of committing suicide, though the electric razor did not provide the means to carry out the act. John also says that Peggy Jean seems to be drinking and it's noted that she has an "unrecognized chemical dependency issue." John says that Peggy Jean had been ranting about Debby Boone after the disposable razors were found on the lawn and that she'd been yelling "hairy bitch" when she was running the electric razor over her own arms. The psychiatrist asks whether it's possible that Peggy Jean had been physically involved with Debby Boone and John says he can't imagine Peggy Jean as a lesbian. The psychiatrist says that Peggy Jean will remain as an inpatient for at least a month and that she will be allowed no visits or calls from home during that time. It's noted that John is upset, apparently because he doesn't know how to cook.

In chapter fifteen, Max is told by the head of a major porn studio that he should send a head shot and two nude photos to the studio. Max notes that being naked in his condominium in the middle of a day with a camera set on automatic in front of him feels rather "decadent." He takes several photos, chooses two and sends them with a publicity photo and a cover letter, feeling good about taking action.



At the Smythe house, Nikki is doing laundry for the family though John says she doesn't have to. As the two flirt with each other, Nikki begins rubbing his shoulders then says that it would be much easier if he were laying down.

Eliot and Bebe make love and the Eliot jumps up to have pizza. He tells her that his mother had called the previous night. When Bebe says she thought his mother was dead, Eliot says that it wasn't his real mother but his biological mother. He says that he'd been given up for adoption — the first time he's mentioned it to Bebe — but that he'd never really thought about being adopted. Eliot says that his biological mother had not mentioned whether he had brothers or sisters, that she had said he was born in Brooklyn, that his biological father had been a cop and that he is dead. Bebe immediately sits up and takes notice. She asks what his biological mother's name is and Eliot doesn't immediately answer until she's insistent. He says that her name is Rosalind which makes Bebe start to cry. She says that her mother's name is Rose — short for Rosalind — that her father was a cop and that her parents had given up their first-born son for adoption. Bebe says that she now knows that Eliot is her brother.

Chapters Thirteen through Fifteen Analysis

There's an interesting contrast between Bebe and Peggy Jean. Though Bebe's out-of-control shopping isn't necessarily detrimental as long as she can afford to pay the bills, it does seem that it could become a problem. In fact, the story will end with Bebe's house catching on fire and burning up quickly because of all the stuff she has inside. Bebe has continually said that she's picking up a little something here and there, often as a gift for someone else, but many times admits that she doesn't know who she's buying for.

When Max is having the final conversation with his agent, he asks about radio stations. What's interesting about this is that Max had initially shunned the idea of a radio station, saying that he couldn't stand the idea of a job that didn't put him in front of the camera. Though it's not clear exactly how much time has lapsed, there has been some time pass and Max is suddenly fearful of the situation, realizing that the publicity surrounding the "penis incident" has done more damage to his career than he'd initially believed. However, his vanity won't let him think like this for long and he soon decides that his problem is that he'd been aiming much too low.

Part of Bebe's on-air charm is apparently her willingness to bring portions of her real life in as part of her shows. She apparently tells a great deal about herself, her dog named Pepper, her mother named Rose who lives in Needles, California, and now about Eliot. It's noted that Eliot has discovered that nothing about himself is safe from Bebe's on-air segments and he apparently doesn't particularly mind though he tells her that she can't tell about him standing naked at the foot of her bed with Pepper begging for a piece of pizza.

The significance of the incident in which Bebe and Eliot believe themselves to be brother and sister is never revealed. Bebe will later call her mother who denies knowing

where the son she gave up for adoption is now and denies having contacted him. This seems to eliminate the question as to a possible relationship in the minds of Bebe and Eliot who will eventually marry and have a son.



