

The Shoemaker's Wife Study Guide

The Shoemaker's Wife by Adriana Trigiani

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Plot Summary

The *Shoemaker's Wife* by Adriana Trigiani is the historical love story of *Ciro Lazzari* and *Enza Ravanelli*. Though they live just a few miles apart in the Italian Alps during childhood, their first meeting occurs when they are teenagers. Shortly afterward, their lives go in different directions. Several years later, a chance encounter leads them to realize that they love each other. The author states that she drew upon her own family history as inspiration for the fictional characters and narrative.

The story begins as *Ciro* and his brother, *Eduardo*, are taken to the *San Nicola* convent following the sudden and mysterious death of their father in America, where he had gone to build his family's fortune. Faced with the burden of full financial responsibility for the family, *Caterina*, their mother, takes the boys to the convent where they will be cared for by nuns. *Caterina* promises to come and pick up her sons in the spring, but she doesn't show up because she suffers a mental breakdown and then secludes herself in another monastery. Communication with *Ciro* and *Eduardo* ceases for a period of years, even though she lives within shouting distance of her children. The young men have difficulty adjusting to life in a religious order following their family catastrophe and lack of any parental support.

Ciro witnesses a priest at the convent making out and fondling the beautiful *Concetta Martocci*, a teenaged girl that *Ciro* loves. *Ciro* tells the nuns at the convent of the lustful encounter, and in retaliation he's shipped off to America by the priest *Don Gregorio*. There, *Ciro* apprentices himself to a shoemaker, *Remo Zanetti*, in the New York neighborhood called *Little Italy*. It is, indeed, very much like a small Italian city with abundant Italian foods, culture, and the living language historically derived from Latin. But, more importantly, *Ciro* learns a trade at the *Zanetti Shoe Shop* where "The painstaking craft of building a proper boot or shoe from simple elements gave *Ciro* a purpose he had never known before."

At about the same time, *Enza* also goes to America and lives for a time in *Hoboken, N.J.* Eventually, *Ciro* and *Enza* encounter each other in *Little Italy*, and their love affair begins to blossom. But, when *World War I* breaks out, *Ciro* volunteers for military service and is shipped to the front in Europe. Assuming they'll never meet again, *Enza* becomes a costumer to opera great *Enrico Caruso* and moves from *Hoboken* to *Manhattan* with her friend and roommate. When he returns from the war, *Ciro* is still recovering from the fact he was sprayed with mustard gas during battle. But, he and *Enza* find each other again, marry, have children, and radiate love for each other and their family.

As *Ciro* and *Enza* mature, their love becomes an outgoing, positive force that touches several generations and extends from *Italy* to *New Jersey* to *New York* to *Minnesota* and, finally, back to *Italy*. The author skillfully weaves the tapestry of everyday life into a complex web of love. However, the journey is not without sorrow when *Ciro* develops cancer because of his mustard gas injuries and dies, but the love he shared with *Enza* continues in the lives of their children and family in both *America* and *Italy*. The author

conveys a sense of the extraordinary arising from the ordinary, through love, which becomes the book's primary message.



Chapter 1: A Gold Ring

Summary

Caterina Lazzari, a 32-year-old widow and mother of *Ciro* and *Eduardo*, gets her two sons packed for their trip to the convent of *San Nicola* in the Italian Alps. It is Jan. 1, 1905.

Caterina, still grieving over the loss of her husband in an alleged mining accident, knows she can't raise her two sons alone and trusts that the nuns will give 10-year-old *Ciro* and his 11-year-old brother *Eduardo* the education and love they need. She hides her sadness as she helps get the boys ready for their trip to *San Nicola*, just a few miles away from the village of *Vilminore di Scalve*. To comfort *Ciro*, his mother gives him a small gold signet ring given to her by her father. There is an instant bond between the two brothers and *Sister Teresa*, one of the younger nuns who works in the kitchen. She talks with the boys and offers them snacks and tries to make them comfortable after their father has died and their own lives are upside-down.

At roughly the same time, in the nearby village of *Schilpario*, *Marco Ravanelli*, the local coachman, prepares to take *Ciro*, *Eduardo*, and *Catarina* to the convent. He's assisted by his daughter, *Enza*, who is a nature-loving Heidi-like Italian girl. She cautions him against going out on a journey that will take him through miles of snow-covered, twisty roads and paths. Her father reassures her that he's only doing it for the three lire fee that his family needs to survive. *Marco's* dream is to expand his business and to buy a large house on *Via Scalina* for his family. Before he leaves, 10-year-old *Enza* crawls under his cart and lubricates the springs.

Analysis

Chapter 1 is about lives disrupted and suddenly diverted and the sustaining strength of the family. *Ciro* and *Eduardo Lazzari* find their lives in turmoil after the unexplained death of their father. *Caterina*, their mother, takes them to the nearby convent where the nuns will take over the rearing of the two boys. It's apparent that life is an economic struggle for most of the residents of the adjacent towns of *Schilpario* and *Vilminore* in the Italian Alps, and *Caterina* knows she can't raise her sons alone. Life for all three in the family suddenly goes from challenging to unmanageable. *Ciro* and *Eduardo* are terrified and in a state of shock when they arrive at the convent. Their mother's only support is to tell them to follow the wishes of the nuns and make themselves indispensable by volunteering to help with any task at hand.

The brothers find strength in each other. *Ciro*, the younger, considers *Eduardo* his entire family, and they encourage and support each other in adjusting to their new lives. *Ciro* receives another traumatic shock when he innocently reports to the nuns the sexual transgressions of *Don Gregorio*, the head of the convent. Instead of amending his



behavior, the priest takes revenge on Ciro by having him shipped off to the United States. Ciro finds, though, that his experiences of loss have toughened him into a man and taught him some valuable life lessons. Eduardo, less defiant than his brother, takes a different path and is sent to study at a seminary for Catholic priests.

Already, the reader sees how these two boys have turned crisis into opportunity. With the apparent loss of their relationship with their mother, both face the prospects of life alone with a measure of trust and faith.

Discussion Question 1

How does Caterina Lazzari summon the courage to place her two fatherless sons in the convent?

Discussion Question 2

How does the breakup of their family affect Ciro and Eduardo Lazzari?

Discussion Question 3

How do the nuns react when Ciro accuses Don Gregorio of sexual indiscretions?

Vocabulary

scalloped, missal, indulgence, pilaster, transom, gnarl, sepulcher, truffles, muslin, padrone, colonnade, poultice, duffel, chute, embellishment



Chapter 2: A Red Book

Summary

Marco Ravanelli maneuvers his old horse, Cipi, with the cart down the mountainside gingerly as he tries to avoid snow and ice. Once she's well removed from the convent area, Caterina Lazzari weeps over the loss of her sons. Marco stops the horse to ask her if she's injured or sick. She tells him of her widowhood, in addition to the loss of her sons. Marco says he has a large family of six children, boys and girls. Caterina shares some food with Marco as they stop to rest; she tells him she's always wanted a daughter, like his 10-year-old daughter Enza, whom Marco praises heartily. Caterina tells Marco the tragedies in her life have destroyed her faith.

Meanwhile, back at the Ravanelli home Enza washes clothes over a coal-fired stove, then hangs them out to dry. Enza's mother, Giacomina, makes buttery winter drinks for them both. Concerned about her father's welfare, Enza says she wants to stay up until he returns. While they await his return. Enza and Giacomina discuss love, marriage, and families. Giacomina says that Marco asked her father if he could marry her just shortly after their first meeting. Her father agreed, probably wanting to marry off the last of his daughters, Giacomina says.

Marco finally shows up, cold and weatherworn, pleased to see his family. After some talk, Enza goes to bed and reflects on how lucky she feels because of her family and wishes that other poor mountain families like hers could feel the same sense of joy and comfort. She also prays that she can always remain with her parents, to help them as they grow old, eschewing the roles of wife and mother.

Analysis

This brief chapter helps to explain an earlier reference in Chapter 2 that her father, Marco, fears Enza is too burdened with the family's problems, including financial hurdles, at the tender age of 10. The fact is that Enza is a sensitive young girl who feels true compassion; this is in her character and probably not inspired by anything her parents say or do. But, the passages in both chapters 1 and 2 concerning Enza's position in the family raise the issue of what therapists now refer to as codependency, or unhealthy emotional bonds that hinder or arrest a person's psychological freedom and mature happiness. The fact that Enza prays and fantasizes about staying at home forever in the role of caretaker reflects her low self-esteem and need to "rescue" others. Enza takes on the sufferings of others as her own. In doing so, she is eventually drained of her spiritual and creative energy.

Discussion Question 1

What is Enza's fondest wish regarding her family and parents?



Discussion Question 2

Why is it that Marco Ravanelli, who lives very near the Lazzari family on the mountain, hasn't heard about the disappearance and death of Caterina's husband?

Discussion Question 3

Is the kind of enmeshment obvious in the Lazzari family typically seen more in European families than in American families? Explain.

Vocabulary

livery, decorum, talisman, aster, litany, tabernacle

Chapter 3: A Silver Mirror

Summary

Ciro and Eduardo throw themselves into work at the convent, as their mother had suggested. Eduardo rises early and serves the morning mass, rings chimes to call the nuns for evening vespers, and uses his beautiful calligraphy to write letters and grades on report cards. Ciro, the more physical of the two, takes over the chores of the aging handyman, Ignazio Farino. With his physical labors and the hearty diet of the convent, Ciro soon develops into a robust 15-year-old. The brothers, because of the loss of their nuclear family, are accustomed to taking care of themselves. Although they clothe themselves in garments from the donation bin, the boys show a pride and maturity beyond their years.

One of Ciro's tasks is to replace the used linens from the altar; one day while performing this chore he encounters Don Raphael Gregorio, the 30-year-old convent priest. They exchange pleasantries and Gregorio tells Ciro he'd like to see him at mass occasionally. Ciro says he'll try to attend as often as possible, given his tight work schedule. Ciro returns to the room he shares with his brother, voices his reservations about the Catholic church, and tells Eduardo he's infatuated with Concetta Martocci. Ciro gets misty-eyed as he describes her. Ciro even maneuvers himself to a spot in the cathedral where he can stare at her for a full hour during mass.

Enza trots up the mountain with a hamper full of fresh spring food and flowers, accompanied by her younger sister Stella. They stop and open the basket, and are soon joined by their other siblings. Stella wants to cool off in a stream and Enza helps her get into the creek where she sees that her sister's body is covered with dark bruises. Enza asks the other children if they know anything about the bruises, and they demur. As they head back down the mountain, Stella rides on Enza's back as the older sister tries to make sense of the evidence of violence. Her joy at the arrival of spring is washed away by fear and apprehension. The next day, a doctor arrives to see Stella and Enza begins to imagine an empty world without her sister even though she hopes for a happy, sunshine-filled future for both of them. She watches helplessly as her sister begins to die.

One day while cleaning in the sacristy, Ciro encounters Don Gregorio and Concetta together; he holds the teenager in a tight grip and kisses her hungrily. When Ciro enters the room, she pulls away from the priest and he threatens to harm Ciro if any word of the episode gets out. Ciro tells Gregorio he's no priest and, if he had his will, he would take an axe to his church.



Analysis

Both *Ciro* and *Enza* are exposed to serious, traumatic shocks in this chapter. For *Ciro*, the loss of his father is compounded by his assignment to a convent. Then because of the lechery of *Don Gregorio*, the convent priest, *Ciro* witnesses his girlfriend *Concetta* and the priest entangles in a lustful embrace. When *Don Gregorio* realizes he's been seen breaking his vows, he explodes with anger toward *Ciro* and threatens him if word of his tryst gets out.

Enza and *Ciro* have their faith tested. *Enza* is horrified to witness her sister *Stella* becoming ill with a fever and dying within a matter of days. Her Catholic faith is shattered, and she begins to understand the meaning of death and loneliness. *Ciro*, too, feels betrayed by the church and his fellow man. The death of *Ciro's* father and the collapse of his mother shake him to the core. Now, *Enza* and *Ciro* have life experiences in common, besides being raised on the same side of the mountain.

These experiences will prove to be part of the foundation for their enduring love as adults.

Discussion Question 1

Does *Don Gregorio* behave like a hypocrite?

Discussion Question 2

Which of the two brothers—*Ciro* or *Eduardo*—does more physical labor at the convent and, at the same time, resents the Catholic church?

Discussion Question 3

What is *Ciro's* initial reaction when he witnesses *Don Gregorio* forcing himself on the teenaged *Concetta*?

Vocabulary

penance, cloister, quell, calligraphy, palpable, pantaloons, sacristy, genuflect, maritime, nonchalance, missal, anticipatory, shantung, maroon



Chapter 4: A Pot of Creme

Summary

Enza prays and worries about her younger sister, Stella, as she fights a fever. The doctor comes and examines her, gives her some medicine to reduce the fever, and has a whispering chat with her parents. Stella tries to cheer herself up by recalling the children she knew who had been gravely ill and survived. The local Catholic priest comes and chants prayers through the night. But, Stella's condition worsens despite their efforts. When Enza sees her sister grow pale and listless, she bolts the house, runs down the street, and weeps loudly. Marco, her father, comes up to her, and they weep together. Giacomina, her mother, covers the child's emaciated body and weeps into her hair. Just as her sister passes, Enza shouts: "No!"

Ciro cleans the church, then notices Concetta Martocci sitting alone in the chapel. He sits beside her, and they have a whispered conversation. Giro returns to work, then hours later returns to find the church doors locked. He goes around to the sacristy's side entrance where he sees Don Grigorio, a priest, clutching Concetta in his arms and kissing her "ravenously," Giro utters some improvised reason for coming inside, then quickly scurries to leave. However, Don Grigorio blocks his escape and tells Giro, in a lowered voice filled with anger and hatred, never to speak of his encounter. Giro responds with his own anger and defiance and tells the priest he has no power to prevent him from speaking. The priest lets Giro out and bolts the door behind him. Don Grigorio returns to fondling and kissing Concetta, who pulls down her lace mantilla and slips quickly outside.

Analysis

Giro's journey into manhood gets another jolt, and he loses his belief about the innate goodness of priests and the church when he encounters Don Gregorio fondling Concetta, who he thinks is his girlfriend. Enraged, Giro challenges the priest and accuses him of hypocrisy without knowing or caring about any repercussions for himself. Both Concetta and Don Gregorio react to their exposure with fear for their own reputations—the priest for being exposed to the nuns as an infidel which could mean the loss of his position and livelihood, and Concetta for fear her father might learn of the tryst. It is only Giro who acts and reacts out of principles and not personal expediency.

Another instance of loss of faith is Enza's disappointment and anger at the death of her sister, despite all the prayers, medicines, and hopes. Enza is disillusioned in a similar fashion to Giro. Both confront the adult world with all its harshness and human weakness, and they are repelled. These rites of passage into adulthood equip both Enza and Giro with a healthy skepticism that later becomes part of the foundation for their grown-up love for each other.



Discussion Question 1

How does the Ravanelli family respond to the news of Stella's death?

Discussion Question 2

What repeat offense involving the priest at the convent drives Ciro nearly mad?

Discussion Question 3

What major life experiences do Enza and Ciro share? How does each handle the disappointments?

