

Smitten Study Guide

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Plot Summary

In this example of the "popular romance" genre of novel writing, struggling divorced mother of two, Lizabeth Kane, talks her way into a job with hunky contractor Matt Hallahan. As a sexually charged, emotionally intense and comic romance develops, the narrative explores themes relating to the relationships between past and present, and parents and children.

The narrative begins with the first meeting of the two central characters. Determined divorcee Lizabeth uses every argument at her disposal to convince reluctant construction-site boss Matt that she deserves an entry-level job as a laborer. She is, however, unaware that she doesn't really need to be too persuasive - Matt is immediately attracted to her. In spite of his reluctance to mix business with pleasure, realizes that the only way he'll be able to pursue his intention to be with her is to hire her onto his team. For her part, Lizabeth is just as attracted as he is, but is determined to live an independent and fulfilled life after her divorce from her controlling, ambitious ex-husband. Her firm purpose and his desires win the day, and Lizabeth is soon working on what Matt believes to be suitably easy jobs painting wood trim.

Lizabeth's eccentric Aunt Elsie arrives to take care of Lizabeth's house and sons while she's working. The boys (Billy and Jason) are delighted by the new arrangement, particularly because Elsie lets them get away with just about anything. They become even more excited when Matt drives Lizabeth home - he's much more friendly and playful with them than their own father. For her part, Lizabeth finds it increasingly difficult to resist her attraction to her boss, particularly when he firmly resolves to protect her from what he believes to be the potentially dangerous naked man who appears repeatedly on her lawn (naked, that is, except for the bag over his head).

After he and Lizabeth get caught in a rainstorm as they're preparing to go home for the day, Matt detours to his town-house so he can change into some dry clothes. Lizabeth is shocked to discover that he garages his beloved Harley-Davidson motorcycle in his living room, that he keeps an exceedingly messy office, and that he lives like a slob. In the aftermath of these discoveries, she and Matt both remember that they're both soaking wet and both very cold. Lizabeth takes a shower, and when she emerges both she and Matt realize that their attraction is too strong to resist, and they make passionate love.

Their sexual relationship continues, in spite of Lizabeth's resistance to Matt's repeated suggestions that they establish something ongoing. Their professional relationship also continues, with Lizabeth taking over the administration of Matt's company. Finally, the visits of the flasher continue, and Matt and Lizabeth concoct a plan to get him to reveal his identity. Meanwhile, Lizabeth's ex-husband Paul arrives to take the boys for their annual vacation together. Lizabeth's sense of loneliness is so intense that she allows Matt more intimacy (emotional as well as physical) than she has in the past.



The boys return sooner than expected, their father having turned out to be a manipulative user (a sense that increases when it's revealed that the flasher is an acquaintance of Paul's that he manipulated into harassing Lizabeth). Lizabeth returns to her arms-length relationship with Matt, using her commitment to the boys as an excuse. It's only when the beloved family dog is run over by a car that Lizabeth realizes that Matt is also committed to her sons' well being, and as a result, her determination to keep him at a distance vanishes. She agrees to marry him; the dog recovers; the boys are happy; the ex-husband agrees to stay out of the new family's life, and everybody looks about to live happily ever after.



Chapters 1 and 2

Chapters 1 and 2 Summary

Chapter 1 - After a brief introduction describing heroine Lizabeth Kane's childhood fantasies about growing up to be a fairy (see "Quotes", p.2), narration describes her first encounter with hunky love interest and carpenter, Matt Hallahan. Both resist their (intense) initial attraction to each other; both realize Lizabeth is seriously under-qualified to be a laborer on Matt's construction project, and both realize that her handyman-special home is the most important thing in her life. When Matt gives in and hires her, Lizabeth resists the temptation to celebrate her desperately needed job with a kiss.

On her first day, Lizabeth leaves her two sons (Jason and Billy, both excited about their mom's cool new job) in the company of her elderly and eccentric Aunt Elsie. At the site, Matt gives Lizabeth her first, and deliberately easy, assignment - painting wood trim. Later in the day, he finds that she's a paint-covered mess, but she has the job done. When he touches her hair to look at a splotch of paint she got on herself, the sudden electricity between them jars them both, and they find themselves passionately kissing.

Chapter 2 - Post-kiss conversation between Lizabeth and Matt reveals that Lizabeth is the son of a wealthy tobacco farmer, and that her ex-husband Paul was politically ambitious, narrow minded, charming, constantly unfaithful, and not good with his children. Later, when Lizabeth brings Matt home to check out the state of her house, Jason and Billy react excitedly to Lizabeth's cool new boss, tell her all about the great day they had with Aunt Elsie, and talk Matt into playing baseball with them. On his first time at bat, he breaks a window in Elsie's precious Cadillac, but talks his way out of a reprimand by promising to help Lizabeth fix her house.

A few days later, Lizabeth talks herself into more responsibility at the construction site, but almost hurts herself falling through an unfinished floor. Matt confesses that he's quickly developed deep feelings for her, but she tells him she's not ready for anything serious - she's still trying to find an identity, which she never developed after a privileged but anonymous childhood and an unhappy marriage (see "Quotes", p. 50). She proposes that she and Matt be friends, and Matt agrees - reluctantly.

Chapters 1 and 2 Analysis

There are two levels on which analysis of this novel must take place - as an example of the genre (romantic comedy fiction), and as a self-contained piece of writing. On the level of the former, many elements common to the genre are introduced in this opening section. In terms of situation, these include a spirited, attractive, romantically-challenged heroine, a charming and devastatingly sexy leading man, instant attraction (emotional and sexual) between the two, and complications that get in the way of the two central characters acting on that attraction. There is also the very clear sense that union



(sexual and emotional) between the two central characters is inevitable, with the result that the reader is drawn into a position of wondering what plot elements the author is going to develop to keep them apart for as long as possible. This sense of delayed action is another hallmark of the genre, specifically in terms of plot. Finally, there is the genre-relevant sense of style about the writing, which might best be described as breezy and humorous, with timely and titillating dollops of lusty innuendo.