Chapters Sixteen through Eighteen

Chapters Sixteen through Eighteen Summary

John and Nikki are having sex with Nikki calling out that she's been a "bad girl." After the sex, Nikki comments on the warmth of John's body and he says it's because of the hair. Nikki says that her father is "smooth," and that she knows from an incident when she was fourteen. When John asks if her father raped her, Nikki says it wasn't rape, that she had been curious and had gotten into the shower with him. She then tells John that she isn't seventeen, but that she is almost sixteen. As John and Nikki are lying in bed after the sex, John hears the boys arrive home. He panics, telling Nikki to hide, but Ricky throws open the bedroom door. John expects a scene but Ricky says hello to Nikki and asks if they can order pizza for dinner since Peggy Jean is "in the loony bin." John agrees and Ricky rushes back out, apparently uncaring about the scene he'd just witnessed. That night they have pizza in front of the television and watch scary movies.

Max arrives at the porn studio where he meets Ed Palentino of Eagle Studios and learns about the number of films produced yearly. Ed says that he likes Max's photos and energy and that he wants to know how serious Max is about the possibility of working in porn films. Max is careful not to commit, but says he wants to learn more. Ed says that he can imagine the title of Max's first film as "Home-Shopping Hunk." Ed then says that he knows that Max is comfortable in front of the camera, but needs to know whether his "dick" is comfortable, and whether Max can achieve an erection with a camera aimed at him.

In chapter seventeen, Peggy Jean has gotten past the initial withdrawal though the first three days had been filled with hallucinations and sickness. She notes that they'd told her that she'd become addicted to drugs and alcohol. Peggy has a room of her own though she's not allowed to close the door. Peggy Jean quickly learns that she's required to participate in an intense therapy program. She calls home and Nikki answers. Peggy Jean thanks her for helping care for John and the boys during her absence and decides that she must buy Nikki a particular necklace as a thank you gift. Peggy Jean asks to speak to John who talks to her only a moment while Nikki massages his toes with baby oil, prompting him to hang up quickly. Peggy Jean excuses the abrupt end to the call by saying that it is probably difficult for him to talk to her.

Leigh's answering machine picks up and she hears Howard's voice. He says that he can't live in a hotel forever, that he loves her, that the divorce papers have been filed and that he wants to come to her now. Leigh picks up but tells Howard that it's over between them. Leigh finishes writing a letter to Peggy Jean, wishing her a speedy recovery.

Max is on the set of Eagle Studios where he learns that the "artificial semen" in a cup is actually made of Oil of Olay eye gel, non-dairy creamer and sugar. There's a young



dark-haired boy reading Vanity Fair that Max learns is a "fluffer." The boy's job is to help the actors "keep their dicks hard" between scenes. Max next meets an actress named "Trixie Thunderpussy" and then an actor named Rocky who is watching a ballgame with several other members of the crew. Rocky agrees to be Max's partner for the screen test. Max goes to a room where he showers and changes prior to the screen test. He's still nervous but not yet really certain this is a good idea.

Max finds Rocky, and the two talk on the way to the set of "Pizza Parlor Pussy" for Max's screen test. Max remains nervous but Rocky says that he doesn't work only with men unless it's someone who is "not slutty" and not an "old pro," which flatters Max. As the camera rolls, Max finds himself somewhat nervous, but then attracted to Rocky. The screen test is a success.

In chapter eighteen, Peggy Jean is being forced to confront her addiction. After a particularly bad situation, she finds that she does crave both liquor and a Valium, and then realizes that these cravings mean that she is addicted to both. During a group therapy, someone tells Peggy Jean that she's using the drugs and alcohol not because she had a stalker who had driven her to it, but because she'd wanted to. When Peggy Jean describes her "mental collapse," a woman tells her that it was an alcoholic blackout, and that all alcoholics had had them. Soon after, Peggy Jean admits her addiction. Peggy Jean is then befriended by a woman who says her name is Debby and that she is the mother of conjoined twins who hate each other and fight constantly. Peggy Jean says "it's no wonder" Debby has problems with addiction.

Bebe and Eliot are talking about the scare they'd had when they thought they might be brother and sister. Bebe had called her mother and discovered that her mother had not been in touch with the son she'd given up for adoption and that the boy she'd given up had a large birthmark on his chest. Bebe knows that her relationship with Eliot is secure, unlike Peggy Jean's. Bebe had seen John Smythe the day before with a young girl, and the two had been heavily involved.