Vocabulary

jaundice, piety, assuage, sacrament, impertinent, seraphim, alcove, elated, cassock, cassock, coddle, besotted, mantilla



Chapter 5: A Stray Dog

Summary

Ciro tells Sister Teresa that he's caught the priest in an amorous clutch with Concetta and demands that she tell Sister Ercolina, in hopes the complaint works its way to the mother abbess, who has the power to fire Don Gregorio. The nun asks Ciro whether his sole intent to punish Don Gregorio is motivated by his anger at Concetta for betraying his love. Ciro says priests should be held to a higher standard than religious figures, but Sister Teresa reminds him that all humans have flaws. She admits she has been disappointed in her career in the church having traded her mother's kitchen for the kitchen that feeds the nuns—and Don Gregorio

Ciro sets out on a five-mile trek to Schilpario to dig a grave for Father Martinelli. His journey takes him over the mountains and through a tunnel. As he walks through the dark tunnel he is almost run over by a fast-moving carriage pulled by a team of horses. As he ascends the mountain, Ciro is aware of something, or someone, following him and creating a rustling sound in the bushes. Ciro greets the dog with joy and relief that he isn't one of the local wolves. He gives the dog water from his canteen, tells him to go home and continues. The dog follows. Ciro reaches Schilpario and enters the Church of Sant'Antonio da Padova to present himself for duty. He realizes he's walked into the funeral service for Stella Ravanelli for which the entire village has turned out. Enza, Stella's older sister, reflects on the situation and decides "life is not about what you get, but what is taken from you."

Although they haven't yet met, Ciro notices when Enza rises from kneeling to put her hands on her distraught mother's shoulders to comfort and support her. The dog, which he calls Spruzzo, runs up to him and Ciro gives him a piece of salami, aware that they are now bonded, for better or for worse.

Analysis

In the face of adversity and death, a stray dog adopts Ciro one day while he is walking five miles to Schilpario to dig a grave for Father Martinelli. They bond quickly, and Ciro develops a deep love and compassion for Spruzzo the dog. This chapter has an allegorical quality to it, as if by becoming close to an animal Ciro experiences the kind of unconditional love described in the Bible. His faith in God and in humanity is gradually restored through his relationship with the dog.

At the same time, Ciro is further disillusioned when he reports Don Gregorio's tryst with Concetta to Sister Teresa. Instead of being outraged, the nun tells Ciro that everyone has weaknesses and shortcomings. Her dismissal of his concern further alienates him from the church because it seems Sister Teresa is more interested in covering up the episode than finding the truth and acting accordingly.



Discussion Question 1

How does Sister Teresa view her life as a Catholic nun? How does she view Don Gregorio?

Discussion Question 2

What is the only form of unconditional love Ciro experiences while at the convent?

Discussion Question 3

In addition to Ciro, on whom does Don Gregorio vent his rage after being found in an illicit tryst?

Vocabulary

puree, unrequited, dupe, vestment, rectory, torrent, catastrophic, edible, dispel, benediction, dormant



Chapter 6: A Blue Angel

Summary

Since *Ciro* hasn't finished digging the grave, *Stella's* casket is buried some four feet down covered with flowers and greenery for the graveside service. After the family and mourners leave, *Ciro* realizes he's left with *Enza* and *Spuzzo*, the dog, to watch and support him as he completes digging. Once he reaches seven feet, *Enza* jumps into the grave to help *Ciro* position the casket. Also, she can't part company with her little sister. As they leave the cemetery in twilight accompanied by the dog *Spuzzo* and his wagging tail, *Ciro* sees that *Enza* is far more beautiful than *Concetta Martocci*. Besides her physical beauty, *Enza* is attuned to the feelings of others—unlike *Concetta* who is too narcissistic and focused on her own beauty to be open to others' feelings, *Ciro* decides.

He confesses to *Enza* that he's had an infatuation with *Concetta* but isn't really sure whether she likes him. *Enza* replies that he is worthy of love and should have no trouble finding it among the eligible females on their side of the mountain. Besides, she tells him, there are plenty of blonde girls in *Lucerne, Switzerland*, on the other side of the mountain. *Ciro* asks *Enza* what her ambitions are, and she replies that she'd like to continue living at home to take care of her parents as they grow older. *Enza* cries when she speaks of her sister, and *Ciro* takes her in his arms to comfort her. They kiss; *Enza's* heart accelerates. They walk together to the church so *Ciro* can collect his lire for digging the grave. *Enza* offers to take him and *Spruzzo* back to the village in her carriage.

They stop first at *Enza's* home to get some food for their journey, and *Ciro* meets *Enza's* parents. Then they return to the carriage, and *Ciro* notices that the carriage seems to be the same one that carried his mother to her grave. *Enza* drops *Ciro* and *Spruzzo* off at the convent in *Schilpario* then heads home. When *Ciro* enters the convent, he sees his brother *Eduardo*, who cautions *Ciro* that he can't have a dog. But *Ciro* replies the dog is for *Sister Teresa*, who has a rat in the kitchen she needs to eliminate. When they join the nuns, they learn that *Don Gregorio* has demanded that *Ciro* and *Eduardo* be removed immediately from the convent. Their manner is grave. *Ciro* learns that he is to be sent to the boys' workhouse in *Parma*, and his brother will enroll in a priests' seminary.

Sister Ercolina tells *Ciro* they've devised an alternative to the workhouse—an apprenticeship to a master shoemaker in *America*. Recovering from the shock, the brothers discuss their fates in their room in the dark. *Eduardo* tells *Ciro* that if he ever discovers where their mother is, he will go to her in an instant.



Analysis

Enza and Spruzzo keep Ciro company as he digs the grave for Stella, her sister. Once he's dug it, Enza jumps into the grave to help Ciro position the casket properly. At this point, Enza and Ciro not only share the experience of death but also the physical reality of burying a loved one. They have their first kiss when Enza begins to weep at the loss of her sister. When Cio returns to the convent with Spruzzo, his brother Eduardo cautions him about having a dog. Deftly, Ciro says the dog isn't for himself but for Sister Teresa to rid her kitchen of rats. The reader gets a sense of Ciro's big, loving heart as well as his cleverness in this chapter. The reader also gets the first inkling of a romantic attraction between Ciro and Enza.

Discussion Question 1

What are the rather unusual circumstances under which Enza and Ciro are first brought face-to-face?

Discussion Question 2

What does Don Gregorio demand concerning the Lazzari brothers in the wake of his faux pas?

Discussion Question 3

What pact do the brothers make between themselves during their last night in the convent?

Vocabulary

portico, mausoleum, paisley, enamored, prosciutto, trivet, piazza, wimple, novitiate, infidel, excavate, columbine, diligence, prosciutto, unspool, pram, piazza, smattering, novitiate, penance, reconfigure, treacherous



Chapter 7: A Straw Hat

Summary

The sisters prepare a dinner of veal for Don Gregorio and serve it to him in the rectory as the Lazzari brothers squirm and await their fate. Sister Ercolina tells Don Gregorio she's made arrangements for Ciro to be immediately removed to the workhouse. However, Gregoro needs to come up with 100 lire to handle costs of the sudden move. She does not reveal her plan to use the money for Ciro's passage to America. The priest grumbles and finally agrees. Then he pulls Sister Teresa aside and asks why she went to the Martocci family to report the incident of sexual harassment because it has caused them great distress. Don Gregorio angrily tells Sister Ercolina to transfer Sister Teresa from the parish, but she refuses and asks again for the 100 lire.

After a tearful farewell to the nuns, Ciro and Eduardo climb into the carriage as the good-natured Sister Teresa assents to care for Spruzzo until Ciro can return to claim him. During their ride in Enza's father's carriage, he tells Eduardo and Ciro, their father went to Iron Range, Minnesota for a mining job and rode in the same carriage. They make a stop in Clusone to deliver a package, and Ciro spies Concetta crossing the street. He jumps from the carriage and follows her, finally stopping her to say he's leaving for America. She tells Ciro she never could have loved him because of his crude manners, dirty clothes, and general lack of polish.

When Enza hasn't heard from Ciro for a while, she grows restless and decides to go to the convent. She learns that Ciro no longer lives there, but Sister Domenica refuses to tell her where he went.

Analysis

The nuns of San Nicola practice the axiom that the quickest way to a man's heart is through his stomach on Don Gregorio by means of a special veal dinner. Their motive is to negotiate for leniency on behalf of Ciro. Truthfully or not, they tell him that Ciro has been accepted at the workhouse—which is like a prison—but that the convent must come up with 100 lire to cover the administrative costs of making the transfer. He grumbles but finally agrees, unaware that the nuns plan to use the money to buy passage for Ciro on a ship to America.

Ciro receives another metaphorical slap in the face when he unexpectedly encounters Concetta and she tells him she never had romantic feelings for him. More of the story is filled in as Mario continues chattering while they ride. Enza gets some steel in her spine when she goes to the convent looking for Ciro, only to be told he's left but not told where he currently lives. This is a point in the story where everyone's credibility and integrity is on the line. Not coincidentally, Don Gregorio tries to orchestrate the outcome in his favor



by recruiting nuns who will be just as duplicitous as him. Secrecy, lies, and coverups abound as perennial flowers.

Discussion Question 1

Which nun earns the wrath of Don Gregorio for spreading the word about his embarrassing moments with Concetta?

Discussion Question 2

Through what ruse do the nuns extract 100 lire from Don Gregorio to buy a ticket to America for Ciro?

Discussion Question 3

What reason does Concetta give Ciro for rejecting him?

Vocabulary

outskirts, stonemason, spats, indentured, workhouse, opulent, embroider, chifferobe, con-celebrate, missal



Chapter 8: A Friar's Robe

Summary

Short of hair, itchy of scalp, and gawky in clothes, the two Lazzari boys stumble starry-eyed through the Bergamo train station. The previous day, Sister Domenica had given Ciro and Eduardo haircuts. Other nuns had cleaned, mended, and pressed their clothes. Once alone in the station, the brothers realize they'd never been separated a day in their lives. They make a vow to return to the mountain as soon as possible. Eduardo boards the train for Rome with four other novitiates when Ciro tells Eduardo that his "brothers" are waiting for him on the train. Eduardo protests that Ciro is his one and only brother, forever. Ciro then leaves on another train for Le Havre, France, where he embarks on a sea voyage to New York. Both boys experience excitement, fear, and sadness in equal measure.

Analysis

This chapter restates and reinforces the importance, strength, and durability of families. Both Cito and Eduardo will have times when the memory of their pledge of loyalty and love will be the key to their survival.

Discussion Question 1

What realization dawns on the Lazzari brothers as they await their separate trains?

Discussion Question 2

What are the train destinations for each of the brothers?

Discussion Question 3

How does Ciro feel after the final parting from his brother?

Vocabulary

grosgrain, piping, defunct, distraught, cassock, contemplative, glint, paisley



Chapter 9: A Linen Handkerchief

Summary

Ciro hears all kinds of languages and dialects of Italian, as he waits to board the SS Chicago. He eats only small portions of food so he'll have some money left when he reaches America. His "stateroom" on men's below-deck third level measures five by five feet with not enough room for him to stand. So, he sits on his cot and takes stock of what has happened in his life, starting with the departure and apparent death of his father. From his vantage point of poverty, *Ciro* watches breathlessly as wealthy Europeans board the ship with all their possessions, servants, and luggage. He has determined that making a success of himself is one way to settle his score with Don Gregorio.

Ciro is shocked when he enters the hellish heat of the boiler room, where he'll work in exchange for his passage. But, it isn't hell that he enters, just an altered state of reality where the boss, Massimo Zito, purloins gourmet treats from the dining room for his workers and is lenient about arranging work schedules. *Ciro* meets another worker, Luigi Latini, who is headed for Ohio and an arranged marriage with an immigrant Italian girl he's never met. They share a few laughs over the absurdity of the world and become friends. When he retires to bed, *Ciro's* head is filled with visions of girls, "a kind of religion to him." *Ciro* can still feel Concetta and her beauty in his gut, but the image of Enza is a shining picture of a whole person who is beautiful in all her parts, as well as in total.

Analysis

Ciro's resolve and character are tested by real adversity. His determination to reach the United States and to find a wife drive him to endure the hardships of work-for-passage on the ship. The reader witnesses him grow stronger and more durable with each challenge he overcomes. *Ciro* burns with a desire to make a success of himself in the new country as a way to overcome the harm done to him by Don Gregorio. Once again fellowship with another immigrant Italian, Luigi Latini, becomes a saving grace for him. From their common struggle develops a lifelong friendship in which each helps and supports the other.

Discussion Question 1

Who or what serves as an inspiration for *Ciro* as he travels to America?

Discussion Question 2

What kindness does the boiler room supervisor show toward his workers?



Discussion Question 3

Who is the new friend Ciro makes aboard the steamship?

Vocabulary

dinghy, ebullient, stamina, banishment, mandate, dialect, enunciate, tulle, steerage, immaculate, periwinkle, nonchalant, chute, pallor, disparate



Chapter 10: A Green Tree

Summary

Ciro and Luigi are greeted by "big American noise" as their ship heads up New York harbor. When it docks, the immigrants must wait for a ferry to take them to Ellis Island where their entry will be processed. They're instructed to pin a copy of the ship's manifest on their chests to serve as identification. Through the mosh pit of immigrants, American officials, and a slow-moving line, Ciro passes his physical exam with flying colors. Then, he is called aside by an immigration official who leads him to a small conference room where he worries that Don Gregorio might have contacted American officials. He is assured that Gregorio is not allowed entry. But, the official tells Ciro that the nuns of San Nicola have telegraphed them offering themselves as character witnesses. Ciro is immensely relieved when he learns his paperwork will receive high priority for processing.

An immigration officer gives Ciro a list of common English and American surnames to substitute for Lazzari, but Ciro tells the officer—an Italian-American—that he doesn't want to change his name. He tells the official that he's an apprentice to Remo Zanetti, who is also his American sponsor. With all his paperwork in order, the official stamps Ciro's papers and tells him to get in line for the ferry to take him to Manhattan. Ciro pauses long enough to ask if the official can help his friend, Luigi Latini. Ciro and Luigi are overjoyed to be permitted into the United States. Ciro feels good about becoming a shoemaker in the rapidly-growing country.

Carla and Remo Zanetti, his American host family, show up to take Ciro from the busy loading dock to their modest home in Little Italy. Ciro is shocked at the boldness and lack of manners of the poor in Little Italy. Compared to the simple folk on the mountain, these new Italian-Americans seem ill-behaved. They haggle over prices of everything, speak loudly, and act self-assured. But, Ciro is grateful to finally be in America.

Back on the mountain, Enza and her father, Marco, face a domestic crisis. For years, Marco has paid rent to Signor Arduini for the house they occupy with the understanding that when he had the cash, Marco would buy the house. But Signor Arduini visits the family and asks them to see him the barn that stands adjacent to the house. Enza asks Arduini if he's forgotten about his promise to sell them the house, but he replies that he can't sell because he's promised it to his son. Enza calls him a liar; a fight erupts; Arduine evicts the Ravanellis. Enza pleads with her father to let her go to America where, she believes, she can earn the necessary funds in a short time.