All in all, these genre-related characteristics, which to some readers and/or analysts might be archetypal and which to others might be merely formulaic, lay the groundwork for the individualized details defining the narrative of this particular novel. In that context, the detail most worthy of particular note is the reference to Lizabeth's previous marriage, the circumstances of which play a significant role in the resolution of one of the book's central narrative questions. In other words, it is a significant piece of foreshadowing, and is therefore noteworthy on the second level of analysis - as a piece of writing. Aside from its previously discussed sense of style, other well developed elements in that context include characterization (characters are clearly individualized, albeit in broad strokes without a great deal of depth) and theme (the idea of the characters striving for emotional independence from a troubling past - see "Themes - Leaving the Past Behind" - functions clearly on a number of levels).



Chapters 3 and 4

Chapters 3 and 4 Summary

Chapter 3 - A few days later, Matt brings Lizabeth home covered in wet cement - she had accidentally fallen into a bed of concrete. After Ferguson (the family dog) steals the ham that was to have been eaten for dinner and after dinner itself has been abandoned, Lizabeth goes to bed, but is wakened by a light, repetitive tapping on her window. She fantasizes that it's Matt (see "Quotes", p. 61), but when she goes out to see if it's really him she discovers a man in the yard - almost naked, except for the tie around his neck, the sneakers on his feet, and the paper bag over his head. Stifling her giggles, she waves to him, and he waves back in a way that Lizabeth finds somewhat unusual. Still laughing to herself, Lizabeth reports the man to the police.

The next morning Matt arrives early to start work on Lizabeth's decrepit bathroom. No one responds to the doorbell, so Matt throws pebbles at Lizabeth's window to wake her. Fearing the flasher has returned, Lizabeth calls the police and Matt is arrested, but is released when Lizabeth tells the police he's not the flasher. Later, as he's working on the bathroom tile, conversation between Matt and Lizabeth reveals that Lizabeth has no real ambitions or plans for her life (other than fixing her house and being a fairy), while Matt is hoping for a family and children - specifically, with Lizabeth. He confesses that he loves her, and again they kiss, and almost seem to be going further, but they're interrupted by Elsie, who needs to use the facilities. As Elsie comes in, she comments on how much Matt is sweating.

Chapter 4 - In the aftermath of the flasher's visit to a neighbor, Matt and Lizabeth deduce that the flasher must be someone from the neighborhood - he seems to know the right windows to throw stones against. Lizabeth also reveals that there's something familiar about the flasher that she can't quite place, leading her and Matt to plan a barbecue for all the families of the neighborhood. Lizabeth rationalizes that if she got all the men in one place, she might recognize the flasher, even though he'd be fully clothed. Meanwhile, bantering conversation builds the sexual tension between the two, leading Lizabeth to set some boundaries for what can be said, done and touched. This, in turn, leads Matt to immediately start pushing those boundaries, which leads Lizabeth to ask him to respect her desires and her privacy, which leads Matt to comment that in his large family, there was no privacy. Something in his voice leads Lizabeth to understand that Matt's childhood was not too happy, and he confirms her suspicions, leading her to want to comfort him but deciding not to (see "Quotes", p. 92). Lizabeth also realizes that part of what's holding her back from giving herself completely to Matt is the fact that he's "just a carpenter." Meanwhile, Matt continues to flirt with her, joking that a lot of fairies (of the sort that he thinks she still wants to be) were highly promiscuous. She comments that there are undoubtedly fairies who are more sexually oriented than others.



Chapters 3 and 4 Analysis

In terms of genre, a key noteworthy element in this section is the increasing sexual tension between the two central characters, evident in both the witty dialogue and the plot, which brings Lizabeth and Matt together under a variety of mostly comic circumstances. At the same time, another genre-related element is the internal, emotional resistance of Lizabeth to that sexual tension, which she probably knows is inevitably going to be relieved at some point. The exploration of how this resistance manifests and what effect it has on the central relationship is an important element to note on the writing level of analysis, in that it propels the plot forward in a classic action/reaction structure. Specifically, Matt acts, leading Lizabeth to react, leading the first character to react with more intensity, leading the second character to react with more intensity, and so on and so on.

A significant element to note on BOTH levels of analysis is the introduction of the flasher sub-plot, which creates a sense of mystery and draws the reader further into the action - a particularly important development in novels of this genre since the outcome of the romance plot is essentially a foregone conclusion. A key component of that sense of suspense is Lizabeth's sense that she finds something about the flasher familiar, which in the tradition of mystery plotting and sub-plotting everywhere, foreshadows the ultimate resolution of the mystery. Other significant points of foreshadowing in this section (functioning on the writing level of analysis) include - the dog's stealing of the ham, which foreshadows the important role played by the dog in the buildup to the novel's climax, and the hints of Matt's troubled childhood, which foreshadow a key point in the climax of the romance plot.



Chapters 5 and 6

Chapters 5 and 6 Summary

Chapter 5 - This chapter begins with Elsie and Lizabeth waiting up late at night to catch sight of the flasher. Their patience is eventually rewarded, and Elsie makes racy comments about how "under developed" he seems to be. The next day Matt, against Lizabeth's objections, installs a home illumination and security system, which Elsie sets off the following night, when the flasher returns despite heavy rain. Both Lizabeth and Elsie react with something close to pity, he seems so pathetic.

The next day at the work site as the rain continues, Lizabeth and Matt pick their way across a rain-sodden, would-be lawn to get to Matt's truck. "Boards had been laid," narration comments, "from the small cement front porch, across the quagmire ... Matt walked across without thinking, as surefooted as a mountain goat, and Lizabeth tiptoed behind him, using her arms for balance ... wondering at what point in her life she'd lost her sense of daring ..." Matt taunts her into dancing like a fairy, which she does, getting soaking wet in the process. As Matt takes her to his apartment to change into some dry clothes, she reveals that the flasher came again in the night. Matt angrily decides to stay the night at Lizabeth's and to break every bone in the flasher's body if he comes back. Lizabeth taunts him about being too macho, and he responds with pleasure - it seems being macho isn't such a bad thing. At Matt's townhouse, Lizabeth discovers he keeps a Harley Davidson motorcycle in his living room because he doesn't have a garage, that his house is a mess, and that his office is in his home because his business partner, Frank, has been in the hospital, and Matt's been running things out of his home. After a few minutes of habitual tidying, Lizabeth remembers she's soaking wet and cold. Matt offers her his shower, and she indulges herself in a long, steamy, child-free sojourn in the bathroom. When she comes out, wearing only a towel, Matt finds her too attractive to resist, and Lizabeth realizes she doesn't want to resist any more. They make passionate love, twice (see "Quotes", p. 121), and then Matt convinces her to go for a ride on his motorcycle - "the next best thing to good sex." Her last words as they ride off are to remind him that she's a mother.