At the Sellelevision studio, Trish and Adele encounter each other just prior to Adele taking a phone call from her mother who says that there was a mistake and that Adele doesn't have Indian ancestors after all.

At the rehab clinic, Peggy Jean breaks down in tears during a group therapy session, then says that she'd become an alcoholic because she hadn't worked through her emotions.

On the Dazzling Diamonelle set at Sellelevision, Bebe introduces her first two items which sell out quickly. Bebe's show has become even bigger as she's telling about her budding relationship with Eliot, much to Eliot's chagrin. There are now two assistants who help Bebe answer fan mail. On this particular show, Bebe is presenting a two-carat ring when she's alerted that there's a caller, Michael from Pennsylvania. Bebe answers the call and immediately recognizes Eliot's voice. Eliot, still using his first name Michael, says that he selected this ring because it's a classic, and that the woman he's going to ask to marry him is "anything but classic." He adds that the fact that the ring has a large



stone might increase the odds that his intended will say yes. Bebe is silent for a moment, she screams, then laughs and begins crying before she's able to pull herself together to announce that the caller, Michael, is really her boyfriend Eliot. Eliot then asks Bebe for an answer and she says that she'll marry him. The set erupts into chaos as Eliot tells Bebe that he loves her and that he's "the stain you'll never get rid of," apparently referring to his dry cleaning business.

Chapters Sixteen through Eighteen Analysis

Nikki says that she's from the "Fashion Café" generation - that if something feels good and the action doesn't hurt anybody, there's no reason to abstain. The interesting point about this is that the sex with her father and with John will hurt other people and Nikki seems willing to overlook anything that makes her feel good, whether someone else gets hurt or not.

Max's attitude about the possibility of being a porn star is split. He says that he believes in himself though he fears the unknown. As it turns out, Max will become a star in his own right, earning an award for his debut.

When Peggy Jean is forced to participate in the therapy program at the rehab center, she's skeptical but eventually comes to agree to the terms of the program. While there's no doubt that Peggy Jean has been hypocritical about many things, including her drinking. Despite the hypocritical actions, Peggy Jean seems to have had a good heart with at least some good intentions. It seems that Peggy Jean's main problem has been that she hasn't received what she believes to be sufficient recognition for her good deeds, resulting in her desire to recognize herself. The fact that Peggy Jean can't believe that Nikki has anything but her family's needs at heart seems to be an indication that she believes in the inherent goodness of others.

Max finds himself attracted to Rocky which seems to help tremendously in the screen test. However, Max gets so caught up in the scene that he forgets that it's a screen test, or at least seems to. When the director calls to "cut," Rocky steps away and gives Max a "squeeze," something like would happen when two friends encounter each other. While it seems this could be a bad start to the situation for Max, it turns out that it's a good move and Max launches a successful career from this screen test.



One Year Later - the Epilogue

One Year Later - the Epilogue Summary

The epilogue begins with a scene from Max's debut porno film, "Home-Shopping Stud." Max, acting under the name Kyle Thunderwood, wins the industry award for best newcomer in a gay feature. As Max accepts the award, a scene from the show plays on a giant screen in which Max makes love to a telephone. The following day, Max's mother is ironing while watching Inside Edition when she learns of Max's award. She passes out, breaking her wrist in the fall. Inside Edition goes on to say that it's been a difficult year for Sellelevision, including information about other escapades on the show, including the firing of Howard after Leigh's broadcast of their affair.

Max meets a new, exciting man. Adam literally Rollerbladed into Max as Max was coming out of a supermarket. The two had exchanged phone numbers and spent some time getting to know each other. As they part after sharing a meal, Adam asks if they can get together again. Max blushes and admits that showing his emotions is a trait he's never overcome. Adam asks if Max likes quail and when Max says he does, Adam says he does also but can't cook, so suggests they order a pizza instead.

