

Then We Came to the End Study Guide

Then We Came to the End by Joshua Ferris

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Contents

Then We Came to the End Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	3
You Don't Know What's In My Heart.....	4
Enter a New Century, Chapter 1.....	6
Enter a New Century, Chapter 2.....	9
Enter a New Century, Chapter 3.....	13
Enter a New Century, Chapter 4.....	17
Enter a New Century, Chapter 5.....	20
The Thing to Do and the Place to Be.....	24
Returns and Departures, Chapter 1.....	29
Returns and Departures, Chapter 2.....	32
Returns and Departures, Chapter 3.....	35
Returns and Departures, Chapter 4.....	39
Returns and Departures, Chapter 5.....	42
Characters.....	44
Symbols and Symbolism.....	48
Settings.....	51
Themes and Motifs.....	52
Styles.....	56
Quotes.....	58

Plot Summary

Then We Came to the End of It is a story about copywriters and art directors (creatives) working at a Chicago ad agency. It is the end of the dot com boom of the 1990s and the agency is suffering the loss of business. The 1990s created lots of new clients with big budgets and the creatives had been well compensated and lived very comfortable lives. Their comfort is not being shaken by a stream of creative department layoffs due to no new business. The stress of impending doom is coupled with the hours of boredom that must now be filled in order to look busy so as not to be the next one to get laid off. The story is primarily about the relationships that lie on top of the business decline. Days are filled with group meetings, both formal and impromptu, in which the creatives repeat gossip and tell stories to keep the days as animated as possible. The personal lives of the group members are complicated too by marital problems, affairs and cancer. The team is headed by a woman named Lynn Mason, a partner in the agency, who is formidable in spite of her diminutive size. Her right hand man, Joe Pope, is a bit of a loner but stands in for Lynn as the voice of reason in team meetings. Amber Lawton has had an affair with Larry Novotny who is afraid that Amber will not have an abortion and his marriage will end as a result of his indiscretion. As might be expected from creative types, some of the characters such as Tom Mota and Benny Shossburger have volatile personalities. After he is terminated, Tom returns one day dressed as a clown and shoots people with a paintball gun.

In addition to the stress of the decline in business, Lynn is diagnosed with breast cancer. Her on-again, off-again relationship with a man named Martin leaves her longing for love and satisfaction but that does not come because Martin is a workaholic and confirmed bachelor. Martin tells Lynn that they are not going to make it but he offers to stay with her through her cancer surgery and treatment. Lynn declines Martin's offer and throws herself into gaining new business for the firm.

By the end of the story it is 2005 and all the original creatives have either been laid off or left of their own accord but they reunite when a former copywriter, Hank, has published a book and they gather at one of his readings. They all catch up learning about each other's lives now and learn that Lynn had died in 2003 from ovarian cancer.



You Don't Know What's In My Heart

Summary

The creatives of a Chicago ad agency realize that they are well paid and have great benefits, but for the most part they are all bored. They all wonder if there aren't some more nobler professions they should be pursuing but they stay because of habit and compensation. Lynn Mason, a partner in the agency and head of this particular team of creatives, is dying from breast cancer although there has been no formal notice, just enough to keep the rumor mill going strong. The thought of death makes the younger creatives think of Frank Brizzolera (Old Brizz) who is a heavy smoker and smells of nicotine all the time. The creatives have put Frank at the top of the Celebrity Death Watch and have made wagers on his demise.

To fight boredom, the creatives pull pranks such as when someone puts a piece of sushi behind books in Joe Pope's office. It took 2 weeks for security to find the offending fish and the creatives compliment themselves on their prowess. Karen Woo is a know-it-all who has no problem sharing her knowledge with everyone, especially on the topic of food and new restaurants. Marcia Dwyer is an art director who bonds with another art director, Genevieve Latko-Devine and they email each other after every meeting. The department members are always in a meeting, talking about a meeting or dreading a meeting. The rest of the time was spent concepting for ads until someone like Benny Shossburger would come around with another good story or piece of gossip. The creatives love stories and will stop almost everything to listen and participate.

When a person starts to work at an agency, it takes awhile to learn all the names and quirks. Eventually, as in the case of this firm, Jim Jackers is the eager redhead, Benny is the slightly heavyset Jewish guy with corkscrew curls and Marcia Dwyer seems to be stuck in the 1980s with her big hair and questionable choice of music. Tom Mota is especially quirky and does things like wearing three polo shirts at one time all embroidered with the agency's logo for days at a time. Tommy is going through a divorce and the other creatives wonder if he has lost his other clothing in the division of property.

Analysis

The author sets the stage for the novel by describing not only the physical attributes of the ad agency office space but also by starting to introduce the characters. The Creative Department in any ad agency is populated with quirky individuals whose job seems like play to others but who take their work very personally. Toys, trinkets and games abound in this group too and when they are bored and games are not enough to fill a day, they visit each other's offices with updates on office politics and rumors and just stories in general.



The author establishes the timing as the end of the 1990s when the dot com boom has crashed and all types of companies--especially ad agencies--are losing clients and revenues. The comfortable bubble the creatives have been inhabiting is about to burst as the real world of finances takes precedence over free bagels and office pranks.

The author also begins to introduce what will become a rather lengthy cast of characters in the story but has established the most important ones in this chapter. He also establishes the use of the first person plural (we) narrator who tells the story from the perspective of all the creatives. They are all in the game together and are experiencing the same fears and angst, so whatever happens to one of them happens to all of them.

Discussion Question 1

Why would the creatives say they are fractious?

Discussion Question 2

If given the chance, would any of the creatives take up any profession they might consider to be more noble than advertising?

Discussion Question 3

Why does the author use the first person plural (we) narrator?

Vocabulary

fractious, reviled, indomitable, collective, loot, furtive, persistent, disingenuous, derogatory, proximity, paucity, mortified, cynics, entrepreneurial, familiarize, contingent, visceral, exhumed, chattels, ingratiate



Enter a New Century, Chapter 1

Summary

Layoffs at the agency have been rumored for months but they are now official. Benny Shassburger is in Tom Mota's office when Tom is packing up his personal items. Tom wants to throw his computer against the window but only if he can be guaranteed that the window will break and the computer fall the 62 stories down. In the stress of layoffs, the creatives tried to put things in perspective such as Janine Gorjanc's losing her 9 year old daughter to murder. However, the creatives had thought themselves to be immune from bad things because of the new economy which should have given them jobs forever. But now people who had just bought houses or had babies are being laid off.

Tom asks Benny to collect some personal items of his from other creatives and when Benny returns, Tom is sitting on the floor of his office bemoaning the fact that everyone thinks Tom is a clown. Tom cuts one leg off his trousers and the sleeve of his polo shirt. Benny accompanied Tom down to the lobby where Tom quotes Ralph Waldo Emerson and states that no one ever really knew Tom at the agency. Before leaving the building, Tom holds out his empty coffee mug and solicits donations from other people exiting the elevators. Some of the other creatives, especially Amber Ludwig, are afraid Tom will return to do damage after they hear the story of how Tom beat up personal items with a baseball bat during his divorce. Amber is already under a lot of stress and contemplating having an abortion to end a pregnancy that resulted from an affair with co-worker, Larry Novotny.

When Janine returns after the death of her daughter, she looks old and tired and wears disheveled clothes every day. When Janine's daughter had gone missing, Lynn Mason had organized the distribution of flyers and the creatives went everywhere they could think of to hang them. Joe Pope tells everyone that he finds Janine crying in the men's room the day after her return, obviously confused about where she was. Eventually Janine plasters the walls of her office with pictures of her dead daughter.

One day, Lynn schedules an input meeting to discuss a new project and while the creatives wait for her in her office, Chris Yop, who likes to be called Yop because it makes him sound younger than his 48 years, tells the story of Tom Mota's desk chair. Yop was cleaning his office a few days after Tom Mota's departure when he is approached by the office manager demanding to know if the bookcases and chair had really belonged in the office now vacated by Tom. When Yop declares that the items are his, the office manager asks to see the serial numbers because all of the items in Tom's office have disappeared and it is her job to get them back. Yop tells her that she can have the bookshelves but not to take the chair because it is his but she demands to know whether he had stolen it from Tom's old office. Yop admits to the other creatives that the chair actually belonged to a guy who retired last year. But now that he knows



about the serial numbers, Yop knows that the office manager is going to try to get him fired for having the wrong chair.

Austerity measures in the agency mean no more fresh flowers and bowls of free candy. Then comes a hiring freeze, the revocation of summer days and no more bonuses. When the layoffs begin, the creatives start calling it, "Walking Spanish down the hall" from a trick Spanish pirates used to do to prisoners about to walk the plank when they picked up the prisoners by the scruff of the neck so that their toes barely touched the wood on the way to their deaths.

The office manager returns to Yop's office the same day and Yop tells her to stop harassing him so she wants to get Lynn involved. Yop follows her to Lynn's office. The office manager lays out Yop's offenses about the bookshelves and that Yop has been harassing her but denies knowing anything about the chair. When Yop tries to defend himself about the chair, the office manager claims to know nothing about it. Lynn then terminates Yop who asks if it has anything to do with the chair and Lynn states that it does not. Yop tries to bargain to keep his job but Lynn is firm. Yop tells the creatives that he started to cry because so many things are not right in his life. The termination occurred an hour ago and the creatives want to know why Yop is still here and he claims that he and Lynn did not have a chance to finish their conversation.

Lynn finally arrives for the meeting and the creatives all direct their attention to Lynn and her consummately professional, formidable demeanor. Lynn distributes packets of information about the project. The creatives are silent, their minds on the rumor that Lynn's breast cancer surgery is scheduled for the following day. The creatives would all like to offer support but do not because Lynn has never shared any personal information with them. There is no mention of Yop's presence in the room and he participates as if he has not just been let go. The project is pro bono work for an organization called the Alliance Against Breast Cancer which is having a fundraising event. At the end of the meeting Lynn asks Yop to stay and that's the last anyone saw of Yop.

Analysis

The author uses the technique of foreshadowing in Tom Mota's declaration that everyone at the agency thinks he is a clown and that no one there ever really knew him. The fear of his violent repercussions is also an issue with the creatives and all of this will come full circle at the close of the story.

The creatives at the agency are under a lot of stress to perform and to be seen as industrious so they will not be targeted for termination. They had been living very comfortable lives in cushy jobs until the dot com bust and now they see that they are no different from many others who lose their jobs in other industries all the time. To assuage their fears, the creatives try to compare their situations with people they know who have had really bad experiences so they think they could survive a layoff if it should come to that. One of their own colleagues, Janine, has suffered a terrible loss when her daughter goes missing and is later found murdered in an alley. This is probably the first



time that the creatives have had any bad news in their group and they show uncharacteristic compassion for Janine when she returns to work.

The incident about Yop's using bookshelves and a chair that had not been originally assigned to him is characteristic of the minutiae that can envelop people who work in a creative environment. They can tend to dwell on irrelevant things when there is a downturn and have too much time on their hands. This type of behavior only adds to the paranoia that is spreading throughout the company. Yop is even convinced that it is the chair episode that has led to his termination which is not at all accurate. Layoffs are based on business decline and when accounts in an ad agency are lost, typically those people assigned to them are let go if they cannot be assimilated into other client work. However, when the environment is stressed with the fear of termination, people try to hold on to anything in the hopes that their job will not be cut.

The topic of Lynn's breast cancer is never publicly addressed and the creatives speculate on the impact it has had on Lynn's life. They would like to comfort and support her but she does not let them in on her personal life, retaining her aloof persona. The creatives cannot understand why Lynn accepts a pro bono project about breast cancer when she has been stricken with it but they are afraid to address the subject with her.

Discussion Question 1

Why is termination especially unsettling for someone like Chris Yop?

Discussion Question 2

How do the creatives react to the stress permeating the office environment once layoffs have begun?

Discussion Question 3

What is the significance of Tom Mota's chair to the story?

Vocabulary

deposed, abstention, indication, buoyed, ingenious, immune, dislocated, buttressed, glut, synonymous, condescension, foreshortened, alleviate, ridicule, pieties, sublime, deemed, ensued, bloodbath, kerning, oblivious, credenza, mandate, bureaucrat, supplication, austerity, missives, respites, manifestations, mercurial, aficionados, loomed, extraneous, surreal, conglomerate, wary, buttressed, rebuke, conscripted, communique, gnomic



Enter a New Century, Chapter 2

Summary

The creatives like to gather in Benny's office in the mornings to get the day started with a story. One day Benny tells about how he wanted to go a whole day without clicking on his computer so he taught a security guard named Roland how to use Photoshop. All day Benny instructed Roland on how to choose, edit and re-size images for ads. Amber Ludwig is not happy when she hears this because she thinks Roland should be poised as a security guard in the event that Tom Mota returns for revenge. Joe Pope arrives at Benny's office, his pant leg stiff cuffed from riding his bicycle to work. Joe parks his bike in his office every day and locks the wheel to the frame to deter theft. The bike is the only personal item in Joe's office. No one knows anything about Joe except that he spends way too many hours working at the office.

