

Stories Study Guide

Stories by Doris Lessing

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The Habit of Loving, The Woman, Through the Tunnel

The Habit of Loving, The Woman, Through the Tunnel Summary

George Talbot is sixty and living in London when he discovers that the woman he's had an affair with for several years, Myra, is not willing to return to him. She's moved to Africa while he was out of the country and she tells him that she is happy there. He convinces her to spend two weeks with him, but at the end of that time, she returns to Africa, ending their relationship. George flounders and doesn't know what to do with his time. He calls on his ex-wife and asks her to marry him. She tells him that she's about to be married to someone else. They talk about their failed relationship and she tells him that his affairs while they were married is the cause of their divorce. He continues to fight heartache, first taking it for physical illness. After awhile, he does become sick and is told that he should be in the hospital. He refuses and calls on his ex-wife to help him find a nurse. She refers a woman named Bobby Tippitt. She's in her late thirties and has been somewhat involved in theatre. As a producer, critic and former actor, George offers to make some calls in order to help Bobby get work. When he's over his illness, she continues to live with him and he marries her, eventually helping her get a role in a theater production.

After they are married, George finds that Bobby moves away from him in her sleep and he is soon dissatisfied, believing that they aren't as close as they should be. As the story draws to a close, Bobby celebrates her fortieth birthday with only her sister and George present. She's left behind her lovely clothes that are approved by George and wears a frumpy navy suit with heavy shoes, saying that it's time to grow up. George has a terrible ache in his heart again and closes his eyes to avoid looking at her.

In "The Woman", two men who had fought in military campaigns against each other meet on a hotel terrace. Over the course of their conversation, one of them, Herr Scholtz, tells the story of having had an affair with a young woman and that it ends when she tells him that her purpose of the affair was to have a child. The second man, Captain Forster, realizes that Scholtz is making up the story to impress a young woman who is near enough to overhear, but insists that he did have an encounter like that.

In "Through the Tunnel", a young boy named Jerry is visiting the seaside with his mother, a young widow. Jerry, at eleven, still tries to please his mother. She realizes that he needs some freedom, so she works hard to balance her concern for him with giving him room to experience life for himself. This is the reason she agrees to allow him to go to a rather rugged part of the bay while she rests on a nearby beach. When Jerry encounters a group of boys native to the area, he watches as they dive repeatedly, making a long swim through a tunnel in a rock. For days to come, he works at holding his breath long enough to make the dive himself. He has his mother purchase



swimming goggles so that he can see the tunnel better and finally makes the dive through the rock, barely managing to emerge on the other side.

The Habit of Loving, The Woman, Through the Tunnel Analysis

"The Habit of Loving" is typical of the stories written by Lessing. The majority of the stories simply draw to a close, usually by an epiphany discovered, though some of the stories don't really come to any conclusion, exactly as would likely happen in real life. In this story, George finds that he is bitterly unhappy when he's alone and marries the young woman named Bobby. However, he soon discovers that he really has nothing in common with her other than a love of the idea of theater, though the kind of theater they like differs greatly. It's soon evident that he's as alone when he's with her as he was prior to meeting her. This seems to have been a chronic problem for George throughout his life, but this time he decides not to see anyone else, changing his typical behavior of years past. As the story closes, he feels a physical pain in his heart, as he has in other times of great loneliness. Each time he's felt that he might be physically ill and it seems possible that the depression that takes over might lead to physical illness and even death.

The story of "The Woman" is an example of two older men trying to relive their youth. Both are anxious to have the company of a young woman, an employee of the hotel where they are staying, and each is jealous of the attention the woman pays to the other. The woman happens to be on the veranda as the two men meet one day, and one of them, Herr Scholtz, takes the lead in the conversation, apparently seeking to make the young woman jealous. The second man, Captain Forster, is very upset at the turn of the conversation. It seems likely that the Captain really had an encounter such as the one described but Scholtz, and that he hates having the situation ridiculed. Scholtz further ridicules the situation by saying that it never actually happens but that some man made it all up because it's such a good story.

The story of "Through the Tunnel" is truly a coming of age story. The boy, Jerry, is struggling to find himself. When he first meets the boys, he is shy, but the boys welcome him into their group until they discover that he's not local and that there's a language barrier. As he comes to understand that they are closing ranks to exclude him, he makes a fool of himself, horse playing, in an effort to regain their attention and their favor. Even as he's doing it, he realizes that it's something he would do in order to attract his mother's attention and is mortified that he resorted to the juvenile tactic in this situation. As they leave, he cries. His efforts to swim through the tunnel are so taxing that he has nosebleeds. As the date of their departure from the seaside holiday nears, Jerry almost decides that he'll wait until the following year to try the swim through the tunnel, but realizes that he'll probably never do it if he puts it off.



Pleasure, The Witness, The Day Stalin Died, Wine, He

Pleasure, The Witness, The Day Stalin Died, Wine, He Summary

In "Pleasure", Mary and Tommy Rogers plan to go to the south of France on vacation, a trip that had been an annual outing until the previous four years, during which time Mary had gone with her daughter in order to help with her grandchildren. This year, her daughter is going away with "the other grandmother", leaving Mary free to go on vacation with Tommy. As soon as Mary is finished taking the Christmas decorations down, she begins sewing clothing for the trip. She works on this through early summer. When Tommy worries about the cost, she waves the concern aside. She also ignores the suggestion that they should reserve a room. They arrive at the Plaza to find that the cost of rooms is much more expensive than they'd paid in years past and that at that price, their vacation will have to be cut in half. They wind up at a villa with few amenities and return to the Plaza, find the room is no longer available, and return to the villa. They spend their first day on the crowded beach a short distance from where sewage is dumped into the ocean. They sunburn and spend the next few days in the room. When they finally emerge again and go to the beach, Tommy decides that he wants to buy goggles, snorkel and fins. He begins snorkeling while Mary lays on the beach.

One day Mary encounters a young woman named Betty Clarke, who says her husband is also snorkeling. Mary gives in to Tommy's urgings to try it but doesn't like it. Betty often goes out with the men but Mary remains on the beach. One day Tommy says he's invited the Clarkes to dinner. They dine at the Plaza, but Mary is uncomfortable and upset during the meal, saying little. When the Clarkes repay the invitation, Mary declines. As Mary and Tommy leave for home, Mary remains very quiet and Tommy begins to worry. During a layover in Paris, she finds a large bowl and says that it would be perfect for Christmas. Tommy urges her to buy it.

"The Day Stalin Died" is presented in first person from the perspective of a young woman who is working to live in Communism while getting on with her life. In "Wine", a couple are sharing coffee in a coffee shop when the man calls for wine. They don't drink it but spend a great deal of time talking about a particular night one summer when the man was young and turned down the woman's offer of sex.

"He" is the story of two friends, Mary Brooke and Annie Blake. Annie's former husband has left her for another woman, but Mary delivers the message that he wants to come back. He drops in that evening but Annie is furious about the dirt his shoes leave on her clean floor and even more angry when he spills tea. The man realizes her anger and leaves. As soon as he's gone, Annie wishes she had been more lenient on these points and when Mary stops in later, Annie is obviously sad. Mary goes to tell the man this and



to ask him to come see Annie again. Annie realizes that she's committing to spending her time ignoring what she sees as his faults if she's going to accept him back.

Pleasure, The Witness, The Day Stalin Died, Wine, He Analysis

In "Pleasure", the author notes that Mary has two great loves. One of them is the beach in France and the other is obviously the Christmas holidays. Ironically, Betty Clarke's husband says that Betty likes those two things as well, though he says it in something of a depreciating manner that angers Mary. It seems that Mary believes herself too good for people like the Clarkes, though Betty says that meeting new people is a major reason she enjoys her vacation in France. The two women are more alike than Mary would like to admit, and it seems that Mary is longing for her lost youth as she looks at the younger woman.