Peggy Jean shows up for an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting and says that she's tired of dealing with the same "shit" of hurt feelings from seeing "them" together. She says that she's been taught to believe that divorce should be shameful. Peggy Jean thinks about the words of a man who is a recovering drug addict. They met through a homeless shelter where Peggy Jean works. The man has said that he was a crack addict because the most important thing is the thing that you focus on most. Using that thought, Peggy Jean tells the AA group that she's going to stop working so hard on the external parts and focus on "the inner garden."

Peggy Jean is later on the road and thinks back over the past year. She's divorced after having come home to her family a day early and finding Nikki handcuffed to the coffee table and both Nikki and John naked in the living room. She'd been called to school after Ricky created an explosion in the school building and was taken into custody by juvenile officials. She learns that that Ricky was pretending to be Zoe, Ricky saying that he had hated her for treating him like an infant and that he'd had control issues to deal with himself.

At the Poco-No-No Motor Lodge, John and Nikki are involved in sexual foreplay when the remote gets dropped to the floor and the television comes on to a show called "Retail Salvage," a home-shopping television show based in the Poconos. Peggy Jean is the guest, touting her book which is titled "Peggy Jean, Jesus and You!"

At the Holymount Hospital, Bebe and Eliot are asked if they want to keep the placenta from the birth of their son. Eliot points out that the baby has lots of stuff and that their house will soon be too crowded for the family. Bebe objects, saying that she enjoys



buying things to make a home for her family. At their home, the Glade plug-in and several other items are plugged into the same outlet which causes a spark. The spark lands on a book, "Zen and the Art of Simple Living," and setting the pages on fire. The fire spreads quickly, catching the myriad of items in the duplex. Pepper, Bebe's dog, is being kept by a neighbor and watches his house burn. The firefighters not that it's always the "pack rats" that cause the biggest fire.

At the Sellelevision studio, Trish Mission is rushing to make it to the set on time for her segment. As she rushes out the door, she collides with Amanda who is holding a chocolate milkshake. Trish is angry and Amanda has a new pink blouse she offers to Trish who takes her up on the offer, taking off her own bra because it is also soaked with milkshake. On the set, she realizes that the first item for sale - a porcelain figurine - is just out of her reach. When she leans over to pick it up, her left breast falls out of her blouse.

One Year Later - the Epilogue Analysis

Adam works in a hotel and tells Max about his job. He has learned to completely clean a room in sixteen minutes so that he can spend the rest of the time allotted to the task snooping through the guests' belongings. He tells of finding a photo of an obviously gay man with a woman and of posting an advertisement for the man, asking for help from his heterosexual relationship. Adam says the worst part of the job is that he never sees the people again, so he can't possibly know the outcome of that advertisement. Adam seems to have no compunction that what he's doing is wrong or illegal. He doesn't indicate that he takes things from the rooms, but admits to snooping through suitcases and computer files.

Peggy Jean's focus has changed dramatically over the year since her breakdown, but the true self remains very much the same. When Peggy Jean was dealing with the police in what she truly believed was the case of a stalker sending a message that her life was in danger, she'd told a neighbor that crushing up chips on top of a casserole was a good way to pep up an ordinary dish. This reverting to the "homemaker" in this time of dire stress was completely natural to Peggy Jean - an inherent part of her character. When she is divorced and without a job, she begins volunteering at a homeless shelter. It's here that she meets a man who says that Peggy Jean's turkey loaf is really good, and that it's so good because she puts her heart into making it good.



Characters

Max Andrews

One of the most popular hosts on Sellelevision until an incident during a Slumber Sunday Sundown show. Max, wearing just a robe because a latte had been spilled on his underwear, inadvertently shows his penis during the slumber segment. The calls from viewers pour in and Max is fired by the company. Max, a homosexual, feels confident he will soon find work but eventually comes to realize that the incident is going to be a huge stumbling block for him. Max agrees that he might lower himself to work on radio though his first love is television, but finds that the idea is repugnant. Max has gotten caught up in the glamorous lifestyle from the large salary he's making and is a vain person. He says that the camera loves him and that he is most comfortable in front of the camera.