Chapter 6 - Lizabeth's sons react with excitement when their mother pulls up on a Harley, but Lizabeth herself isn't so sure she had a good time. Matt tries to reassure her, but she remains uncertain. Later that night, after Elsie and Matt have fallen asleep waiting for the flasher to show, Lizabeth becomes concerned over what Matt might do, and when she sees the flasher, tries to warn him off. At the sound of her voice, Matt wakes up, chases the flasher and tackles him to the ground, but Ferguson, the dog, interferes and the flasher gets away on Matt's motorcycle. Elsie grabs Matt and Lizabeth and chases after the flasher in Elsie's Cadillac, picking up a police tail on the way. The flasher pulls into a neighborhood driveway and runs off. The disgusted Elsie slams on her brakes and is rear-ended by the police, who accept Lizabeth's explanation and allow all three to go home.



The next day, Matt asks for Lizabeth's help in finding some missing paperwork. She goes through his office and realizes that he's let the business get badly behind. He recognizes her efficiency and value, and promotes her to office manager. She spends the day sorting out his desk, in the process discovering a letter that Matt tells her is from his money-grubbing father. Later, Matt takes Lizabeth home on the Harley, only to find that her husband Paul has come for a visit. She enjoys shocking him with the Harley, with the state of her home, with Matt, and with Elsie, whom Paul can't stand, and invites him to dinner. Jason and Billy are completely awkward and silent around their father, leading Matt to angrily think about how great the boys are and how Matt wants to be a good father to them. Meanwhile, Paul surprises everyone by announcing that he's come to take the boys for their two-week vacation with him, agreed to in the divorce. As narration reveals that he's rarely been in touch and completely missed Jason's birthday, Elsie forces her way into accompanying them on the vacation, saying she committed to stay with the boys all summer and that's what she fully intends to do. Paul grudgingly accepts her "offer."

Chapters 5 and 6 Analysis

On the level of genre analysis, the noteworthy element of this section is the way in which the narrative propels the relationship forward by having the characters give in to their sexual desire. In more conservative novels of the genre, sexual consummation of a relationship might not come until after marriage, if it enters into the narrative at all. This novel walks a fine line between a more contemporary portrayal of sexuality and traditional conservatism. It's important to note, for example, that there are no swear words, no overly-graphic depictions of sex, and no crude descriptions of genitalia. In other words, there is a certain coyness and/or idealism at work in the description of the sex act, a stylistic choice that is also a key element on the second/writing level of analysis. For further consideration of this question, see "Topics for Discussion - Consider the novel's attitude ..."

Meanwhile, there are several other elements to note on the writing level of analysis. Most important of these is the development of further complications in the relationship with the introduction of the Harley and Lizabeth's preconceptions of what the Harley means while at the same time more reasons are presented for the union of the relationship—such as sexual compatibility, Matt's sensitivity and passion to protect Lizabeth. This last is vividly portrayed in contrast to Paul's coldness and tendency to be judgmental. At this point in the narrative, the reader might well be justified in thinking that Lizabeth should, in no uncertain terms, get over herself and see how good Matt is for her. It is, however, one of the novel's strengths that Lizabeth's concerns don't come across as contrived, as being put in place simply for their own sake. The presence of Paul, vividly portrayed as he is, functions to illustrate clearly why Lizabeth is so cautious - she has been wounded deeply, and is justified in protecting herself. Meanwhile, for further consideration of the symbolic value of the Harley, see "Objects/Places - Matt's Harley."



Also on the writing level of analysis, the introduction of Paul functions to develop one of the novel's secondary themes, exploring the relationship between fathers and sons. This theme is also developed through exploration of the difficult relationship between Matt and his father (see "Themes - Fathers and Sons"). Finally on this level, the narrative in this section introduces one of the book's few metaphors when Matt leads Lizabeth across the boards in the rain. For further consideration of this aspect of the book, see "Topics for Discussion - What are the symbolic and/or metaphoric resonances ..."



Chapter 7

Chapter 7 Summary

In the hours after her sons leave with their father, Lizabeth feels sad and alone, but Matt comforts her with some things he brought from home, including some movies and a DVD player. Matt's taste for movies containing graphic violence causes some friction in that Lizabeth doesn't enjoy those sorts of films and doesn't want her sons exposed to them. Their differences are quickly resolved, however, and they make love three times. Later, Lizabeth and Matt are awakened by the rapping of pebbles on the window - the flasher. Their attempts to ignore him are thwarted when the flasher throws a shoe through the window, causing Matt, still fully naked, to leap out of bed and out of the house in hot pursuit. He's tackled by the patrolling police, who mistake his nakedness for the flasher's. Lizabeth covers him up with a robe, and covers up the fact that she had a naked man staying with her by telling the neighbors he's her husband. The neighbors react happily, and jump to the conclusion that the impending barbecue is a celebration of the marriage. Again, the police let her and Matt go and they return to the house, where a sudden, intense argument flares up over Matt's impulsive, protective behavior - an argument that suddenly resolves when Matt suggests they could actually get married (see "Quotes", p. 170). They calm down enough to go to bed, and Lizabeth wakes the next morning fearful that Matt's absence from the bed means he's angry and leaving her. Her fearful thoughts are interrupted by the arrival of an unexpected visitor at the front door, who turns out to be a window repairman hired by a man in a suit with a paper bag over his head - the flasher.