In "The Witness", Mr. Brooke is past retirement age but continues to work. His reasons are twofold - he doesn't have a way to live without his job and he doesn't have anything else to take up his time. He's an outcast but dreams of being part of the group. This is another theme typical of Lessing's stories. The ending is pure epiphany, in that the young girl who creates so much chaos in the office marries the boss. However, there's a twist in that it's Mr. Brooke himself who prompts her agreement to the proposal. When he enters the room, he finds the boss pleading with her, apparently in the depths of the proposal, and the girl has apparently refused. But when Mr. Brooke walks in, she screams at him that she's marrying the boss. It's likely a reaction from the previous encounter when she goes to his apartment which is really nothing more than a small room.

The story "Wine" is rather confusing in that there seems to little purpose for the story with a confusing story line. It could be interpreted to be a couple reliving their first encounter during a summer when they were very young. The man describes his life as a young man but talks about a girl who came to him, and it seems possible that the girl is the young woman who is with him in the café.



The Eye of God in Paradise

The Eye of God in Paradise Summary

In "The Eye of God in Paradise", a young couple named Hamish Anderson and Mary Parish are visiting a small German resort village referred to only as "O —" that is becoming somewhat commercialized because of all the American soldiers still stationed in the area. Both are doctors and they feel uncomfortable in the country, remembering the destruction wreaked by Hitler just years earlier. They are on the verge of deciding that they'll leave the following day for France but know that their vacation will be greatly shortened because the accommodations in France are much more expensive. As they eat what they believe will be their final dinner in France, they meet a man who identifies himself as Dr. Schroder. He has obviously undergone extensive reconstruction surgery on his face, and when he later points it out to them as being some of the best work in the country, both Mary and Hamish pretend that they hadn't noticed.

Dr. Schroder is very pushy and eventually reveals that he wants Mary and Hamish to pave the way for his move to Britain to practice. He offers to help them move to a village farther up the mountain and they try to decline, but he insists. They plan to leave the country the following day, but their landlady also suggests that they move farther up the mountain to stay with a friend of hers. This friend is the same woman Shroder had mentioned, but Hamish and Mary say that they are much less repulsed by the idea after the woman gives it than when it had come from Shroder. They manage to avoid him as they make the move, but he arrives to visit them a few days later.

Hamish and Mary eventually go to the city where they reconnect with a physician they'd met briefly in Britain, Dr. Kroll. Shroder reappears but is upset by the idea that they are visiting Dr. Kroll. As it turns out, Dr. Kroll runs a mental institution and suffers depression himself. He takes Mary and Hamish on a tour and shows them a children's ward where one little boy is tied to a bed frame with a straightjacket. Other children are lying placidly in bed, most horribly deformed. Hamish and Mary wonder what Kroll might have done as a physician during Hitler's regime. He says simply that things were different but doesn't elaborate. Kroll shows Mary and Hamish a great many paintings he's done with those completed during his times of depression consisting of dark images. He indicates that he prefers those to the paintings that are lighter in mood and cooler. He shows them one painting that is a paradise of blues and greens with a large eye in the middle of the sky. Mary realizes it's "The Eye of God in Paradise". The couple leave, relieved to be back on the bus and headed away from Dr. Koll's hospital.

The Eye of God in Paradise Analysis

Mary and Hamish are uncomfortable almost from the time they arrive in Germany and feel the stigma that's been associated with the country ever since Hitler's atrocities were made public. Mary is obviously of Jewish descent and Hamish's wife had gone to try to



save her family but had disappeared and was presumed dead. Hamish himself had admitted to looking for her face in every woman he sees during his time in the country, a fact that makes Mary angry. Their tension with each other may be contributing to their feeling of dread in the country, but it also seems that they'd expected something other than they've found. They note that the Germans lost the war and that they don't act like the losers. They see Germans out on the town, enjoying themselves and spending a great deal of money while they are barely able to afford their holiday.

Another interesting point about Mary and Hamish are their attitudes toward different people. They find themselves uncomfortable with Dr. Shroder from the moment they meet him. They simply don't like him and try to say that it has nothing to do with his appearance, but it seems likely that they are put off by his looks - the cosmetic surgery job being less than perfect and being very obvious to both Mary and Hamish from their first moments with Shroder. When he suggests that they might move to another location, they find the idea repulsive. When a woman makes the same suggestion, they're suddenly interested. There's another instance of this kind of comparison seen when Mary and Hamish hear Shroder talking politics. They are immediately put off by his attitudes. When they realize that Kroll is overseeing a mental hospital, they know that he probably worked as a physician under Hitler and that he might very well have done experiments, tortured and killed any number of patients placed under his care. However, they look to each other, hoping to find that their suspicions are not true. They are willing to defend this man who was likely a monster, and they have no rationale for the different attitudes.



The Other Woman

The Other Woman Summary

Rose is still living at home with her mother and father when she gets word that her mother has died after being run over by a lorry. She sends word to her father, Jem, then writes a letter to her boyfriend George, though her father says that she should telephone where he works because they could get him a message immediately. George receives the letter and is angry that she hadn't called him. He now realizes that there have been several instances over the three years of his engagement with Rose when he feared that she might be reluctant to marry him. Now the date's been set for the following week, and George's first fear is that she'll use this to delay the wedding. George rushes to Rose's house as soon as he gets the letter the day after her mother's death. He tells Rose that they are family and that he's upset that she didn't call him the day of the accident. Rose is cool and it's quickly clear that she isn't going to marry him. They officially break off the wedding plans with Rose arguing that she can't leave her father, though George counters that Jem can live with them.

Rose begins working on the house, moving things to suit herself, and Jem realizes that she's changing all the things she and her mother had argued about over the years. Soon after her mother's death, Rose takes over her mother's duties. She cleans and cooks as her mother had done, and in the evenings she sits in her mother's chair in the evenings. Rose believes she is happy, though she never thinks about it. As the war approaches, Rose decides to leave her job at a bakery for one at a munitions factory to make more money. Three years after her mother's death, Jem falls at work and hurts his back. Rose urges him to take it easy and he stops work, taking over a great deal of the housework for her. She continues to believe she's happy but notes an emptiness which is greater after she learns that George's wife has given birth to a daughter, Jill.

One day Rose arrives home to find their neighborhood has been bombed and her father dead. A firefighter named Jimmie urges her to leave but she refuses, though the house is virtually destroyed. Jimmie returns several times and eventually convinces her it isn't safe. By now, there's an attraction between them and Rose agrees to move in with Jimmie but he puts her off, saying that he hasn't got an apartment of his own and leading her to believe it's because his neighborhood was also bombed. In reality, he's married. He finds an apartment the next day and Rose moves in. Jimmie begins staying with her a great deal of time. When she comes to realize that he's married, he says that he's asked for a divorce but that his wife won't give him one. Rose argues with him about it occasionally but he continues to put her off.

Rose has discovered that Jill's mother was also killed in the bombings and that Jill is living with her grandmother. Rose goes to visit and the grandmother, who is elderly, agrees that Jill would be better off with Rose. Jimmie is furious, accusing Rose of trying to get custody of Jill in order to get George back, though she says that her time with Jimmie "canceled out" her memories of George. She learns that George is serving in



North Africa and is killed there. Jimmie realizes that Rose wants children of her own but he already has two by his wife and feels jealous of Jill. Rose begins spending most Sundays with Jill, stopping to eat with Jill's grandmother in the evenings. The officials won't let Rose adopt Jill because she can't prove that she can support the girl.