Many of the creatives struggle with depression and several are on antidepressant medication. Janine is on several after the death of her daughter and subsequent divorce from her husband. Few creatives ever quit, however, because they cannot imagine a life without the luxuries they have now.

Most days begin with a story from Benny and this day he tells about watching Carl Garbedian saying goodbye to his wife. Carl's wife, Marilyn, is an oncologist and drops Benny off at the office every day before going to work. This morning, Marilyn takes a call on her cell instead of kissing Carl goodbye. Carl is irritated and remains in the car watching the bum who sits in front of the office every day. Carl waves Benny away when he tries to get Carl's attention but Benny waits on the sidewalk for Carl to get out of the car. Carl feels inadequate because his wife's job is more important than his. Carl dials Marilyn's cell number and she is annoyed when she sees his number come up but he leaves her a voice message anyway. Marilyn ends her call and tells Carl that he is depressed and needs treatment. As they sit in the car, Carl points out Janine walking by and tells Marilyn that Janine smells and he cannot go to work today because he does not want to hate Janine who has been through so much trauma. All the while he is talking, Carl is removing his clothes down to his underwear. Carl tells Marilyn that is so weary and begs her not to make him get out of the car. Benny cannot finish his story because Joe has interrupted to ask about an ad.

Joe has received his second promotion and the other creatives feel a mild disdain for him. Joe made the other creatives feel uneasy too because of his inscrutability and they avoided spending time with him if at all possible.

Hank Neary, a black copywriter, wears the same brown corduroy suit to work every day and he is working on a novel about work.

A year after Tom Mota was let go, Old Brizz (Frank Brizzolera) is terminated. Brizz makes his rounds to say goodbye to everyone and his sense of calm is unnerving to the



other creatives. They are amazed when Old Brizz stands at the elevator for a half hour talking to one of the building guys and nobody every really talks to the building guys. Old Brizz files for unemployment and takes on some freelance jobs and the next thing the creatives hear, Old Brizz has died from cancer. Benny comes around to visit everyone to collect their money because Old Brizz' death means that Benny has won the Celebrity Death Watch poll. At Old Brizz' funeral, the creatives meet his brother whom they call Bizarro Brizz because he is as healthy looking as Old Brizz looked ill. Soon afterward, it is learned that Old Brizz leaves a totem pole to Benny in his will.

Some of the creatives go to a new place for lunch every day but some bring their lunches and eat in. Carl eats his lunch at his desk every day and 6 months before he was laid off, Tom Mota, interrupted Carl's lunch one day to give him a Ralph Waldo Emerson book. Tom proceeds to read from the book and he wants Carl to get Emerson's message that if men exercise reason, they can be princes. Carl then confides to Tom that he has been sneaking antidepressants from Janine's desk drawer and takes one every day. Carl does not want Marilyn to know that he knows that he is depressed. Carl does not want to see a doctor about his depression because he thinks it will get back to Marilyn. Joe interrupts Carl and Tom to ask Tom to come to an input meeting at 3:30.

Tom and Joe have not always gotten along, knowing that Tom talks about Joe to the others, and one day Joe begins a meeting by saying that people need to be aware of the impact of the things that they say around the office. Tom tells Joe that that's there's nothing wrong with being gay and Joe considers that to be slander and warns Tom to control his anger.

One morning some of the creatives are sitting around talking and Joe interrupts and Genevieve Latko-Devine offers him a bagel and he accepts. Joe wants to know how the new TV spots are coming for the cold sore medication company. Karen Woo takes offense at Joe trying to assert authority over them but Joe claims he is just having trouble coming up with concepts himself. Eventually Joe and Genevieve, the art director, came up with the concepts of Cold Sore guy which the client would like and buy. The next day Joe sees that someone has written the word fag on his office wall with a black marker.

Analysis

The creatives love good stories and love to play pranks on each other and now that the work has slowed down considerably, there is much more time for both. Benny has fun with teaching Roland how to use Photoshop just as a game to get Benny through another long day. This establishes the theme of boredom in the book because the creatives look for various ways to fill the hours waiting for more work to come in. Because what they do consists of words and graphics, it is just natural for them to talk and Benny is the master of telling stories every day. People look forward to Benny's tales to break up the day but it has become a challenge for them to engage in non-work related conversations and still look busy so they won't get laid off.



Joe Pope is further positioned as the guy who sucks up to authority, get promoted and lords it over the others on the team. It might be different for Joe if he were a little more social or let himself be known a little more but he stays to himself most of the time and works. The other creatives despise him for his ambition and resent his interruptions into their story time. They all know what Joe does to stay ahead but they are not willing to give in to the corporate game, preserving their creative code.

The author establishes Carl's fragile state of mind with Benny's story about witnessing him with his wife in their car one morning. Carl is clearly burned out on working at the agency and would like some validation from his wife but she has cancer patients to attend to and cannot devote the time Carl would like. Carl exemplifies the theme of stress in the story. The pressure of coming up with new ideas for clients can be very stressful but now that the work has slowed down, the stress, ironically, has increased because everyone needs to look busy to avoid termination but there is not enough work to fill the days. Carl is also suffering from an inferiority complex where his wife is concerned because her job is so much more important than his and he feels inadequate. Carl probably does not feel like a full husband in his fragile state of mind and he struggles to find some firm footing in his world. Carl also exemplifies the theme of grief as he mourns the relationship he used to have with his wife and the security he used to enjoy with his job. Carl's taking Janine's pills will soon lead to a disastrous event and turning point for Carl.

The author uses the technique of foreshadowing when talking about Old Brizz and the totem pole he wills to Benny. The significance and full effect of the gift will be revealed as the story unfolds.

Discussion Question 1

Why is Amber so upset that Benny has taught Roland how to use Photoshop?

Discussion Question 2

Why would the creatives suffer from depression when their jobs seem to be so much fun?

Discussion Question 3

Why do the creatives resent Joe so much?

Vocabulary

generic, perimeter, solemn, moratorium, pedometers, inclement, sublime, lithium, derring-do, retractable, arbitrary, preempted, mnemonic, tetchy, exasperation, flee, obviously, paunch, aesthetics, temerity, wince, approbation, brazenly, erudition,



inscrutable, woefully, devoid, palpable, cynical, surreptitiously, bequeath, myriad, impervious, akimbo, pretentious, fraught, interloper, burnished, slander, anorexics, analgesic, harebrained, egregious



Enter a New Century, Chapter 3

Summary

In the weeks that preceded Tom Mota's termination, he went on a kick to have a billboard announcing that Janine's daughter was missing taken down. The agency had paid for the billboard when Janine's daughter had been abducted in an attempt to help find her. The media buyers have been ineffective in working it out with the billboard company and Tom no longer wants Janine to have to look at the billboard on her way home every night.

On the day that Lynn is supposed to have her breast cancer surgery and the day after she terminated Yop, Yop shows up at the office to use the print station to make copies of his resume. Marcia encounters Yop and he acts as if it is perfectly normal for him to be back in the building. Lynn had told Yop that if he came back into the building he would be arrested for trespassing but Yop feels like after all he has done for the company, the least they can do is let him print his resume on their copier. Yop asks Marcia to proof his resume even though he is a copywriter. Yop tells Marcia that he is still thinking about the breast cancer pro bono campaign and cannot stop working in his head. Yop tells Marcia that she will be let go just like it's happening to so many others and then Marcia won't be so smug anymore. Marcia tears up Yop's resume and throws it on him.

Joe calls a meeting to discuss the breast cancer campaign and Karen Woo announces that she already has some concepts. Karen's campaign consists of a series of faces of people who had lost someone to breast cancer and she calls the campaign "Loved Ones." All they guys hate Karen because she is a strong woman with definite opinions and she does not back down when they push back on her campaign. Joe asks the team to keep working on new concepts and tells them that he will be reviewing the work because Lynn will be out of the office for a week.

After the meeting, Amber wants to talk about the fact that Tom Mota's ex-wife, Barbara, had called Lynn to tell her that Tom has dropped out of sight after sending her a string of email, voice mails and letters with quotes from Marx, Emerson, the Bible and more. Barbara had wanted to know if Lynn had seen Tom and also to warn her of his erratic behavior. Barbara would have never suspected anything erratic from Tom until he took a ball bat to everything in their house one day. Lynn called building security to alert them to a possible threat from Tom. Amber is still worried that Tom is coming back for revenge and has a hard time sleeping at night.

The conversation turns to the topic of Lynn and her breast cancer surgery today. The creatives are curious about Lynn's personal life and Genevieve tells them that she has seen Lynn at dinner with a good looking man, a lawyer that her husband recognized. No one else knows anything else about Lynn's situation but that does not stop the speculation. Amber states that she wanted to call Lynn last night and offer to take her to the hospital today but Lynn's barriers prevented her from doing it.



Not long after the layoffs began, things like handcuffs and Mardi Gras beads started disappearing from people's offices. The creatives try to pin the thefts on Joe and also accuse him of writing the word fag on his wall. They have a good time talking about all the pranks they have pulled on him such as wrapping his office in biohazard tape and locking him out of the server so he could not complete his work.

One day Karen returns from lunch at McDonald's and tells Jim Jackers that she had seen Janine sitting in a pool of balls in the PlayPlace area. The next day Jim accompanies Karen to McDonald's to see Janine for himself and spots her sitting motionless amid the hundreds of brightly colored balls. The day after that, Karen and Jim take Benny to McDonald's to see Janine and on the following day they bring Marcia who tells them that Janine is obviously mourning. The next day Karen brings Amber and Larry to see Janine at McDonald's and the sight reduces Amber to tears. Over the course of a few weeks, Karen takes everyone who will accompany her over to McDonald's to watch Janine submerged in the pool of balls.

One day Joe returns from lunch to find Roland and Mike from security waiting for him. All the missing items are set out on display in Joe's office. Lynn is called in to the office and clears Joe of any wrongdoing within a half hour. Later that day, Joe approaches Benny and the others and they think he is about to scold them for setting him up with the stolen office items. Instead Joe chastises the group for making Janine one of their games and warns them to let Janine do what she wants to do in peace. Apparently Tom Mota had told Joe about everyone gawking at Janine at McDonald's and then he told Janine as well. The offenders were required to apologize to Janine who admits that her behavior is odd but the PlayPlace had been one of her daughter's favorite places and she had been there with her and does not want to lose that feeling. The creatives apologize again and vow to not make any new spectacles of anyone.

Early one weekend morning, Tom Mota climbed the rotting ladder up to the billboard asking the disappearance of Janine's daughter. Tom climbed slowly balancing his materials including paint, rollers and a thermos of martinis. Tom sips his martini as he prepares his painting materials as dawn creeps up on Chicago. Tom uses an extension to increase the reach of his paint roller and eventually switches to a paintball gun to blast the white paint over the little girl's image. Tom's requests to the media department had gone unheeded and the day before Janine stated that she could no longer bear to look at the billboard anymore.

Analysis

The theme of fear is evident when Yop shows up at the office the day after he has been terminated. He claims to only be copying his resume but then says he cannot stop thinking about work, especially the breast cancer campaign he had been working on. Yop is probably in shock from the separation and his mind won't make the adjustment yet. Yop is older than most of the other creatives and he is afraid that he won't be able to find another job in advertising which is typically known as a young person's game. The fear is blocking Yop's sense of reason and he is behaving inappropriately by



showing up after the termination. Marcia tries to interact with him professionally but he panics and ends up being offensive to her which obliterates any compassion she might have had for him.

Amber also shows fear when it is revealed that Tom Mota's ex-wife has called Lynn to warn her that Tom is missing. The creatives have heard about Tom's erratic, destructive behavior and Amber is still afraid that he will return to seek revenge on the creatives who remain at the agency. Conversely, the creatives do not understand why Lynn does not show any fear about having breast cancer and does not even mention having surgery. They would all like to show support for her but Lynn does not let anyone in to her personal world, perhaps from a fear of getting too close and needing to maintain a professional image to the team.

While the creatives think they are capable of compassion for Lynn, they are mean spirited when it comes to Joe. Setting him up as the thief of the stolen items around the office is sophomoric and certainly counter productive to a work environment. Joe has ambitions while most of the others prefer to coast and his professional demeanor rankles them, partly because they do not like authority and partly because they do not have the first idea on how to achieve what Joe has achieved at the agency.

In spite of his volatile behavior, Tom Mota shows tremendous compassion for Janine when he climbs up to the billboard to paint over the image of her dead child. Perhaps because of the divorce, Tom knows what it is like to have your life fall apart and lose what you love and he cannot bear for Janine to suffer any more pain than she already has from the abduction and murder of her child. Tom thinks that the others in the agency think he is crazy, but he is the only one who has taken any real steps to help a colleague in an area that really matters.

The theme of grief continues with the situation of Janine sitting in the pool of balls at the McDonald's PlayLand. While most of her colleagues do not understand Janine's behavior, it is easy to understand when she explains that the PlayLand was one of her daughter's favorite places and that she remembers being there with her and it makes her feel closer to her daughter. Janine represents the shock of reality into the creatives' lives. Up until now, their lives are filled with creating, playing and buying luxuries. The murder of Janine's daughter shows the intrusion of the real world into their creative haven and they are not sure how to respond or manage what it brings.