Later that day, Lizabeth goes to the job site, where she realizes that the house that Matt and his partner had been working on is almost finished. As she's considering what this will mean for Matt's company and for their relationship, she overhears a message being left on Matt's answering machine from an angry older man who doesn't leave his phone number. After spending several hours clearing out the on-site office, Lizabeth is surprised and excited to see Matt, sexy in a well-cut suit, come in from a series of meetings. Lizabeth realizes that he is in effect a CEO, running a large and growing construction firm. For his part, Matt confesses that he hates wearing a suit, asks her to stay on and help in administration, and then says he wants to go home - although which home (hers or his) he doesn't know. All he knows, he says, is that he wants to get out of the suit.

Chapter 7 Analysis

On the genre level of analysis, this chapter continues the simultaneous development of obstacles to the relationship, incentives for the relationship to continue, and complications that make decisions about the future of the relationship difficult. The specifics of all three of these components manifest on the writing level of analysis. In this case, obstacles are mostly internal (emotional) - specifically, Lizabeth's fears and



prejudices, specifically, her objection to Matt's taste in violent movies. Incentives, thanks to developments in this chapter, now include professional compatibility, mutual respect and mutual need. Complications include the views of the neighbors. This last is particularly effective, in that the neighbors' perspective functions simultaneously as an obstacle for Lizabeth, in that she's striving to achieve separation from Matt and the neighbors' attitude makes that more difficult and an incentive for Matt, in that it gives him more ammunition in his pursuit of Lizabeth.

Other elements functioning on the writing level of analysis include the overheard answering machine message, which turns out to be from Matt's father, making it a development in the secondary fathers/sons theme, and the surprising appearance of the flasher-paid repairman, which adds an intriguing layer of intrigue to the ongoing mystery sub-plot.



Chapter 8

Chapter 8 Summary

After an uncomfortable, argumentative evening, Matt ends up in Lizabeth's bed in spite of her having told him she doesn't want him there; he tried sleeping in Jason's, but his weight broke it. After a bit more arguing, they end up making love ... but in the morning, Lizabeth comes to the conclusion that she's got to let him go (see "Quotes", p. 184). She's a mother first and foremost, she thinks, and she also wants to make an independent life for herself. If she married Matt, she theorizes, he'd get lost. Her reverie is interrupted by the smell of smoke and the arrival of firemen. She races downstairs only to discover that the well-intentioned but kitchen-challenged Matt started to make breakfast, but the grease of the bacon caught fire and set the entire kitchen ablaze. For a few moments Lizabeth is struck silent, but then recovers enough to start planning the improvements she wants to make to her new kitchen. Later a new bed arrives, followed by a wedding gift from a neighbor, and Lizabeth realizes she has no choice - she's stuck with him, at least for a while.

Late that night, Lizabeth decides to burn off some excess sexual energy by going for a jog. Matt decides to go with her, and eventually outruns her - he's in much better shape. As they're coming home, and as they're striking a deal that she'll teach him to cook and he'll help her exercise, they notice a man with a paper bag on his head climbing a vine to a neighbor's house. Matt chases the man down, only to find that the man was only trying to spice up his sex life by pretending to be the flasher.

When Matt and Lizabeth get back to the house, they discover that Elsie and the boys have returned early. They describe a series of comic misadventures which led Paul to quickly become fed up with them, while they became fed up with him when they learned he only wanted them there to be present at a photo opportunity.

Chapter 8 Analysis

This chapter continues the two-level process (genre-wise and writing-wise) established in earlier chapters, developing the tension between and within the characters (well, within Lizabeth), by developing obstacles, incentives and complications. Again, the obstacles are mostly internal (Lizabeth's indecisiveness); the incentives are external (Matt's evident, if somewhat misguided, desire to take care of Lizabeth), and the complications (the views of the neighbors), which function as obstacle for Lizabeth and incentive for Matt. It's also important to note, however, that at the end of the chapter, one of Lizabeth's key obstacles (her concern for the well being of her sons) is reinforced - the lack of harmony between Paul and the boys clearly indicates to her that they belong to and with her, and will for the foreseeable future. This reinforces her doubts about whether Matt is the right person to take over as their father.



Also on the writing level of analysis, it's possible to see an additional level of meaning in the admittedly comic encounter with Mr. Hooper. There is the possibility that Mr. Hooper's use of the flasher disguise as a catalyst to improve his sex life can be seen, on some level, as equivalent to the real flasher's functioning as a catalyst, albeit unwittingly, to improve Lizabeth's emotional life.



Chapter 9 and Epilogue

Chapter 9 and Epilogue Summary

Chapter 9 - At the barbecue, Elizabeth feels increasingly guilty about the pile of "wedding presents" accumulating in the house and also worries that because of the number of people there, she's not going to be able to identify the flasher. Soon, however, she spots a man of the right physical type and waves to him. When he waves back with the flasher's characteristic wave, she realizes she's found her man. At that moment, however, Ferguson, the dog, decides to steal a ham brought by one of the guests. When he's chased by Matt and the boys, he runs out into the street and is hit by a car. Elizabeth, Matt and the boys immediately take him to the vet, and while they're waiting for news, Elizabeth is happily surprised and touched when Matt distracts Jason and Billy from their worry by telling them a bit about his troubled childhood as the child of a miner. This leads Elizabeth to realize he's willing and able to share responsibility for raising them in a way that Paul never was.

After they receive word that Ferguson only has a broken leg and is going to be fine, Elizabeth heads home with Matt and the boys. At home, Elizabeth learns that Elsie has identified the man both women believe to have been the flasher - Richard Hastings. Elizabeth and Matt track him down, and he reveals that he learned her identity from Paul, who told him at a convention that Elizabeth was looking for a husband and that she had a kinky obsession with flashers. He also confesses that the flashing of the neighbor was an accident - he was trying to warn her that she'd left her curtains open while she was changing. "That's a nice neighborhood," he says, unaware of the irony, "but you never know when some weirdo is skulking around." Elizabeth and Matt let him off the hook and drive home. As they approach the house, Elizabeth realizes the time has come to stop resisting what seems totally natural, and agrees to marry Matt. They celebrate their new future by having sex in the garage on the hood of her old beat up car.