While he's watching television one day, he happens across a show during which a pornography star is telling how he got involved in the porn business and describing the pay he receives for a typical movie. Max contacts the movie producers and is hired to play in a porn movie using the name Kyle Thunderwood, which earns him recognition from the industry.

Peggy Jean Smythe

One of the most popular hosts on Sellelevision, Peggy Jean is a self-proclaimed Christian. She is self-centered, evidenced by the fact that she often makes comments aloud about her Christianity and her ability to maintain a career and be a homemaker, citing the fact that she likes how it sounds. Peggy Jean is very self-conscious, to the point that she takes any hint of criticism to heart and immediately seeks to change whatever others might see as a flaw. It's toward this end that her son begins sending emails to Peggy Jean, claiming to be Zoe and pretending to have small criticisms, such as the fact that Peggy Jean has hairy earlobes.

Peggy Jean soon gets a prescription from her doctor for Valium and is able to take many more than is prescribed by having multiple prescriptions for different doctors. She is soon drinking as well and the combination of the drugs, alcohol and escalating efforts of Zoe - including hundreds of disposable razors dropped on Peggy Jean's lawn - drives her to a nervous breakdown and into a rehabilitation clinic.

Bebe Friedman

Another of the popular Sellelevision hosts, Bebe talks a great deal about her personal life and shares details about her budding affair with a man named Elliot who Bebe briefly comes to believe is her long-lost brother and who proposes to her during a live broadcast. Bebe is addicted to shopping and buys many items, sometimes saying that



she'll find someone she wants to give the item to and sometimes saying that it's something she needs or is a good investment.

Howard Toast

Executive producer of Sellelevision who is married but is involved in an affair with Leigh, one of the hostesses on the show until she reveals their relationship during a live broadcast. Howard is immediately fired and his wife kicks him out, prompting him to call Leigh who then refuses to have anything to do with him.

Leigh Bushmoore

One of the up-and-coming hostesses on the Sellelevision crew who is having an affair with Howard Toast, though he is married and she knows that. Leigh wants and seems to expect that Howard is going to leave his wife. When she finally comes to the realization that it's never going to happen, Leigh reveals the affair during a live television broadcast and immediately quits.

Trish Mission

One of the young hosts on Sellelevision, Trish's father is rich. Trish finds a young man she wants to marry and he buys her an engagement ring but Trish's father refuses to have her wear such a tiny ring and buys a million-dollar ring to replace it. Trish bumps into Amanda as she's going to tape a segment and Amanda spills milkshake on Trish's blouse. Amanda provides another blouse and Trish goes on air with a borrowed blouse and no bra. When she leans over, her left breast falls out of the blouse.

Michael Eliot Klein

The man Bebe falls in love with after meeting through a personal advertisement placed by Bebe. Eliot owns a chain of dry cleaning stores and proposed to Bebe during a live broadcast of Sellelevision.

Adele Oswald Crawley

The young hostess on Sellelevision who hosts several American Indian theme shows based on her belief that she has a slight amount of Navajo blood. The companies, including Sellelevision, are frantically searching for hosts of various ethnicities and Adele, in an effort to jump start her career, is willing to act the part. Her mother later calls with the news that she'd been mistaken about the Indian ancestry, a fact that doesn't really seem to bother Adele other than her realization that she'll have to redecorate her home.



John Smythe

Peggy Jean's husband. John seems to be the obedient husband for awhile but runs wild while Peggy Jean is in the hospital, starting an affair with a sixteen-year-old neighbor named Nikki. John and Peggy Jean divorce and John later sees Peggy Jean on a shopping network touting her new book while John and Nikki are in a hotel in the Poconos.

Don

An overnight host who is one day very upset because a segment he was hosting included a cooking demonstration and the food he was cooking stuck to the non-stick pan. Don says that his mother has never felt he was capable of caring for his daughter and predicts that his mother will use this as an excuse to come take care of the daughter.

Ricky Smythe

Peggy Jean's oldest son, Ricky is harboring deep resentment and anger that causes him to send Peggy Jean emails using the name Zoe and pretending to be a devoted fan. As Ricky's anger escalates, he comes to threaten Peggy Jean, still posing as Zoe. After Peggy Jean and John divorce, Ricky causes an explosion at a school and is arrested.