Discussion Question 1

Why do the creatives set up Joe as the suspect in the office thefts?

Discussion Question 2

Why do the creatives react the way they do when they see Janine sitting in the pool of balls at the McDonald's PlayLand?



Discussion Question 3

Why does Tom Mota paint over the old billboard? Is this out of character for him?

Vocabulary

fanatic, acrid, blatant, largesse, loquacious, unconscionably, imperative, furtive, pro bono, irked, discreet, savvy, phonetic, species, illusory, acronym, misogynists, flamboyant, lucid, disdainful, palette, thatched, glinting, biohazard, redundancies, infamous, slump, grim, zeitgeist, dissembling, tinge, prepossessing, redress, gawk, interminable



Enter a New Century, Chapter 4

Summary

Carl begins acting strangely by staying late to clean the office furniture at the agency and shields his eyes from the office lighting with a legal pad when in meetings. Occasionally he would leave meetings to sprint down the hall and he eventually covers his office windows with black construction paper. Lynn visits Carl in his office and suggests that he see a doctor for his vision problem and Carl says he is better now and no longer thinking about suicide. Lynn is taken aback and questions Carl who says that one of the reasons that Carl wanted to kill himself is so that his wife would find his body. Lynn tries to comfort Carl and asks Carl what has changed that makes him no longer consider suicide and Carl says that he is taking medication, neglecting to mention that it is Janine's antidepressant meds.

When Tom Mota sees Carl's blacked out windows, he feels guilty for not saying anything to someone before now about Carl's stolen medication. Tom can understand some of Carl's motives, having had a wife who always knew everything too. Tom hears a howl come from Carl's office and looks in to see Carl writing on the floor in agony, pulling at his hair. Tom goes to his office to call Carl's wife, Marilyn, and leaves a message for her where she works at the hospital next door. Marilyn returns the call immediately and Tom tells her about Carl's condition. Tom walks Carl to the hospital where Carl is diagnosed with toxic poisoning and the creatives visit him later that day to encourage him in his recovery. Everyone by now knows that Carl had been taking Janine's pills and Janine calculates that he has taken way too many past the dosage amount and has even mixed different kinds of pills. The doctor assures Marilyn that once Carl's system is cleared, he will be put on appropriate medications that will help him. Marilyn thanks Tom Mota for his help but Tom rudely accuses Marilyn of driving Carl to take the drugs. Lynn arrives and cannot believe what Carl has done and tells the creatives that they need to come to her if they ever feel desperate enough to do something like this. Six months later Carl has recovered from toxic poisoning and taking antidepressants prescribed just for him. One day, the creatives elect Amber to tell Carl that Karen says Carl is the source but Carl does not know what they are talking about.

On the day that Lynn is scheduled for surgery, she shows up at the office. Karen sees her first and then Genevieve sees her standing in the conference room looking out the big window. The office coordinator is later seen with Lynn packing up things in Lynn's office. Benny later sees Lynn sitting on a desk in an abandoned cubicle just looking kind of zoned out. Marcia later sees her at a print station. The creatives speculate that maybe Lynn just stopped in on her way to the hospital next door or maybe there was never any surgery scheduled at all. Karen says that the surgery was scheduled for 9:00 and she knows because she always gets her information from the source--Carl.

When approached, Carl states that he does not know anything about Lynn's surgery and if he had known he certainly would not have told Karen. Maybe Karen thinks that



Carl knows because Marilyn is an oncologist at the hospital but Carl moved out of the house 6 weeks ago and Marilyn would have never said anything anyway if Lynn had been her patient. Carl claims that the first he heard of Lynn's cancer was from Sandy Green in Payroll. The creatives question Sandy about Lynn's cancer and she claims that it had been Deirdre who had told her. The creatives move on to Deirdre who said she got her information from Robbie, an account executive. Robbie says that he heard the news from Doug Dion and that he does not want his name attached to the rumor.

The creatives go to Marcia's office because they want her to call the hospital pretending to be Lynn who is confused about her surgery time. Joe interrupts the gathering, telling them to stop their gossiping because they can be heard all the way into the elevator.

Analysis

Carl's self treatment of depression has had serious implications and he is diagnosed with toxic poisoning. Carl is overwhelmed in his life by his marriage troubles and the stress of the layoffs at the office. Carl wants to retaliate against his wife and her superior career by killing himself so that she will find his body and finally feel sorry for him. Tom can also identify with Carl's feelings about hating his wife because Tom hates his ex-wife who also always knew everything and put Tom down. Carl and Tom share this feeling of inadequacy and it may be the reason that Tom never said anything to anybody about Carl's abuse of Janine's pills. Lynn, however, shows uncharacteristic tenderness toward Carl, perhaps because she is also battling a secret health issue.

Lynn shows up at the office on the day her surgery had been scheduled and it is clear that she has not stopped in just to take care of a few things before going on to the hospital. Lynn is spotted lingering at different locations at the agency almost as if she is reviewing her life and her dedication to building the business. Perhaps she is pondering what her life would have been like had she made other choices and she has to come to some resolution before having a serious surgery like a mastectomy. The round robin rumor mill is almost comic in that the creatives attempt to determine the source of Lynn's cancer news and is almost humorous in a sitcom fashion if the subject were not so serious. The creatives have too much time on their hands that they can devote to idle conversation and chase down information that has no immediate bearing on their work.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Carl want to see Janine when he is in the hospital?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Tom Mota sympathize with Carl's situation regarding his wife?



Discussion Question 3

Why does Lynn show up at the office on the day she is supposed to be having breast cancer surgery?

Vocabulary

interim, sanctioned, excruciating, quell, implacable, pensive, rhetorical, logician, lethargically, smirk, regimen, revitalization, oncologist, incarnate, perplexed, parody



Enter a New Century, Chapter 5

Summary

Someone once passed around a link to a news article about a man working in an office had a heart attack and died in his cubicle and was not found for several days. The creatives cannot understand how something like this could have happened. The creatives also hated not knowing something such as who would be laid off next and how that person would survive. Marcia lives in fear that the office coordinator will discover that she is using Tom Mota's chair so she swaps it for the chair used by a guy named Ernie and then is afraid that the office coordinator will discover that she has Ernie's chair. Ultimately, though, everyone switched chairs with every office move and Marcia cannot be sure that she even has Ernie's chair now.

One thing Larry Novotny hated not knowing is if Amber is going to have an abortion or not. Larry also hates not knowing--but really suspecting--what his wife would do if she found out about his affair with Amber and her resulting pregnancy. Amber also hates not knowing what God would do to her if she has an abortion. Amber still hates not knowing whether or not Tom Mota will return to seek revenge someday but the other creatives think that if he were going to do it, he would have done it by now. However, they do remember how explosive Tom had been with Carl's wife in the hospital and Tom has long subscribed to gun magazines and has a sizable number of guns at home although most of them are collector items which probably don't even fire anymore. Then again, it would be easy to buy a new gun. But most of all the creatives hate not knowing why Lynn had come into the office on the day she was scheduled for surgery.

Jim Jackers' father sold medical equipment and had arranged for Jim to have a meeting with an oncologist. Jim had hoped to get some insight on the breast cancer campaign but the meeting never happened because the doctor was too busy. Jim returns to the office and encounters Lynn on the elevator so he goes to Benny's office and waits while Benny finishes a phone call. Benny tells Jim that the storage company where Benny is keeping the totem pole is increasing its rates. No one really understands why Old Brizz left the totem pole to Benny but Benny feels compelled to keep it. Benny had gone to Old Brizz' house to visit the totem pole several times until the house was sold and then he had it transferred to the storage unit. Benny tells Jim that he'll have to get rid of the pole because paying \$349 a month to store it is not reasonable. Benny has had the totem pole appraised and it is worth \$60,000. Benny then tells Jim that Lynn is in the office today, spoiling Jim's surprise. Joe interrupts with news of meeting that has been called.

In the meeting Joe tells the creatives that they are no longer doing a campaign for a breast cancer fundraiser, the scope has changed and the client wants a humorous campaign targeted to the person who has breast cancer. Essentially it is an awareness campaign to show the funny side of breast cancer. Karen wonders why she can't find



any mention of the Alliance Against Breast Cancer on the Internet and Joe suggests that perhaps it is an umbrella group of regional organizations.

That afternoon, Benny calls Joe into his office to tell him that he has received an email from Tom Mota saying that Jim has told him they are doing a pro bono cancer ad. In the email Tom shares the story of his mother's death from cancer and offers up the information to be used in the campaign if they see fit. The email gets forwarded to the team and they all agree that Tom is not a vengeful former employee poised to make an attack.

Joe tells Jim that any communication from Tom Mota is to be shared with building security. Jim shares another email that Tom has sent him about grenades exploding during the filming of a mattress commercial. When word gets out, Amber is back to square one and petrified that Tom is returning with lots of weapons.

Genevieve goes to the bookstore to pick up some books on breast cancer and Joe catches her crying in her office. Joe and Genevieve are teamed as copywriter and art director and Genevieve tells Joe that creating a humorous campaign about breast cancer is simply impossible. Joe, who never says anything is too difficult, is inclined to side with Genevieve on this one.

One day Yop arrives with ad concepts for the breast cancer fundraiser campaign and he wants someone to take them to Lynn because he has been terminated and can't take them in himself. Benny says he has worked hard on the ads because he is trying to get his job back. Benny tells Yop that the direction for the campaign has changed and Yop is indignant that no one let him know and asks someone to email him with the parameters of the new campaign. Karen then pulls everyone into her office as she calls the hospital and learns that Lynn's surgery had been scheduled for 9:00 that morning but Lynn never showed.

Analysis

Managing through so many unknowns is very unnerving for the creatives. The theme of fear is reinforced because the creatives do not know who will be next to be laid off and they cannot help but imagine their own lives with their resources at an end should they lose their job. There is also fear for the creatives in their speculation about the scope of Lynn's illness. They are not only concerned for her well being but also worried about what her potential absence would mean for them as a team. This also plays into the theme of stress. Each day they feel the need to perform but there is no real work to create. The change in the breast cancer campaign has yielded little significant work but it all has to be discarded. Now they are tasked with coming up with an impossible assignment of making breast cancer funny. It seems as if the creatives cannot get any traction in their work and attempts to look busy are turning out to be futile.



Fear rises again when Tom Mota's emails surface making the creatives recall his interest and ownership of guns. That coupled with his volatile rantings make the creatives edgy again on top of their job-related stresses.

One of the ongoing stories in the book is Amber's pregnancy and whether or not she has plans to terminate it. Amber is clearly under stress as is Larry whose marriage will end once his wife finds out about Amber and a possible baby. The secret of the totem pole is another ongoing story in the book. No one knows for sure why Old Brizz had left the totem pole to Benny but Benny feels there must be some significance to the gift. However, it is getting expensive to store the totem pole and Benny has checked into its value for possible sale. The longer Benny has the totem pole, the less luster the gift seems to have because the meaning has not been determined.

Yop is still in denial about being terminated and hopes to get his job back by working on the breast cancer campaign. The other creatives think Yop is crazy but he is completely serious when he demands to be notified of any more changes to the direction of the work. The author still has not defined who the Alliance Against Breast Cancer really is which leads the reader to wonder if it is really a legitimate assignment or whether Lynn has created it as an exercise for the creatives for another purpose.

One thing that has been confirmed amid all the unknowns for the creatives is that Lynn ducked out on her scheduled surgery. But that only sets the stage for further speculation going forward.

Discussion Question 1

Why did Old Brizz leave the totem pole to Benny?

Discussion Question 2

In what ways do the creatives attempt to get some perspective on the breast cancer campaign?

Discussion Question 3

What is it about Tom Mota that gives the creatives reason to believe that he will still seek revenge on the agency?

Vocabulary

reputable, outsourcing, virtue, per se, naught, misogyny, smirked, robust, communal, mastectomy, novelty, appraise, evasive, absurd, reincarnation, karma, authentic, pagan, artifact, appraised, hypocrisy, atrocities, mangled, jibes, preposterous, incredulity,



alliances, regression, memoir, anguish, context, morbid, muddled, ornery, epoch,
dysfunction, barista, preternatural, craven



The Thing to Do and the Place to Be

Summary

On the night before her surgery, Lynn goes home but feels anxious with no work to keep her occupied. Lynn reflects on the day, especially Yop's breaking down when she terminated him. Lynn has grown immune to the emotions surrounding the layoffs. Lynn talks to her cat and wonders where Martin is tonight and she knows that he is probably at his law office working late as usual. Lynn's order of Chinese food arrives and after a third glass of wine, Lynn still wonders what Martin is doing. Lynn tries to distract herself with the remnants of ice cream and cleaning out her bedroom closet but soon abandons that and finishes the bottle of wine.

Martin Grant is a 45-year-old attorney who has never married. He and Lynn have dated for a year but he is not interested in being married so Lynn is not sure how to think about their relationship. Martin has a history of cancelling on their plans at the last minute because of work and Lynn really cannot count on him. Lynn vows not to call Martin tonight after the emotional content of their last conversation.