Remo Zanetti shows Ciro his shoe-making shop, which is large and crammed with tools, leather, and other items of the trade. He also shows Ciro his sleeping quarters—a tiny space with a cot behind a curtain in the workshop. Ciro says the space is as good, if not better, than any living quarters he's had. Ciro offers to pay rent so that he has some security, as opposed to the situation at the convent, which ended badly. However, Remo



says he considers *Ciro* an apprentice to whom he offers free room and board until he learns the craft.

Analysis

Ciro secures a stable, modest position as apprentice to the shoemaker *Remo Zanetti* in Little Italy. Just as he is finding his way in the New World, *Enza* struggles with her father to maintain a home when the landlord—who has promised to sell his house to *Marco* when he has the funds—reneges on his offer and evicts the *Ravanellis*, including *Enza*. She is so distraught that she pleads with her father to let her go to America where she believes she can earn the funds to buy the house. The reader feels the pull of America for struggling Europeans. By the time *Enza* and her family face their crisis, the answer seems to be right at hand-- go to America.

Yet, as the chapter unfolds, the reader also becomes aware of how big an adjustment it is for new immigrants to fit into American society. The reader sees how different ethnic and geographic groups coalesce behind the instinct for survival and the notion that there's safety in numbers. The same kind of herd behavior is evident in many species of wild animals such as herbivores. On arrival in New York harbor, *Ciro* and *Luigi* are put aback at the noise, hustle and bustle of New York. It is both stimulating and a bit frightening to them and they naturally gravitate toward the enclave of Little Italy.

Discussion Question 1

When he is called aside by immigration officials in New York, what does *Ciro* fear has happened?

Discussion Question 2

What important side benefit does *Ciro* receive as an apprentice to shoemaker *Remo Zanetti* in Little Italy?

Discussion Question 3

As *Ciro* finds an apprenticeship, what challenge does *Enza* face back in Italy? What does she propose as a solution?

Vocabulary

disembark, bursar, brusque, reverberate, stethoscope, naught, bemused, rhinestone, organza, periscope, quarry, demure, mantilla



Chapter 11: A Blessed Medal

Summary

As her father, Marco, seems immobilized by grief and shock Enza quickly finds another rental house nearby. Marco is devastated because his cherished goal was to buy the house they'd rented. But, he continues to resist selling the barn to Arduini. As Enza acquires her dress-making skills, she is confronted one day with news that the family's faithful old horse, Cipi, has died. Her whole childhood with Cipi repeats in her memory, and she is bereft.

Ciro finds a new girlfriend in Felicita Cassio, and they conduct their daytime trysts in her parents' apartment. As he dresses to leave, Felicita demands the gold ring on his finger that had been his mother's. Ciro flatly rejects her demands and offers to buy her another ring. However, Felicita won't accept any substitutes.

Enza and her father plan to journey to America in search of better economic opportunities. She tells her mother that she'll get work as a seamstress and Marco will find work in construction. They promise they'll return before Christmas and replenish the family's savings, with some left over for a nice holiday celebration. Giacomina shows Enza a letter from her cousin in Hoboken, N.J. offering to let her stay there and even do some work for the relatives. Friends bring gifts for Enza and Marco—hand-baked cookies, special soaps, and knit gloves.

As Enza prepares for her trip, she tries to ignore ominous feelings of impending disaster. Giacomina looks forward to an end of her recurring nightmares about her husband and daughter's trip to America. Enza's attention is focused solely on the trip abroad; she is too self-absorbed to see that shadows under the Pizzo Caminio are "more menacing than they'd ever been."

As they travel the Atlantic aboard the SS Rochambeau, Enza becomes quite ill. Marco is very worried about her condition. She's rolled up in a fetal position when he finds her in the ship's infirmary. The ship's doctor tries potent anti-nausea and sedative medications, but nothing helps. She becomes dehydrated and mostly unresponsive. The father has frightening nightmares about losing both of his daughters.

Marco is extremely anxious as he approaches immigration officials, filled with remorse and self-recrimination for bringing Enza on the long voyage. She is driven to help her family survive and determined to create a new home in America. Marco goes into his daughter's hospital room and finds her curled up in a fetal position. He puts his hands gently on her head. She moves her lips, but no words come. For the nine-day duration of the voyage, Marco curls up on the floor and sleeps next to Enza.

Working intensely for long hours in the Zanetti shoe business tires Ciro, and he accidentally cuts his hand on the lathe. Signora Carla Zanetti immediately decides to



take him to the hospital. Enza regains consciousness in St. Vincent's Hospital in Greenwich Village. A nun tells her she collapsed on the ship during the journey because of low blood pressure. She is reassured that her father knows where to find her. She reels from her illness and all the sudden changes in her life—including the loss of her sister.

Marco Ravanelli stumbles, exhausted, through the crowds on the railroad platform until he runs into a gregarious Italian-American carriage driver who asks good-naturedly if Marco is feeling OK but quickly realizes Marco can't speak English. The driver, a hulking man who looks like a prize fighter, asks Marco if he's Catholic; Marco nods and pulls out his devotional medal to show the driver. The driver snaps his fingers and tells Marco the ride is free. He scribbles his daughter's name on a piece of paper to show why he's there. In a hurry to retrieve his daughter, Marco passes Ciro on the way out of the hospital.

Before Ciro can hail a carriage, Signora Carla Zanetti stops him and says they must first stop at the chapel and offer thanks. As if synchronized, Ciro and Carla enter at the same time as Enza and her father. Sudden recognition produces shock, then joy, then talk and laughter. Ciro explains to the stunned Carla these are friends from Italy, then introduces everyone. Just as Ciro and Enza begin to renew their relationship, Felicita—Ciro's girlfriend—runs up, grabs his hand, and kisses it. Enza realizes that Ciro and Felicita are lovers, and she is stunned.

Analysis

This chapter brings the element of chance back to the love story of Enza and Ciro. No sooner have they found each other in New York and started to revive their relationship than they experience another setback when Enza realizes that Ciro has another girlfriend. At the same time, Enza struggles to find work that will enable her to send money to her mother in Italy in hopes of purchasing the house they've rented for years. And she still grieves intensely over the loss of her sister, Stella. So the once-lovers, Ciro and Enza, are tested as a couple and as individuals in what seems to be a hostile environment where the laws of natural selection are at play.

Discussion Question 1

What does Concetta demand of Ciro that he refuses to give her?

Discussion Question 2

How does Enza fare on the transatlantic crossing to America?



Discussion Question 3

Why does Marco feel remorse during the steamship journey to New York?

Vocabulary

bobbin, emigrate, betrothed, pummel, bludgeon, wrought-iron



Chapter 12: A Fountain Pen

Summary

After they dock, Enza is taken to St. Vincent's Hospital in Greenwich Village. At about the same time in a distant part of the city, Ciro works feverishly on the boots he's learning how to construct. His hand slips and is cut deeply by the lathe. Signora Carla Zanetti wraps the wound and takes him immediately to the hospital. Meanwhile, Enza awakens in the same hospital with a splitting, crazy-making headache. Enza is reassured by the nuns that her father knows where she is, and is coming to the hospital. Marco, Enza's father, looks for a carriage to take him to St. Vincent's. He meets a huge and friendly driver from the same place in Italy; the driver offers to give him a free ride when he learns that Marco is a Catholic.

Marco rushes into Enza's room when he finds her in the hospital. She tells him her doctor wants her to stay until her headache resolves. Father and daughter go to the hospital chapel together and are comforted by the familiarity of the setting and liturgy. As she is leaving the chapel with Marco, Enza hears her name spoken loudly and in her regional dialect. She turns and sees Ciro; they are overjoyed to see each other again. Signora Zanetti demands to know who Enza is, and Ciro tells her they are from the same village in Italy. Felicita Cassio, Ciro's new girlfriend, enters and kisses his wounded hand.

Immediately, Enza realizes the relationship between the two and is shocked. As Ciro leaves the hospital, Marco takes his daughter back to her room and insists she get rest.

Analysis

During their brief, bitter-sweet contact at the hospital, Enza notices that Ciro has changed in some way. He stands more erect, carries himself with more confidence and even a bit of swagger—attributes she ascribes to his contact with Americans. Enza's heart is broken again by Ciro when she sees that he's involved in a romantic relationship with Felicita. After her shipboard illness and long, hopeful wait to see Ciro again, Enza withdraws into her own private world. She finds solace in the small chapel within the hospital with its candles, stained-glass windows and familiar rituals. She also draws strength from the loving presence of her father, Marco. Her determination to help her family survive in Italy takes precedence over her relationship with Ciro once she realizes his true nature.

Discussion Question 1

What do Marco and Enza do together once they're reunited at the hospital in New York



Discussion Question 2

Why does Ciro come to the hospital?

Discussion Question 3

What are the unintended consequences of Ciro going to the hospital, besides finding Enza there?

Vocabulary

chiffon, sumptuous, fetal, dehydrated, cohosh, disheveled, percolate, parapet, reinvention, gangrene, interminable, venial, incorrigible, wizened, swagger, intuition, charmeuse



Chapter 13: A Wooden Clothespin

Summary

Ciro develops an interest in making women's shoes after a salesman leaves some promotional material on women's shoes. Carla Zanetti scoffs that *Ciro* only wants to make women's shoes so he can be constantly meeting new women. Remo, co-owner of the shoe business with his wife, Carla, explains to *Ciro* the difficulties he's had training a young apprentice because of his wife's objections to each candidate—until *Ciro* appeared.

Ciro receives a letter from his brother, Eduardo, explaining that their mother has been severely ill and living in a sanitarium at the direction of a local physician because of her "mental distress so severe she could not function." Much of this depression stems from the death of her husband, Eduardo writes. "The news that Mama is alive is a blessing to me," Eduardo says.

Enza marks six years as a domestic servant to an Italian family in Hoboken, N.J., and her father goes for work in the coal mines of Pennsylvania. During that time, the combined earnings of father and daughter accumulate in *Giacomina's* bank account, and they begin looking for real estate on the mountain so *Marco* could build or buy the "dream home" he envisioned for his wife and family. But, Enza toils as a virtual slave and is "mistreated, overworked, forced to do the cleaning, cooking, and laundry" for *Anna Buffa* and her three daughters-in-law. In addition, Enza must pay rent for her basement quarters, make pasta, and try to stay on top of housework.

After dinner, *Anna Buffa* has a few shots of whiskey and wants to be friends with Enza. She asks Enza to sit beside her and listen to music from the *Victrola* such as *Enrico Caruso*. When Enza puts records on the machine, *Anna* barks at her to be careful not to break a disc which reminds Enza of how much she dislikes the materialism of her employer. She dreams longingly of her lost family back in Italy, so unlike the selfish *Buffa* family

Remo tells *Ciro* and his friend *Luigi* that he'd like to make them both journeymen so he can expand his business, before getting into making women's shoes. He proposes to have *Luigi* work in the shop beside him so he can learn the trade, while *Ciro* circulates in the business district with his repair cart, selling and repairing shoes. *Ciro* likes the idea and *Luigi* calls it "a great opportunity."

As Enza learns the ropes at the *Meta Walker* blouse factory, she learns from friends—chiefly *Laura Heery*— how to negotiate the streets of Hoboken in the dark, as well as how to handle unwanted advances. "Shut up!" she finally says to *Joe Neal* of the finishing department when his persistent attempts at courtship become intolerable. *Laura*, a native New Jersey girl, sees that Enza is tired and beaten down from both the



job and particularly her living situation, so she suggests they rent a flat together in New York City and find better jobs. They both attach their dreams of betterment to this quest.

Analysis

Enza settles into a six-year stint as a domestic servant to a middle class Italian-American family who treat her with medieval harshness. She is poorly paid, disrespected, and forced to work a schedule that in a later time would be considered unhealthy and unethical. Because of her devotion to her family, she puts up with the abuses so she can continue sending small amounts of money back to her mother in Italy. Enza finds a kindred spirit in a fiery young Irish girl from Hoboken called Laura Heery who lives in the same rooming house. Laura suggests they move out of the rooming house, out of Hoboken, and out of the blouse factory to find a better life in Manhattan. Laura seems to have just the spark of independence and defiance that Enza needs to change her life. They envision a one-bedroom apartment stoic in its furnishings and Lilliputian in size. The main benefits will be freedom and the opportunity to live as full human beings.

Discussion Question 1

What are some of the unethical—and probably illegal—conditions of Enza's live-in position with a family in Hoboken, N.J.?

Discussion Question 2

How does Enza handle persistent sexual harassment by Joe Neal at the blouse factory?

Discussion Question 3

Who is responsible for raising Enza's awareness of her situation and offering a solution?

Vocabulary

layabout, penitent, servitude, waft, tenement, journeyman, marionette



Chapter 14: A Rope of Tinsel

Summary

Laura and Enza take a break from their dogged pursuit of jobs and apartments to enjoy Columbus Day in Little Italy where there is an outpouring of cultural, culinary, and ethnic gifts. Laura is shocked when Enza tells her that her boyfriend from the old country, Ciro, is actually living and working in Little Italy. Enza says it's been a few years since she's heard from Ciro, and Laura asks where he works. When Enza tells Laura that Ciro works at Zanetti Shoe Shop, Laura grabs her by the hand and drags her down the street to the shop. They introduce themselves to Carla Zanetti and tell her they are from the same mountain as Ciro. Signora Zanetti gestures toward the street revelers and says, "We're all from the same mountain!" Enza reminds Carla that they met in the hospital when she took Ciro for his hand wound.

The door opens and Remo Zanetti, with Luigi Latini and his girlfriend, enter followed by Ciro and Felicita. Enza and Ciro rush toward each other. Ciro notices how beautiful Enza has become in the intervening years. Felicita bristles with jealousy. They decide to go to the roof and enjoy the celebration. Enza chides Ciro for flirting with her while Felicita is so near. Enza tells Ciro that her father now works in California, although the rest of her family remains on the mountain. Ciro tells her that Eduardo studies in Rome to become a priest. Enza decides it's time to leave the party, and Ciro shows her his tiny living quarters behind the shop.

Ciro tells Enza that Felicita is an old friend and not a current lover. Before they part company, Ciro asks Enza her address and whether he can call on her sometime. "Yes," she replies, and they make plans to meet again.

Analysis

This chapter seems to reiterate the maxim that "good things come to those who wait." At least in Enza's case, this seems to be true. After several years during which she and Ciro haven't had any contact, Enza appears in the shoe shop with Laura. Ciro is overjoyed to see her again. She asks whether he's still involved with Felicita, and he replies that they're just old friends. He stresses that they can't be anything other than friends because "she's been betrothed since she was 12 years old," according to the old Italian custom of arranged marriages. As they part company, Enza tells Ciro in a steady voice that she will not pursue him and that he should, after all these years, know her value just as she knows his. This is the moment when mature love between them blossoms for the first time, the moment when they stand spiritually naked before each other and connect on a deeper level of humanity and understanding.



Discussion Question 1

What is the occasion for Enza and Ciro meeting at the shoe store where he's an apprentice?

Discussion Question 2

What happens when Enza and Ciro meet at the shoe shop that changes the course of their relationship?

Discussion Question 3

What causes a spike of jealousy when Enza meets Ciro at the shoe store?