One day Rose is reading the newspaper and finds a story about "the other woman". She knows about Jimmie's wife by now but doesn't feel like "the other woman". Jimmie begins spending time in a bar with a woman named Pearl, which makes Rose angry. He justifies it by saying that she leaves him alone every Sunday to spend time with Jill. Jimmie spends more time with Pearl, taking her out but warning her that he isn't a good person to become involved with, and telling himself that he's clear of any responsibilities for her hurt feelings because of having warned her. Pearl knows about Jimmie's wife and Rose but continues to go out with him anyway.

Rose writes a letter to Jimmie's wife, Mrs. Pearson, inviting her over. Jimmie goes on to bed and is asleep when his wife arrives. She and Rose talk, all but ignoring Jimmie. Mrs. Pearson says that she divorced Jimmie three years earlier and that she's urged Jimmie to marry Rose. Jimmie makes excuses and Mrs. Pearson tells Rose that she plans to open a bakery, then invites Rose to move in with her to help with the business. Rose asks if she can adopt Jill and Mrs. Pearson agrees. Rose waits, hoping that Jimmie will plead with her to stay, but he doesn't, and she leaves with Mrs. Pearson.

The Other Woman Analysis

Rose's reasons for ending the engagement with George are never really clear. She seems to feel some need for having control of her home but it seems that she would have been happy to make a home with George. She also seems to feel some responsibility for her father, but he urges her to think about what she's giving up by not marrying George, and George says that Jem can live with them. Rose apparently argued a great deal with her mother and it may be that she's feeling guilt for that. She comes to regret her decision.

Jimmie continues to be jealous of Rose and the fact that she'd had a long engagement with George despite the fact that he is married and seeing Rose. Jimmie simply isn't happy with himself or his life, and he will spend a great deal of time blaming others for this. He blames Rose for having had a life before he came into it. He wants to have an increase in salary that would occur if he were to pass a test associated with his job, but he can't settle down to study because he doesn't want to have that level of domesticity between himself and Rose - the evenings at home with her quietly sewing while he studies.

Rose's obsession with adopting Jill is probably a desire to grab onto a life that she gave up when she broke her engagement with George. Interestingly, Jimmie thinks that having Rose have a child of her own would likely ease her unhappiness some, but he never makes that step. He is also very angry when Rose talks about adopting Jill.

Jimmie says that Rose is being selfish, but what he really means is that he's not willing to share her time and attention, even if doing so would make Rose happy.



One off the Short List, A Woman on the Roof, How I Finally Lost My Heart, A Man and Two Women

One off the Short List, A Woman on the Roof, How I Finally Lost My Heart, A Man and Two Women Summary

In "One off the Short List" a man name Graham becomes disillusioned with his marriage but discovers that a young woman he's attracted to is not what he'd believed and returns to his wife.

In "A Woman on the Roof", three men are working on a roof in the blistering heat. All three are watching a woman who is sunning herself on a different roof. The three are seventeen-year-old Tom, Stanley who is married and Harry who is forty-five with grown children. The three are having difficulty working in the heat. At one point they go nearer the woman's tanning place. When the woman ignores them, the three men whistle at her, but she continues to ignore them. Her attitude angers all three, but Harry tries to diffuse the situation. When the woman is not there another day, Stanley says that the woman's husband has probably put a stop to her nude sunbathing. Tom dreams about the woman and on the day they complete the job, Tom goes to the woman's roof. She ignores him and his feelings are hurt over it so that he goes away and gets drunk.

In "How I Finally Lost My Heart", the author says that she'd had lunch with one lover, tea with a second and had just met the potential third when she looks down at her hands and sees that she's holding her heart there. She says that she tries to get rid of it, but it's stuck to her fingers. The woman is later on a train and when the heart loosens, she shakes it free and puts it on the seat beside a mad woman who takes it in her hands. The other passengers nod approval for the author's actions.

In "A Man and Two Women", Stella and her husband have rented a cottage in Essex with another couple. Their dreams and plans are interrupted by the birth of a child as the two couples struggle to come to terms with changes in their lives.

One off the Short List, A Woman on the Roof, How I Finally Lost My Heart, A Man and Two Women Analysis

The three men who are working on the roof are common laborers and the three have obviously worked together enough to form some sort of bond despite their differences



and their age difference. Harry is the peacemaker and Stanley is very macho, saying that he would not allow his wife to be out on the roof at all. Harry teases him, saying that Stanley's wife might be up on a roof at this very moment but Stanley is certain that she isn't. Tom looks up to Harry as a role model. The presence of the woman doesn't create disharmony that it might have. Stanley's reaction is typical of the coming of age theme in that he'd dreamed of having a relationship with the woman but is forced into reality.

The story of "How I Lost My Heart" is different from some of the other stories in that it's written in first person. The story is almost like a rambling narrative on the impact of love, with the author talking about the potential of people she hasn't yet met to be important in her life. She says that a woman typically has two great loves early on, her father and her brother, followed by the first who isn't either of these people. The author calls this person "A" in her own life. She says that there were some others who were not very serious and calls the second great love "B". She says that no matter how happy she is in a relationship, she's always got at least part of her eye focused on the people around her in search of the next great love of her life. The interesting part of this is that she says that everyone does this and seems not to believe that anyone might ever be happy enough with one person that they wouldn't be looking for another great love. The metaphorical use of the heart as an object outside her body is effective, with the heart standing for love and deep emotion. The fact that she gives it away to a woman tagged "a mad woman" by her fellow travelers is also metaphorical in that only a deranged person would really want to be bound by the heart. The fact that her fellow travelers approve of her decision indicates that having a heart is not desirable. Finally, the fact that the author says she is relieved and happy when she leaves her heart behind indicates that she'd been weighted down throughout her life.



A Room, England Versus England, Two Potters, Between Men, Our Friend Judith, Each Other

A Room, England Versus England, Two Potters, Between Men, Our Friend Judith, Each Other Summary

"A Room" is the story of a new tenant to an apartment, who has an experience that makes her believe that she'd traveled back in time to experience the feelings of a child who'd lived in that room during another time. "England Versus England" is the story of a young man struggling to find his identity as he moves from a life of abject poverty and struggles to obtain an education.

In "Two Potters", the author has a dream about a potter, an old man, that reminds her of the only real potter she's ever known, a woman named Mary Tawnish. In the dream, the old potter makes a rabbit and pleads with God to breathe life into it. The author shares the dream with Mary, who doesn't dream and doesn't believe in God. The dream is followed by another and another, and each time the small village where the potter lives has grown and changed, though he continues to create pottery and to plead with God to breathe life into the rabbit. Later, the author goes to visit Mary, who has made a small clay rabbit for the author. That night, the author dreams about the potter again, but this time the author is in the dream and presents the potter with the rabbit Mary made. The potter sprinkles water onto the rabbit and the rabbit then hops away.

In "Between Men", a painter named Maureen Jeffries invites a woman named Peggy Bayley to visit. Maureen wants to show off "the new me", referring to a haircut, and she worries a great deal about where to sit in order to show off her apparel to the best advantage. Peggy is also looking remarkably well. Maureen had been the mistress of Peggy's husband, Tom, though she had more recently been involved with a man named Jack. Mureen and Jack have split up and Maureen wants to call on Tom for some introductions so that she can find a new man to support her. Maureen knows that she can't ask Tom for help without Peggy's blessing. When Peggy arrives, she announces that she and Tom have split up and that Tom is now marrying a woman who is apparently pregnant. Jack's new girl is also pregnant. Maureen and Peggy commiserate with each other, drinking all the while, and decide that they will open a dress shop together in London, eliminate their dependence on men and insist on marriage before letting another man into their lives.