Lynn is not sure how she got here but she is now sitting in a neighborhood wine bar but she is not sure this is the place she should be or the thing she should be doing tonight. Lynn recalls the morning in the shower when she first felt a lump in her breasts and she asked Martin to feel it but he is preoccupied by getting home to shower and going to work. Lynn can't help but be disappointed in his lack of interest in something that concerns her. Martin spends the next month working in California and Lynn does not return his calls so he stops calling. They do not see each other for two weeks after his return and Lynn has missed him so much that she does not argue with him about his behavior. When they make love that night, Lynn asks Martin not to touch her left breast because it is tender so he does not. Martin does, however, bring it up at breakfast the next morning and Lynn tells him that she has found a lump in her breast. Martin grills Lynn about going to the doctor and he agrees to go with her.

Lynn parks in the garage at Nordstrom's department store and heads to the lingerie department. Maybe this is the thing to do and the best place to be tonight but she's still not sure. Lynn wonders what Martin is doing right now and realizes that she just wants to be close to him in his office. Lynn thinks about marriage and whether it would matter to her if she never married but something deep down would like the white picket fence in the suburbs life that so many other people have. Lynn has agreed to have a mastectomy if the doctors find that the cancer is invasive so breast reconstruction would be the next step. She has been asked to bring a favorite bra so the plastic surgeon will know the size to create after she has had six months of chemo and radiation. Lynn selects 15 bras to try on in the fitting room and wonders for whom she should be trying to look sexy because it is over between her and Martin. Lynn begins to scream in the dressing room and the sales clerks come running and Lynn shoves all the bras back at them and she realizes that this is a stupid place to be on this night.



After Martin had found out about Lynn's cancer, he would leave her voice messages about how intelligent people do not let problems like these go without seeking medical attention. Lynn does not answer her phone when Martin calls because he does not understand that fear is stronger than logic. When Martin takes Lynn to the doctor for her first visit, she will not get out of the car. Martin cannot understand Lynn's fear of entering the building because most people want to get problems fixed but that is exactly what scares Lynn. Martin enters the building and comes out a few minutes later telling Lynn that the appointment has been rescheduled. Martin will not tell Lynn the new appointment time but asks her to tie a handkerchief over her eyes.

Martin takes Lynn into a building and they enter an elevator where the people stare at her because she is blindfolded. When Martin unties the handkerchief, Lynn realizes that they are on top of the John Hancock building so that they could view the city and surrounding suburbs. Martin ties the blindfold on Lynn again and they get back in the car and Martin drives them to another building where they climb some stairs. When her blindfold comes off, Lynn sees that they are at Gino's East pizza restaurant. After lunch, Martin takes Lynn outside and ties the blindfold on her again, Lynn thinking that they must be headed back to the hospital. When the blindfold is removed again, Lynn realizes that they are at the Jazz Record Mart where Martin browses albums for several minutes. Then the blindfold is back on and they are at the Art Institute where they mull around for a half hour. At last, it is 3:00 and Lynn knows that Martin is leading her across a wide parking lot into the hospital but it is actually the Department of Motor Vehicles. Lynn sighs with relief and Martin tells her that now she will be able to enter the hospital.

Lynn finds herself sitting in her car outside Martin's office building and knows that it is really not the right place to be tonight. She wants to be in Martin's office with him so badly but she will not let herself go in. After 20 minutes, Lynn drives away, thinking that Martin has made clear what his terms for the relationship are and she cannot accept the terms. Martin had taken her to the doctor and was the one to ask the hard questions when the doctor told them that Lynn's cancer was really bad. Martin had been good to her but he had also treated her poorly. The morning after the doctor visit, Lynn had come out of shock and asked Martin what the doctor had said and then wanted to know Martin's opinion about what she should do. The next day Martin tells Lynn that he will be available to her throughout her surgery and recovery but that they are not going to make it as a couple for the long term. Martin admitted that his timing was bad for delivering that message but he did not want Lynn to get the wrong idea about why he was willing to care for her during her treatment.

Lynn continues to speed down Lake Shore Drive, thinking that she does not need a man in her life. She has proven herself to be quite capable and successful and does not have to be partnered to be worthy of a great life. There is something about death, though, that will humble you on the night before a major surgery. Lynn heads to a bar on the South Side called the Velvet Lounge where she and Martin had spent some time together but the bar is closed tonight so she sits in her car and listens to some blues. It is now past midnight and Lynn knows that she will not be able to go to the hospital tomorrow without Martin so she finds a phone booth and dials Martin's office number. Lynn leaves several messages for Martin asking him to call her at that number but he



does not call. Finally Lynn tries Martin's home number and she awakens him. Lynn tells Martin that she cannot go through surgery tomorrow without him and he agrees to pick her up in the morning. Lynn is now calm as she drives toward the office where she spends the night working until six a.m. Lynn calls Martin to tell him that she is at the office and can get to the hospital next door on her own and he does not need to come pick her up. Martin protests but Lynn is adamant and promised to call him when she is out of surgery. Lynn clears some clutter off her office sofa and lies down to sleep, vowing to clean the office later today and make a fresh start.

Analysis

Lynn admits to having no emotion over the layoffs at the office anymore and that seems to have infiltrated her personal life too. On the night before her breast cancer surgery, Lynn leaves the office relatively early but does not take any work with her which makes her feel anxious. Work is all Lynn has concentrated on for her adult life, forgoing marriage and children in favor of building a successful ad agency. But now that her personal life is staring her in the face with no work to distract her, Lynn does not know what to do with her time. She is essentially alone on a very frightening night and she tries to process it as she would a business decision, asking what is "the thing to do and the right place to be." She tries to optimize the night with logic which is noble but she is just prolonging the emotional tipping point which will come later.

Lynn's relationship with Martin is a double edged sword for her because he has been almost the only person in her personal life for the past year yet she knows not to rely on him. Martin has a habit of forgetting dates and cancelling at the last minute because of work, something Lynn can relate to but at some point Lynn would have liked Martin to have put her ahead of everything else. He is simply not willing or able to do that. Even on the morning when Lynn discovers a lump in her breast, Martin does not want to be delayed by taking time to look at it when she requests it. Alarm bells go off in Lynn's head because Martin intuitively understands what Lynn's request really means--that she is probably very ill--and he does not have the interest to go the distance with her. He has told Lynn that he will see her through the surgery and recovery but that they are not fit for each other long term--he wants to make sure Lynn is aware of his intentions. Martin's honesty is both good and bad. From a logical perspective, it makes sense for him to be up front with Lynn about his intentions but his telling her this three days before the surgery is really bad timing. Unfortunately, Lynn has realized that she is in love with Martin and wonders about the white picket fence and the house in the suburbs. Now this will never come to be and it is another loss that Lynn will have to bear. Perhaps it is this overwhelming sense of loss that drives Lynn back to her office to work until dawn and not go in for the surgery. Lynn spends time cleaning her office of clutter which symbolizes her clearing her life for a new start. Lynn has found the the thing to do and the best place to be and it is driving new business for the agency.

The theme of fear is clearly evident in Lynn's behavior related to the breast cancer. Martin says it well when he cannot understand why someone as intelligent and informed as Lynn delays seeing a doctor when the lump has appeared. Lynn tells Martin that fear



is stronger than logic. Martin also cannot understand why Lynn does not want to address the problem and get it resolved because most people with a serious illness want it treated right away so they can begin healing. For some reason, Lynn views this from the opposite perspective. Perhaps Lynn has chased business and goals all her life and there are always new ones to replace the ones that are achieved. If Lynn's deals with the cancer and it is found to be untreatable, then what will Lynn do when there are no more goals? It is a frustrating matter to Martin who uses an attorney's logic to address issues. There are also female emotional implications that Martin cannot begin to understand. If Lynn has a mastectomy and resulting breast reconstruction, there will be a period of a year or so when she will be scarred and not feel like a real woman. Breasts are a crucial part of a woman's personal identity and it will be uncomfortable for Lynn to have that taken away. Also, at a time when Lynn is evaluating her life and whether or not she made the right choice to not marry and have children, the loss of a breast will be especially emotionally painful as another thing that has been taken from what could have been a fuller life. This all plays into the theme of grief for Lynn who is mourning the chance she had to have a family and alter the course of her life. Now on top of that, after the surgery, she will mourn the complete woman she was and possibly her life. The business she had helped to build will also be lost to her and the losses are stacked overwhelmingly against Lynn tonight.

The author deviates from the second person perspective used throughout the rest of the book to use the third person point of view in this chapter. Third person perspective is characterized by using the pronouns he, she and they. For example, the author writes, "She promises to call when she is out of surgery. He protests again, but she insists. She hangs up and staggers over to the white leather sofa." The third person point of view is the most common one used in literature but in this story the point of view is also omniscient as if an unseen narrator tells the reader what Lynn is thinking as opposed to a limited point of view which just points out activities and events as the characters move about in the story.

Discussion Question 1

Do you think Martin's honesty is well timed or should he have waited to tell Lynn he just wants to be friends after she has recovered from surgery?

Discussion Question 2

What does Lynn finally discover is "the thing to do and the right place to be" for her?

Discussion Question 3

Why do you think Lynn did not show up for the breast cancer surgery?



Vocabulary

impromptu, seduce, intact, deficient, deposition, pathologically, noncommittal, vague, mastodon, fixated, mulling, implications, inimitable, lavished, blotto, cerebral, mastectomy, glut, articulating, coax, levity, receded, gaudy, canards, prognosis, lachrymose, tailspin, clarity, muddled, obscuring, stippling, impoverished

Returns and Departures, Chapter 1

Summary

The creatives come into another quiet day and face the breast cancer campaign in which they are supposed to make breast cancer patients laugh. The fact that concepts for the campaign elude them stings their self esteem and makes them wonder if that might be part of the criteria to see who would be laid off next. Benny breaks the tension by telling everyone that he had seen Carl and Marilyn outside the building this morning and everyone is surprised because they have separated. Carl sits in the car watching workers power spray the alley next to the building. The futility of their work reminds Carl of when a client waters down creative work yet the creatives still have to make sure the logo is used appropriately, a process called polishing the turd by the creatives. Carl and Marilyn had spent their first night together in six weeks last night. Marilyn is now on her cell phone yet again but Carl is not angry like he used to be because he realizes that she has a job to do just like everyone else.

As he sits in the car, Carl sees a beautiful woman crossing the street and realizes that it is Marcia who has had a new chic haircut making her almost unrecognizable. Benny, who is standing on the sidewalk, makes a comment to Carl about the haircut and both are amazed that she has given up her 1980s structured big hair. Everyone in the office except Marcia knows that Benny has a major crush on Marcia but it is complicated because she is not Jewish and he needs to marry a Jewish woman.

Joe tells the team that there are two new business pitches that they need to work on, one for a beverage company and one for a running shoe company so they need to get the breast cancer campaign completed right away and concepts need to be reviewed tomorrow not next week. Amber visits Genevieve's office to fill Genevieve in on Karen's phone call to the hospital yesterday. Larry joins them and Amber tells Genevieve about Lynn's fear of hospitals. Benny enters the office and states that he finds it odd that the breast cancer work arrived at the office at the same time that Lynn was going into the hospital and wonders if that is more than just a coincidence. Jim Jackers enters the room and states that this is Lynn's way of telling everyone that she has breast cancer. Hank Neary comes into the office to listen and says that he and Benny do not believe there is even a client, unless it is Lynn herself. They think that Lynn made up the whole campaign just so they could make her laugh at a time when she needs that. It is also suggested that Lynn made up the campaign to keep her team looking busy during the layoffs. Carl joins the group and suggests that Lynn's life has been so marketing centered that the only way she can deal with her disease is to look at it from that perspective. The team wants Genevieve to talk to Joe about Lynn's situation because Genevieve and Joe are tight.

Genevieve finally approaches Joe about Lynn but Joe is close mouthed, stating that it is none of his business. Joe admits that he would help Lynn if she needed it but he is not convinced that she is sick. Joe also would find it awkward talking to Lynn about female



health issues, especially when they are this personal. Genevieve offers to accompany Joe if he talks to Lynn but Joe is still apprehensive because he does not like to get caught up in the idle gossip of the others on the team because most of them are indiscriminate and blame him for things. Genevieve takes offense to Joe's comment and says that he is very well compensated for whatever abuse he thinks he suffers. Joe admits that he does have privileges that the others do not and he should not complain and apologizes if he appears like a martyr. Genevieve tells Joe that sometimes he can be aloof making him appear to be an elitist which bothers him but he agrees to think about talking to Lynn.

Joe then asks Genevieve to go to lunch and they find a bench where they can eat their sandwiches. Joe tells Genevieve that he had looked up the word "elitist" and he does not feel that he is one, especially because part of the definition is being part of a group and Joe is definitely not inclined to be part of a group. He then tells Genevieve about an experience he had once as a kid in high school as part of a clique which decides to torment another kid named Henry for asking out the girlfriend of one of the group's members and badmouthing his alcoholic family too. So one day Joe's clique decides to tie Henry up tightly with garden hoses like a mummy and stuff a shirt into his mouth. They then proceed to beat him up watching him fall and standing him back up to repeat the blows. Joe did not participate but he could not leave either because these guys were his friends but also because Henry might need help. They eventually left Henry lying all tied up in his back yard. Joe had to go to juvenile court for the offense and spent the last year in high school at a detention home. From that point on, Joe has never wanted anything more to do with groups, not even joining a fraternity in college.