Vocabulary

extravaganza, camaraderie, apprentice, chimney, swizzle, milliner, ruckus, drizzle, atomizer, fetching, ricochet, illuminate, squander, axis



Chapter 15: A Yellow Diamond

Summary

Luigi and Ciro attend to the mobile shoe repair cart stationed in Queens. As they await customers, Luigi informs Ciro that he and Pappina plan to marry and he's looking for a big diamond. Ciro tells Luigi that he and Felicita aren't getting married and asks whether he noticed Enza on the rooftop during the Columbus Day celebrations. Luigi says Enza is "nice, and beautiful." A large, powerful Irishman named John Cassidy appears at the cart to pick up his resoled boots. He's with Kirk Johannsen, a friend who tells Ciro he's quit his job to join the army and looks forward to defeating Germans in France. By nightfall, Luigi has fallen asleep in the cart. Ciro writes a letter to Enza explaining that he won't be able to see her as early as they'd planned because of his commitment to the cart and to the Zanettis. He does not mention his plans to also join the army.

As winter snow blankets Hoboken, Enza scurries to place buckets under leaks in the roof of the Meta Walker factory and feels the weight of exhaustion and depression. Her exhaustion comes from the fact she's been working double shifts to gather enough money to move to a better apartment in New York City with Laura. She's also sad that her father (Marco) won't be able to join her for Christmas and about the uncertainty surrounding Ciro's plans. She sometimes bursts into tears when she thinks about her father or when anxieties over her job accumulate. She is consistent about putting aside something from every paycheck for moving, and this brings her some cheer as well as the occasional letter from her siblings.

Enza is on a ladder at the dress factory gathering tickets for the finished blouses, when Joe Neal ascends and puts his hands between her legs. She loses balance, falls off the ladder, and lies bleeding on the floor. Neal finds out how enraged she is when Enza kicks him hard. He throws himself on top of her and calls her a "Dago bitch." Laura appears with a large pair of scissors and yells at Neal to get off Enza before she drives the scissors into his back. Night shift women gather in the break room where Laura tells them to always carry scissors for personal defense. Laura and Enza decide now is the time to make their move. Enza buys oranges to pass out to the Italian kids in her neighborhood.

A final confrontation between Enza and Carla Buffa affirms for Enza she's made the right choice. She informs Signora Buffa she's leaving and tells her to make her own lunch. Enza joins Laura in marching out of the sweat shop, heads held high, to a torrent of abuse shouted by the Buffa family from the front porch. They skip and sing as they depart for Manhattan.

Analysis

This section in the book provides a look at the working conditions in America before the rise of labor unions and government agencies to protect workers. Enza is abused and exploited both at home and at the factory. Her domestic employer, Signora Buffa, is a narcissistic middle-class immigrant who seems to think Enza is a slave with no rights at all. At the blouse factory, Enza is subjected to routine sexual harassment, physical battery, and attempted rape. Enza decides to leave both situations and make a better life for herself in a shared apartment in Manhattan. The chapter explores the conditions under which immigrant women lived in the early decades of the 20th Century.

Discussion Question 1

What does Joe Neal do at the factory that causes Enza fear and suspicion?

Discussion Question 2

How does Laura respond to the situation with Enza and Joe Neal?

Discussion Question 3

What is the significance of Enza quitting her job at the blouse factory and leaving the Buffa family?

Vocabulary

emblazon, borough, tenement, brandish, decimate, indentured, lockstep, taunt, citrine, admonish, brandish, decimate, foothold, reminiscent, shrew, caterwaul, taunt



Chapter 16: A Chocolate Truffle

Summary

On Christmas Day, Ciro goes to Enza's apartment building in Hoboken with a box of expensive chocolates for her. The landlady (Anna Buffa) tells him that Enza moved out weeks ago and returned to Italy. She calls Enza a whore and then invites him in for a drink, but he flees outside, brokenhearted and filled with self-reproach that he didn't communicate his love to Enza sooner. He opens the box of chocolates and gives them to children in the street.

Enza and Laura lunch at the automat. Enza asks her friend if their employment agency has found them any work and Laura explains there are jobs for scullery workers who scrub pots and pans and mop the floors. Enza says that kind of work is OK with her, and Laura reassures Enza that they are doing well—living at the YWCA and finding jobs. Their first assignment is the James Burden mansion at 7 E. 91st. Street, which Enza refers to as a "palazzo" (palace) because of its opulent furnishings that reflect wealth. The butler takes them on a walking tour of the kitchen, which amazes them because of its vast size and the fact the workers go efficiently about their tasks like a well-oiled machine.

Emma Fogerty, the kitchen captain, tells the girls "you'll hate me with a divine fury when you see the dishes you have to do. But that's what this is: the rich enjoy life and we clean up after 'em." Enza and Laura devise a system for washing the mountains of dishes that is efficient and organized; they use the extra time while guests are eating to catch up in their work. Without complaining, they work hard and derive some pleasure out of working inside such a townhouse.

As they clean up from the dinner party, the scullery maids hear the sound of a brilliant piano and the interwoven Italian lyrics of a man and woman singing a duet. They learn from Emma Fogarty that the pianist is Puccini, the famous Italian opera composer and musician. Enza's heart warms as she bathes in the rich Italian culture, and realizes how restorative the arts—especially music—can be. They are encouraged by Emma to find decent living quarters and move out of the YWCA.

Analysis

Anna Buffa, the evil witch of Hoboken, lies to Ciro when he comes to see Enza at Christmas time. She tells him Enza returned to Italy weeks previously, then invites him inside and tries to seduce him. Ciro runs outside and keeps on running. When they are confronted with a huge mountain of dishes at the Buffa house after a big dinner party, Enza and Laura cleverly invent an efficient system for washing that affords them long breaks and enables them to witness the post-dinner entertainment. On one particular night, the crystal clear tones emanating from the piano are made by none other than the



great pianist Puccini. Everything that night is anticlimactic once they've heard the master. The music not only uplifts their spirits but offers a sonic beacon that helps them stay focused on their shared goals.

Discussion Question 1

What is the sound that maids at the Burden mansion in Manhattan hear as they clean up from a big party?

Discussion Question 2

How does the landlady Emma Buffa react when Ciro comes to call on Enza?

Discussion Question 3

What is the Italian term Enza uses to refer to the Burden residence?

Vocabulary

scullery, premises, festoon, rotunda, toque, catacombs, dumbwaiter, czar



Chapter 17: A Sewing Needle

Summary

Enza and Laura move into the Milbank House, a 260-bed room and board house in Greenwich Village operated by the Ladies' Christian Union. They are thrilled with the space, with closets and bathtubs thrown in for good measure. Ciro decides to take a few hours off and heads toward Little Italy through Greenwich. He passes a gay Italian wedding and realizes it's the nuptials for Felicita Cassio and her dark Sicilian groom. Felicita spies Ciro and beckons to him. Ciro congratulates her and wishes her well. She asks Ciro if he plans to marry Enza, and he asks her to pray for him.

Ciro joins his friend Luigi and they go to an Army recruitment center. They both are motivated by a desire to get American citizenship, and military service is the most direct route. Also, they both want to serve the United States war effort. Ciro is accepted and given papers to show up in New Haven in a few weeks; Luigi is rejected because of deafness in one ear. Meanwhile, Enza prepares samples of her sewing work and an introductory letter for herself and Laura. She receives a letter inviting both girls to an interview at the Metropolitan Opera House.

There they meet Serafina Ramunni, costume designer for the opera company, who takes them to the costume shop in the basement. She gives them each a square of fabric and a tin of crystals with scissors, thread, and needles. She shows them a sketchbook drawing of a harlequin bead design and tells them to reproduce it on the fabric. When she sees the samples, Serafina tells the girls they need to decide who will take the position.

Enza and Laura take turns trying to convince the other that they should take the job. Finally, Serafina offers to hire them both at the same salary: one dollar a week.

Laura announces that she has a date with a Colin Chapin in accounting. She tells Enza that she introduced herself to him to encourage his romantic impulses. Amazed at Laura's cheekiness, Enza herself finds a man in publicity who she likes named Vito Blazek. Serafina makes Enza's day when she asks her to meet with the tenor Enrico Caruso for some costume adjustments for his role in an upcoming operatic production.

Analysis

Ciro is nothing, if not unpredictable. He and Luigi decide to honor their adopted country by volunteering for service when World War II breaks out. Luigi is rejected because of a congenital foot problem, but Ciro is accepted into the army. Meanwhile, Laura and Enza occupy an apartment in a boarding house operated by a women's church affiliate with polished wood floors and tall light-filled windows. Both Laura and Enza are elated to receive a letter from the Metropolitan Opera inviting them for an interview for the



position of costume designer/maker. Their hopeful hearts soar. The good news bolsters Enza's self-esteem—another marker on their journeys to full womanhood.

Right away, their romantic interests are piqued. Laura happily reports that she's got a crush on a young accountant named Colin Chapin. Then, Enza is pursued by Vito Blazek, who works in the publicity department. Serafina brings in a load of costumes belonging to opera singer Enrico Caruso and asks Enza if she'll do the adjustments that Caruso has requested. Enza immediately accepts. Thus, she is another step closer to the pinnacle of fame, which helps her to heal from the losses she's suffered.

Discussion Question 1

Why is Luigi Latini rejected for military service?

Discussion Question 2

What is the major motivation for Ciro volunteering for military service in World War I?

Discussion Question 3

What does a society columnist call the ring of private viewing boxes at the Metropolitan Opera?

Vocabulary

whimsy, manicured, conjure, banns, marabou, fleur-de-lis, belligerent, brownstone, scroll work, downstage, damask, mannequin, pastiche



Chapter 18: A Champagne Flute

Summary

Caruso proves to be a warm and sensitive person who impresses Enza with his outgoing affection and concern for her welfare. Although Caruso is getting fat, Enza tells him she can make costumes for him that will make him appear slimmer. He confesses that he can't stay on his doctor's diet of lettuce and hot tea. The opera singer prefers potatoes and pasta with butter and spices. He tells Enza that he'd like her to cook for himself and the cast, a challenge she reluctantly accepts although there is nowhere for her to cook at her rooming house and nowhere at the Knickerbocker Hotel where Caruso is staying.

Enza measures Caruso to make him a smock for the upcoming production of *Tosca*. She will modify his costume from the last opera in an effort to make him appear thinner.

She tells Caruso her plan: "I raise the shoulder, drop the sleeve, nip the waist in the back, pipe it boldly, and use double buttons. You will shrink underneath it."

Signora Zanetti washes and irons *Ciro's* army uniform, as he prepares to go to the front line in France. While he waits, *Ciro* tries to imagine what his mother would think about his enlistment and uniform. He decides she wouldn't be thrilled about either. She'd say the uniform is a drab and unexciting color. *Ciro* imagines *Eduardo*, a pacifist, would be supportive but would not want his brother to die in any war except a religious war. When he thinks about his lost father, *Ciro* weeps for all he has lost.

Enza starts making the *gnocchi* for Caruso. He is soon joined by *Laura* and *Colin Chapin*, her latest boyfriend, in the singer's hotel suite. They bring greens and spices for the dinner. Then, a hotel butler appears with the liquor cart of fine wines, hard liquor, and champagne. Enza tells *Laura* it looks like she's in love, and her roommate affirms it.

Caruso sweeps in and, smelling the aroma of Italian food, announces "I am in heaven." Caruso is overjoyed that he can once more eat like the Italian peasant he is. He tells the group that a Jewish friend who gives large sums of money to the opera can't get a viewing box because he's a Jew. Asked why his friend supports the Met in the face of such discrimination, Caruso says, "Love. He loves art like I love life."

Vito Blazek, the publicity man that Enza likes, is at the party and asks Enza for a date after dinner. Shyly, she accepts. After their first date, *Vito* pursues Enza with the enthusiasm of a cub reporter on the trail of a big story. *Vito* takes Enza to her first full-length movie, "The Immigrant" with *Charlie Chaplin*. She is offended by the depiction of poor immigrants and the filth of the ship, and runs crying to the lobby.

Vito gets serious and asks Enza what she most wants in her life, what she thinks will bring her happiness—beyond cooking for Caruso and adjusting his costumes. Enza



says she really doesn't know the answer but will ponder it. Vito says she's worth having happiness and should try to find the answer—for herself.

Analysis

Enza is charmed by Caruso. The chubby Italian peasant with a God-given voice is a child in many ways. He lavishes praise on everyone who works for or with him, is very generous and outgoing. It's almost as if the man has so much soul that it's constantly expanding him in every direction. Despite his tendency toward grandiosity, Caruso has a good sense of humor and a modesty that are appealing. For Enza, these are gifts to be treasured because they make her feel lighter and fresher. Unlike some famous performers, Caruso is not an egomaniac and not a sadist. Enza and Enrico share the same roots and soil-- true Italians.

The opera is an alternative reality for Enza, a magical place where dreams can power flights of fantasy that lift her to the heavens. She feels honored to be able to work for the Met and for Caruso. And when Vito asks Enza what her hopes and dreams for herself are, she can't give him an answer and asks for time to ponder the question. The fact she leads a rich fantasy life, the fact she feels more important because she works for the Met, and the fact she sacrifices herself to take care of her family in Italy and stays in a depressing job and living situation for six years—these are all indications of someone with very low self-esteem.

Discussion Question 1

Why does it take Enza six years to decide to move out of the Buffa home and leave the blouse factory?

Discussion Question 2

What is Enrico Caruso's biggest personal challenge that affects his health?

Discussion Question 3

What does Enza do for Caruso that endears her to the opera singer for life?

Vocabulary

conjure, pomade, mezzanine, improvisation, idiom, galvanize, bodice, lackluster, catharsis, erudite, gnocchi, maestro, whitecap, delirium, frivolous



Chapter 19: A Calling Card

Summary

Opening night for the new opera is a pastiche of flowers, congratulations, imperfect costumes, and — music! The boxes are filled with Vanderbilts, Cushings, Whitneys, and Steeles. Enrico Cruso is in fine form, and his singing brings tears and cheers to the audiences. A group of soldiers admitted as a public service gives a standing ovation afterwards. Vito leaves for the press room and Enza makes her way slowly through the happy throng.

She hears her name shouted from somewhere in the phalanx of humanity moving toward the front doors. “Enza!” once again rises from the turmoil. Then she feels a hand on her forearm, looks up and straight into the blue eyes of Ciro. Both are a bit shocked at their impromptu meeting. “What are you doing here?” Ciro asks. Enza quickly scans Ciro’s uniform and replies with “You joined up.”

Most of the emotional energy between them is exchanged unfiltered by words or “proper” mannerisms. Ciro asks Enza to have coffee with him. She hesitates because of her dating relationship with Vito, then agrees. Ciro tells her about his trip to see her at the convent and his disappointment on learning she’d gone back to Italy. “Well, I didn’t,” Enza answers.

At the Automat, Enza tells Ciro of all the times he seemed more attracted to other women. He protests that he was always happy to see her, despite other women. Enza says she can’t judge his intentions, only his actions. But he asks what would happen if she knew that he wanted her by his side. He walks her home, and Enza gives him a peck on the cheek. The passion in their relationship seems drained away.