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"Our Friend Judith" is the first-person account of a woman's friendship with a woman named Betty and their mutual friend, Judith. Judith is a poet and something of an enigma to her friends despite their belief that they know her well. "Each Other" is the story of a young bride and her affair.

A Room, England Versus England, Two Potters, Between Men, Our Friend Judith, Each Other Analysis

The story of the potter is likely symbolic of the creation of life. It seems possible that the author is writing about this from her own point of view rather than the perspective of an unnamed character in the book. The creative process is such for some people that some describe writing as bringing a child into the world or breathing life into an inanimate object. Another interesting point about the rabbit is that once the old potter brings it to life, it hops away and stops as a hawk circles. The hawk doesn't find it, meaning the rabbit remains safe.

The story of "Between Men" has an interesting title in that it seems to indicate that there's some sort of conversation going on between men. In fact, the conversation is between women and both are without men in their lives at the moment, or they are "between men". The two women, Maureen and Peggy, are very much alike in many ways. Peggy says that she'd gotten married because Tom believed she was pregnant. She says that she miscarried and that she had never been able to carry a pregnancy to term. Maureen admits to several abortions and says that she'd not become pregnant in some time despite not using birth control. The two were both somewhat professional in their attitudes and actions toward men. They also say that they never took money from a man unless they felt they'd earned it, and that even then they'd felt guilty. Finally, they each say that it's different to take money from a man if there's a marriage license involved.



Homage for Isaac Babel, Notes for a Case History

Homage for Isaac Babel, Notes for a Case History Summary

"Homage for Isaac Babel" is the story of the author taking a young girl named Catherine to visit a young boy named Phillip where he is attending school. The youngsters spend an afternoon together and the three see a movie that makes Catherine cry. She later writes a thank-you note for the trip, adding that she'd learned from the movie that capital punishment is wrong and that the simplistic writing of the writer Isaac Babel is what makes his writing so strong, so that she's now trying to emulate him.

In "Notes for a Case History", Maureen Watson is born at 93 Nelson's Way, just down the street from Shirley Banner, the girl who would become Maureen's best friend. Maureen is pretty, more so than Shirley. Both girls grow up hearing from their mothers that they are fortunate that they have everything they want and need. The Banners have a store, and when Maureen is a child, her parents also open a store, theirs becoming more successful than the Banners' business. The Watson's store is "Maureen's Store" and Maureen realizes from an early age that her mother is caught up in Maureen's future. Maureen's mother at one point calls on a cousin for help breaking Maureen into the modeling business. That doesn't happen, but Maureen's mother holds out hope that Maureen will marry well.

At fifteen, both Maureen and Shirley drop out of school. Maureen is sent away to learn to speak without the neighborhood accent. She resents being forced into this change but works as instructed. Maureen decides that she wants to go to secretarial school. Her mother objects to the amount of money it will cost, but Maureen says that she can't work as a clerk in the store hoping to meet a suitable man. Her mother says that Maureen could have had the same training for free if she'd stayed in school, but Maureen refuses to feel guilty, saying that if they'd made her stay in school, this situation would not have occurred. Upon completion, Maureen goes to work in an architectural firm and Shirley works in a draper's shop. The girls date, but Maureen is careful not to go too far. A boy named Tony Head starts work in the architectural firm and they go out to lunch twice, but Tony says that he can't afford Maureen. Shirley marries soon and at twenty is married with a child. The girls grow inevitably apart.

Another young man begins work at Maureen's firm. His name is Stanley Hurt and he is very ambitious. Stanley and Maureen are very similar, and when he asks her out, she agrees but is careful not to be available too often. They get along well but both believe they can do better, so their emerging relationship is very tense. However, Stanley believes that Maureen will be compatible with his ambitions, and the fact that she has a reasonable nest egg will boost his plans. Throughout her dating Stanley, Maureen has occasionally gone out with Tony. Tony tells her that she's making a mistake. She



believes him but continues seeing Stanley. Finally, Stanley asks her marry him and she agrees. Maureen asks Stanley to visit her parents and makes plans to visit his a week later. Maureen's mother is frantic, trying to make everything right, though Maureen continues to say that it doesn't matter. Maureen takes the attitude that Stanley knows of her background and will not be expecting anything more than her parents will provide. Stanley admits this to be true but says that it's one of the prices that he'll pay for having Maureen, who will be a suitable wife for his emerging career.

When Stanley arrives, Maureen is dressed in an outlandish outfit, including a rag tied around her hair. He is appalled, and she chats as if there's nothing out of the ordinary. He leaves angry and Maureen's mother cries. Maureen changes clothes, dresses nicely and goes to a payphone where she calls Tony. He doesn't answer and she's devastated. She calls Stanley and hesitates, but then asks if he's really angry, saying that it was only a joke. He finally agrees that he'll meet her later, though she knows that he hasn't really forgiven her.

Homage for Isaac Babel, Notes for a Case History Analysis

Maureen realizes that her mother is very ambitious on Maureen's behalf and that when she urges Maureen on, her mother is really living vicariously through Maureen. She also realizes that her father is indifferent and sees the situation as it truly is - that Maureen is a pretty girl who's been terribly spoiled by her mother. When Maureen throws the fit in front of Stanley, her father understands what she's doing and wonders only why she had led Stanley to believe that she'd marry him when she obviously doesn't want to. Her mother is angry and horrified, resorting to tears and hysterics.

Maureen is immediately attracted to the young man named Tony Head, though she knows that he is not exactly what she wants in a suitor. He isn't wealthy and isn't in the inner circle of power within the company, though he's ambitious. What's interesting is that Maureen is soon caught up in a relationship with a young man who is also not yet in the inner circle of power, though he is evidently nearer reaching that goal than Tony. This second young man, Stanley Hunt, is from a background similar to Maureen's. Maureen and Stanley are very much alike in their desires and ambitions, but there's a tremendous problem in that they are both overly ambitious. One problem between Maureen and Stanley is that Maureen's opinion of Stanley is completely obvious and it lessens Maureen's self-esteem, a situation that she doesn't know how to handle because she is seldom in this position.

Maureen's decision to break it off with Stanley seems nothing more than a desire to get away from the situation that she believes to be a poor decision. When Maureen goes and calls Stanley, asking that he forgive her, Stanley seems to reluctantly agree. However, Maureen knows that he'd been secretly relieved earlier in the day when he thought their engagement to be off.



To Room Nineteen

To Room Nineteen Summary

Susan and Matthew Rawlings are different from their friends in that they wait until their late twenties to marry. By this time, they have each had several love affairs and it's noted that all of these were sweet rather than bitter. Their friends hadn't put them together but agree that the match is perfect. Matthew is a "subeditor" for a newspaper, preferring to be one of the people who make the paper run rather than standing in the limelight as a journalist or editor. Susan is a graphic artist for an advertising company. Both continue to work until the first pregnancy. Susan stays at home to fill the role of mom, they buy a large house, and soon have a daughter followed by twins, a boy and a girl. With the four children, the nice house and the serving woman, people believe that Susan and Matthew have a perfect life. They look at themselves and realize that they are incredibly fortunate to have created such a life for themselves, though they begin to realize that there's a "certain flatness" to their lives. They search for a central driving force that cannot be the children or the house, and hope that it's their love for each other.

Matthew admits to having an affair and Susan forgives, though it's noted that this isn't the same as forgetting. Susan struggles with Matthew's comment that it wasn't important. She says that if this woman wasn't important, that she probably isn't important either. She argues, trying to decide if she should care, and comes to resent the fact that he meets exciting, tempting young women at parties while Susan's energy is literally drained out of her by her efforts to take care of the four children and the big house. It's noted that both Susan and Matthew know the price of the "four healthy children and the large white garden house", and that both are willing to pay the price.