Epilogue - Elsie leaves for home, saying she's no longer needed and that she's lonely for a love life. Elizabeth sits on her front porch and twists the new wedding ring on her finger as she worries where Matt and Billy are - they've been out with the Harley far longer than they usually are. As Jason comes out and complains that he's not out on the bike, Matt returns with a new boat being pulled by a new car. He explains that he thought Elizabeth might be happier with the boat than with the bike, that he had some money saved up, and that he's going to use what's left for college funds for the boys. As Billy excitedly tells her about how fast the boat can go, Matt murmurs in Elizabeth's ear that riding the boat is "the next best thing to good sex."

Chapter 9 and Epilogue Analysis

On the first level of analysis, Chapter 9 and the Epilogue bring events to the inevitable close inherent in the novel's genre-defined opening, situation, and central relationship -



in other words, the lovers end up happily ever after. The circumstances of that coming together (essentially, the climax of the novel's main plot) are defined by elements functioning mostly on the writing level of analysis - Lizabeth's internally defined obstacles are finally transcended as the result of Matt's actions, in that he gives her incentive (i.e., caring for her sons) to let the obstacles to marrying Matt go. It's interesting to note here that these actions are not taken with the direct intent of influencing Lizabeth - Matt does what he does out of concern and/or regard for the welfare of her sons. He wins her over indirectly. It's also interesting to note the way other carefully foreshadowed elements all play a role in defining this moment - specifically, the irrepressible greed of Ferguson the dog and the thematic exploration of the relationship between fathers and sons. This last is particularly noteworthy, in that Matt turns a bad example of that relationship (his own dealings with his father) into a lesson for creating a good version (his dealings with the boys), which in turn serves as the final tool towards lowering Lizabeth's resistance. The crafting of this chapter serves as an excellent example of the way disparate elements can be brought together - the way loose ends can be effectively, and even movingly, tied up.

Meanwhile, the mystery sub-plot is also resolved, in a way that leaves no doubt that Lizabeth is right to include Matt rather than Paul as the father figure in her sons' lives. Finally, the second of the novel's two mechanical metaphors appears in the epilogue. The boat represents (as did the Harley - see "Objects/Places - Matt's Harley"), a kind of freedom that, while not exactly Lizabeth's long dreamed of fairy wings, does in fact give her soul the capacity to fly.



Characters

Lizabeth Kane

Lizabeth is the novel's central character and protagonist, a character that some might describe as a "typical" female heroine for a romance novel such as this - attractive, romantically wounded, independent minded but full of longing for her ideal man to come into her life and make her feel loved. That longing is clearly grounded in her past - specifically, in her pampered but lonely childhood as the daughter of a wealthy industrialist, and in her troubled marriage with her husband Paul (see below). The resolution of the novel, in which Lizabeth's longing is finally fulfilled, is therefore as much a healing of her past as it is a happy movement into a previously bleak future.

It's interesting to note how professional fulfillment echoes Lizabeth's personal fulfillment. In the same way as Matt Hallahan (see below) meets her sexual and emotional needs, so does he fulfill her need for a meaningful, well-paying job, a need that like her emotional sexual/needs also has echoes in her past - again, as her father's daughter and her husband's wife as opposed to a woman with her own identity. The third major component in Lizabeth's transformation is the awakening of her sexuality and sensuality, again at the hands of Matt Hallahan and again a necessary awakening because of her experiences with her less than affectionate father and less than sexually affectionate husband. In short, in spite of Lizabeth's "typicalness" and in spite of her journey of transformation taking place with the context of a sometimes disparaged form of writing (the "romance" novel), her journey from emptiness to fulfillment might be seen as fully archetypal.

Matt Hallahan

In the same way as Lizabeth is in some ways a "typical" romance-novel heroine, Matt is in many ways a "typical" romance-novel hero, and as such might well be defined as an antagonist, in that he is the character who, through various types of confrontation, triggers the greatest and most substantial change in Lizabeth (the protagonist). To be specific, he confronts her with open affection, direct sexuality, and demands for honesty, all of which trigger the various levels of her personal transformation as described above. Extremely attractive physically, nurturing emotionally, and in clear need of a so-called "woman's influence" in his life, Matt is a somewhat more idealized character than Lizabeth, and is perhaps defined as much by the author's interest in creating a character that her probable target readers, women, would themselves find desirable as by the demands of plot and narrative. Like Lizabeth, Matt comes with past wounds that the relationship between the two helps to heal - and also like Lizabeth, a troubled relationship with a father figure is a key component in that wounding (for further consideration of this aspect of the novel, see "Themes -Parents and Children"). Matt's version of this relationship is somewhat under-developed, particularly when juxtaposed with the more well-developed aspects of his character - specifically, the contrast



between him and Lizabeth's ex-husband Paul (see below). The differences (particularly their respective relationships with Lizabeth's two sons) between the two men are portrayed in broad, but nonetheless effective and above all consistently present, strokes. Matt's relationship with his father is portrayed in an equally broad fashion, but tends to disappear from the narrative for long stretches and, as such, occasionally comes across as almost an afterthought.

Billy Kane

Billy is Lizabeth's ten year old son. Like his brother Jason, Billy isn't particularly individualized as a character, but neither boy has to be. Both are catalysts, serving as the focus (rationalization?) for Lizabeth's fears, the triggers for Paul's revealing of himself as a selfish loser, and the means by which Matt's full and compassionate humanity is climatically revealed.

Jason Kane

Jason is Lizabeth's eight year old son. Both he and Billy are rambunctious, affectionate with their mother, uneasy around their biological father, Paul Kane, and overjoyed when the rugged, affectionate, playful Matt Hallahan comes into their lives.

Elsie Hawkins

Elsie is Lizabeth's elderly, eccentric, willful aunt. Outspoken and compassionate, she is Lizabeth's confidante and ally, urging her to take steps and see truths that she (Lizabeth) might otherwise be unwilling and/or unable to take and/or see.

Howie White, Benny Newfarmer, Bucky Moyer, Oliver Roth

These four are employees of Matt Hallahan's construction firm. They each appear in only one or two scenes and are mostly not individualized, universally coming across as somewhat comic and rather chauvinistic. A sexual pass at Lizabeth made by Oliver Roth is the catalyst for Lizabeth falling into the cement at the beginning of Chapter 3.