Analysis

As much as she cares for Ciro, Enza begins to wonder if he is capable of being a faithful lover and husband. She reminds him of the times they’d drifted apart because of his obvious interest in other women. In effect, she tells Ciro that she judges him only by his actions—not by promises or rationalizations. It is difficult for Enza—and for the reader—to gauge his seriousness when Ciro wants to reengage with her. It is especially difficult to tell whether Ciro believes that he honestly loves her or is just deluding himself. After their latest encounter when they hug and have one kiss on the cheek, Enza is unsure how she feels about him. As the author explains: “She remembered him in her prayers but did not pine for him.”



Discussion Question 1

What does Ciro do to ingratiate himself to Enza when he runs into her at the opera on a home leave?

Discussion Question 2

What is largely responsible for the chill in relations between Ciro and Enza?

Discussion Question 3

What are the names of some prominent opera-loving families who attend the Met?

Vocabulary

wistaria, pandemonium, catacombs, vestibule, cummerbund, flounce



Chapter 20: A Hatbox

Summary

Ciro writes his brother, Eduardo, from the front telling him he hopes to be in Rome for his induction into the priesthood. The stress of warfare affects people in different ways. In Ciro's case, stress registers in his periods of utter blankness when he can't remember whether the war is over and when he obsesses over and fantasizes about death and how he would be a willing martyr to protect his fellow soldiers. It seems to him there is no coherent plan for the war and that his unit spends as much time burying the dead as fighting the enemy.

In New York, Enza and Vito are at an after-hours party for Caruso at the Met when he takes her for a ride on an outside elevator to the heights over Manhattan where the lights of the city seem like stars in the darkness. Caruso praises all the back-stage workers, but singles out Enza and Laura for special praise. He suggests to Enza that she should be designing and making new costumes rather than rehabilitating old ones. Caruso places gold coins in the hands of both Laura and Enza. Laura proclaims she will buy a mink stole, and Enza says she'll hold onto and treasure the coin forever.

Vito asks Enza to marry him, and she accepts. They seem like the yuppies of the 1980s in America, socializing with other young professionals, drinking champagne and wearing silk. They become besotted with themselves and their rising stations in life.

When Ciro arrives in Rome, he addresses and delivers letters to every prelate at the Vatican and elsewhere, asking for information about Eduardo's whereabouts. He gets not a single response. Discouraged, he goes to his hotel room and, as he prepares for bed, he hears a soft rap on the door. Expecting the maid, he opens the door to see Eduardo standing like an apparition. "Brother!" he shouts. They embrace and Ciro tells Eduardo he's been looking high and low for him. Eduardo answers with a simple, "I've heard."

Ciro tells Eduardo that he could have had any position in the world, including "writer and printer." He wonders aloud how Eduardo could have chosen the priesthood. "Any racket but the Holy Roman Church!" he declares. Eduardo says he feels drawn to the priesthood, just as Ciro is best suited to life as a layman, husband and father. They vow to come to each others' aid any time regardless of where they are and what they're doing." Ciro goes to his brother's ordination and talks one of the guards into letting him get close enough to Eduardo to touch his hand at the end of the ritual. Soon Ciro goes back to America and his life as a soldier.

Analysis

This chapter draws clear lines of distinction between Ciro and Eduardo, Enza and Laura. Ciro is the upstart rebel, impatient with rules and procedures and ready to strike



out on his own at any time. Ciro is also creative and warmhearted. Eduardo is the more pensive one of the brothers; his entry into the priesthood stands as proof of his ability to tolerate and survive within a bureaucracy. He seems able to function for long periods of time away from his family, living a celibate life. Ciro's passionate feelings for women draw him into many dubious romantic relationships.

Laura's temperament is similar to Ciro's. She is impulsive, self-confident and pleasure-seeking but also a woman of values and principles. Enza, on the other hand, is very unselfish and compassionate. Her original idea of her role in life is to be guardian and caretaker for her parents in their old age. Some of Laura's fiery Irish personality rubs off on Enza once they share an apartment. But Enza remains, basically, a sweet peasant girl from the Italian Alps who sees life through a rather simple lens of utter guilelessness. Perhaps because of her low self-esteem, Enza falls easy prey to the slick, fast-talking Vito and agrees to marry him although she really loves the rascalion Ciro.

In these relationships, it seems to be the case that opposites do, indeed, attract each other. Ciro seeks the intimacy he lacks with his mother but doesn't know how to achieve it; Enza tries to fill the empty hole in her heart by people-pleasing but that doesn't bring her satisfaction, either.

Discussion Question 1

What does Enza decide to do with the gold coin Caruso gives her as thanks for her hard work on his costumes?

Discussion Question 2

What drives Ciro into a constant round of romantic relationships with women?

Discussion Question 3

How does Enza's determination to be a caretaker for her parents affect her ability to form a lasting relationship with Ciro?

Vocabulary

recruit, contingency, tedium, perimeter, rambunctious, prelate, incur, parasol, disingenuous, monsignor, ordination obelisk, disparate



Chapter 21: A Gold Braid

Summary

As he steams across the Atlantic to New York at the close of World War I, *Ciro* is in many a broken man. He grieves intensely all of his losses—his parents, his brother, his innocent way of life in the Italian Alps and, most painfully, the separation from *Enza*. Unsure about his mother's whereabouts and health, hurt by the death of his father, and feeling excommunicated by *Eduardo*, *Ciro* fervently hopes that *Enza* is waiting for him for an exchange of hearts.

Vito sends letters to *Marco* in California and *Giacomina* in *Schilpario* asking for *Enza's* matrimonial hand and describing the kind of life he hopes to provide for her. This is both a joy and a new sadness for the *Ravanellis*, as *Enza's* marriage certainly means she will be out of their lives. Borrowing from novelist *Thomas Wolfe* ("You Can't Go Home Again"), the author observes "*Enza* accepts that she will never go home again." There is even a sadness in the imminent parting with her roommate *Laura*.

Laura helps *Enza* move out of *Milbank House* and fond farewells are exchanged with the opera singers, then *Laura* and *Enza* go to the church. As she waits outside, *Enza* reflects on her past and future, *Enza* hears her name. Then she hears it again, turns and sees *Ciro* in his dirty, tattered uniform, his helmet under one arm and a bouquet of flowers in the other. Awkwardly, *Enza* tells *Ciro* the obvious: "I'm getting married." He replies: "I know." But, *Ciro* feels grateful that he's survived the war and tries to talk to *Enza* who slips through the church door and locks it behind her. *Ciro* yells through the door, telling her to abort the wedding.

Ciro tells her she doesn't know her fiancée as much as they know each other. He pleads his sincere love and, once again, tells her not to marry *Vito*. She realizes that a marriage to *Vito* would be about her, while a marriage to *Ciro* would be about family, history and real love. *Enza* ponders her dilemma, then slowly removes her engagement ring. *Ciro* takes her face in his hands and says, "I have loved you all of my life." *Enza* puts *Ciro's* flowers in her waist jacket and says, "I belong to you *Ciro*."

Analysis

Ciro shows up just before *Enza's* wedding, wearing his dirty, torn uniform which seems to open the door to her heart just as wedding preparations are underway. *Ciro* forces his way into her room, holds her head lovingly in his hands, and tells her she's the only woman he's ever truly loved. *Enza* is touched and tells *Ciro* she's always loved him. At the last second, the church wedding is cancelled leaving *Enza* "stunned, speechless." As a recurring theme in this book, good and truth seem to win out over expediency and self-serving. This chapter emphasizes the inevitability of *Ciro* and *Enza* as a couple,



after years of fly-bys and temporary connections. The passion and deep love that each feels for the other becomes evident in this unvarnished expression of love and unity.

Discussion Question 1

What does Ciro do that causes Enza to cancel her wedding at the 11th hour?

Discussion Question 2

Does Ciro mature emotionally while in the service? Does this make him more convincing to Enza?

Discussion Question 3

What injury does Ciro sustain that will ultimately cause his death years after the war?

Vocabulary

iridescent, seminarian, inseparable, despot, nationalism, annihilation, Tintoretto, fresco



Chapter 22: A Bunch of Violets

Summary

Laura quizzes her roommate, Enza, about her reasons for calling off the wedding. She replies that the church requires someone planning to get married to be prepared for a lifetime with that person and that the bond be an honest one. She tells Laura she's loved Ciro since she was 15, but her roommate continues her grilling. She asks Enza what prospects a lad from Schilpario has in a post-war America. Enza jumps to Ciro's defense telling Laura that Ciro plans to open his own boot/shoe store. He will specialize in making women's footwear. Enza plans on continuing to work in the field she loves and to advance her career.

Enza says she's made the decision to marry Ciro based upon her feelings of love, not for any external, material, or financial considerations. She declares she'll give all of her love for all of her life to Ciro, through good and bad times. For once, Enza says, she's made a decision for her own benefit rather than to please others. Luigi, Ciro's friend at the Zanetti Shoe Shop, stops by the shop where Ciro is relaxing on a cot. They agree that the shop owners, especially Signora, profit from their hard labor while they struggle on meager earnings.

They visualize various places where they could prosper as shoemakers and enjoy their environment. Ciro asks about different places in New York, but Luigi says he prefers the country. They consider California but decide there would be too much competition. Luigi insists he'd like to live somewhere similar to Vilminore, where the presence of nature is strong and where there are lots of lakes. Luigi mentions Minnesota as a possibility, but Ciro winces and explains that's where his father went to work and disappeared.

For a moment, Ciro weighs the idea of working in the same mines that gobbled up his father. Then he realizes, "Enza will never leave New York City." But, later Ciro understands how much he wants to go somewhere else to start a fresh, new life together with Enza.

Marco (Enza's father) comes to visit her at Milbank House. He checks out his daughter and the living quarters and seems pleased with what he sees. He asks Enza why she called off her marriage to Vito, then asks her to join him on the return voyage to Italy. She says she can't make the voyage because of her illness on the first transatlantic crossing, and she won't reconcile with Vito Blazek because she really doesn't love him.

Enza writes a tearful resignation letter to Signora Ramunni at the Metropolitan Opera, where she is head of costumes. She seals the letter, then cries again. She and Ciro have agreed to move to Minnesota where Ciro believes he can establish a shoe store. She understands what it means to sacrifice for love, has no regrets about her decision to marry Ciro and move to the Land of 10,000 Lakes, but feels deeply the severance of



her connection to the Met. Enza sees her father off to Italy at the docks, where she again cries. Ciro supports, hugs, and loves her.

Ciro automatically becomes an American citizen for his service during the war. Their marriage means that Enza can also say proudly she's a citizen of the United States. Ciro and Enza, with Luigi Latini and his wife, board the train first for Chicago, then Minnesota. Soon Enza feels a sense of excitement about the next chapter of her life with Ciro just beginning to unfold. She says she'll sew since Hibbing, Minnesota, has no opera company. As Ciro embraces Enza, he continues to dream of his own shoe store.

Analysis

In this chapter, Enza and Ciro get down to the nuts and bolts of fashioning a life together. Enza overcomes her love of New York and the Met and agrees to go to Minnesota with Ciro where he believes he can build a successful shoe store. This is the first of many compromises that will go into their lifelong partnership. The foundation of their relationship now is complete, unconditional honesty. Both Ciro and Enza know their love is real and enduring and both are committed to each other. Luigi and Pappina decide to join the newlyweds on the train to Minnesota so Luigi can partner with Ciro in operating a shoe store. This chapter illustrates how trust and honesty are the building blocks of any relationship, whether marriage or a business partnership.

Discussion Question 1

What spurs Ciro and Luigi to imagine a better economic future for themselves as shoemakers?

Discussion Question 2

How does Enza display greater emotional maturity after Ciro has returned from the war?

Discussion Question 3

While Ciro nurtures his dream of having a shoe store in Minnesota, what does Enza envision for herself?

Vocabulary

matron, pummel, oblivious, antiquity, opulence, baluster, oxblood, apprenticeship, nuance, condescending, gangplank



Chapter 23: A Library Card

Summary

Enza and Ciro, Luigi and Pappina clutch each other as they are hit with a frigid Arctic wind when they get off the train in Hibbing, Minnesota. Enza had thought the coldest place on earth was the Italian Alps in winter, but she is now forced to change her opinion. It is apparent to them that Hibbing is a town hastily built near the mines, a town that had endured, like the mines, through good and rough times. The two couples come shuddering into the Hotel Oliver where they'll stay until they find more permanent quarters.

At the hotel, they meet Mel Butorac, a local businessman who leases real estate to entrepreneurs and assists them in working with the banks to get their businesses started. He offers to show them around and suggests they consider opening two shops, one each in Hibbing and in nearby Chisholm because of demand for their services. Enza and Ciro are exasperated that Butorac has deviated from their original agreement to open a single shoe store. But he quickly explains that he'll show them the real estate already discussed and asks they keep an open mind about operating two stores.

The Italians discuss their options. Enza points out that Pappina should be close to a hospital when her baby comes, which means she should live in Hibbing where there is a medical facility. They decide by group conscience that Enza should handle business operations because of her experience running the opera costume shop. And there is general agreement that the shoemakers should be allowed to make shoes. They decide as a group that no one will cut and run back to New York when challenges arise.

Ciro and Enza rent a capacious upstairs apartment in Chisholm complete with skylights to brighten every corner, which pleases Enza. A friendly neighbor gives them the rundown on the community and its bank. He advises them to avoid a certain teller who is, in fact, twice a teller—once for the bank and a different kind of teller who talks about the business of everyone else. The neighbor also gives them the ethnic breakdown of the town with its large Italian community, as well as Middle Europeans.

Enza goes post-nuptial shopping in Chisholm for a bed and a record player. She also buys some Caruso records and requests a library card although she finds few Italian titles in the shelves. Emilio, Ciro's new friend, describes the large and vibrant Serbian population that emerges during Serbian Days in July. He also recalls the 1904 mining collapse and death of hundreds of miners—the worst disaster in the Iron Range. Ciro cringes as he wonders whether that tragedy killed his father. Enza and Ciro go to an all-day Serbian house party honoring the feast day for one of the Catholic saints. There is food, wine, music and dancing.

Ciro slips away and dances with a young Serbian beauty, Enza screws up her courage and enters the throng of dancers to confront Ciro, but she can't find her husband. She



waits a long time; when there is no sign of Ciro she walks through the frigid night back home and gets into her new bed around 1 a.m. About three hours later, Ciro shows up and says he was playing cards with some men in the barn and apologizes to Enza. He also claims he doesn't remember dancing with the young woman and begs her forgiveness. She softens, and tells him they need to buy a wedding ring for him.

Enza asks Ciro why he doesn't sell women's shoes at their new shop; he replies that he doesn't have time. Enza offers to work at the shop to give Ciro time to make women's shoes, and he agrees. She goes to the bank seeking a business loan to purchase women's shoes as inventory for the shoe store. Then she checks a safety deposit box in the name of Ciro's father. Inside is a stock certificate in the name of Carlo Lazzari worth about \$100. She cashes the stock and places it in a new joint account in both their names.