Analysis

Carl is markedly improved since taking the correct antidepressant medication. He and Marilyn have been separated for six weeks but have reunited, at least briefly, and he is not so acutely aware of her perceived slight of taking calls on her cell while saying goodbye to him in the morning. Carl has a renewed enthusiasm for life and is particularly buoyed up by Marcia's new haircut believing that if Marcia can make such a drastic change, then there is hope for all of them. The others notice Carl's lighter demeanor and he becomes the voice of reason in the group especially when it comes to analyzing Lynn's motives for the breast cancer campaign. Carl suggests that Lynn's life has been totally marketing focused so she created the breast cancer ad campaign project so that she can come to terms with her disease in a form that is most familiar to her--advertising. The other team members do not necessarily buy in to Carl's theory but Carl, being a bit older and suffering some major life issue, may have a bit more insight into human nature than the others in the group. At any rate, it is good for Carl to have these perceptions about someone else when he had been so self absorbed when he was critically depressed.

The theme of boredom continues because the creatives still have too much time on their hands and they continue their office visits, this time the topic is whether or not Lynn really has cancer and how they can find out for sure. Probably if the agency had a full



scope of projects, they would be concerned for Lynn but there would be less time for speculation. Lynn's survival is important for them too, however, because her presence will determine whether or not they will remain at the agency. If Lynn leaves due to illness or death, then the creatives on the team will likely be scattered because they will have no one to champion for them anymore. The reader hopes that their interest is based in more compassion and that they are capable of feeling something for someone else going through a very difficult time.

The theme of choices is important in this chapter as Joe explains to Genevieve how being part of a group had such a horrible impact on his life when he was in high school. Joe had chosen to be part of a group of boys who took revenge on another kid, and although Joe did not inflict the actual abuse, he chose to stay because of his alliance with the group. It was this choice and the negative repercussions that led Joe to make the choice never to be a part of any group again. Joe chooses to maintain a distance from the others on the team and refrains from joining in on their pranks and idle gossip. The choices Joe makes are right for him but alienate him from the others but he is willing to suffer through that because of decisions he made long ago.

Discussion Question 1

Why does the creative team select Joe to act as their representative to talk to Lynn about her breast cancer?

Discussion Question 2

Why has Joe determined that he would never again join any type of group?

Discussion Question 3

What is the significance of Marcia's new haircut?

Vocabulary

vexing, existential, predicated, assuage, indictment, hordes, paroxysms, converging, glimpse, gauge, reproachful, insolence, indifference, credenza, nebulous, compassionate, compelling, distinction, subtleties, condescension, snide, elitist, surrogate, aloof, stereotype, imperceptibly, guilelessness, swaths, skeptic, misanthrope, clique, commingle



Returns and Departures, Chapter 2

Summary

Jim Jackers finds an abandoned cubicle on the empty 59th floor of the building so he can work on the breast cancer campaign in quiet. Soon Jim hears some tinkling sounds in another cubicle and looks to find Yop dismantling an office chair. Yop is dressed in a suit and has a toolbox with him but he refuses to talk to Jim about what he is doing there. Finally Yop states that no one emailed him about the changes to the breast cancer campaign. Jim is taken aback that Yop would consider this a reasonable request when Yop had been terminated two days ago. Yop states that he knows he has been terminated and that advertising is a young man's game but he did not expect the creatives to not send him an email when he had asked them to do so. Then Yop states that he is really glad that no one emailed him because he would not want to work on a team where no one respects him. Jim then helps Yop pack up the chair parts in a suitcase, wrapping the seat in brown shipping paper. Jim then accompanies Yop out of the building with the suitcase and the package and they walk down to the edge of Lake Michigan where Yop throws the chair parts into the water. Yop tells Jim that he would thank him for his help but Yop has always considered Jim to be an idiot.

Joe and Genevieve have gone to Lynn's office to talk to her and the creatives anxiously watch the closed office door. Larry is especially nervous these days because Amber has not decided whether or not she is going to have an abortion. Lynn tells Joe and Genevieve that she has asked for a security guard for the agency because she does not want to take any chances that Tom Mota will return and do some damage and the other partners have agreed. The security guard will be positioned outside Joe's office because he has a vantage point to the elevators.

Benny has learned from an appraiser that the totem pole is authentic and worth \$60,000 and he plans to give it to the Indian tribe that wants it. Benny still does not know why Old Brizz had willed it to him or why Old Brizz did not sell it when he could have used the money but Benny will see that it will be returned to the rightful owners. Marcia suggests that Old Brizz willed it to Benny, knowing that Benny would get it back where it belonged. Benny tells Marcia that he likes her updated haircut and she takes offense to the word "updated." Genevieve stops in and asks Marcia if she can speak to her so Marcia follows her to Genevieve's office. Benny makes several calls to Jim's office to tell him that Genevieve is out of Lynn's office and a minute later, Karen walks by and tells Benny that it turns out that Lynn does not have cancer after all.

Genevieve tells Marcia about the meeting with Lynn. Joe had stated that there was a rumor that Lynn had breast cancer and that people are concerned. Lynn seems bemused that Joe has been pulled into the office gossip and states that there is nothing wrong with her. Joe persists until finally Lynn states that she has a suspicious mole and has rescheduled her surgery due to the new business pitches. Lynn thinks that Joe has been set up by the other creatives to confront Lynn. Genevieve later sends a scathing



email to the team chiding them for their behavior in stirring things up so much that Joe would get involved and ultimately look foolish in front of Lynn.

Analysis

Yop is in serious denial, and probably shock, about being terminated two days before and he takes the only revenge he can think of--taking apart an office chair and then throwing the parts into Lake Michigan. This is symbolic because he thinks that being accused of having Tom Mota's office chair led to his being let go. Yop is destroying the only thing he can, the chair, as an act of revenge against the agency. While Yop needs time to adjust to his unemployment, he keeps working on the breast cancer campaign in the hopes that he can get his job back. But what really upsets Yop is that his former colleagues do not email him any updates about the campaign. It makes no sense for them to communicate about projects with someone who no longer works there but Yop is being irrational right now. The theme of fear runs high for Yop who is 48 and knows that the advertising industry values young people. Yop fears for his immediate well being as well as for his future. That is a lot to manage emotionally in the course of just a few days and Yop had hoped for more support from his former teammates, some of whom may yet face the same fate.

Lynn is also in denial. Her attempts to divert thinking about her breast cancer have been very disruptive in the office, and possibly fatal for her. Lynn may have also done damage to Joe when she denies her breast cancer when she implies that the other creatives have set him up when they goaded him into talking to her about her illness. Admitting that she only has a mole that needs attention makes Joe look overzealous and reactionary when that was not his intent at all. This further positions Joe as an outsider to the overall group and it is unfortunate that his good intentions have gone so badly astray.

Benny finally comes to a decision about what to do with the totem pole and it seems like a noble one. Instead of taking the \$60,000 appraised sale price, Benny donates it to a dwindling tribe of Indians to whom it has significant meaning. Totem poles have many purposes but mainly they tell stories that are symbolic to a particular tribe. Perhaps Old Brizz, in willing the totem pole to Benny, wanted Benny to do the right thing with it, thereby telling the story of the creative team who really are concerned and compassionate people when it really matters.

Discussion Question 1

Why is Yop really so upset with the creatives after he has been terminated?

Discussion Question 2

Why has Benny decided to give the totem pole to the Indian tribe when he could have sold it for a lot of money?



Discussion Question 3

Do you think that the creatives have set up Joe in a conspiracy or are they genuinely concerned for Lynn's health and think she might open up to him more easily?

Vocabulary

eluding, canny, ruminates, memento mori, cacophony, yammered, pang, furrowed, unhinged, recoiled, terminus, exasperation, dismantled, articulate, allusions, novice, mockery, nonchalance, implied, eluded, aversion, bemusement, incapacitated, pathetic, conspiracy, veracity



Returns and Departures, Chapter 3

Summary

The creatives meet in Lynn's office for the purpose of showing her concepts for the humorous breast cancer ads but they do not have any to show. Fortunately, Lynn says that there is no more time to devote to the humorous breast cancer campaign because they all need to focus on the new business pitches. Lynn does want to see the concepts for the breast cancer fundraiser ads so the creatives show what little they have on that campaign. Lynn chose Karen's concept and that was the end of the pro bono breast cancer work.

The creatives have separate meetings on the running shoe client work and the beverage client work and then retreat to their offices to being brainstorming. Around noon Roland calls Benny that he thinks Tom Mota might be in the building and that he may have just entered the express elevator. Roland says that he thinks it was Tom Mota who approached him, saying that he had a package to deliver but he could not be sure because the man is dressed in a clown suit with full makeup. Roland tells Benny that the head of security thinks that Benny should warn people. Benny goes out into the hallway and tells the first person headed his way, Marcia, that Tom Mota may be in the building.

Tom Mota takes the elevator to the 62nd floor and finds Andy Smeejack, an Account Manager with whom he had had confrontations in the past. Tom Mota raises a gun and shoots Andy. Andy is able to call 911 after Tom Mota leaves the office.

On the creative floor, everyone is scrambling not sure what to do or where to go in the event that Tom Mota really has returned to seek his revenge.

Genevieve hears Carl singing in his office and she is glad to know that he is in a better frame of mind. Carl, however, is bored with the prospect of doing more work, this time on the new business pitches, and he and Marilyn are still separated, their marriage still in trouble. Tom Mota had emailed Carl this morning asking why Carl just does not quit his job. Tom Mota is thinking about starting his own landscaping business and wants Carl to join him. Tom says he will be in the office later today to talk to Joe and will stop in to see Carl. Genevieve passes a clown in the hallway but thinks it's probably someone delivering a singing telegram. When the clown says her name, Genevieve is startled but the clown has already entered Carl's office.

Roland arrives in the Creative department and tells Benny and Marcia that everyone has to evacuate the building via the emergency stairs. As Benny and Marcia take the stairs, Benny cannot help but think for a moment how romantic the situation is, being in a life and death situation with the woman he loves. Larry coaxes Amber into hiding in a server closet and he tries to keep her from crying. Larry cannot help but think that if Amber does not have an abortion, he might as well make himself an open target for the



gun-toting Tom Mota because his life will be over anyway. Larry's wife had given birth just over a year ago and his marriage would not withstand his infidelity. Larry again asks Amber if she plans to have an abortion and all she can say is that she is scared. Amber admits that she is not scared for him or her and Larry knows that Amber is speaking as a woman who has no plans of aborting her child.

Tom Mota walks into Carl's office and Carl asks Tom why he is dressed like a clown. Tom does not understand why people are not laughing and Carl tells him that clowns can be kind of scary. Carl senses that something is really wrong and wishes he could call his wife one last time. Tom asks Carl whether everybody thought Tom would return for revenge and Carl reluctantly admits that it's true. Tom states that he has come back to ask Joe to lunch and unzips his backpack and removes his gun which startles Carl. Tom tells Carl that he is not going to shoot him and that he is dressed like this because everyone in the office had thought Tom had been a clown. Tom shoots at the wall to show Carl that the gun is a paintball gun.

Joe goes to a vending machine on the 59th floor to buy a soda and sees Lynn sitting alone nearby. Joe asks Lynn why she had lied to Genevieve about the breast cancer yesterday only to tell Joe the truth after Genevieve left. Lynn tells Joe that she does not want the creatives to know about her cancer until the very last moment and she knows that she can trust Joe not to say anything. Lynn tells Joe that she has a friend who will not let her skip the surgery again and that Carl's wife is her doctor. Joe asks Lynn if he can do anything for her and she responds that he can win the new business for the agency.

Tom leaves Carl's office and heads out to find the creatives but most of them are already taking the emergency stairs to avoid seeing him. The Chicago police have arrived at the building. Tom begins shooting rounds of paintballs and Amber hears the shrieks of people from her hiding place in the server closet. Tom shoots Jim a few times before Benny can pull Jim into his office where he has been hiding with Genevieve. Benny confronts Tom about whether he is shooting paintballs just as Lynn and Joe exit the elevator. Lynn wants to know what is going on and Tom says he has come to take Joe to lunch. Just at that time, Tom's first victim Andy Smeejack, takes a running leap at Tom knocking him to the floor and pummeling him with his fists until the police arrive at the scene.

Analysis

In a moment of life mirroring art, Lynn no longer wants to see any humorous ads about breast cancer but is interested in seeing the fundraiser ads. When life mirrors art, people are able to process feelings and emotions in a way that they are used to, for example in paintings or other techniques. All Lynn really knows is advertising and she views the world through what comes out of the creative process. This is a turning point for Lynn who has accepted the fact that she needs to address her cancer. She is no longer interested in seeing the humorous work but wants to see the fundraiser campaigns. Although Lynn does not want the team to know the truth about her illness



until the very last minute she goes in for surgery, they have unknowingly helped her process her situation through the fundraiser campaign concepts. Building the agency is all Lynn has known for so long that the only thing she can think to tell Joe of how he might help her during her recuperation is to simply win the new business for the firm. This would mean more to Lynn than other shows of affection and concern.