Officer Dooley

Local police officer Dooley responds to Lizabeth's calls for assistance in finding the mysterious flasher and is the police officer placed in charge of the case. His amused tolerance of Lizabeth's family's escapades enables Matt to remain out of jail and therefore free to continue his romantic pursuit of Lizabeth.



The Flasher (Richard Hastings)

For much of the narrative, the identity of the flasher is a secret - he appears in Lizabeth's yard, naked (except for a tie, a pair of sneakers, and a paper bag over his head) and harassing. The narrative eventually reveals that he is an acquaintance of Paul Kane, Lizabeth's ex-husband, duped by Kane into playing what he Richard thinks is a kinkily attractive trick on her. The narrative doesn't indicate whether he ends up facing criminal prosecution for his actions.

Paul Kane

Paul is Lizabeth's ex-husband, described by narration in the novel's early chapters as emotionally stifling and politically ambitious. When he shows up (Chapter 5) to take Jason and Billy to his home for a visit, his actions bear out the impression conveyed by that narration, and a reader is likely to feel a vague sense of satisfied justice when the narrative reveals the overwrought state in which the visit by his boisterous sons leaves him.

Ferguson

Ferguson is Lizabeth's dog, a large, mischievous, terminally hungry mutt whose injury in Chapter 9 when he's hit by a car becomes a catalyst for the final, relationship-establishing connection between Matt and Elizabeth.



Objects/Places

Chase Mills, Pennsylvania

Protagonist Lizabeth makes her home here after her divorce from her oppressive ex-husband. It's a small, quiet town, perfect for her rest and healing but still within easy driving distance of larger urban centers like Philadelphia.

Lizabeth's House

This is the run-down character home, a "fixer-upper," in which Lizabeth and her family live and which Matt helps her turn into a realization of her dreams. For further consideration of the metaphoric value of the house, see "Topics for Discussion - In what ways ..."

Matt's Motorcycle

Matt's prized Harley Davidson motorcycle is an important symbol - of power, of excitement, of sexuality, and of freedom. As such, it's simultaneously a threat to Lizabeth's fear-bred sense of safety and a trigger for the release of her own power, excitement (for life), sexuality, and freedom.

Elsie's Cadillac

Elsie's car, as equally prized by her as Matt's motorcycle is by him, is for her a symbol of many of the same things, principally excitement and freedom. For Lizabeth's sons, the car represents the playful, mischievous times they have with their great aunt. For Lizabeth, the car is the focus for the somewhat exasperated affection she feels for her favorite female relative.

Matt's Townhouse

The townhouse is Matt's home, his office, and the garage for his motorcycle. Messy and disorganized, the townhouse is also the setting for the first time Lizabeth and Matt make love.

Matt's Worksite

This lane of new houses being built by Matt's construction company is the setting for many of the novel's key moments. These include the first meeting between Lizabeth and Matt, their metaphor-rich crossing of the muddy grounds (see "Topics for



Discussion - What are the symbolic ..."), and the angry, manipulative voice mail message left by a man that the reader comes to understand is Matt's father.

Lizabeth's Kitchen

When Matt makes an effort at being domestic by trying to cook Lizabeth's breakfast, he accidentally sets the kitchen on fire. Its destruction symbolizes and foreshadows the eventual destruction of Lizabeth's fears about him and their relationship, while her immediately decisive plans for renovation and the eventual completion of that renovation represent the way she's prepared to "renovate" her life as the result of her relationship with Matt.

Matt's Videos

Like his motorcycle, Matt's collection of violence-themed videos serves as a focus for Lizabeth's preconceptions about him and what she believes to be his lack of qualifications to be a quality father figure for her sons.

Matt's Suit

Matt's appearance in an expensive suit (see Chapter 7) brings Lizabeth to a key realization - that he is not only a contractor but the owner of a successful business. This realization leads to others - that she has, on some level, been avoiding the development of their relationship out of a kind of snobbery, that that snobbery does them both a disservice, and that Matt is exactly the kind of successful, determined, responsible man she wants as a father figure for her sons.

The New Boat

The boat purchased by Matt as a replacement for his motorcycle (see above) is an important manifestation of several of his key desires - to change for Lizabeth's sake, to respect her feelings and those of her children, and to continue bringing excitement, freedom and playfulness into all their lives.

Themes

Personal Fulfillment through Romance

The central theme of this novel is, essentially, the theme of romance in general and the romance genre of narrative in particular - that passionate, selfless, mutual love is the source of true happiness. Personal troubles, relationship issues, suffering triggered by a traumatic past - it can all be healed, according to the basic premises of the genre, by true love. The specifics of how this theme is played out may vary - not all heroines, for example, are single mothers like Lizabeth, and not all heroes have the troubled past that Matt does. In the thematic template of the genre, all heroes and heroines are opened to a broader experience of themselves, of love, and of passion, and end up happier as a result. If they're not broadened, and if they're not happier, then it's not romance - tragedy, comedy, or drama, but not romance.

One of the fundamental criticisms of the genre no matter where its thematic templates are employed (novels such as this one, film, television, poetry) is that its essential premise is unrealistic, that no relationship is as fundamentally happy, right, or fulfilling as the relationships in romance. Criticism of the genre goes further by suggesting that those who absorb and/or buy into this thematic premise are ultimately doing a fundamental disservice to themselves, their relationships and society as a whole - they are unrealistic and essentially shallow. It could be argued, however, that romance as a genre provides incentive, an ideal to which those striving for contentment, happiness and fulfillment can aspire. The challenge lies in the challenge of using romance as a tool, rather than as an inflexible standard - a means, rather than an end.

Leaving the Past Behind

This secondary theme is a manifestation of the above-described primary theme. Both Lizabeth and Matt have troubled pasts they wish to transcend - Lizabeth has the after-effects of her privileged childhood and stifling first marriage, while Matt has his resentment and anger over his difficult relationship with his father. Both are somewhat able to heal from and move beyond their pasts as the result of finding true, romantic, ideal love. In other words, the love they each find in the other, as well as the capacity to love they find in themselves, prove to be the catalyst for putting the past in the past where it belongs, the catalyst that time alone couldn't be.