On Christmas day Enza goes to mass, then to the cemetery and finds the black granite tombstone with Carlo Lazzari's name in gold letters that she purchased with some money from the sale of the stock certificate. Arriving at the church, Ciro sees Enza and asks why she bought a tombstone for his father since his body was never recovered. She replies that his life is worth remembering, as well as his son's—a photo of which she buried in the grave. Enza tells her husband she's pregnant and that the child was conceived during their train trip to Minnesota.

Analysis

Another challenge to their union arises for Ciro and Enza. At a Serbian party, Ciro slips away and is seen dancing with a young Serbian beauty. When Enza tries to find her husband, she can't see him anywhere. Later, she asks him why he disappeared and he says he doesn't even remember it. Enza swallows her anger and suspicion, and says he needs to wear a wedding ring. Then she discloses that she's pregnant and tells Ciro she's anxious that he may just disappear from her life as he's done in the past..

A slippery real estate agent tries to maneuver both couples into renting another property they don't need, to serve as a second show store. After overcoming their irritation with the agent, Luigi and Ciro decide they will go ahead with a second store anyway. Enza interjects that the Latinis need to be close to the hospital because of Pappina's pregnancy.

Enza presses Ciro to make women's shoes because she believes it's a rich market; he replies that he doesn't know how to do that and doesn't have time to learn. He agrees to let Enza sell already-made women's shoes in their Chisholm store on condition the shop will sell only his women's shoes when he makes them. It appears that both Enza and Ciro have control issues. Enza's issues relate to Ciro's latent infidelity. Ciro's control issues relate to the operation of their business. At this stage, though, they are able to resolve their issues in a positive, amicable way.



Enza goes to the bank seeking a business loan, and the banker asks her what she and Ciro intend to do with the safe deposit box that belonged to his father. She opens the box and finds a stock certificate from the mining company that caused his death. The banker says it's worth about \$100. So she sells the stock and puts it into a new joint account she opens for herself and Ciro—a gesture of trust.

Discussion Question 1

How do the two couples—Enza and Ciro, Luigi and Pappina—support and help each other once they're confronted with the cold reality of Minnesota?

Discussion Question 2

What does a rent-hungry real estate agent suggest to Ciro and Luigi about opening a shoe store?

Discussion Question 3

What does Enza do when she finds a mining company stock certificate owned by Ciro's late father?

Vocabulary

decamp, entrepreneur, windswept, capitalize, tonic, field stone, escalator, stencil, billow, plummet, voluminous, premonition, trousseau, womanize, epiphany, layette, cosign, prattle, reparation, escargot, tithe, midwife



Chapter 24: A Train Ticket

Summary

Enza prepares their home for the summertime delivery of their child. Ciro is at work one day in the shop when Laura Heery appears in the doorway and announces she's come to help Enza through the historic event. Laura sits down for a coffee and gives Enza a box filled with baby attire made by her friends at the opera costume shop. Enza, Ciro and Laura go to the annual ethnic festival where Enza goes into labor. Luckily a friendly cop gives them a ride to Chisholm Hospital. Thrilled at having a male heir, Ciro decides the boy's name will be Antonnio and Enza agrees.

As Laura prepares to go to the train station and to New York, she hears a commotion in the staircase and comes downstairs to see her old flame Colin Chapin, who's just gotten off the train from New York. Shocked, Laura asks why he came to see her. He replies that he loves her and wants to get married. After some hesitation, Laura agrees. Colin reminds her that his two sons are part of the deal; after the wedding, the four go to Miami Beach as a combined vacation and honeymoon.

Enza returns to work in the shoe shop, with Antonio in a playpen. She and Ciro work together in the shop. She receives a letter from Laura informing her of the death of Caruso. She weeps as she reads the letter, and Ciro holds her in his arms. For the first time since moving to Minnesota, Enza hungers for New York. Pappina brings her newborn daughter, Angela, into the shoe store to introduce her to Enza and family. Enza knows the child will become a surrogate for the daughter she doesn't have. Angela is Pappina's fourth child, and Enza wonders why she herself is still struggling to have a second.

Analysis

Old business intersects with new business as people and issues from the past surface. Laura Heery suddenly appears in the doorway of the shoe shop, having arrived to help Enza in the last days of her pregnancy. Colin Chapin, Laura's old boyfriend, appears at her doorstep to proclaim his love and ask her to marry him. Resistant at first, Laura finally agrees and accepts the fact Colin brings with him two children from his first marriage. Enza gives birth to their first child, a boy named Antonio.

Discussion Question 1

What divergent views do Ciro and Enza have regarding the sex of their first child?



Discussion Question 2

Where is Enza when she begins labor?

Discussion Question 3

What do Enza and Ciro, Laura and Colin do after Laura's wedding?

Vocabulary

Marrakesh, bunting, pivot, ultimatum, pedigree, pierogies, chenille, displacement, inimitable, grappa



Chapter 25: A Lucky Charm

Summary

Ciro takes the 11-year-old Antonio to the doctor for a physical exam because his athletic son wants to play junior varsity basketball. Antonio gets a clean bill of health, but Doc Graham asks Ciro how severe his back pain is and examines his back. When he applies pressure to an area just above the kidneys, Ciro yelps in pain. He also notices some skin anomalies. Doc Graham gives Ciro a referral to an oncologist at the Mayo Clinic. The oncologist sees a black spot on Ciro's X-ray that is a tumor which was probably caused by his exposure to mustard gas during the war. The doctor tells Ciro he has about a year to live.

Ciro can't wait to get home to his family and wishes that the train would go faster. He stops to smell flowers and to take in the world around him. When he hears Enza happily humming in the kitchen, he pauses to gather his strength to tell the bad news. When he tells her, she crumples into his arms, crying. Somewhat outraged, Enza insists there must be a doctor who can help. But Ciro reminds her there are no better specialists than those at the Mayo Clinic. "You can't just give up!" Enza says. They worry over telling the news to Antonio.

Ciro says he'll tell his son everything, as he always has done. Then Antonio sweeps into the house after school, and asks his father about the outcomes at the Mayo Clinic. When Ciro tells his son of his cancer, Antonio at first denies it because Ciro seems so healthy-looking. But Ciro explains the cancer has been a slow-growing menace triggered by the mustard gas. Everyone cries and embraces, then the house falls silent. Cool moonlight bathes their bedrooms as they try to come to terms with the inevitable. Antonio, especially, is distraught and frightened at the prospect of losing his father—just as Ciro had lost his own father.

The two couples—Enza and Ciro, Luigi and Pappina—have a picnic at Longyear Lake, and Enza jumps on Ciro again for being defeatist about his fate. She insists that he can make a difference in the outcome of his disease if he changes his attitude and thinking. When he tells her he's made plans to consolidate the shoe shops so they can continue after his death, Enza's irritation flares into anger. She tells her husband he should make a trip home to the mountains, where he will find healing.

Ironically, Ciro receives a letter from his brother, Eduardo, telling him he's located their mother "beaten down from years in a convent with terrible conditions." Eduardo urges his brother to come for a visit to see him and their mother. Enza is overjoyed when Ciro tells her he's decided to return to Italy; she informs him she's saved the money from his father's stock sale to finance the trip. Enza writes to her friend Laura in New York City asking if they can stay with her a few days before Ciro sails for Europe. Then Ciro and Enza make arrangements for Antonio to stay with Pappina and Luigi and board a train



to the East Coast. From there, Ciro will sail to Europe and Enza will remain with Laura and Colin in New York until her husband returns.

Analysis

The familial ties that bind are plainly in evidence. Ciro wants to have a doctor check his son, Antonio, because Antonio will be playing sports. His son is fine. However, after asking Ciro questions about Ciro's back pain, the doctor refers him to an oncologist. The oncologist discovers that Ciro has spinal cancer and that he only has a year to live. Enza and Antonio both provide Ciro strong emotional support. Then word comes from Eduardo that he has found their mother, Caterina, and that she's okay. Immediately, Ciro and Enza make plans to go to Italy to see her. They leave Antonio with Luigi and Pappina and head for the East Coast by train. This chain of events underscores the closeness in separation of loved ones, and the strong bonds that hold families—Italian or otherwise—together. In this story, there are no towering egos—simply people who care for one another and try to help each other in the struggles of life.

Discussion Question 1

What dire bit of news does Ciro learn when he takes his son, Antonio, for a medical checkup?

Discussion Question 2

What astonishing bit of family news comes in a letter from Eduardo?

Discussion Question 3

What is the impact of these important messages on Ciro and Enza. and what do they do?

Vocabulary

chide, radiate, precarious, scaffolding, insidious, incalculable, banish, metastasize, Great War, disciplinarian, pungent, skein, subside, stalwart, enthrall



Chapter 26: A Carriage Ride

Summary

Enza throws her arms around her old friend Laura and realizes she's very close to delivering her child. Laura says she didn't tell Enza about her pregnancy because the medical outlook for the baby has been iffy. They return to the penthouse apartment of Laura and Colin, where the girls swap pregnancy stories. The next morning, Ciro goes for a walk and ends up in Little Italy where he sees the storefront where Zanetti Shoe Shop had once operated; the building is vacant and "for rent." When Ciro returns, he and Enza return to the Metropolitan Opera for a quick sentimental journey. Enza sees a 20-year-old seamstress working at her old station and smiles. They also stop at the Automat for pie and coffee.

In the back of Enza's mind is always the fear of facing life alone without Ciro; but, her hopes for a miraculous cure help provide her some emotional balance. Before Ciro departs, Laura has her son; Before she can even hold the child a nurse leaves the room with the neonate in her arms. Laura cries out to return her son, but the nurse replies the baby is going to the hospital because he's having trouble breathing. Ciro and Colin follow the baby, while Laura and Enza begin to cry. Henry Heery Chapin is placed in an incubator, and by the next morning the doctor reassures Laura that she'll be going home with the baby in a few days.

Ciro finds his steamship passage to Italy much more pleasant than his previous journey from Europe to the United States. When the ship docks in Naples, Ciro takes the train to Passo Presolana and decides to get off and hike the final stretch of mountain to Vilminore and the convent at San Nicola where he's been invited to stay as the guest of honor. When he rings the door bell at the convent, his old friend Sister Teresa greets him warmly. He greets the nuns as they walk toward the kitchen, and he learns about those who have died or gone to other convents. When they reach the kitchen. Ciro tells Sister Teresa the reason for his visit is the fact he's dying of cancer. She tells him to pray, but he objects that he's not a good Catholic any more.

Sister Teresa tells him he's a good man, which is more important than being a good Catholic. He also learns that his old nemesis, Don Gregorio, has been assigned to a church in Sicily. And Sister Terese assures that she took good care of Spruzzo, giving him the best cuts of meat, until his death. His grave is marked with a small headstone. Ciro then visits Enza's family and catches up with each one. He tells Giacomina, Enza's aging mother, that she's doing very well in the United States. One of Enza's sisters hands him Enza's diary in which she writes about the pain of losing Stella. His heart is warmed when he reads an entry in which she describes her excitement when first meeting with him. He realizes that his wife has loved him since that day.



Analysis

Ciro is reminded of the love that surrounds him when he returns to Italy. He's given a very warm reception by Sister Teresa at the convent when he stops for a visit. He learns that Don Gregorio has been transferred from San Nicola convent to Sicily and that his dog, Spruzzo, has died. Again, these contacts seem characteristic of an extended family that extends from Italy to the United States. *Ciro* realizes how long his wife has loved him when he is presented with her childhood diary. His homecoming, like life, is joyful and sad at the same time. But *Ciro* develops a deeper sense of gratitude when he has the chance to take in a wider perspective of the people and times that have been huge influences on his life.

Discussion Question 1

What does Enza do as payment to Laura for helping her with the birth of her son?

Discussion Question 2

Why does *Ciro* return to Italy alone, as Enza remains in New York with Laura and Colin?

Discussion Question 3

While *Ciro* is in Italy, what happens that reveals to him how long and how deeply Enza has loved him?

Vocabulary

chic, bellman, flack, impending, swaddle, transgression, pastina, hindsight, prognosis, mannerism, sullen, rudimentary, confluence



Chapter 27: A Blue Cameo

Summary

Ciro runs to meet the black carriage approaching the piazza with his mother and brother Eduardo inside. She is dressed just the same as she was 26 years earlier when they parted; she is still the same thin beauty, albeit with gray hair. What's different is her tremor and obvious anxiety. Ciro puts his head on her shoulder and cries, "Mama." Then Eduardo emerges in his Franciscan brown habit, and the brothers embrace.

Ciro pulls out an envelope with the cash proceeds from sale of the mining stock and hands it to Caterina. Then he unfolds the etching of his father's gravestone made by Enza and gives it to his mother. She folds the etching carefully and hands the envelope back to her son. "Keep this for my grandson and kiss him for me," she says. She gives him a small blue cameo that's a family heirloom.

When he learns that Caterina worked for those 26 years at a convent within a day's drive from where he lived, Ciro is overcome with the irreversible nature of his loss. He reflects that, had he known where she was, he could easily have gotten a ride to visit her. She explains that she was sick in the hospital. By the time she felt well enough to contact them, her sons were in America.

The sons discuss their mother after they're in bed. Eduardo tells Ciro that Caterina's "heart is frozen" because of the mental suffering she's endured and reminds him that she needs their love. As Caterina brushes her hair before bed, tears roll down her face for the losses all of them have suffered. Then she hears them laughing through the walls, and her heart begins to heal a bit.

When Ciro returns to Manhattan, Enza is waiting on the dock. After they kiss, Ciro hands his wife a small velvet box containing the cameo, "from my mother to the woman I love."

Analysis

When Ciro, Eduardo, and Caterina are at last reunited at a carriage station in Italy, there is much emotion and touching. Both Ciro and Eduardo are relieved that Caterina is basically hale and healthy, although with some inevitable signs of aging. Ciro tries to give her the money from sale of her husband's mining stock, but she refuses it and asks him to use it for her grandson, Antonio. Once again, the unselfish love between these family members is apparent. In the face of all the setbacks and adversities experienced by the family members individually, their strength comes from the love and caring they feel toward each other. Neither time, separation, struggle, nor even death can extinguish their all-enriching love.



Discussion Question 1

What does Caterina do to cement the bond between herself and Enza?

Discussion Question 2

What does Caterina do with the money from the sale of her husband's mining stock?

Discussion Question 3

When Ciro, Eduardo, and Caterina are together again, what occurs that helps to heal her broken heart?

Vocabulary

torrone, ladle, ninelle, chignon, reparations, poignant, dutiful, cameo, disembark



Chapter 28: A Skylight

Summary

Despite his cancer, Ciro continues working as a shoemaker through 1932. When he is too weak to continue working, Luigi helps him. They both continue to attend the regular Thursday night card games, smoking and drinking coffee until late at night. Everyone knows the end is fast approaching, and Ciro takes to his bed. He regrets that his son, Antonio, will grow into a man without having his father—just as he did. Enza embraces her husband and studies his hands with reverence for all they have done for the family. When Ciro becomes restless, Enza administers a morphine injection that calms and relaxes Ciro. All through the night, the three huddle close. At daybreak, Antonio gets into bed with his parents and holds them both until Ciro passes away. At the last second, Enza whispers in his ear: "Wait for me."