When the youngest children, the twins, start to school, Susan drops them off for their first day of class but finds she is reluctant to return home because she feels a threatening presence there. She continues to sense this presence and tries to keep busy, noting that the presence is less of a threat if she's occupied. During a school holiday, she snaps at the twins, prompting them to hold hands and rush off together. She feels horrible about the lack of control with regard to the children, though the oldest, Harry, explains to the youngsters that Susan has a headache and that everything is alright. Matthew comforts her as she cries over having snapped at the children, and she notes that it's the last time they come together physically with that comfort, though even this is a lie because Susan hasn't told Matthew what's really bothering her.

Susan continues to feel that there's never a moment when she isn't being weighed down with the responsibilities. When she tries to confide this to Matthew, he says that he isn't free either, and points out that he works hard and that he even phones if he's going to be late home from work, meaning that there's never a time when he's by himself and has no need to be anywhere. Susan knows he's right but doesn't understand why he doesn't feel trapped as she does. Susan turns a spare bedroom into



"Mother's Room" where she's supposed to be able to go without being disturbed. Instead, it's soon turned into a room where everyone feels free to interrupt her quiet time and it becomes something of a joke. She begins seeing a demon, especially at times she feels very stressed, and comes to decide that she's going to rent a room in Victoria. She rents a hotel room from a woman named Miss Townsend, explaining that she isn't well and needs a place to rest when she's in Victoria. Miss Townsend is so worried about her that she brings Susan a cup of tea, interrupting her privacy and forcing Susan to make up a larger lie about her "illness".

Despite this interruption, Susan loves the time alone and resents the fact that their daytime maid, Mrs. Parkes, can't seem to run the household without calling on Susan for answers to questions. She goes on a "walking holiday" to Wales but talks to the children every morning and to Mrs. Parkes throughout the day when the maid has questions. Susan feels the need to respond to these telephone calls "like a leash". Susan asks Matthew to hire an "au pair girl" to help with the children. He argues briefly but gives in, and Susan chooses Sophie Traub, a German who quickly realizes that Susan wants someone to make decisions while Susan is away. Sophie takes over the role of answering Mrs. Parkes' questions, answering summons from the school related to the children and taking care of the children until six in the evening, at which time Susan takes over.

With this new security for the house, Susan rents a room at Fred's Hotel, Room 19, and makes arrangements to rent it three times each week. Susan's time in the room are spent just sitting and being alone. Her time at home becomes outwardly willing, though Matthew senses the strain. One night he asks if they're going to continue like this, and when Susan says that she doesn't see why things should change, Matthew asks if she wants a divorce. She counters, asking if he does, but they agree that they can't imagine not being married to each other.

The next time Susan goes to her room at Fred's, she discovers that a detective has asked for her and that the proprietor had given a description of Susan and had told the detective that she never, as far as he knew, received visitors. Susan finds that the room isn't the haven it had been because Matthew now knows where to find her. She tells him so a few nights later and he seems embarrassed, saying that he wasn't trying to pry but was worried about her. She knows that he hopes she has a lover so that he can confess his own love affair and she makes one up, saying that she's seeing a publisher from the city. Matthew reveals the identity of his mistress and suggests that the four of them meet for lunch sometime. Susan agrees that it's a good idea and that there's no reason they shouldn't.

Susan is again trapped and realizes that now she's going to have to produce a man who will agree to masquerade as her lover, the publisher. She makes one final trip to Fred's Hotel and settles herself in for the afternoon. She thinks for awhile about her life, her children and Matthew. She wonders whether he'll marry his mistress after Susan's death and thinks that it would be better for him to marry Sophie, who is already doing all the things a mother would for the children and is comfortable running the house. She puts a



shilling into the gas stove, puts a rug across the bottom of the door so that there's no air flow, and drifts off to sleep as she listens to the hiss of gas pouring into the room.

To Room Nineteen Analysis

It seems that Susan and Matthew have let the spark go out of their lives and that this drives them to the situation that leads to Susan's death. It's repeatedly noted that they aren't happy with their lives, that they feel that there's nothing exciting or wonderful and that they have to find a reason to continue. An outsider looking in believes that they have a perfect marriage and perfect lives, but it seems that they've simply let their relationship die in their efforts to create this perfect life. It seems that the end occurs for Susan when Matthew admits to having an affair. Both admit that there's a problem in that Matthew is never really "joyous" and that Susan is "threatened by emptiness". The shame of this situation is that they recognize the emotions but do nothing to try to fulfill them together, seeking instead methods of self-fulfillment.

Susan's vision of a demon is likely symbolic. The reader is left to decide the exact purpose of this demon, but it seems likely that it's meant to signify Susan's feeling of entrapment.

It's interesting that Susan creates a lover during Matthew's questioning. She already knows that he has taken a mistress but apparently doesn't know who it is. Susan insists that Matthew wants to find out that she has a lover so that he will be exonerated from guilt over his own affair. It's not clear why she decides to create this lover, but it seems possible that she want him to admit his affair. As Susan is preparing to die, she considers leaving a note "for the coroner". She briefly considers that Matthew will try to find the publisher she'd said she was having an affair with and that he'd discover that the man doesn't exist. Susan believes that Matthew will decide that she'd simply given a false name rather than believing that she'd made up the affair.

As she is falling asleep, Susan calls herself a hypocrite for thinking about the well-being of her children but doesn't let this change her mind. This seems to refer back to that initial conversation in which Susan and Matthew were trying to rationalize the reason for their sacrifices. At that point, they'd both come to hope that their love is a sufficient reason for their work and sacrifices because the children and the house is not.



An Old Woman and Her Cat

An Old Woman and Her Cat Summary

In "An Old Woman and Her Cat", Hetty Pennefather is left a widow when her husband, Fred, dies shortly after the Second World War. Hetty has four children, but none of them want to be around her. She gets a single Christmas card from one of the daughters at Christmas. Other than that, there's no contact with either her middle-aged children or her grown grandchildren. Hetty is a gypsy and has always been drawn to brightly colored clothing. Her quick temper and passion make her stand out, and her children don't appreciate her heritage. She'd left her heritage behind to live in an apartment with her husband and children. After her children leave home and her husband dies, Hetty finds that she doesn't like to be in the house alone and spends a great deal of time in the streets. For a time she keeps in touch with the children but realizes that she's an embarrassment to them and leaves them alone.

Hetty adopts a stray kitten, names him Tibby, and finds in him at least some sense of companionship. Through him she makes friends with some of the neighbors and has to feed him only occasionally, as he roams the neighborhood in search of rodents and birds.

Hetty falls behind in her rent and slips away quietly to escape the debt. She fears reapplying for her pension because she knows she'll have to pay the back rent, so she simply begins living off what little she can make by begging and selling rags. Tibby regularly brings home pigeons and Hetty cooks and eats them, supplementing her meager diet. She lives in a single room of a condemned house along with several others in the same situation. Then the plight of the homeless in the city comes to the attention of politicians seeking reelection, and officials come to the house, promising those who live there that they'll be moved to another home in the suburbs with care and help gaining their pensions. Hetty, like the rest, agrees to go until she's told she can't take Tibby. On the day of the move, she is gone. Others say that she'd mentioned moving in with her daughter.

Hetty stays away from the house for several days but returns and stays until the builders arrive to begin renovations. She moves across town to a large dilapidated house. She finds a dry corner and makes herself a bed there. Tibby continues his practice of bringing her birds and she never worries when she has little to eat. The cold doesn't really bother her either, because she's never really had a warm place. Even the apartment she lived with her husband was seldom heated in order to save money.

