Choosing Destiny Essay, Research Paper

Throughout life, one will encounter many ups, downs, highs and lows. It’s quite obvious that some will handle the downs and lows better than others. These problems can range anywhere from something serious such as family conflicts, or it may be something foolish like laundry issues. Others find that their lows in life are due to the fact that they face the same daily obstacles, and tend to get annoyed with the repetition behind them. Life all of a sudden seems to have no particular meaning, and a person begins to feel worthless. Life in itself is repetitive, however a person can only take so much until they begin to need a serious modification.

The concept stated above is demonstrated in A Jest of God by Margaret Laurence and The Book of Eve by Constance Beresford-Howe. In A Jest of God, Rachel is deprived of a fulfilling lifestyle mainly because of the limits she is placed under by her mother. Day in, and day out, Rachel is living a confined life and feels there is no possibility of changing it. Her sister Stacey has married and moved away and Rachel is the only support her mother has. Rachel feels obliged to provide and care for her. After her affair with Nick Kazlik, Rachel begins to have a different outlook on life and therefore decides to change it drastically. In The Book of Eve, Eve is restricted to some of life’s simple things such as going out for walks. Her husband Burt is afraid of fire and resents being left alone even for short intervals. After Eva decides to leave, she experiences a whole new lifestyle. Eva now has enough time to go out for strolls, ’shop’, and is still left with too much time in which to contemplate her situation. In each novel it’s evident that the protagonists are getting fed up with their lives and are taking matters into their own hands.

In A Jest of God the protagonist is Rachel, a thin, tall, lanky teacher in the town of Manawaka. Rachel lives with, supports and cares for her mother despite her somewhat negative feelings towards her. Rachel’s sister Stacey does not care to visit her mother, and clearly does not have any intentions of attending to her medical needs. Therefore, Rachel is left with an awfully irritating mother who criticizes and controls her life wherever, and whenever she gets the opportunity to do so. At the age of thirty-four, Rachel is unmarried and living with her mother. Her life revolves mainly around her grade one class at the school she teaches, and her wonderful mother. She doesn’t exactly associate with many people except for Calla, a teacher at her school and Willard Sidley, the principal of the institution.

Rachel rarely goes out except for the occasional movie with Calla. Calla frequents a local Tabernacle, and quite often invites Rachel to go along. However, she does not feel comfortable attending such a place and rarely agrees to going. Willard also invites Rachel to dinner with his wife and a friend, but Rachel doesn’t necessarily appreciate their company and declines the offer. As a result of her ordinary life, Rachel begins to long for something different, particularly a husband.

The person to thank for Rachel’s change is Nick Klazik. He comes into her life as a wake up call! As Rachel’s sexual affair with Nick becomes more intense, the reader notices a significant change in Rachel’s outlook on life. Until Nick came along, she kept more to herself and thought of nothing more than living a day to day humble life. However, Nick brought out the best in her and it’s clear that Rachel’s ideas about her future begin to change drastically, particularly regarding children. Rachel mentions quite often her studies of babies and their mothers. Rachel will speak of a baby and automatically give reference to a book she read regarding the same topic. For the first time, Rachel feels loved and begins to consider marriage and a family. For Rachel, the only family she has is her mother. She has no sense of having something of her ‘own’, such as a husband and children. Nick has been the change in Rachel’s life. He was the one responsible for taking Rachel out of her daily routines. Nick was the source of amusement for Rachel.

Rachel changed mainly after her close encounter with motherhood. Regardless of what society would think of her, Rachel was willing to keep her child. For Rachel it would be an escape from her present life. This baby is just what Rachel needed, someone she could love and care for, someone that was part of her.

After Rachel discovered that she wasn’t pregnant but actually had a tumor, she took ‘her’ life into ‘her’ hands. Until then it had been partially or almost fully controlled by her mother, but things were just about to change. Life had to change for Rachel. The whole concept of living in the same small town, with the same people was getting to her. Rachel was watching everyone else grow up, except herself. She barely recognized students she had taught in grade one because they had obviously changed. However, her students recognized her, same old Miss Cameron! That’s exactly why things were getting out of hand. Rachel was getting older and nothing was changing. That’s why she decided to move, because it was time. For once, Rachel did not consider her mother’s suggestion to stay in Manawaka. She insisted on leaving and that would be the final say. A new city would bring a new job, new friends, and hopefully, a whole new lifestyle.

In A Jest of God, the reader is guided through Rachel’s problem throughout the novel as the plot unfolds. The reader only finds out how Rachel intends to deal with her dilemma at the end of the book. In The Book of Eve the novel begins with ‘the’ drastic change and we get to live through Eva’s different lifestyle with her. Every so often she mentions what caused her to leave, and so we are not informed all at once of her reasons for leaving, but gradually throughout the story.

In The Book of Eve, Eva is getting frustrated because her sick husband is treating her as a servant. Eva finds herself following a very strict lifestyle due to Burt and she therefore runs away. She runs not only from the servitude of nursing Burt, but also from running the house, shopping, cleaning up and that dull routine. It’s actually quite selfish of Eva to leave Burt after being devoted to him for forty years, however, she had to act quickly because her life was slowly being consumed.

Eva has changed in order to accommodate to her needs. In this case, her needs are nice and simple. What Eva needs is solitude; she needs time to be with herself. Now that Burt is no longer a burden to her, she can lead her own life and make her own decisions without the constant worry of his harassment.

Due to Eve’s spontaneous departure from home, she had to begin a new way of living. Now Eva is not as financially stable as she was with Burt, yet she still manages. She deprives herself of some things that would’ve been essential to her in any other situation, in order to save money. She eats soups and other foods that are cheaper, but not necessarily healthier for her. Eva declines money that her son Neil offers to her. Since Eva was the one to leave Burt, she feels that it’s in her best interest not to depend on any money from him or from her son. If Eva did receive any donations from her son, it would be as if she had lost her battle. If she accepted them, it would be like saying that yes she couldn’t support herself. One of Eve’s quests was to be able to take care of herself and therefore she was not susceptible to any offerings.

All the suffering and economizing that Eva goes through is basically to prove not only to others, but mainly to herself, that she doesn’t have to put up with other people’s problems. In this case, since the problem is her husband, it makes it that much more difficult to restrain herself from returning home. Eva must have complete dedication to herself and to her goals to allow for such heartless behaviour towards others.

Eva is better off in the sense that she has her solitude, yet she still has friends. Not only does Eva have friends, but she also still has a sex life. Leaving Burt did not mean Eva was now going to become a nobody, and she made sure of that. Over the course of the novel, Eva did change considerably. Change isn’t possibly the best word, but rather recognition. The most important outcome of Eve’s escape was discovering more about herself. Had she not been so incredibly courageous to leave Burt, she wouldn’t have been able to learn from her life experiences.

When comparing Rachel’s character to Eve’s, it’s ridiculous to assume they were under the same circumstances. Eve’s life and Rachel’s were two completely different sagas. However when seriously thought out, they are both pursuing the same thing. Both women were indeed struggling to achieve their own wants and needs when surely these needs were in conflict with other family members.

Life is like a movie. When the movie comes to the end, it’s rewound and everything starts all over again. Every day in life can be compared to a movie quite easily. Day after day, the same routine tends to occur. Whether or not one wishes to modify that routine, is based on their strength, courage, determination and physical and mental capacity.

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