Analysis

Faced with the ultimate reality, Ciro and his family huddle together until he dies from cancer. As his death approaches, Enza and Antonio do not cry out for medical miracles or curse the fates for Ciro's fate. Like nature, they accept the profound reality of death and make it a shared family experience.

Discussion Question 1

What regret does Ciro have about his life as it's slipping away?

Discussion Question 2

What does Antonio do just as his father approaches death?

Discussion Question 3

What does Enza whisper in Ciro's ear as he is dying?

Vocabulary

lathe, aphorism, cherub, legacy, trinity, sacrosanct, morphine, syringe, condolence



Chapter 29: A Pair of Ice Skates

Summary

Enza watches 17-year-old Antonio zoom around on the Chisholm ice skating rink with his girlfriend, Betsy. Her intense grief at the loss of *Ciro* has morphed into a constant dull ache, and she is cheered by the steady flow of youngsters coming and going at the shoe shop—friends of Antonio. He goes to the doctor for a physical exam so he can play sports at school. During the exam, the doctor receives a call that Pappina is in the hospital, and Antonio runs home to tell his mother. By the time Enza and Antonio reach the hospital, they learn that Pappina has died in childbirth along with her infant. Enza becomes mother 'in loco parentis' to the Lartini family, doing household chores and showing the sons how to do their laundry and prepare their meals.

Luigi shows up early at the shoe shop one day and tells Enza he's decided to return to Italy. He plans to take his two sons with him. He asks Enza if she'll raise his 10-year-old daughter, Angela. Enza welcomes the idea so she doesn't have to live alone and because she knows Pappina would have done the same if the situation were reversed and Enza had died. Angela becomes something of a recluse, but one day Enza hears her singing along to a phonograph recording and realizes that Angela has a miraculously clear and distinct voice. Enza quickly arranges singing lessons for the talented girl. The instructor tells Enza that Angela could become a professional singer if she works hard enough.

America is dragged into World War II and Antronio receives a letter from the Selective Service Administration calling him for an interview. At the draft board, the recruitment officer tells Enza and Antonio that he's eligible for an exemption because his mother is a widow. But Antronio protests and says he wants to serve his country. Enza is disappointed and disturbed that her son won't take the exemption. Once he's deployed from New Haven for the Navy, Enza worries constantly about her son. Within a year her black hair turns completely white. Angela is accepted at the Institute of Musical Art in New York City, and Laura invites her to live with her while she attends. During her time at the institute, Angela develops a strong desire to join *La Scala*, which means she doesn't intend to return to Minnesota.

The doorbell rings. When Angela answers it, she sees Antonio at the doorstep in his dress uniform. They both get a very good look at each other. Antonio calls Enza in Minnesota to tell her he's coming home to see her. A week later, he arrives in Chisholm with his new bride. Enza is overjoyed at the safe return of her son and his marriage. Angela tells Enza: "The truth is that I've loved Antonio since I was a little girl."

Enza embraces her son and new daughter-in-law and gives Angela a small blue cameo with pearls that had belonged to *Ciro's* mother. Enza goes to her room with a cup of tea and reminisces, trying to fit all the pieces of her life together and to make sense of them. She remembers *Ciro's* advice to be mindful of the things of the world "that can mean



everything or nothing." She realizes *Ciro* gave her both love and gold,"but the love had been the everything."

Analysis

After Luigi loses his wife in childbirth, he asks Enza to care for Angela, his 10 year-old daughter. Antonio and Angela grow up together, but they take different paths in adulthood. Angela works hard at voice lessons in hopes that she can someday be an opera singer. Antonio dedicates himself to sports with a view toward a professional sports career. The fact that they initially choose different directions is much like *Ciro* and Enza taking separate paths when they were young. Just like his parents, Antonio realizes that he loves Angela later, and they are married. Enza is pleased when Antonio marries Angela. His marriage makes Enza feel that she is a part of something much larger than herself, something eternal and sacred—an outgoing love that replicates fairly closely the divine love she feels within herself. She acknowledges *Ciro* as her spiritual and earthly partner.

Discussion Question 1

What unexpected blessing occurs for Enza and Angela in the wake of the deaths of *Ciro*, Pappina, and her stillborn child?

Discussion Question 2

What does Antonio do, or not do, that causes his mother Enza great distress?

Discussion Question 3

What is the one most important gift that *Ciro* gives Enza before he dies?

Vocabulary

dexterity, prudent, coverlet, pore, soprano, skylight, calfskin



Characters

Ciro Lazzari

Ciro Lazzari and his brother Eduardo are sent to live in a nearby convent in the Italian Alps after the death of their father. Their mother, Caterina, decides she can't cope with raising two boys—either financially or emotionally. Giro is the younger brother who is approaching adolescence when the story begins. Giro seems the more poetic and carefree of the two brothers, Eduardo the more practical one. Going to the nuns at the convent of San Nicola doesn't appeal to either brother, but they try to follow their mother's advice about being polite and respectful. They also follow her advice about volunteering for work at the convent. Giro, despite the pain of rejection he feels, actively tries to fit in with the nuns and gains their favor. Caterina, their mother, meanwhile deteriorates mentally until she suffers a complete breakdown and is hospitalized.

Giro is an extrovert with a strong sense of right and wrong. He is engaged completely in his life and in the world. He likes women, and they return the admiration. When he reports to the nuns the sexual adventures of the priest, Don Gregorio, Giro is rewarded with being shipped off to America where he has no family or friends. He feels the loss of his brother Eduardo to the priesthood like a knife in the gut.

Eduardo Lazzari

Thrust into the role of his brother's caretaker, Eduardo steps up and tries to do the sensible, manly thing that his father would have expected. Eduardo tends to be the more practical one while Giro is subject to strong passions and compulsions. Eventually, Eduardo is sent to study at a Catholic seminary for priests, and Giro to the United States. Remarkably, the two brothers survive their ordeal and remain close even after "graduating" from the convent. Eduardo is an introvert whose strongest instinct is to withdraw from the world. He is more comfortable with the disciplined life of a priest than with the unpredictability of the world. His personality seems weaker than his brother's, although he is kind and compassionate.

Caterina Lazzari

After the death of her husband in a mine accident in the United States, Caterina is too grief-stricken to care for her two sons, Eduardo and Giro. In her shock and pain, she places the boys in the care of nuns at the San Nicola convent in the Italian Alps. Giro is badly hurt by his mother's abandonment, which may explain his skirt-chasing as he grows older. Giro is an energetic extrovert, and a survivor, who has little tolerance for the rigid rules of the convent and none whatsoever for the misconduct of the priest, Don Gregorio. When he reports his sexual transgressions to the other nuns, the priest retaliates by sending him to America. This turns out well in the end because while in America Giro re-encounters Enza, the love of his life and future wife.



Enza Ravanelli

Enza is a happy young girl in a strong family whose world is shattered by the death of her sister, Stella. Enza is a nice Italian girl who isn't interested in challenging the rules or "the system." In youth, she loves *Ciro Lazzari*, but soon learns he has a wandering eye with the ladies, so she protects herself by not getting too close. Several times their lives intersect, in Italy and in America, but *Ciro* isn't ready to be serious and Enza isn't willing to have her heart broken. But eventually *Ciro* realizes that he loves her, too, and their full union comes about and leads to marriage and children. But her time with *Ciro* is truncated because of his exposure to mustard gas during World War I, which causes a fast-moving cancer to take his life. Enza remains undaunted, happy for the time and happiness they shared and for their mutual love.

Marco Ravanelli

Marco Ravanelli, the father of Enza, has been the operator of a carriage service in the Vilminore-Schilpario region of Italy for quite a while by the time his daughter, Enza, marries *Ciro*. He is a proud man who is offended when the landlord reneges on his offer to let Marco purchase the house where his family has lived for many years. He decides to go with Enza to America where both will search for employment. After she is taken ill on the ship while crossing the Atlantic Ocean, she goes directly to the hospital. But Marco locates her and arrives there to check on her and give emotional support. This is one example of the kind of deep, enduring bonds that exist between and among almost everyone in this story. Enza decides to come to America and earn money to help her parents buy the house in Italy because she is so devoted to them.

Don Gregorio

Don Gregorio is a Catholic priest who is guilty of having a tryst with *Concetta*, a young girl. The priest's true nature is revealed when he seeks revenge on *Ciro* for exposing his sexual battery on the young woman in his parish. The priest treats nuns at the convent in a callused, high-handed way and displays arrogance. Don Gregorio sends *Eduardo*, *Ciro*'s brother, to a seminary for priests in Italy and exiles *Ciro* to New York. The priest's character is defined by dishonesty, exploitation, and revenge. In this story, Don Gregorio is the personification of evil.

Sister Teresa

Sister Teresa is one of the nuns at San Nicola convent who displays a warm and affectionate feeling toward both *Eduardo* and *Ciro*. Her relationship with *Ciro* becomes very important to the narrative since she's the one *Ciro* tells about the sexual misbehavior of the priest, Don Gregorio. Sister Teresa manages to collect money from the parish to cover *Ciro*'s trip to America after the priest seeks revenge on *Ciro* for divulging his secret. She also takes care of *Ciro*'s dog, *Spruzzo*, while he's in America,



and makes a special grave for him when he dies. When Ciro returns to the convent for a visit, Sister Teresa is the one person he wants most of all to see. They spend time together, and Ciro leaves knowing their friendship will last forever.

Concetta Martocci

Concetta, with her blonde hair and blue eyes, is considered "the most beautiful girl in Vilminore." She is avidly courted by Ciro Lazzari despite the fact that Enza Ravanelli is in love with him. Ciro puts Concetta on a pedestal and idealizes her as an unattainable treasure. When he finds that Concetta is engaged in a predatory love affair with the convent priest, Ciro loses interest in her as a romantic partner. Later, she is cruel to Ciro when she tells him that she never loved him and probably would not love him in the future.

Laura Heery

Laura is Enza's friend from the factory where they work under medieval conditions in Little Italy. She prods Enza to move to Manhattan and share an apartment with her. Though Enza is more reserved and practical than Laura, theirs is a strong friendship between opposites. The high-spirited Laura can always be counted on to find the silver lining in any situation. Laura is courted by several young men, but not by Colin Chapin—he one man she is really interested in. As Laura and Enza get older, their friendship deepens and matures into a sisterhood. They both support each other emotionally as their lives continue to intersect. Eventually Colin Chapin shows up on Laura's doorstep and asks her to marry him, which she does.

Enrico Caruso

Enrico Caruso, the opera singer, is a large and expansive personality tinged with a bit of bravado. He comes from a peasant family in Italy, loves pasta, and is delighted when Enza, who works in the wardrobe department, cooks home style pasta for him. Caruso seems to radiate love and warmth and gives the costume workers (Laura and Enza) each a gold coin. Enza treasures hers and saves it to pass along to her children.



Symbols and Symbolism

Gold Coin

Enrico Caruso gives gold coins to his staff, including Enza and Laura, to thank them for their hard work. Laura spends hers right away, but Enza treasures hers because it represents not only the kindness and generosity of Caruso but also her beloved Metropolitan Opera.

Cameo

Before she leaves for America, Enza receives an old blue cameo from her mother that is a family heirloom and treasure. It has been handed down through the generations, and her mother gives it to her in a kind of symbolic passing of the torch, or flame of life. As she does the gold coin from Caruso, Enza holds onto and appreciates the meaning of the blue cameo—the survival of families and love.

Farmhouse

To Marco Ravanelli, the house that he's rented for years and in which his children have grown up really feels like his own. That's because the landlord has promised he'll sell Marco the house whenever he gets the down payment. Then, apparently on a whim, the landlord changes his mind and decides to sell the house on the open market. The whole family panics and tries to find a way to raise the money. Eventually, Enza and Marco both go to the United States in hopes of earning enough money for the house. The house is both an object of utility and a symbol of family to the Ravanellis.

Trains

In the era before everyone has cars, trains figure prominently in this story. The characters ride trains from their small village to Rome or France to undertake the sea journey to America. In America, they ride trains from New York to Minnesota once they're established in their new lives.

Stock Proceeds

When Enza discovers a mining company stock certificate owned by Ciro's late father, she sells it and puts the money in a safe deposit box at the bank as a "rainy day" fund for future emergencies. Then Ciro takes the cash with him when he visits his mother, but she refuses it and tells him to use it for her grandchildren. These acts of generosity and investment in the future yield benefits much greater than simply financial.



Religious Training

It's quite apparent that Eduardo Lazzari uses his religious training to become a priest as a surrogate—or symbol—for his own battered nuclear family. With the death of his father, the breakdown of his mother, and his placement in a convent with his brother Ciro, the world is a frightening place for Eduardo. His disappearance into the clergy seems a fear-driven escape from reality and a way of protecting himself against the death and losses of the world.

Opera

Enza immerses herself in the Metropolitan Opera for the same reasons that Eduardo pursues the priesthood. Besides loving the music and costumes, she is drawn into the opera family of performers, designers, costumers and promoters as a symbolic family of her own creation. The loss of her sister, Stella, carves a deep wound in Enza's soul that also makes her appear aloof at times to Ciro. She knows his history as a womanizer and isn't immediately convinced that he has serious intentions with her. Thus, keeping him at arm's length provides a kind of security for her until they finally surrender to each other.

Spruzzo

Spruzzo, the stray dog that adopts Ciro on the mountain one day, is a typical canine example of devotion and loyalty. With no offense to Spruzzo, one could say he symbolizes the kind of human love Ciro seeks and eventually finds in Enza, who is homo sapiens and not a canine. But the love they share resembles the kind of unconditional love that dogs are capable of.

Automat

The Automat embodies and symbolizes the fast, no-frills approach to life that characterizes Americans. Without regard to quality, the Automat promises almost instant gratification for hungry New Yorkers. Enza and Ciro do a fair amount of courting there, and return to it when they travel from Minnesota. Eating at the Automat is fast, impersonal and sanitized just the way New Yorkers like things.

Shoe Store

The shoe store that Luigi and Ciro open together in Hibbing is both a means of support for their families, but also a symbol of their success in America. For Ciro, the store represents his mastery of shoe making skills plus the realization of his dream of being in business for himself.



Settings

Italian Alps

The Italian Alps are beautiful, and they hide the poverty of the area from tourists. All of the Italian characters in the book—except Don Gregorio—have a connection to the community between Vilminore and Schilpario from which Enza and Ciro originate. Because of the poverty, many residents of the area go to the United States seeking employment. Some return with money to buy property, but most do not return permanently. For Ciro and Enza, the area is home, and they have multiple family and friend connections.

Little Italy

Little Italy is so named because of the rich Italian-American community within the New York City community. When Enza leaves Hoboken, she moves to Little Italy. Ciro, too, finds the community comfortable and somewhat of a buffer against the larger American society with its emphasis on speed and money.

Hoboken, N.J.

Hoboken is where Enza first lives upon her arrival in America. She goes there instead of New York City because she has a prearranged commitment to work as a domestic for an Italian-American family. But the job is unpleasant and the family expects her to work overtime and do many more chores than agreed upon—without additional compensation. She feels like an indentured servant and can't wait to move to New York with her friend, Laura.

Vilminore di Scalve

Vilminore is the location of the San Nicola convent where the Lazzari brothers live after their mother turns them over to the church for charity care. Both Ciro and Eduardo start to plan their exit as soon as they arrive. Ciro goes to the United States, and his brother goes to a Catholic seminary in Italy.