It is possible that this secondary theme is developed in the novel's exploration of the relationship between Lizabeth's sons and their biological father, Paul. This difficult relationship has left the boys uneasy with father figures - or, at the very least, eager for a man they see as a more likely father figure to come into their lives. Thus, in the same way as Matt's romantic love for Lizabeth helps them both to transcend their pasts, his paternal love for Lizabeth's sons helps them transcend their fearful, repressed past with their biological father. It also works to heal Matt, in that his resentments about his



relationship with his father are eased by his determination to be, and skill at being, a better father than his ever was. Finally, Matt's loving paternalism also helps Lizabeth transcend her past in another way, in that her initial resistance to Matt's presence in her sons' lives is based on preconceptions which are, after all, nothing more or less than wrong-headed beliefs based in past experience. Seeing Matt and her sons relate in the way they do helps Lizabeth transcend her previous beliefs about the way men like Matt did relate to their sons.

Parents and Children

There are several manifestations of this theme throughout the novel. First, there is the relationship between Lizabeth and her wealthy father, in which Lizabeth was both physically pampered and emotionally neglected. Both aspects of her childhood affect her in adulthood, as she strives for independence and self-determination for herself, and a healthy emotional relationship with her own sons.

Second, there is the relationship between Matt and his father, a relationship that feels somewhat underdeveloped and underused, but when aspects of it do appear they clearly make their point - that Matt had, and continues to have, a tense relationship with his father, a fact that directly affects the openness and warmth he determinedly displays towards Lizabeth's sons.

Third, there is the relationship between Lizabeth's sons and their biological father, which is in some ways a direct parallel to Matt's relationship with his father and which in other ways is the exact opposite of the kind of relationship Matt wants to have with the boys. Finally, there is the relationship between Elsie and Lizabeth. There is the sense that Elsie is something of a surrogate mother for the younger woman - Lizabeth's biological mother is rarely mentioned, if ever, and the friendly, unguarded intimacy between the two women comes across as being very much the ideal sort of relationship that Lizabeth, and perhaps many women in the novel's core audience, would have wanted. In other words, the relationship between Lizabeth and Elsie, like the relationship between Matt and Lizabeth's sons, is perhaps another manifestation of the idealized, genre-defined and thematically-central romanticism discussed above.



Style

Point of View

The narrative is written from the third person, limited omniscience point of view. Its primary focus is on Lizabeth, her perceptions, thoughts, actions and reactions. It also focuses on the same aspects of Matt's character, but to a lesser degree. In other words, the reader comes to know more about Lizabeth than about Matt, but enough about Matt to give him both depth and appeal. A possible reason for this particular narrative choice might be the apparent target audience for this novel, and indeed for many narratives (film, television, plays) of this genre - women. There is a sense that the novel's narrative focus takes the form it does so that readers can have a central character with which they can, and perhaps want to, identify.

In storytelling terms, the choice of giving both central characters a degree of narrative focus means that right from the beginning, the reader is fully aware of the attraction they feel for each other - its intensity, its sources, and perhaps most importantly the reasons why each character is determined to resist it. The result of this choice is to draw the reader fully, almost irresistibly, into the story - the reader wants to know not if but when and how the two central characters will get together emotionally and/or sexually. This technique, like the point of focus as defined above, is typical of the genre, and also manifests in other so-called "romantic" narratives.

Setting

The novel is set in contemporary, small town America. This is noteworthy for two reasons. First, a contemporary setting allows for a freer exploration of sexuality between the two characters - specifically, allowing them the opportunity to freely experience and to act upon their sexual attraction to each other. This is important because Matt's awakening of Lizabeth's sexual potential plays a key role in freeing her from her past, helping her embrace her present, and helping her define the freedom in her future. Placing the narrative in any decade earlier than the 1960's would impose conditions of "propriety" on both the characters' choices and on the author's ability to narrate both the choices and their consequences. The point is not made to suggest that characters in earlier romance novels didn't have sexual feelings, or that they didn't act on them, but that characters (particularly women) weren't, for the most part, free to be comfortable and/or eager about sexual expression without fear of judgment - from other characters, from readers, and/or from critics.

The second reason the setting is important relates to its small-town atmosphere. First, small towns, in narrative and (to a certain degree) in reality, are perceived as havens of peace and simplicity, two traits particularly important to Lizabeth - for their value in helping her healing process, and for their value in raising her sons in a good environment. Second, small towns are notorious, again in narrative and in reality, for



people knowing each other's business. This aspect of small town life puts a certain degree of pressure on Lizabeth, putting her in a place of having to consider what the town will think of her in terms of how she raises her sons and how she relates to Matt. She feels she has not only herself and her sons but her community to keep in mind as she copes with her feelings for her undeniably desirable boss.

Language and Meaning

The language of the narrative might most relevantly be described as "breezy" - light, humorous, occasionally thoughtful and even moving, but ultimately without a great deal of intensity. Even potentially dramatic moments such as the appearances of the flasher, Lizabeth's troubled history with Paul, Matt's revelations about his painful past, and the injury to Ferguson the dog are narrated with a lightness of touch that keeps things from getting too heavy. This is very much in keeping with the novel's overall narrative intention and with the intention of other narratives of this genre - to provide the reader with what is essentially an escapist, romantic, idealistic entertainment. There is also some sense that this use of language relates to the narrative's essential point - that there is nothing in life so serious that it cannot, or will not, be made eventually better by true love and romance. This is not necessarily negative - narratives of this genre offer an experience, as fleeting and as unrealistic as it might be, of joy, of hope, and of optimism. Romance is, by definition, idealistic, an experience of what sustains a human being emotionally (as opposed to physically and even spiritually) through difficult times. Narratives anchored in romance are on some level deeply and archetypally affirming, and this one is no exception. The presence of such affirmation, particularly when juxtaposed with familiar sources of human pain such as those included in *Smitten* (divorce, troubled relationships with parents) may very well create the sense in the reader, at least for a moment or two, that life isn't always so bad.

Structure

Overall, the narrative is structured in a straightforward, linear manner. Events move in a progression from A to B to C, beginning (the job interview) to middle (development of the relationship) to end (the marriage and happily ever after). Within that progression, there is a clear sense of momentum, of narrative tension building in parallel with the sexual and emotional tension between the characters, bringing both the characters and the reader to several points of climax. Narratives of this genre often employ, and benefit from, a "two steps forward one step back" sensibility, a sense that while the ending may very well be inevitable (as the result of foundations laid by the genre), the journey to that ending will be, like life in general and romance in particular, somewhat bumpy but worth the ride.