Objects/Places

Sellelevision

A retail broadcasting network where Peggy Jean is a hostess and where Max is a host until the penis incident.

Slumber Sunday Sundown

The broadcast during which Max's penis is seen on television, prompting Max's termination as a television host.

Jewelry Faith Program

Hosted most often by Peggy Jean, the products sold during this broadcast are generally Christian-based jewelry.

Woodlands Mall

Where Max goes to buy a gift for his niece and where he is recognized by a child causing Max to be detained by a security guard who believes Max had revealed himself to the child.

E-Z Shop Channel

A competitor of Sellelevision where Max interviews after the penis incident but doesn't get the job.

The Divinity Center

Where Peggy Jean and her family attend church.

Changes

Where Bebe and Eliot meet in person for the first time.

Paris

Where Eliot takes Bebe for their third date.



Ming Ling's

The Chinese restaurant where Leigh orders Chinese for her evening with Max only to discover Howard there with his wife.

The Anne Sexton Center

Where Peggy Jean is taken for rehabilitation.

Home-Shopping Stud

The name of the porno movie made by Max Anderson as Kyle Thunderwood.



Themes

The Importance of Self-Esteem

The lack of self-esteem seems to be a prevalent problem among the hosts of the television show with only a couple of possible exceptions. What's most interesting is that the characters find various ways to deal with their lack of self-esteem. In the case of Peggy Jean, the cure is time-consuming and detailed. Peggy Jean takes her role as homemaker in the family very seriously. She has spent such an enormous amount of time and energy on this front that it has become second nature. Meanwhile, she greatly admires Princess Diana and seeks to emulate her whenever possible. She notes that she has sponsored two babies at an AIDS hospital and that she has even held one of them, "Just like Princess Diana." Leigh is another of the characters that shows outward signs of self-esteem issues. When Leigh is given additional on-air hours, she asks Howard if she got the hours because she deserved them or because he wants to keep her mind off their affair. Howard says that she deserved them but Leigh doesn't seem convinced. Bebe's shopping, Trish's worries that she's settling for something less than she deserves and Adele's willingness to play on a Native American heritage that doesn't even exist are all likely signs of this lack of self-esteem.

The Lives of On-Air Personalities

Over recent years, stardom has come to include the anchors on the local news channels, radio broadcasters and others, including the hosts on home-shopping networks. While it's a simple matter to get caught up in these lives, it seems that these personalities may pay a tremendous price for their popularity. This price may, however, be necessary in order to climb the ladder of this particular industry. The personal lives of the characters of this book were filled with melodrama but it seems that at least some points of these stories could be real-life issues. For example, Leigh goes on the air after having come to the realization that her lover and boss, Howard Toast, is never going to leave his wife. Though her personal life is in serious trouble, Leigh goes on air and never lets on to her public that there's a problem. The time on live television seems to dictate the actions and attitudes of the hosts, especially those who are seeking ways to advance their careers.

Coming of Age

Two of the characters, Peggy Jean and Max, make great strides toward coming to know and understand themselves over the course of this story. Both go through these changes not because they want to, but because circumstances force them to. What's interesting about this is that both felt they were happy in their situations but both seem to find themselves in better places because of the changes in their lives. Peggy Jean is arguably the better example. Peggy Jean finds herself addicted to Valium and alcohol



and is willing to blame it on the fact that she has a stalker, but comes to admit that she was looking for an excuse to turn to the addictions. She wallows for awhile in self-pity of the addictions but gets past it sooner than might have happened without the support of others, specifically a therapist and a group from Alcoholics Anonymous.

The interesting thing about Peggy Jean's situation is that she refused to consider a therapist of her own free will, so would likely never have confronted her addiction and her reasons for the addiction without the mental collapse that prompted hospitalization. After reaching the bottom and finally confronting herself, she comes to realize her faults and is ready to move on. As she tells someone during an AA meeting, she has wasted a lifetime focusing on the outer things that ultimately mattered very little and is now ready to focus on her "inner garden."