Schilpario

A mining town in the Italian Alps where mineral ore such as iron is mined and shipped to Milan for processing. It is most likely the place where Ciro and Eduardo's father died in a mining accident.



Themes and Motifs

Family

In the *Shoemaker's Wife*, the author examines the nature of family. Here family is depicted as the vehicle and institution of love itself. The real warmth and love that exists in many Italian families is in evidence throughout. Family relations appear on every page. Perhaps it's the emphasis on family that undergirds and supports new immigrants to America. This is another facet of the ethnic community where people can feel safe and supported in a strange, new land. The strength, resilience, and durability of family are beneficial for all.

The author demonstrates the power of healthy families sustain and nurture members and how the lack of a functional family unit places great stress on members in the case of what had seemed like an ideal family with the Lazzaris. The family of Carlo and Caterina and their sons *Ciro* and *Eduardo* disintegrates when *Carlo* is killed at a job site in America. *Caterina*, overwhelmed by her sudden responsibility for the entire family, shifts that burden to the charity of the nuns at the *San Nicola* convent and hopes for the best. She also becomes a non-functional person for a number of years because of stress caused by the death of her husband.

Eventually, *Ciro Lazzari* and *Enza Ravanelli*, former neighbors on a mountainside in the Alps, find each other as adults in America. They begin their own family which becomes a strong unit that lasts beyond the death of *Ciro*. Their family values are passed on to their children.

Luigi Latini, a friend of *Ciro* from the steamship passage to America, pursues and wins the hand of *Pappina* and they also start a family, which becomes intertwined with the Lazzari family to form an extended family of mutual support and love. The two families travel together and go on outings together.

Unselfish Love

There are many examples of unselfish love in this book. There is the love between husband and wife as shown by *Enza* and *Ciro*, *Luigi* and *Pappina*, and *Laura* and *Colin*. The couples support each other during the good and bad times.

When *Caterina* realizes that she cannot raise *Ciro* and his brother properly, she entrusts their care to the nuns at the convent. That is most certainly an unselfish act of motherly love. Similarly, after *Pappina's* death during childbirth, *Luigi* demonstrates unselfish, fatherly love when he asks *Enza* to raise his only daughter, *Angela*. He realizes that *Angela* will be better raised by a woman. Then, he takes his sons and returns to Italy.

There is the brotherly between *Ciro* and *Eduardo*. The brothers are there for each other without thought of repayment in any form. Having shared the loss of their father through



an accident and the loss of the presence of their mother because of dire circumstances, they have shared experiences that bind them forever.

Also, a real love exists between Ciro and his dog Spruzzo. Spruzzo showed a loyalty to Ciro, and Ciro returns that loyalty to Spruzzo even after the dog dies.

Strength in Numbers

Why do immigrant groups form communities in the New World? Because there is strength in those communities where the language and customs are familiar. Little Italy in New York is a good example of Italians from all parts of the country peacefully coexisting perhaps more harmoniously than in Italy. Within the city of New York, there are a multitude of ethnic neighborhoods—Irish, Italian, Czech, Polish—where immigrants can feel comfortable that there are others in their same group with whom they can converse, do business, find a mate, and find support. The strength in numbers is one aspect of survival within the group based on man's underlying need for society.

Retribution

Shortly after the episode of illicit romance between Don Gregorio and Concetta at the convent, Ciro is enraged and proclaims that if he had an axe he'd take it to the church and to the wayward priest. Instead, he goes forward with his life determined to do better than Don Gregorio as a way of convincing himself he is better than the man of the cloth. In so doing, Ciro dissolves his resentment at Don Gregorio and turns it into a positive form of energy. This is retribution at a higher plane than taking an axe to the church. Don Gregorio, however, experiences retribution (or karma) when he is sent from the San Nicola convent to another post in Sicily and the convent returns to normal.

Durability of Love

Both Lazzari brothers are upset and angry when their mother, Caterina, sends them to a convent because she doesn't have the strength to care for them. Either or both of the boys could have been so angry that they never wanted to hear from her again. Instead, because they love and respect her, they pray for her, and hope to be reunited soon. They are at last reunited.

Enza contracts a bad case of love for Ciro when they are children, and it never dies. At times, she shows interest in other men even to the point of agreeing to marry the fast-talking Vito Blazek. On the day of her wedding, Ciro shows up in his tattered and torn Army uniform and tells Enza that he has always loved her. She tells him the same, and Enza calls off the wedding. Their love has endured from childhood and blossomed into mature love.

When Ciro returns to Italy for a visit, he learns that his dog Spruzzo has died. One of the nuns at the convent buried him and made a little headstone. Ciro is moved to tears



because of his dog's unwavering love and because of the love of Sister Teresa in honoring him with a headstone. Ciro knows that Spruzzo loved him until he died, just as Ciro still loves him.



Styles

Point of View

The point of view of the novel is that of the omniscient narrator, or author who is herself Italian-American and can write from both the inside and outside of that community. In that sense, the book reads somewhat like a fictional family memoir which, in fact, the author says it is. This approach lends the story a more personal and immediate character which helps the reader feel more intimately involved in the narrative.

Language and Meaning

Generally, the story unfolds in plain everyday American English with a rich peppering of Italian phrases thrown in. This helps to lend the story authenticity and the author obviously has done her homework in researching locales, settings, and historical context. Although the story takes place around the turn of the last century, the author's characters use modern words and expressions at some points in the story. For example, Colin Chapin uses the phrase "I'm going to blow" while speaking to co-workers. Also, Laura Heery, describes her new position as costumer of the Met by saying, "This job has perks."

Structure

The novel is written in straightforward narrative style, devoid of flashbacks, flash forwards or interior monologue devices. The structure facilitates easy comprehension of the plot action and is not obtrusive. The book is divided into three parts designated by geographic locales, thus: "Part One - The Italian Alps," "Part Two - Manhattan," "Part Three - Minnesota."

Part One describes the rather idyllic life shared by the Lazzari family in a small village in the Italian Alps. But, this pellucid scene is disturbed when Cateria Lazzari gets word of the death of her husband in America. It covers the placement of the boys in a convent and the subsequent disappearance of their mother because of a mental breakdown. It includes the unfortunate incident involving Ciro, Don Gregorio, and Concetta Martocci that leads to the expulsion of the brothers—Ciro to New York and Eduardo to a religious seminary near Venice.

Part Two picks up the narrative of Ciro in New York, after a grueling passage aboard a steamship, his relocation to Little Italy in New York, and his apprenticeship under a master Italian shoemaker. During his apprenticeship, Ciro dreams of learning to make women's shoes but does not have time because of his heavy work schedule. Enza Ravenelli, a young woman from Ciro's hometown, arrive with her father, Marco. Ciro and Enza meet each other in passing at a hospital, then separate as she goes to Hoboken.

NJ. But, they encounter each other again in Little Italy and, eventually, get married after *Ciro* returns home from World War I.

In Part Three, *Ciro* and *Enza*, with their friends *Luigi* and *Pappina Latini*, move to Minnesota to make new lives and new careers for themselves. *Ciro* opens a shoe store with *Luigi* as partner. While having his son checked by a doctor for school sports, *Ciro* learns he may have cancer. A trip to the Mayo Clinic confirms the cancer, probably caused by his exposure to mustard gas during the war. When *Eduardo* finds *Caterina*, *Ciro* returns to Italy to reunite with his mother and brother. *Enza's* friend, *Laura Heery*, gives birth in New York but the child dies. *Enza* and *Ciro* have a son, *Antonio*, and a daughter, *Angela*. *Ciro* dies a peaceful death surrounded by his family.

Another noteworthy aspect of the book's structure is the fact that chapters are given in two languages—English and Italian—thus: "Chapter 14 - A Rope of Tinsel (*Una Cordia di Orpello*)."



Quotes

Caterina could not bear the responsibility of making every decision alone. In the fog of her grief, she had to be sensible and think of every possible alternative for her boys. In her mental state she could not take care of her sons, and she knew it.

-- author/narrator (Chapter 1 paragraph paragraph 1, page 6)

Importance: The quote depicts the state of mind of Catarina Lazzari after the death of her husband, when she faces the fact of single parenthood for her sons, Ciro and Eduardo. The reader gains insight into why she places her boys in a convent as orphans against her will but because she wants the best for her children.

Ciro's chest heaved when she disappeared from view. He longed to open his mouth and cry out for his mother, but what good would that do? Ciro hadn't yet learned the difference between sadness and anger. He just knew that he would have liked to smash everything in sight.

-- author/narrator (Chapter 1 paragraph paragraph 7, page 19)

Importance: This glimpse of Ciro's soul reveals his deep-seated fear of abandonment because of the death of his father and placement in a convent by his mother. This fear is so intense it makes Ciro angry, and he feels like doing something violent for his own relief.

Enza prayed to stay near her mother and father. She wanted to live with them always and never marry or become a mother herself. She couldn't imagine ever being that brave, courageous enough to stand away from all she knew to choose something different. She wanted to live in the same village she had been born in, just like her mother.

-- author/narrator (Chapter 2 paragraph paragraph 1, page 29)

Importance: The quote reveals Enza's familial connections to the earth, to her village, and to her family. By giving the reader this bit of information the author sets the stage for Enza's later grief over leaving Italy.

Ciro imagined kissing Concetta's dewy pink lips as they pronounced the rote Latin. Who invented women? Ciro wondered as he observed her. Ciro may not have believed in the promises of the Holy Roman Church, but he had to admit that God was onto something if he invented beauty.

-- author/narrator (Chapter 3 paragraph paragraph 1, page 39)

Importance: The quote shows Ciro's abrupt entry into adolescence shortly after arriving at the convent; He positions himself in the church to get a glimpse of Concetta with other school girls at the weekly children's mass celebrated by Don Grigorio.

Don Gregorio took Concetta in his arms and kissed her to reassure her. Once she was in his arms, risk was meaningless. Her proper upbringing, strict morals and common



sense held no power against his kiss. The rules she had promised her mother to respect until marriage dissipated in the air like smoke from an urn of incense. She told herself she had nothing to fear. No one would believe a servant over the word of a consecrated man.

-- author/narrator (Chapter 4 paragraph paragraph 6, page 61)

Importance: The kiss that Don Gregorio gives to Concetta Martocci, unbeknown to both of them, is witnessed by Ciro, who runs to tell Sister Teresa. He demands that the priest be punished. The nun's first response is to deny and minimize Ciro's complaint, but he insists on some kind of justice. Ciro is eventually expelled from the convent.

Life, Enza decided, is not about what you get but what is taken from you. It's in the things we lose that we discover what we most treasure. Enza's most profound wish was that she might have kept Stella safe, that she had not failed her baby sister, that they would not have to face the years ahead without her.

-- author/narrator (Chapter 5 paragraph paragraph 2, page 71)

Importance: Ciro is sent from his convent to Schilpario on a grave-digging mission. As he hikes through the mountains, he is nearly run over by a fast carriage that carries a small casket. When he arrives at Sant'Antonio da Padova for the funeral, Ciro realizes that the child being buried is Stella Ravanelli—Enza's curly-haired little sister. Participation in this event serves as a bond between Enza and Ciro in their later relationship.

There are two kinds of people in this world. Those who want to know the facts, and those who want to make up a nice story to feel better. I wish I was the kind who made up stories,' Enza admitted. 'I was taking care of Stella the day before she died.

-- Enza Ravanelli (Chapter 6 paragraph paragraph 9, page 77)

Importance: Although Stella actually dies of a fever, Enza blames herself for her sister's death despite the fact a physician comes and declares there is nothing he can do for the sick child. Ciro tries to ease her suffering by telling Enza that no one is directly responsible for Stella's death. But Enza's guilt is just as strong as her grief, and she vows to never forget her sister.

She savored their conversation and often when doing her chores, she remembered the words he said to her and how hopeful he was that she might kiss him again. Now she wished she had. Because one kiss is not enough. Neither is one conversation. Enza had so much more to say to Ciro Lazzari.

-- author/narrator (Chapter 7 paragraph paragraph 7, page 108)

Importance: Enza goes to the convent to find Ciro; but, he is told that Ciro doesn't live there now. The nuns will not tell her that Ciro has gone to America, while his brother Eduardo has relocated to a school for Catholic priests. Unable to find Ciro, Enza is overcome with shock and sadness, a sense of having lost something valuable.



You always tell the truth. You stand up for the weak. And you're not afraid of taking chances. When the sisters told us that we had to leave and they told you that you had to go to America, you didn't flinch. You didn't cry. You didn't try to make a better deal for yourself, you just accepted their offer.

-- Eduardo Lazzari (Chapter 8 paragraph paragraph 2, page 114)

Importance: These words of praise and admiration from Ciro's older brother illustrate the strong bonds of brotherhood between the Lazzari orphans. Although they separate at this point in their lives, the door remains open for their eventual reunion. Eduardo is satisfied that his younger brother can fend for himself physically, and he admires Ciro's strength of character.

Ciro's heart ached for all he was leaving behind, especially the company and counsel of Eduardo, the person who had made him feel safe in the world. None of the events of the past week had seemed real as they were happening but, now that he was alone, Ciro felt the finality of all of it. Ciro had been punished for something he had seen, not something he had done. He was aboard this ship because he had no advocate and was an orphan.

-- author/narrator (Chapter 9 paragraph paragraph 4, page 120)

Importance: The reality of his situation hits Ciro once he boards the ship for America. He is buoyed by his brother's parting remarks and expression of confidence. Despite a rough childhood, Ciro is now faced with the greatest challenge of his life—becoming a man.

The poor of Little Italy were different from those Ciro knew. On the mountain, they wore clothes made of sturdy fabric. Boiled wool was their velvet; buttons and trim were extravagant extras added to clothing worn on feast days, at weddings and for burial. The New York Italians used the same fabrics to make their clothing but they accessorized with jaunty hats, gold belt buckles and shiny buttons. The women wore lipstick and rouge and gold rings on every finger. They spoke loudly and expressed themselves with theatrical gestures.

-- author/narrator (Chapter 10 paragraph paragraph 4, page 139)

Importance: Ciro experiences culture shock when he arrives in New York City—especially when he goes to the Italian neighborhood. The Italian-Americans are just as strange to him as the other New Yorkers, but the slap in the face of reality takes Ciro's mind off his melancholy musings about home, family, and the convent.

All these pazzo people and their dreams of America. What do they think? If every Italian leaves to find a job in America, pretty soon there will be too many workers in America lining up for a few jobs. And then what? They've lost their home here, and any possibility of returning. Crazy dreams!

-- Signora Sabatino (Chapter 11 paragraph paragraph 13, page 148)

Importance: The quotation shows how the sufferings caused by poverty can warp anyone's viewpoint. Signora Sabatino can only view the situation in Little Italy as jungle



survival instead of the land of dreams some immigrants see, or hope to see. Instead of feeling good that the economy is still churning out more jobs for Italian-Americans, the older woman can visualize only need and want of the kind the immigrants had known in Italy when they had almost zero chance of getting a good job. Her fatalistic attitude reveals fears among Italian immigrants, before and after their journey to America.