What the creatives have feared since the beginning of layoffs is coming true--Tom Mota has returned to take some revenge. Symbolically, Tom has dressed as a clown because he feels that people always perceived him as being a clown when he worked at the agency. There are certain people who Tom targets, too, such as Andy Smeejack in account service whose bungling interventions meant missing an important client deadline at one time. Tom also targets Jim whom he considers to be weak and ineffectual. During Tom's tirade through the office, he quotes from Ralph Waldo Emerson's critique of social conformity, in his "Man the Reformer," speech before the Mechanics' Apprentices' Library Association, Boston (January 25, 1841) when he writes, "I content myself with the fact, that the general system of our trade, (apart from the blacker traits, which, I hope, are exceptions denounced and unshared by all reputable men,) is a system of selfishness; is not dictated by the high sentiments of human nature; is not measured by the exact law of reciprocity; much less by the sentiments of love and heroism, but is a system of distrust, of concealment, of superior keenness, not of giving but of taking advantage. It is not that which a man delights to unlock to a noble friend; which he mediates on with joy and self-approval in his hour of love and aspiration; but rather that which he then puts out of sight, showing only the brilliant result, and atoning for the manner of acquiring it by the manner of expending it." Tom is a big fan of Emerson's work and this passage shows Tom's feelings for the shallow industry of advertising which is not always principled and sometimes calls upon man's lower instincts to sell and persuade.

This chapter is a turning point for Larry who now knows that Amber will not be having an abortion. When she states that she is afraid, but not necessarily afraid for Larry or herself when Tom Mota in on his office tirade, Larry knows that Amber is thinking like a mother would. Amber is afraid for her unborn child. Larry knows that his life is also critically impacted because his wife will learn of his indiscretion and resulting child and the marriage will be over. Larry feels as if Tom Mota might as well shoot him and end his life because for all intents and purposes, the life that Larry knew is now over anyway.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Tom come back to the agency dressed like a clown?

Discussion Question 2

What is the significance of Tom reciting lines from Ralph Waldo Emerson's work as he rampages through the ad agency?



Discussion Question 3

How does Larry finally know that Amber will not be having an abortion?

Vocabulary

regressed, alchemical, irradiated, pathetic, permeated, prostrated, debilitated, synchronization, tranquility, indeterminate, grimace, loath, eerie, copious, vivid, caterwauling, tedious, yokels, peril, antagonism, apostasy, reticence, irrepressible, intemperate, carnage, petulant, exasperated, looming, phantasmagoric



Returns and Departures, Chapter 4

Summary

Tom Mota's rampage has so affected the creatives that some of them quit or take time off due to the stress of the event. Tom's episode also creates a lot of fodder for agency stories, each one getting richer with embellished details. Amber has been diagnosed with post-traumatic stress syndrome and has gone to her mother's home in Cleveland to rest. Carl resigns and creates a landscaping business which he names Garbedian and Son. Marcia is let go and the creatives think it should have been Jim. Marcia is given a half hour to pack her personal items but in the end she takes nothing with her. The other creatives cannot believe that Benny is going to let Marcia leave without telling her how he feels about her. Marcia returns to the building on Monday but Roland will not let her upstairs. Marcia insists that Roland call Benny to let him know that she is here and Benny, angry that Roland will not let Marcia in, goes to the lobby to see her. Marcia says that she has returned to take apart Yop's chair which had been Ernie's chair and then throw the pieces into the lake. Benny diverts Marcia to step outside to talk and then they re-enter the building hidden in a group of people in the office lobby.

Benny and Marcia go to Jim's office where Marcia leaves an envelope on Jim's keyboard. Marcia notices that Jim and a few others have kept some of the items she had left behind. Jim returns from lunch to find the envelope which contains a Hallmark apologizing for the way Marcia had treated Jim. When the other creatives ask Benny later what happened between him and Marcia, Benny tells them it's none of their business.

Tom Mota is being detained at a holding center near the courthouse with his bail set at \$20,000. Joe visit Tom because Tom had sent an email before his rampage to Carl saying that he wanted to take Jim to lunch. Tom had wanted to talk to Joe about Ralph Waldo Emerson. Tom also admits that he had been the one to write the word "fag" on Joe's office wall. Tom tells Joe that he refused to conform and he learned all that from Emerson. According to Tom, conforming means losing your soul and he could not allow that to happen but he was eventually terminated for it. Tom admits to being "down here," a place of negativity and resentment while Joe was always "up here," taking the high road in life.

The creatives visit Lynn in the hospital after her surgery and she looked painfully tiny and vulnerable in the hospital bed. The creatives feel awkward in the small room but Benny breaks the ice with his imitation of James Brown imitating Clint Eastwood. Lynn learns of Carl's resignation and she is pleased for him because advertising never made him happy. Against the advice of the others, Jim presents his concepts of the humorous breast cancer campaign to Lynn and she finds them amusing.

A few weeks later, Jim is let go, followed by Amber a few weeks after that. When Benny is terminated, he has so many personal items that he has to call his father to bring a car



to help him leave. The agency does not win the new business and the environment in the agency turns morbid. In the last week of August 2001 and the first ten days of September, there were more layoffs than in all the preceding months and then the summer ended.

Analysis

The theme of stress is clearly obvious in this chapter. Some of the people quit or take some time off because of the stress related to reactions about Tom Mota's clown rampage. Amber is even diagnosed with post-traumatic stress syndrome following the event. In spite of all the stress, however, Tom's visit puts an end to all the speculation and anxiety about whether or not he would return to seek revenge. In a way, the creatives can now relax as least as far as any threats from Tom are concerned.

The theme of fear is also important in this chapter. Tom's gun-toting outburst creates panic and fear, especially those who are hit by Tom's paintball pellets, thinking they are real bullets. Tom is believable enough that some of the creatives can escape via the emergency stairs and hide in the best places they can find. What no one really says, though, is the fear they feel that this could happen to any of them. Tom Mota had been one of them until the layoffs and they are all still vulnerable to terminations. For so long, they have protected their lifestyles and now they now that they can be taken away at any moment, whether by a corporate layoff or a fanatic co-worker.

The chapter also shows a turning point for Lynn who has gone through with the breast cancer surgery. Whether or not she was the one who had originated the breast cancer work, the campaigns are complete now and Lynn can continue with her recuperation with the full support of her team.

Layoffs intensify in the late summer of 2001 and the author ends the talk of layoffs at the end of the first ten days in September. On September 11, 2001, terrorists attacked America and everything else paled by comparison.

Discussion Question 1

Do you think Benny ever tells Marcia how he really feels about her?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Tom say he wanted to take Joe to lunch when he arrives at the office for his clown rampage?

Discussion Question 3

Why do you think Ralph Waldo Emerson's writings are so important to Tom Mota?



Vocabulary

urge, negligence, insatiable, shenanigans, sanctum, ambiguous, unflagging, dispelling, ennui, maniacal, obscure, inscrutable, brandish, stultifying, ashen, belittlement, pitiable, raconteur, disparaged, unrequited, pillaging, generic, idiosyncratic, cowering, juxtaposition, aphorisms, eloquent, sequestered, vortex, manacled, bantering, irrevocable, grandiosity, juxtaposed, assess, perseverance, atrocious, loathsome, consensus, regale, amiability, transcend



Returns and Departures, Chapter 5

Summary

It is now the summer of 2006 and Benny receives an email from someone whose name he does not immediately recognize. The creatives have moved on to other jobs. Benny is working at a new agency, having been hired by Jim Jackers, but Benny is having trouble adjusting to life in a smaller agency. Jim has also received an email and does not recall the name. Marcia later tells Benny that the name on the email--Hank Neary--is the copywriter they worked with who wore the brown corduroy jacket to work all the time.

The other creatives from the old agency have also received an email from Hank and they meet at a bookstore where Hank is giving a reading of his new book. Amber is there with her little girl while Larry sits alone in the back trying to hide under his ball cap. Genevieve is there with her husband and a new baby. Benny and Marcia sit with Jim while Carl sits with Marilyn. Karen is also there but Yop and Tom Mota do not show. Janine is there with her motorcycle riding boyfriend and is hardly recognizable in her new bohemian style. Everyone wonders where Joe is now but no one seems to know. When Hank begins to read, the creatives feel a swell of pride that one of their own has made it big. As Hank continues, they realize that the book is about Lynn.

After the reading, the creatives go out for drinks and learn that Benny and Marcia are engaged and that Carl's landscaping business is hugely successful. Hank tells the others that he had visited Lynn several times during her illness and she had shared many personal things about her life with him and it gave him the idea for his book--that people in authoritative positions can still be just as human and vulnerable as those they manage. Hank tells the others that Lynn died of ovarian cancer in 2003. They all toast to Lynn's memory. Carl tells them that Tom Mota joined the army and was accepted in spite of his age due to his excellent marksmanship skills and the group orders martinis to salute Tom.

The creatives begin to leave the bar as the night winds down but the conversation of the few remaining turns to Joe and they dial Joe's old number but it now belongs to someone new. The others straggle out to their cars and the narrator says, "But for the moment, it was nice just to sit there together. We were the only two left. Just the two of us, you and me."

Analysis

The author wraps up the book by telling what has happened to the creatives. Clearly Benny has stated his love for Marcia as they are engaged to be married. Carl is happily successful in his marriage and business. Amber has a little girl and Larry lives in the shadows, a broken man. Jim has hired Benny who is grateful for a full time job but



struggles with small agency culture. It is ironic that Tom Mota, who prized his nonconformity, has joined the army and is doing well. Hank is the surprising success story in the book and the others are truly happy for his success.

It is said that all good things must come to an end and so does the time this group of people spent together working at jobs they both loved and hated. "Then We Came to the End" is the close of the story for the characters as they have moved on to other jobs and other lives. However, there is something about surviving traumatic circumstances that binds people together just as the creatives lived through the dot com explosion and resulting layoffs. The title of the book not only signifies the end of the lifestyle the creatives had enjoyed, but also the end of innocence and security in America after the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001.

The author ends the book by stating, "But for the moment, it was nice just to sit there together. We were the only two left. Just the two of us, you and me." It is unclear who he means exactly but it could be perceived that he means the narrator (we) as the spirit of the creatives who had worked together and the memories they created in the time they had together.

Discussion Question 1

Who do you think is the most successful character in the book?

Discussion Question 2

Why has Hank decided to base his book on Lynn?

Discussion Question 3

Why is it ironic that Tom Mota has joined the army?

Vocabulary

eluded, anonymity, crass, prepossessing, savvy, mensch, banter, inconsequential, ponderous, amnesty, bequeathed, demise, averted, ersatz, incredulous, mediocrity, fetishistic, scorn, insipid, saccharine, approbation, formidable, antics



Characters

Narrator/We

The narrator tells the story and uses the pronoun we to include all the characters in the book. The group shares the same frustrations, fears and passions and so becomes one entity--we--and the story is essentially told by all of the creative team members. The narrator/we becomes the faceless representative of all the characters in the story. The narrator/we is also the one who introduces the reader to all the individual team members who are important to the story. The narrator/we provides background information and flashbacks so that the reader has the information necessary to understand the narrative. At first it may be unnerving to read the story written like this but it really reflects the nature of corporate culture in which everything is positioned as "we" and "us." This is important, too, as the "we" begins to break apart with each termination and the individuals are forced to bring forth their own identities and separate from the group.

Lynn Mason

Lynn Mason is one of the partners in the ad agency and has become a workaholic, forgoing a personal life in favor of building the business. Lynn manages the group of creatives whose stories unfold in the book. Lynn is tiny in stature but formidable in her professional appearance. Part of Lynn's persona is that she does not engage personally with any of the team members and retains an aloof aura in the business. The team members know little about Lynn other than she has never married, has no children and wears outrageously expensive Italian leather shoes. Lynn has an unsatisfactory relationship with a man named Martin who is also married to his work. When Lynn is diagnosed with breast cancer, she has no one to be with her or help her through the experience. Lynn ultimately dies from ovarian cancer in 2003.

Martin Grant

Lynn Mason dates a workaholic attorney named Martin Grant for a short time in the story. Martin has told Lynn that he is not the marrying kind but she secretly thinks she can change him because she loves him and longs for the perfect suburban life with him. Martin comes in and out of Lynn's life but wants no attachments. Prior to Lynn's breast cancer surgery, Martin tells Lynn that they are not right for each other but that he will see her through the illness as a friend. Lynn ultimately rejects Martin's weakness.

Tom Mota

Tom Mota is a volatile character and one of the first ones to be terminated from the agency. Tom has a hard time separating and even attends a meeting and continues to



create concepts after he has been laid off. Tom sends bizarre emails to his former colleagues and one day shows up dressed as a clown shooting people with a paintball gun. When Tom is arrested, Joe goes to visit him in jail and Tom finally gets the closure he needs. It is later learned that Tom has joined the army because of his precise marksmanship skills.