Some nights men arrive and go through the lower floors of the house, searching for those who are sleeping there and removing any who die. They never come upstairs where Hetty is, feeling that no one would be desperate enough to risk climbing the rickety stairs. Hetty becomes ill, though it's some time before she realizes that she's sick. She finally manages to go out and beg a little money, spending it on a bit of food



for herself and milk for Tibby. She begs a hot tea and feels so much better for it that she thinks she might survive the winter after all, but soon becomes even more ill. At the height of her illness, Tibby brings her a pigeon, but she's too sick to cook it. She dies one night, and Tibby remains only a short time, until the rats come. Having been bitten by a rat that left a wound that took a long time to heal, he's cautious and slips away, moving from one garden to the next.

An Old Woman and Her Cat Analysis

The story of Hetty Penefather is one of the few in which there's a definite time frame set. It's noted that Hetty is born "with the twentieth Century" and that she dies seventy years later, meaning the story begins in the late 1960s, just a short time before her death in the early spring of 1970.

The story is very dark, though it may very well be a realistic portrait of the life of a homeless woman. It's noted that Hetty is virtually mad by the time she's in her late sixties and that few people want to be around her. Her devotion to Tibby is evidence of her desperate need for companionship, though she rants and raves about her children, saying that she doesn't need them. She feigns only anger at their uncaring attitudes but is really very hurt by the situation.

When Hetty leaves her apartment, she has a few possessions, and a friend with a car helps her move. However, when she later has to move from the condemned house she takes only what she can carry in a baby buggy. It seems likely that Hetty knows what to expect from the officials that are trying to relocate these people - that they're actually going to a nursing home of sorts where they'll be until they die. She seems to realize this but is willing to go anyway until she's told that Tibby can't go with her.

An interesting aspect of this story is that it should theoretically end when Hetty, as the main character, dies, but it goes on to tell of Tibby's fate. The author says that Tibby lives with a group of wild cats living near a cemetery until the pack of cats becomes too large and attracts attention. Then Tibby is picked up with all those who are not smart enough to escape. Tibby actually comes to the animal control official, seeking to be petted, but is so disreputable looking and smelly that he's euthanized.



The Temptation of Jack Orkney

The Temptation of Jack Orkney Summary

The story of "The Temptation of Jack Orkney" opens with Jack learning that his father is dying and that he's been summoned to his father's bedside. He travels there immediately and then wonders if he should have taken time to make a hotel reservation and to properly pack before leaving. He is, however, a journalist at heart and admits that he'd dashed off with the bare essentials as he would have done on assignment. Jack has actually not worked recently as a journalist but has gained enough recognition to be called on for some other jobs. Because all three of his children are grown and he doesn't really need to earn as much money as he once had, he's slowed his pace. He refers to the "leisure" mentioned by his friends who find themselves in the same situation. His wife, Rosemary, had planned to take some leisure time as well but has returned to college to seek a degree in social work instead. On the day Jack leaves to be at his father's side, Rosemary is at school.

Jack considers the situation he's likely to find at his father's bedside. His sister Ellen and brother Cedric will be there, but he doesn't know how many of their children might be as well. Jack hasn't been especially close to his siblings in recent years and isn't looking forward to the reunion. On the train he encounters a young woman and is enamored with her. He admits that there was a time when he would have tried to induce her to spend the weekend with him, but that his marriage is now good and he is happy just to hear her youthful talk. He is a well-known journalist and he doesn't tell her his real name, knowing that will put an end to her chatter.

James is met at the station by his brother, who says that Ellen has only recently arrived and that she's booked rooms for all three of them at the same hotel near where their father is staying. Jack goes in to see his father, but the old man is asleep or unconscious. The three siblings have dinner together and Jack finds that he doesn't hate being with them as much as he'd expected. That night, Jack's father calls for him, but he isn't in the room at the moment and the man is asleep by the time Jack gets back. Jack then spends the night in his father's room, but he doesn't wake again. When he next wakes, he calls for Ann, Cedric's daughter. Ann comes, though it takes some time for her to arrive, and she sings to him. That night Jack has a dream, which is very unusual because he says that he never dreams. It's a situation that is repeated over the coming nights, and one dream is so vivid that he goes to his father's bedside with the realization that this is to be the day his father dies. He says that he wouldn't have had that insight without the dream.

His father dies in his sleep later that day. Jack returns home and tells his wife and daughters. He then tracks down his son, who is often with protest groups, and tells him of the death. Over the coming days, Jack struggles with himself and tries to decide what he's going to do with his life. He finally decides that he has to live life rather than waiting for something to do with his time and allowing life to pass him by. He takes a teaching



job in Nigeria, a job that had appealed to him though he hadn't wanted to leave Rosemary alone in Europe for the two years of the teaching job. Now Rosemary agrees to go with him and he looks forward to this next adventure and knows that there will be more adventures after that.

The Temptation of Jack Orkney Analysis

The fact that Jack and Rosemary have had problems in their married life is of little surprise, especially considering the rugged adventurous life Jack has led as a journalist. He says that he's spent time in several foreign countries and often been in dangerous situations. In one case, he lies about his name to escape a hostile military force. With the fame, the temptations were bound to exist and Jack apparently took advantage of them. Now, he and Rosemary are happy together and Jack seems amazed that the key to this happiness is that he's paid more attention to Rosemary and her needs.

Jack is desperate to have his father speak to him prior to his death. Jack notes that he and his father haven't been particularly close, but that he and his mother weren't close either. After his mother's death, Jack wanted to share his sympathy with his father but hadn't known how. Now he seems to be waiting for his father to share some insight.



Characters

Rose appears in *The Other Woman*

Rose is a young adult when her mother is killed by a lorry truck. Rose and her mother haven't seen eye-to-eye on everything, though they are very much alike. Almost immediately after her mother's death, Rose sets out to remake the home she shares with her father to be the way she wants. She also breaks off her engagement, though she admits to being confused about the reason for that decision. Rose is a complex character in that she refuses her father's offer that she quit work and stay at home to take care of the housework and other chores, saying that she desires her financial independence. She does, however, remain cloistered away in her father's house until a bombing destroys the building and forces her to move. Even then, it takes the prodding of another person to make her abandon the building. This tendency to desire independence while remaining so co-dependent is not explained. Rose tries to read the newspaper, hoping to make herself better educated because of her boyfriend Jimmie's intelligence. It's while she's reading a newspaper article that she encounters a description of "the other woman". She recognizes that she is playing that role but doesn't really equate it with her life.

Maureen Watson appears in *Notes for a Case History*

Maureen is born at 93 Nelson's Way, the daughter of a middle class family, though she has many advantages not given to her friends. She is very pretty and outshines her best friend, Shirley Banner, who is pretty but winds up with the boys who first notice Maureen but are refused. Maureen dates little and is careful not to give in to the demands of boys. As a result, many of her dates drop out after a few dates. Maureen drops out of school at fifteen to work in her parents' store. Later, she realizes that it wasn't the best choice and her parents dig up the money to send her to secretarial school. They initially object, saying that Maureen would have gotten the secretarial education for free if she'd remained in school, but Maureen counters, saying that they should have been foresighted enough to see that she wouldn't want to remain in the business forever and force her to remain in school. It's a statement of their relationship that this argument apparently works, and Maureen is sent to school. Maureen hates the fact that her mother wants her to live out a particular kind of life, specifically aimed at a particular kind of marriage. However, Maureen herself has ambitions of her own and feels that she's settled for second best by agreeing to marry Stanley.

Hetty Penefather appears in *An Old Woman and Her Cat*

Hetty is a widower who has completely lost contact with her four grown children. She's living on a pension but is unable to make ends meet and finds herself out on the street



when she falls behind on the rent. She spends the rest of her life in condemned houses where she stays until builders put her out to find a new place. Her sole companion is her cat, Tibby, who brings birds for her during the final years when she's literally too weak to go out and beg for food for herself.