Style

Point of View

The story is written in third person from an omniscient point of view. This is the only available option because there are multiple characters and events going on, some simultaneously. The details of the story would be too greatly limited if presented from a single character's point of view. The scenes are transitioned well so that the reader should have no trouble determining the current perspective. As a rule, these scene changes are handled by use of the character's name and a statement indicating the character's current situation. For example, Trish shows the diamond ring to her co-workers and that section begins with Trish's name and the action. When the story changes to an on-air segment hosted by Leigh, the first sentence is Leigh's on-air introduction of herself. The changes in perspective are explained fully throughout the story.

Setting

The story is set largely at the studio where Sellelevision is produced though there are some additional settings. As a rule, these settings are described in great detail. For example, one of the sets is described as having an elaborate backdrop of an unnamed city skyline. Peggy Jean's experience at the rehab is described in equal detail. The colors of walls, kinds of foods, outlines of therapy and other information combines to make the entire place and experience realistic. When Max goes for an audition at the porn studio, he is taken to a guest room where he's allowed time to shower. It's noted that there are clean towels, robes, shampoo and even bottled water and sodas available for his use.

There are additional details about the setting within the entertainment industry that lend credibility to the story. For example, the names of real-life and well-known stars are dropped along with the story line. Debby Boone is a guest on the show and reassures Peggy Jean when Peggy Jean is faced with the idea that she is being stalked. There are several references to Princess Diana and Donny and Marie Osmond. Max sees the porn star that prompts his next career move into porn movies on the Leza Gibbons show. Additional names and places are mentioned that many readers will recognize, including the names of stores and television shows. The fact that Sellelevision isn't real becomes a non-issue when faced with the multitude of real-life people and events because Sellelevision will likely become a place that very well could exist in the minds of most readers.

Language and Meaning

The story is written on a fairly simplistic reading level and the story is presented in a straight-forward manner. Readers may take away some deeper meanings than those



that are specifically outlined—such as the inherent lack of self-esteem among many of the show's hosts. However, these deeper meanings are not necessary for a reader to enjoy the sarcasm and humor of the book. It should be noted that the tone overall is hopeless. The hosts seem constantly grabbing onto anything that might help their careers, as is evidenced by Peggy Jean's instant action after a fan had apparently noticed the fine hairs on her earlobes and upper lip. Though the majority of these actions are somewhat covert, Peggy Jean's paranoia that her stalker could conceivably be one of the other hosts seems less like paranoia as the characters of those on the show are revealed.

It should be noted that there are some explicit sexual scenes. Max's trial for a role in the pornography industry is one such scene but an even more explicit scene occurs between Peggy Jean's husband John and their sixteen-year-old neighbor Nikki. Nikki and John act out some sexual encounters that are fairly detailed and that might be offensive to some readers.

Structure

The story is divided into eighteen chapters with an epilogue at the end of the book titled "One Year Later." The chapters are generally between eight and fourteen pages in length. Each chapter is numbered and chapters have no titles at all. At the beginning of each chapter is a graphic of an old-fashioned television set, complete with "rabbit ears" as the antennae. The chapters are further divided into smaller sections. These sections are not named or numbered and are set apart merely with a small space between the end of one section and the beginning of the next. Each section covers some particular event or scene.

As a rule, sections begin with a sentence or two setting the stage for the next scene. For example, the first sentence of one section is of Leigh confronting Howard about their relationship. These opening sentences provide something of a glimpse of what the reader can expect from that section. The epilogue, "One Year Later," offers some details about some of the characters either through a look directly at that character as in the case of Max accepting his award from the pornography industry, or through some third-person view of the situation as in when the television show *Inside Edition* offers a synopsis of what's happened to several of *Sellelevision's* crew over the past year. The epilogue ends with a scene very similar to what happened at the beginning of the book with a host exposing a body part during a live broadcast.