Joe Pope

Joe Pope works as Lynn Mason's right hand person in the agency and even though he does not have a higher title than some of the others, he is looked up to and sought out for advice because he has Lynn's ear. Joe works long hours and does not socialize with the others at the agency. Joe takes the lead in team meetings when Lynn is not available. Tom Mota gives Joe a compliment when he tells Joe that Joe is always "up here," meaning that Joe rises above the antics and sophomoric behavior of some of the other characters.

Benny Shossburger

Benny Shossburger is a senior level art director who is very gregarious in the agency. Benny loves to tell stories and needs to be included at every impromptu meeting or hallway gossip session. Benny is a bit chubby with curly hair. Benny loves a woman named Marcia Dwyer in the department but he is afraid to declare his feelings for her. Years after everyone has left the agency and have gathered for Hank's book reading, Benny encourages everyone to meet for drinks and is the last one to leave.

Creatives

In the advertising world, copywriters and art directors are called creatives. All the characters combined would be called creatives as opposed to account executives or media buyers.

Jim Jackers

Jim Jackers is a zealous redhead who is kind of an underdog in the agency. Jim is not as ambitious or outgoing as some of the other creatives and he seems to lack office politics savvy. Jim is one of the last of the team members to be terminated, however, which could mean that he stayed as long as he did because he was not a trouble maker and kept a low profile.

Karen Woo

Karen Woo is a senior level art director who is very competitive with the other team members and works to trump the others in coming up with concepts for ad campaigns.



Karen is also a foodie who loves to try out new restaurants. It is also Karen who finds Janine sitting amid the sea of balls at the McDonald's Playland.

Amber Ludwig

Amber Ludwig is a small woman with dark, close-set eyes who is pregnant from an affair with Larry Novotny, another creative. Larry wants Amber to have an abortion because he is married and the revelation will end his marriage. Amber decides to keep the baby and shows up at Hank's reading at the end of the book with her daughter.

Hank Neary

Hank Neary is a copywriter at the agency who is really a frustrated novelist. He is writing a novel about the agony of work life and often copies pages of books to read during office hours. Hank also quotes lofty authors and stay away from office pranks and gossip. At the end of the book, Hank releases a book about Lynn and invites his former co-workers to his author's reading.

Genevieve Latko-Devine

Genevieve Latko-Devine is an art director and one of the few of the group who has any real compassion or style. As her name implies, Genevieve is stunningly beautiful which garners her lots of attention which she deflects.

Marcia Dwyer

Marcia is an art director whose personal style has not progressed from the 1980s. Her hair style is too big and structured and she plays 1980s music from the radio in her office. When Marcia does get a new hair style, it is remarkably chic and noticeable. When Marcia is terminated she does not take any of her personal belongings with her, she simply packs up and asks that everything be trashed. Marcia also admits that the fear of termination for the year prior to the event had made her a bitch to everyone and she is glad she can now let that go.

Carl Garbedian

Carl Garbedian is a volatile character who suffers not only the stress of the looming terminations but also marital problems with his wife, Marilynn, who is an oncologist. Carl feels like his wife's job is more important than his and that she does not give him enough dedicated time. After he is laid off, Carl starts a very successful landscaping business.



Larry Novotny

Larry Novotny is an art director who has an affair with Amber. Amber becomes pregnant and Larry wants her to have an abortion because if his wife finds out, his marriage will be over. Larry wears a Cubs ball cap and is constantly rearranging it in nervous energy.

Frank Brizzolera

Frank Brizzolera, known as Old Brizz, is older than most of the creatives. Frank is a heavy smoker who ultimately succumbs to lung cancer after he is laid off. Frank leaves a totem pole to Jim in his will and Jim eventually sells it for \$60,000.

Chris Yop

Chris Yop is a 48-year-old copywriter who is one of the first to be laid off at the agency. Chris fears for his future because advertising is a young man's game. Chris is in disbelief about his termination and even attends a project input meeting in Lynn's office with the other creatives shortly after Lynn has already terminated him.



Symbols and Symbolism

Meetings

The lives of the creatives revolve around meetings. There are formal input meetings where they get initial direction on new projects and then second level meetings with each other to brainstorm concepts. Third level meetings are held to show creative ideas to Lynn or Joe and there are ultimately customer meetings in which creative ideas are shown to clients. Aside from the formal meetings, the creatives hold impromptu meetings in their offices, the coffee bar, the print station, in restaurants and other places for gossip sessions and story time. When they want to find out the truth about Lynn's cancer, they go about it like they do everything else with both covert meetings as well as a formal meeting with her with their designated envoys, Joe and Genevieve.

Print Station

Print Stations are located around the agency and they are where people gather to wait for their documents to finish coming off the printer. These are good spots for random gossip and idle chatter but also the locations of some uncomfortable moments such as when Marcia catches the terminated Yop copying his resume the day after he has been let go. Lynn is also spotted at a print station standing in a daze on the day she should have been in surgery. The print stations are for public use but many times personal, and sometimes embarrassing, personal documents roll off the printer when the owner would rather no one else see what is being reproduced.

Totem Pole

Old Brizz leaves a totem pole to Benny in his will and Benny is at a loss to understand why he is the recipient of such an unusual object. After Old Brizz dies, Benny visits the totem pole where it stands in Old Brizz' yard. Benny does not understand the significance of the totem pole to Old Brizz's life but he puts it in storage because he wants to keep it until he better understands. Benny has the totem pole appraised and learns that it is worth \$60,000. The appraiser also discovers that the totem pole is authentic and important to the Indians of a diminishing tribe so Benny opts to give it to the Indians. Marcia suggests that Old Brizz willed the totem pole to Benny because he knew that Benny would do the right thing with it. Benny finally comes to a decision about what to do with the totem pole and it seems like a noble one. Instead of taking the \$60,000 appraised sale price, Benny donates it to a dwindling tribe of Indians to whom it has significant meaning. Totem poles have many purposes but mainly they tell stories that are symbolic to a particular tribe. Perhaps Old Brizz, in willing the totem pole to Benny, wanted Benny to do the right thing with it, thereby telling the story of the creative team who really are concerned and compassionate people when it really matters.



Breast Cancer Ad Campaign

Work in the agency has dramatically decreased so Lynn accepts a pro bono campaign promoting a breast cancer fundraiser. The creatives grapple with how to create effective concepts for the challenging subject matter. The assignment difficulty increases radically when a new directive changes the scope of the work to a campaign targeted to women who have breast cancer with the objective of making them laugh. The creatives really struggle to come up with anything that is remotely funny about breast cancer but finally they rally with a few ideas which Lynn finds amusing. It has been suggested that since Lynn has been immersed in marketing for her whole life, she came up with the idea to have the team do the campaign as a way of dealing with her own breast cancer-- something she can look at in an ad and either approve or not.

Walking Spanish

Walking Spanish down the hall is a term that the creatives adopt for when someone is terminated. The phrase comes from a trick of Spanish pirates who would grab their prisoners by the scruff of the neck so that their toes would barely touch the wood when walking the plank to their deaths. The term can be active or passive as in, "... when he walked Spanish" or "...when she was walked Spanish."

Polishing the Turd

Creative work goes through many layers of approval before it is released for publication. Many times the client will change copy and images so dramatically that the original work is almost unrecognizable... essentially a turd... according to creatives. The only touches the creatives are then allowed to affect include making sure the client's logo is placed correctly and perhaps adding a drop shadow in an image... essentially just "polishing the turd."

Tom Mota's chair

The incident about Yop's using bookshelves and a chair that had not been originally assigned to him is characteristic of the minutiae that can envelop people who work in a creative environment. They can tend to dwell on irrelevant things when there is a downturn and have too much time on their hands. This type of behavior only adds to the paranoia that is spreading throughout the company. Yop is even convinced that it is the chair episode that has led to his termination which is not at all accurate. Layoffs are based on business decline and when accounts in an ad agency are lost, typically those people assigned to them are let go if they cannot be assimilated into other client work.



Stories

The creatives love to tell and hear stories from their colleagues. Most of the stories center on what's going on in the agency with work and personal lives. The big stories are how people are reacting to the layoffs, Lynn's cancer and Amber's pregnancy. It is not unusual for the creatives to spend time telling stories because that is essentially what they do in their work--telling stories about products to persuade people to buy them.

Ralph Waldo Emerson book

Tom is a big fan of Ralph Waldo Emerson and gives Carl a book of his writings because he thinks it will help Carl. When Tom returns to the office dressed like a clown, he recites lines from Emerson's critique of social conformity, in his "Man the Reformer," speech before the Mechanics' Apprentices' Library Association, Boston (January 25, 1841) when he writes, "I content myself with the fact, that the general system of our trade, (apart from the blacker traits, which, I hope, are exceptions denounced and unshared by all reputable men,) is a system of selfishness; is not dictated by the high sentiments of human nature; is not measured by the exact law of reciprocity; much less by the sentiments of love and heroism, but is a system of distrust, of concealment, of superior keenness, not of giving but of taking advantage. It is not that which a man delights to unlock to a noble friend; which he mediates on with joy and self-approval in his hour of love and aspiration; but rather that which he then puts out of sight, showing only the brilliant result, and atoning for the manner of acquiring it by the manner of expending it." Tom is a big fan of Emerson's work and this passage shows Tom's feelings for the shallow industry of advertising which is not always principled and sometimes calls upon man's lower instincts to sell and persuade.

September 11

The author ends the discussions of layoffs and agency life at September 11, 2001. He writes, "In the last week of August 2001, and in the first ten days of September, there were more layoffs than in all the months preceding them. By the grace of god, the rest of us hung on, hating each other more than we ever thought possible. Then we came to the end of another bright and tranquil summer." After the terrorist attacks on America, the petty things in life did not seem as important, and the creatives who had longed for some meaning in their lives have to come to terms with real life and death on American soil.



Settings

Chicago

The story is set in Chicago, Illinois, a center for commerce and home to many large ad agencies. The characters live in the area, some in downtown townhouses, some in outlying suburbs and some in the less coveted South Side.

The Agency

The agency is set in a skyscraper on Chicago's Magnificent Mile. The agency is housed on 3 floors of the building with windowed offices around the perimeter and cubicles in the center. Print stations and a coffee bar are also part of the layout.

McDonald's

Janine goes to McDonald's on her lunch break and sits in a pool of plastic balls at the Play Place. Some of her co-workers go to gawk at her every day but are called out for their bad manners and apologize to Janine who says she goes to the Play Place every day because it was somewhere she used to go with her little daughter who is now dead and she likes knowing that they had been there together.

Lynn's Condo

Lynn's condo is the setting for Lynn's ruminations on the night before her scheduled breast cancer surgery. It is finely appointed but not homey because Lynn is not the domestic type and she spends most of her time at the office.

The hospital

The hospital is only a couple building away from the ad agency. Lynn's team members visit her in the hospital after her breast cancer surgery. Carl's wife, Marilyn, is an oncologist who works at the hospital and is Lynn's doctor.



Themes and Motifs

Fear

Fear is an important theme in the book for several reasons. The most obvious is the fear of layoffs that the creatives are exposed to. They know that they are well paid and insured but termination would dramatically change their lifestyles for the negative and that is something that no one wants to experience. Some of the older creatives like Yop, for example, know that finding another advertising job will not be easy because the industry favors young people. The fear for Yop is living in a youth-centered culture as a 48-year-old man. If terminated, Yop may never again live the life to which he has become accustomed. This affects his wife too so the fear looms large in his life. While the creatives may complain about agency life, the fear of unemployment is becoming more of a reality every day and they deal with it in different ways, some becoming vindictive, but most trying to project a positive persona and keep a low profile to avoid detection for the next round of layoffs.

There is also physical fear and anxiety when the creatives live with the possible return of Tom Mota and any possible revenge he may choose to take. The times are uncertain and no one knows for sure how he or she will react when faced with unemployment, but Tom has always been a bit on the volatile side so his termination sets off a process of fear which is realized when he actually does return for revenge. Fortunately, Tom does no real physical harm but the emotional impact of his rampage is scarring in some way for the creatives.

There is also the fear of death in the story with Lynn's breast cancer. She tries to avoid the truth by going into denial but ultimately faces her fears and has the surgery. The creatives live in fear that Lynn will die because their lives at the agency are regulated by her so if she is gone, they will face uncertain futures on top of the layoffs.

Stress

The life of ad agency creatives can be very stressful in that they must come up with new ideas that wow clients every day. If the work does not produce the desired effects, the agency loses business and the creatives who work on those accounts are most likely terminated. The stress of having to be creative on demand is also very stressful. Not everyone is in a good place mentally, physically and emotionally every day yet they are expected to be clever, insightful and engaging. This can lead to serious burn out such as in the case of Carl Garbedian who is suffering from career burnout. Carl is in his mid thirties and is having marriage problems. Carl's wife, Marilyn, is an oncologist with pressing patient needs which makes Carl feel unimportant. The strain in his marriage plus the stress of layoffs depresses Carl who takes stolen antidepressants which ends in his having toxic shock. Ultimately, Carl is treated appropriately and resigns from the



agency to open a landscaping business. Carl is hugely successful once he leaves the job that kept him in a state of stress all the time.