Susan Rawlings appears in *To Rom Nineteen*

Susan is wife of Matthew and mother of four, a boy, a girl and a set of twins. She realizes that she's fortunate to have her life with a husband who is outwardly devoted, four healthy children and a large house. However, she feels often depressed and becomes withdrawn, unable to cope with the demands of her life, which she sees as overwhelming to the point that she gives up and commits suicide.

Jimmie appears in *The Other Woman*

A young man who tries to talk Rose into getting out of her bombed-out apartment after her father's death. Jimmie is an adulterer, and even after he gets a divorce, he continues to lie to Rose about his marital status in order to keep from having to marry Rose.

George Talbot appears in *The Habit of Loving*

George is sixty when his mistress tells him that she's not going to return to him. He battles with depression and loneliness for awhile and eventually becomes ill, prompting him to hire a nurse. The young woman is in her late thirties and George eventually comes to realize that he doesn't want her to leave. As he struggles to find happiness in this new relationship, she tells him that he's in the "habit of loving".

Jerry appears in *Through the Tunnel*

Jerry is eleven when he and his mother go on their annual seaside vacation. Jerry is struggling to come to terms with his emerging maturity. At one point he is horribly embarrassed because he resorts to horseplay in order to attract the attention of a group of older boys. He wants to fit in with them, but wants even more to find a way to be comfortable in his adolescence. He comes to realize that a tunnel through some rocks is symbolic of his emerging maturity. He works diligently to hone his body so that he can make the swim through the tunnel, at one point considering putting it off for another year.



Mr. Brooke appears in The Witness

The accountant who is past retirement age but continues to work because he hasn't got enough money saved to live without a job and because the job is the only thing in his life to take up his time.

Hamish Anderson appears in The Eye of God in Paradise

A young British doctor who travels in Germany with his girlfriend, Dr. Mary Parish. Hamish quickly feels ill at ease in the country and wants to leave. He's very angry with the treatment of the mentally ill in the hospital he visits. Hamish is something of a snob, and both he and Mary tend to judge quickly and harshly, though he realizes that this isn't a good tendency and that his judgments are not always correct or fair.

Mary Parish appears in The Eye of God in Paradise

A young British doctor who is traveling with her boyfriend, Dr. Hamish Anderson. Mary is horrified at the sight of a young boy constrained with a straightjacket while a woman watches over him as she knits. Mary has a strong sense of fairness, though she is quick to judge.



Objects/Places

London appears in The Habit of Loving

Where George Talbot lives.

France appears in Pleasure

Where Mary and Tommy Rogers go on vacation.

The Plaza appears in Pleasure

Where Mary and Tommy Rogers have always stayed in previous vacations to France.

O - appears in The Eye of God in Paradise

The name used to denote the German village where Hamish and Mary encounter Dr. Shroder.

Great Portland Street appears in How I Finally Lost My Heart

Where the author in "How I Finally Lost My Heart" is standing after having had lunch with lovers "A" and "B".

London appears in Between Men

Where Maureen and Peggy say they will open a dress shop.

93 Nelson's Way appears in Notes for a Case History

Where Maureen Watson is born.

Victoria appears in To Room Nineteen

Where Susan rents a room for a day to have a bit of privacy.



Wales appears in To Room Nineteen

Where Susan goes for a walking holiday.

Fred's Hotel appears in To Room Nineteen

Where Susan rents room 19.



Themes

Longing for Youth

Rose, in the story of "The Other Woman", is one of several characters who exhibits the theme of longing for youth. In Rose's case, it's not only her youth that she longs for, but the opportunities of youth. Rose is engaged when her mother dies and she breaks off the engagement, apparently preferring to remain in her childhood home with her father than to begin a home of her own. When her former boyfriend marries and has a child, Rose wonders if she's made a mistake. Later she tries to adopt the child, partly because she wants to give the girl, now an orphan, a home, but also because the child symbolizes her own missed opportunity for happiness and a family of her own.

The two men in "The Woman" are additional examples of this theme. Both men see a pretty young girl and vie for her attention. The girl treats them equally, a fact that angers both. At one point, one of the men tells the story of his trip to this very hotel as a young man of eighteen and of his love affair with a woman who had used him to father a child. The second man insists that this really happened to him, believes the first man is lying, and hates the fact that he does not believe the first man and that the young girl does not believe him.

Coming of Age

Jerry, the main character in "Through the Tunnel", is the most obvious example of this theme. Jerry is eleven, literally on the verge of adolescence, when he spends a summer vacation at a seaside resort with his mother. Jerry is seeking his independence and wrestling to fit this into his need to do what will please his mother. When he sees some older boys swim through an underwater tunnel, he sets out to make the swim himself. He has to work at it for days, practicing holding his breath and using rocks to sink himself to the ledge where the tunnel begins. At one point he decides that he'll wait till the following year but fears putting it off. The tunnel, as a symbol of his trip into adolescence, is dark, foreboding and dangerous, but Jerry does make the trip. To a lesser degree, Jerry's mother is also making a coming of age discovery as she struggles to allow Jerry the freedom to make face this change. In the story "Notes for a Case History", Maureen comes to realize that her mother is living vicariously through Maureen. The family names their store, "Maureen's Store", and Maureen knows that all the work and effort her mother puts into this enterprise is to launch Maureen into the life her mother envisions for her. Maureen's knowledge on these points contributes to her emerging maturity.

The Need for Companionship

The need for companionship plays a role in many of the stories in this book. An example of this theme is seen in "The Old Woman and Her Cat". Hetty is alone and lonely until



she finds a stray kitten. The cat is described as "all joy" because Hetty, barely making ends meet, has the cat's companionship but does not have to put out any money to keep the cat because he hunts for birds and rodents. When Hetty is offered government housing, she refuses because she cannot bring the cat. The cat also needs companionship, and when Hetty is weak from malnutrition, the cat brings birds which Hetty cooks and eats. The interesting twist on the theme in this book is that Hetty dies sooner than she might have if she'd gone to the government home, simply because she wasn't willing to give up her one friend - the cat. The cat runs with a group with wild cats after her death and when the animal control officer arrives, the cat runs to him for companionship and is caught and euthanized.

There are other characters who demonstrate this theme. In "Between Men", the two main characters discuss a plan to move in together despite their having been enemies earlier. The same is true in "The Other Woman". In that story, Rose calls on the former wife of her boyfriend and the two find they have a great deal in common. They come to realize that they will both be better off if they depend on each other rather than the man who'd let them both down.

Style

Point of View

The perspective varies from one story to another in the book, with most of the stories presented with a limited perspective. The majority of the stories are written in third person. Many are presented from the perspective of a particular character. For example, "To Room Nineteen" is the story of a woman named Susan who finds herself in a loveless marriage though she has four healthy children and a large house - a situation envied by many. Despite the positive points, she is depressed and desperate. The reader goes through all aspects of her drop into severe depression, all through Susan's perspective. The reader continues through to the moment's before Susan's death. The same is true of "An Old Lady and Her Cat", when the reader sees the events in third person through the perspective of Hetty. The difference in this story is that the story abruptly switches after Hetty's death so that the reader then sees the story through the perspective of her cat. "The Day Stalin Died" is one of those presented from first person. These tend to be only slightly less limited than the stories in third person.

Setting

The stories are set in an array of scenes, most in Europe. For example, Hetty Penefather lives in London. Though the exact neighborhood is never detailed, the use of London as a setting is very effective in that it is a real place and there are likely women like Hetty who live without family and without homes, fending for themselves as best they can and many of them dying alone. Many of the stories are placed in generic settings and the exact locations are never fully detailed. Mr. Brooke, a character in "The Witness", works in an office building, but the exact setting is never described. There are other examples of this use of generic settings with many of them in large cities that could be London but might also be almost any large city.