Quotes

"While six-foot-two Max sported thick, light brown hair, striking green eyes, and classic, all-American features that would not be out of place in a Banana Republic catalog, the man in the bed resembled a plump lawn gnome. Which was astonishing to Max, because only last night the man had resembled Mel Gibson." Chapter Two, Page 20

"In the car, all three boys sat in the back as usual. The eldest made a gun with the fingers of his right hand and pretended to shoot their mother in the back, through the seat. The other two boys covered their mouths and tried not to laugh." Chapter Nine, Page 105

"'And yet with all of this - a family, a demanding career, and a stalker - I still have time to be a good homemaker.' She said this out loud, because it felt good to say it out loud." Chapter Eleven, Page 129

"To the twenty-four million viewers who tune into Sellelevision at any given moment, Leigh simply appeared to be a happy, attractive young woman who enjoyed her job as host for America's premier retail broadcast network. One would never guess just by looking at her that inside, her heart was being ripped in half." Chapter Twelve, Page 134

"This monstrous Zoe person was making Peggy Jean out to be some chromosomally damaged, testosterone-pumping beast. She was attacking the one thing Peggy Jean prided herself on: polished femininity." Chapter Twelve, Page 138

"Because the sofa was upholstered in an exquisite raw silk, the couple had never even entertained the idea of Scotch-guarding it. And that is why his blood would never be fully removed from the fabric. Suzette had simply taken the closest available object and blindly swung it in her husband's direction." Chapter Thirteen, Page 144

"She did a search and found ShoppingStoppers: The Breakthrough Best Seller that Can Help You Curb Your Compulsive Shopping. She clicked on it. The book jacket appeared on her screen. Beneath the book jacket the text said, 'Customers who bought this book also bought ...' and then listed seven other titles. So Bebe purchased them all, along with a book about investing in Chinese artifacts. She logged off feeling tremendous relief." Chapter Thirteen, Page 152

"But he belonged in front of the camera. He had a certain something that worked on air. Well, until it fell out." Chapter Fourteen, Page 155

"She opened it and removed the emergency bottle of potato vodka. Then she reached in her bathrobe pocket for the Valium. 'Hold my hand, Jesus,' she mumbled as she downed the pills." Chapter Fourteen, Page 158



"She opened it and removed the emergency bottle of potato vodka. Then she reached in her bathrobe pocket for the Valium. 'Hold my hand, Jesus,' she mumbled as she downed the pills." Chapter Fourteen, Page 158

"My parents lived in Brooklyn before I was born. My father was a cop.' She inhaled. 'And they gave their first baby, a boy, up for adoption.' His mouth fell open. He blinked once. 'Eliot, you're my brother.'" Chapter Fifteen, Page 174

"But of course, Trish hadn't worn the milkshake-soaked bra beneath Amanda's low-cut blouse. She hadn't worn a bra at all. So when she leaned over, her left breast fell out." A Year Later, Page 229



Topics for Discussion

What is Sellelevision? Is the setting realistic? Support your answer with specific examples of what seems real or fake in the story. Are there examples of real-life relationships among the characters of this book? Support your answer.

Describe any two of the characters that seem very similar and give examples of the similarities. Describe any two of the characters that seem very different and give examples of the differences.

Describe how Peggy Jean becomes addicted to drugs and alcohol. What are the drugs and alcohol of choice for Peggy Jean? Do you believe Peggy Jean would have become addicted if there hadn't been someone threatening her? Why or why not?

How does Max come to be fired? How does this compare with the final scene of the book in which Trish Mission is in a similar situation? What does this say about the two characters? Examine the similarities and differences between these two characters and the two incidents.

How does Max become a porn star? What is it about his character that makes him suitable for this role? Would Max have ever taken this step if he hadn't been fired from Sellelevision? Support your answer.

Who is Howard? Leigh? How do the two become involved? What is it about Leigh's personality that makes her a prime candidate for this role in Howard's life? What is it about her character that makes the ending inevitable?

Who is Bebe? Eliot? What is the scare the two have? Is it a reasonable fear? Why or why not? What is Bebe's habit? How does she try to deal with the habit? What is the result of this habit?

Who is Don? How does Don compare to the other characters of this story? What might the outcome of Don's life be? Why?