There may well be a relationship between this simplicity of structure and the use of language explored above. In the same way as a lightness of touch can create a sense of optimism and idealism in a reader, a straightforward structure ultimately defined by an inevitable happy ending can create a sense that "everything will work out in the end," in

the little picture of this little romance and in the bigger picture of life in general. A narrative, genre-defined or not, that uses this kind of straightforward, linear, happy-ending structure ultimately suggests this philosophical perspective, that no matter what goes wrong, no matter how much we feel unable to trust what feels right, what's true and healthful and affirming will always triumph.



Quotes

"... even though two decades and several years had gone by since [she] first decided to be a fairy, even though Lizabeth Kane now stood five feet six inches tall in her stocking feet, even though she was thirty two years old - she still had aspirations of growing up to be a fairy." p.2

"[Matt] looked at [Lizabeth's] left hand. No ring. He was doomed. How could he refuse a job to a woman who was about to barbecue Spot to keep her kids from starving?" p. 8

"[Lizabeth] wasn't about to be fooled by the crease in [Matt's] jeans. Anyone with eyebrow like that and a tattoo on his arm had to be part barbarian." p. 20

"[Matt] was jealous of [Lizabeth], he realized. She had two kids and a wacky aunt, a dog, a cat, a house she loved. She had a future that was filled to the brim with life. Somehow he hadn't fashioned that for himself." p. 37

"I used to buy T-shirts with my name written on them, hoping once in a while people would call me Lizabeth." Lizabeth to Matt, p. 50.

"What was [Lizabeth] supposed to do with him? She could hardly invite him up to her bedroom. Maybe he would want to take her back to his apartment. Maybe he wouldn't be able to wait that long. Maybe he'd drag her off into the bushes or lay her out on the picnic table. She hated to admit it, but the picnic table sounded incredibly erotic." p. 61

"The closer [Matt] held [Lizabeth] the more dissatisfied he felt ... he was never able to get enough of her. Never enough talking, never enough laughing, never enough loving." p. 73

"Her life was immeasurably richer since Matt had come into it. Okay, so if it was so much richer, why was she so worried? What was the problem? The problem kept slipping away from her. That didn't mean it didn't exist, she told herself. All it meant was that she wasn't able to nail it down." p. 76

"It was so much easier with children, [Lizabeth] thought. You could ease their hurt with a kiss and by holding them close. You could tuck a little boy under your arm and read him a book and chase all the dragons away, but men ... had a strange ego that one had to contend with. And they had weird ideas about what represented weakness." p. 92

"Matt was a ride down a white-water canyon. Danger had its upside, she decided. There was nothing like an occasional shot of adrenaline to spice up your life." p. 105

"Her first thought, when she was finally capable of thought, was that she no longer gave a damn about being a fairy. She'd just been to the top, and anything else, fairy wings included, would be cold potatoes." p. 121.



"When [Matt] was eighteen, he'd literally run away from his past. In some ways he was still running. Always would be." p. 138.

"The thought of having a brief romance with [Matt] held absolutely no appeal. They weren't merely lovers. They were in love, and they were tiptoeing around marriage. At least she was tiptoeing, Elizabeth thought. Matt was stomping straight ahead. Matt could afford to stomp straight ahead. He didn't have two children to consider." p. 159.

"A lifetime of Matt Hallahan grinning at her over the morning paper. A lifetime of warm sheets, and double-dares, and fresh doughnuts from the bakery. He'd protect her from dragons and flashers and hold her close while he slept. And he'd love her long into the night, whispering outrageous suggestions and words of endearment." p. 170

"Sometimes love just wasn't enough, she thought. Sometimes there were differences that couldn't be bridged. Sometimes there were personalities that couldn't adapt. Some people simply weren't meant to be married. Maybe she was one of those people." p. 184

"Elizabeth let herself relax into him. They were at a party, and they were supposed to be married. And she wanted to indulge herself, even if it was just for a moment. She'd kept him at arm's length for the past few days, but her heart wasn't in it. The truth is, she wanted Matt Hallahan like she'd never wanted anything in her life, and she was feeling downright deprived." p. 210-211.

"[Elizabeth] was physically and mentally exhausted, but she felt at peace. It was as if she'd tossed a box of puzzle pieces into the air, and when the pieces had fallen to the ground they'd all fit together." p. 226



Topics for Discussion

Consider the novel's attitude towards sexuality, as first discussed in relation to Chapters 5 and 6. Is it realistic and/or appropriate to portray pre-marital sexual relations in a novel of this genre? Why or why not?

Discuss the importance of sexuality in relationships in general. How important a factor is it in intimate relationships? Is there too much emphasis placed on it in contemporary culture (literary, film, etc)? Why or why not?

What are the symbolic and/or metaphoric resonances of Matt and Lizabeth's journey across the mud in Chapter 5? What is evoked in terms of their respective characters and their relationship by the narration of this incident?

In what ways does the condition of Lizabeth's house echo her spiritual/emotional condition? In what ways do the transformations to the house reflect transformations in Lizabeth's life?

Are you a romantic? Why or why not? What does romance mean to you? What is the place of romance in popular culture? What is the value of romance in life?

Consider the basic outlines of *Smitten*'s plot - boy and girl meet, boy and girl are attracted, boy and girl encounter obstacles to their desire to be together, boy and girl overcome obstacles, boy and girl form a lasting, "happy ever after" relationship. What other narratives fit into those outlines? In what ways do stories defined by those outlines themselves define contemporary culture? Societal beliefs about relationships? Personal beliefs about relationships?

Consider the novel's frequent references to Lizabeth's desire to be a fairy - in particular, the quote from p. 2. What do you think it is about the so-called "fairy life" that appeals to her? Does she want her life to be a "fairy tale"? How do these ideals and images of her life define her actions throughout the novel? Is it fair to say that her life, as portrayed her, is in fact a fairy tale? Why or why not?