The author uses another means of creating settings that is very interesting. In at least two of the stories, the events occur in a city that she refers to only by a single letter. The letter is apparently meant to convey that they are in a town with a name beginning with that letter. In "The Eye of God in Paradise", Hamish and Mary stay in the small town of "O -". In "The Temptation of Jack Orkney", the main character is headed home because his father is dying and the man realizes that he should have had someone book him a hotel room in the town of "S-". There isn't any indication of the name of the town and its identity is left to the imagination of the reader, as is true of several of the settings.

The settings that are described are presented in some detail. In the "Old Woman and Her Cat", the author gives details about the setting, such as the fact that Hetty piles her brightly colored rags in a corner of a room where a large tree shelters her from the eyes of those who pass on the street. In "The Witness", Mr. Brooke's apartment is presented



in great detail, including the pictures on the wall that create a problem with his young guest.

Language and Meaning

Most of the stories are written in a somewhat formal tone with some variations of style and tone. Some of the stories drop a few foreign words, though most are insignificant or are explained sufficiently. There are few words that will be unfamiliar to an average reader. Despite this, the stories are sometimes difficult to understand because there are wordy descriptions and sometimes barely flowing action. A reader who stays with Lessing's stories long enough to become familiar with the writing style will likely become adept at comprehending her meaning.

There are some additional issues that may become a problem for some readers. For example, in the story "The Other Woman", there's an argument between Jimmie and Rose. In one paragraph, the author includes quotes by both characters. Not splitting the quotes is somewhat confusing, and readers have to pay careful attention in order to keep track with which character is speaking. The tone of almost every story is dark with death and depression as constant themes. There are a few exceptions, such as "Through the Tunnel". In this book, the main character exhibits a coming of age theme and accomplishes a great feat that symbolizes his emergence into adolescence.

It should be noted that many of the words used in this book are the British spellings. These include words such as "favourite", which Americans write as "favorite". Another example is "practised", which is typically written as "practiced" in America. "Realised" is another British term. These British spellings are liberally used throughout the book, but should not be a problem to the reader.

Structure

The book is divided into thirty-five stories. These range from just a few pages to more than fifty. The stories are "The Habit of Loving", "The Woman", "Through the Tunnel", "Pleasure", "The Witness", "The Day Stalin Died", "Wine", "He", "The Eye of God in Paradise", "The Other Woman", "One off the Short List", "A Woman on a Roof", "How I Finally Lost My Heart", "A Man and Two Women", "A Room", "England Versus England", "Two Potters", "Between Men", "Our Friend Judith", "Each Other", "Homage for Isaac Babel", "Outside the Ministry", "Dialogue", "Notes for a Case History", "To Room Nineteen", "An Old Woman and Her Cat", "Side Benefits of an Honorable Profession", "A Year in Regent's Park", "Report on the Threatened City", "Mrs. Fortescue", "An Unposted Love Letter", "Lions Leaves Roses", "Not a Very Nice Story", "The Other Garden" and "The Temptation of Jack Orkney". The majority of these stories are summarized in this study guide, though a few of the shorter stories have been omitted altogether.

Some of the titles give some clue as to the context of the story, though many are vague or misleading. For example, "Between Men" is the story of two women have each



recently broken up with men. To use the slang here, they were "between men". The story of "An Old Woman and Her Cat" is about an old woman and her cat. The fact that they both die as the story comes to a close isn't hinted at with the title, but the two main characters are the woman and her cat.



Quotes

"'You didn't care for me,' she said again. 'If you had, you would never have come home from Phillipa, Georgina, Janet, et al., and said calmly, just as if it didn't matter to me in the least, that you had been with them in Brighton or wherever it was.'"
The Habit of Loving, p. 7

"In the morning Mary announced that she had no intention of cooking on a holiday, and they took petit dejeuner at a café, paid the equivalent of twelve shillings for two small cups of coffee and two rolls, and changed their minds. They would have to cook in the room."
Pleasure, p. 54

"Beatrice said that Bill was corrupt, because he wrote sexy comedies for TV under another name and acted in bad films. She did not think his justification, namely that a guy has to eat, had anything in its favour."
The Day Stalin Died, p. 75

"She felt, though she could never have put it into words, that there was a deep basic insecurity, that life itself was an enemy to be placated and humoured, liable at any moment to confront her, or people like her, with death or destitution."
The Other Woman, p. 166

"It would be easy to say that I picked up a knife, slit open my side, took my heart out, and threw it away; but unfortunately it wasn't as easy as that."
How I Finally Lost My Heart, p. 247

"No, her only hope was to find another man as eminent and lustrous as the others, for she could no longer afford the unknown geniuses, the potential artists."
Between Men, p. 317

"She was not good enough. He was not good enough. They were second best for each other."
Notes for a Case History, p. 391

"Their life seemed to be like a snake biting its tail. Matthew's job for the sake of Susan, children, house, and garden - which caravanserai needed a well-paid job to maintain it. And Susan's practical intelligence for the sake of Matthew, the children, the house and



the garden - which unit would have collapsed in a week without her."
To Room Nineteen, p. 397

"A High Price has to be paid for the happy marriage with the four healthy children and the large white gardened house. And they were paying it, willingly, knowing what they were doing."

To Room Nineteen, p. 402

"This the cat put, still struggling and fluttering a little, close to the old woman. But she was afraid to get out of the pile in which the heat was being made and kept with such difficulty."

An Old Woman and Her Cat, p. 439

"Those bruised lids affected Jack like something in bad taste, like a fart at a formal meal, or when making love of a romantic sort."

The Temptation of Jack Orkney, p. 573

"Jack said, 'I'm one of the old rich lefties you were publicly despising not long ago. You didn't want to have anything to do with us, you said.'"

The Temptation of Jack Orkney, p. 621



Topics for Discussion

Betty Clarke and Mary Rogers, both appearing in "Pleasure", are very similar in some ways. Compare the two characters. Choose any other story with two characters who are either markedly similar or dissimilar. Write a comparison of those. Then compare either Betty Clarke or Mary Rogers to either of the other characters.

Several of the stories depend heavily on symbolism as driving forces. For example, the eleven-year-old boy named Jerry in "Through the Tunnel" comes to believe that he has to make it through the underwater tunnel. Why? What does the tunnel symbolize? List at least two other examples of the use of symbolism.

Describe how the character Rose in "Notes for a Case Study" comes to break her engagement with George. What happens to her over the coming years? Does she ever regret her decision to break off that engagement? What do you believe is Rose's eventual fate? Support your answer.

Who is Hetty Penefather? Who is Tibby? How do the two come together? What is it that makes them stay together? What do they do to take care of each other? What is Hatty's fate? Tibby's?

Describe the two character in "Between Men". What is their connection prior to this night? What do they decide they'll do to create a secure future for themselves? Describe the two characters in "The Woman". What is their connection prior to their conversation on the hotel porch? Compare the two characters from each of the stories. Are their lives at all similar? Are their motives at all similar?

Who is Hamish Anderson? Who is Mary Parish? What are their reactions upon arriving in Germany? Why? They meet two doctors during their trip. Describe each and the reactions of Hamish and Mary to them.

Who is George Talbot? How does he come to be so lonely and why does he marry a woman who is much younger than he? Who is Annie Blake? How does she come to be living alone? What does she come to decide about her life of lonely solitude? Compare George and Mary.

Who is Susan Rawlings? Matthew Rawlings? How do the two of them come together? What are their lives like as a married couple? What does Susan give up for this life? What does Matthew give up? What are their reactions to what they've given up? What is their fate?