The creatives not only live with the stress of impending layoffs but worry about repercussions from volatile people like Tom Mota returning to seek revenge. Larry and Amber have the additional stress of Amber's pregnancy which would end Larry's marriage if his wife finds out which she most certainly would. Lynn seems to be oblivious to all stress at work but when faced with her breast cancer, she is just as vulnerable as anyone else and stresses out the night before her surgery. The stress forces Lynn into denial until she is forced into addressing her diagnosis intellectually instead of emotionally.

In general, the creatives live in a very stressful environment during the layoffs, not only concerned for themselves but also for their terminated colleagues who now must find new jobs and go through the stress of adjusting to new workplaces and people, one of the most stressful things known to working people.

Choices

The theme of choices is important in the book for several of the characters. Lynn has to make choices about which of her team members must be terminated and which will stay. She also must make choices in her personal life. Lynn had chosen a long time ago to devote her life to building the business and now that she is in her forties, her chances of having a husband and a family are narrowing. Lynn wonders what she does not know that other people know that they were able to make the choices they did for fuller lives while she chose the business. Lynn must also make decisions about her health and she lives in denial for awhile about the breast cancer but eventually decides to look at her illness intellectually instead of emotionally and has the surgery.

Joe is another character who is forced to make choices in his life. When Joe was in high school he was part of a clique that beat up another classmate. Joe did not participate but he did not protest either, landing Joe in a detention center for his senior year. From that point on, Joe chooses not to become part of any group because of the mentality and dynamic that is not always positive. Joe keeps to himself at the agency and even tries to break up group story sessions when he sees them occurring in the office.

Carl makes inappropriate choices by taking Janine's antidepressant medication but ultimately he gets the proper treatment and is able to make the decision to quit advertising altogether to open a landscaping business. Lynn is even pleased for Carl's choice because he was never really cut out for advertising and she sees this choice as a healthy one for Carl's life.



Grief

Grief permeates the story almost on a daily basis as the creatives lost their jobs or wait to see who will be next to be terminated. The layoffs end the life that they have enjoyed working together and each termination is a little death for all involved.

The most obvious example of grief, however, is Janine's mourning her murdered daughter. Janine's grief exhibits in ways that most of her colleagues do not understand such as her sitting in a pool of plastic balls at the McDonald's PlayLand. While the creatives gawk at her it does not occur to them why Janine is exhibiting such unusual behavior. She finally tells them that her daughter loved to play in the plastic balls at the PlayLand and by sitting in them Janine feels closer to her daughter.

Grief takes many forms for different people. Lynn, for example, cannot bear to be at home--or anywhere else for that matter--on the night before her surgery. She feels comfortable only at work and the possibility of losing it forever, especially facing such serious surgery, plunges Lynn into a grief she cannot explain. Lynn is also grieving for her lost youth and the chance she has missed to have a husband and family. It seems as if Lynn has never considered this before she is faced with her own mortality and she mourns for what could have been as well as what might not be.

Overall, the creatives mourn the loss of their stability which has been shaken by the recent layoffs. Their daily routines, their relationships and their futures are in jeopardy because of the volatility of the ad agency financial situation.

Boredom

Ad agency life can be boring at times when available workflow is sporadic. This is especially true now that layoffs are in process. There is no real work coming in now and the creatives are forced to look busy to prevent being targeted for layoff. This is difficult to do when everything is boring. Some of the creatives such as Tom, Old Brizz and Yop have been in the business for quite awhile and have probably lost their enthusiasm for their work which has become repetitive after all this time.

The problem with boredom is that people invent things to do and that is not always constructive. The creatives love to linger over storytelling and when there is more time available the stories get bigger and more exaggerated. For example, because of their boredom, the creatives have way too much time to speculate about Lynn and whether or not she really has breast cancer. They then talk and talk about who they should appoint to confront Lynn about her illness, all of which ends disastrously.

The main characters cultivate relationships that are shallow without really investing in each other or learning about each other's real lives. This shallowness exhibits in using each other for entertainment, such as the Celebrity Death Watch to take bets on when one of them will die as in the case of Old Brizz and his lung cancer diagnosis. The sense of ennui and boredom at the agency if the characters would choose to fully

engage with each other instead of viewing each other as pawns in a game of sport or fodder for the next good office story.

Styles

Point of View

The majority of the book is written in the first person plural point of view. First person means that the story is told from the perspective of one person (I) or in the case of plural (we), many people. The pronouns "I" and "we" can be used as the subject of a sentence. For example, the author writes, "We didn't know who was stealing things from other people's workstations. Always small items--postcards, framed photographs. We had our suspicions but no proof." The author uses the collective "we" to communicate as if all the creatives in the group are really one entity. The story is told by an unnamed narrator but it could have been any, or all, of the creatives.

The author deviates from the first person perspective used throughout the rest of the book to use the third person point of view in the chapter titled "The thing to do and the right place to be." This chapter is all about Lynn and is told as if an unseen narrator tells not only about what she is doing but what she is thinking. Third person perspective is characterized by using the pronouns he, she and they. For example, the author writes, "She promises to call when she is out of surgery. He protests again, but she insists. She hangs up and staggers over to the white leather sofa." The third person point of view is the most common one used in literature but in this story the point of view is also omniscient as if an unseen narrator tells the reader what Lynn is thinking as opposed to a limited point of view which just points out activities and events as the characters move about in the story.

Language and Meaning

Because *Then We Came to the End* is set in modern day, the language is current for the times. The author uses 21st century terminology and euphemisms in narration and dialogue to show authenticity. The author uses things like current movies and pop culture icons so that the modern day audience can relate to them. The dialogue and action are all authentic to ad agency life, too, with discussions of creative concepts, input meetings and client approval.

The author also keeps the language authentic to the characters. For example, Tom Mota, who is a volatile, over-the-top character, yells at Carl when Tom returns as a clown and goes on his rampage. Tom yells, "TOM, THAT YOU, TOM? YOU COME TO BLOW US ALL AWAY IN A CLOWN OUTFIT, TOM?" The author captures human emotion too as with Carl's frustrations over his wife, Marilyn's talking on her cell phone instead of talking to him when she drops him off at work in the morning. Carl calls Marilyn's cell number in order to leave a voice mail while she is sitting next to him in the car. "Hi, Marilyn, it's me, Carl. I'm calling at about"--he lifted his arm and looked at his watch, a formal gesture--"it's about half past eight," he said. "And I know you're real busy. Sweetie, but if you could do me a favor and call, I'd love to just... catch up. Chat.



You have my number, but in case you don't, let me give it to you now, it's--" The sarcasm almost drips from Carl's words as he intends to make his wife pay attention to the fractured state of their relationship through this one verbal situation.

Structure

The structure of a novel usually takes one of four forms: character, milieu, event or idea. And while a story can contain all four forms, one usually predominates. "Then We Came to the End" is a character driven story. That means that the book focuses on the transformations of a character or characters as the story extends. In this novel, the characters are tested by the economic downturn and resulting layoffs at the ad agency that employs them. As the stress and anxiety mounts, each of the characters reacts differently. Some like Tom Mota behave in a volatile manner while Joe Pope continues with quiet calm in spite of the chaos now present in the business. Janine is transformed by the death of her child; Carl is transformed by his marriage problems; and Larry is transformed when Amber refuses to have an abortion. Each of the characters is transformed in some way by the direct and indirect impact of the layoffs and other personal problems and the author expertly tracks the route they encounter on their journeys.

Quotes

What are you up to?

-- Benny (You Don't Know What's in My Heart paragraph 10)

Importance: People are always interrupting each other during work hours to just chat or gossip to fill the hours. Benny is particularly notorious for visiting people during the day to start up non work-related conversations.

You don't know what's in my heart," said Tom, pounding his fist against the corporate logo three times. "Corporate pride.

-- Tom Mota (You Don't Know What's in My Heart paragraph 32)

Importance: Tom has taken to wearing 3 corporate polo shirts at one time, sometimes varying the color sequence. The other creatives question his motives and he claims to have corporate pride which apparently cannot be expressed by wearing simply one shirt. This is really the beginning of the end for Tom as this is really a move to show his agitation with the company and he will soon be terminated.

Benny, man, you gotta get my magazines from Jim. That fuck's had them for two months. I'm not leaving here without them--but I can't go out there. I don't want to have to see anybody.

-- Chris Yop (Enter a New Century, Chapter 1 paragraph 8)

Importance: It is embarrassing for Yop--and anyone who has been terminated--be seen by the others who are remaining at the company. No one likes to be cut loose from an organization and made to feel inferior for having been the one chosen to leave. Yop's reaction is pretty universal given the nature of terminations.

And I know you're real busy, Sweetie, but if you could do me a favor and call, I'd just love to just... catch up. Chat. You have my number, but in case you don't, let me give it to you now, it's ----

-- Carl (Enter a New Century, Chapter 2 paragraph 36)

Importance: Carl is frustrated by his wife's inattentiveness and leaves her a voice message while she is on her cell talking about a patient. Carl is close to a nervous breakdown and resorts to outrageous behavior in order to get his wife's attention.

I'm sorry, but you can't still be here, Chris. You've been terminated.

-- Lynn (Enter a New Century, Chapter 3 paragraph 19)

Importance: Yop is in denial about being terminated and cannot bring himself to leave, even returning the next day to copy his resume even though he is in danger of being thrown out for trespassing.



Don't be alarmed when I tell you this," he said, "because I promise you it has all passed, but one of the reasons--and I feel so ashamed of this--but one of the reasons I wanted to kill myself was so that she would find my body.

-- Carl (Enter a New Century, Chapter 4 paragraph 16)

Importance: Carl is having a breakdown related to taking too many antidepressant pills that were not prescribed for him. Carl had decided to take the pills because his marriage is in trouble, his wife not validating him like he needs and he has considered killing himself so that she would find his body and finally be forced to stop and really look at him.

So why did he leave it to me in his will," asked Benny, "if he just found it in his backyard when he bought the place? Why deliberately leave it to me?

-- Benny (Enter a New Century, Chapter 5 paragraph 25)

Importance: Benny has held on to the totem pole, paying to keep it in storage each month, but he still can't understand why Old Brizz left it to him in his will. Perhaps Benny waits to see if the reason will come to him if he waits long enough but the storage fees are speeding up his tolerance for the totem pole's intrigue.

Okay, I got it the first eight hundred times, you're not the marrying type.

-- Lynn (The thing to do and the right place to be paragraph 12)

Importance: Martin is a 45-year-old man who has never married and has told Lynn many times that he does not want to marry. Lynn does not know how to manage a relationship that is not goal-oriented so she and Martin have a disconnect about how to be with each other. Ultimately Martin tells Lynn that he does not think they are a fit for the long term and she is crushed because she has grown to love him in spite of his extreme unwillingness to commit.

If I had to place odds," said Carl, "I would have said Marcia Dwyer would have gone to her grave with that old haircut. I never would have thought, not in a million years, that she would wake up out of it and realize how crappy she's looked all this time.

-- Carl (Returns and Departures, Chapter 1 paragraph 30)

Importance: Marcia Dwyer's style has been stuck in the 1980s with big structured hair so when she shows up one day with a chic new hairstyle, it gives Carl new hope because if Marcia can change, anyone can change. This striking change to Marcia's appearance, coupled with Carl's elevated mood due to antidepressants marks a turning point for Carl who feels energized to make a new start.

I am not unaware, Jim, that I have been shitcanned. Everyone thinks I'm unaware of that--I am not unaware. I am not unaware that I am an old man and that this is a young man's game.

-- Yop (Returns and Departures, Chapter 2 paragraph 8)

Importance: Being terminated is really difficult for Yop who is having separation anxiety.



Yop is doing the only thing he can think of as revenge and that is taking apart an office chair which symbolizes all the problems related to who had whose chair in the conversations with the office manager prior to Yop's termination. Yop still works on the breast cancer campaign, too, even though he no longer works for the agency and the lack of communication from his former workmates just validates that Yop's career is in trouble, especially because he is 48-years-old in an industry that prizes young people.

But this is the important thing," she added. "I mean this. Above all else, Joe. Win this new business.

-- Lynn (Returns and Departures, Chapter 3 paragraph 196)

Importance: Joe asks Lynn what he can do for her as she recuperates from surgery and all she asks of him is to win the new business for the agency. Lynn's life has been consumed by building the business and it is her main concern and by winning the business, Joe would be doing the best thing he could ever do for her.

I thought I was up there, but no, that whole time, I was down here, with everybody else--churning, spinning, talking, lying, circling, whipping myself up into a frenzy. I was doing everything they were doing, just in my own way. But you," he said, "you stay here, Joe. You're up here.

-- Tom Mota (Returns and Departures, Chapter 4 paragraph 115)

Importance: Tom had spent his time at the agency trying hard to conform and he took out his frustrations on others, especially Joe, on whose wall he splashed the word "fag." It had made Tom angry that Joe did not seem bothered by the defamation and it never occurred to Tom until a few days after Tom was terminated that Joe always took the high road in life and Tom wanted to tell him that he appreciates him for his character. Tom had tried to break Joe down with negativity but he could not touch Joe's inner strength.