***Walk Two Moons***

***Chapter 39***

***Summary and Analysis:***

***Brief Summary***

In Chapter 39, Prudence and Mr. Winterbottom clean house but then fear Mrs. Winterbottom will feel as if she wasn’t missed, so they mess it up again. Phoebe asks Sal to be with her when Mrs. Winterbottom returns and Sal agrees though she believes it is a time for family. Mr. Winterbottom is obviously upset when Mrs. Winterbottom introduces Mike to Prudence. Several minutes pass before she reveals that Mike is her biological son. She says she gave him up for adoption as a baby. There are tense moments as Mr. Winterbottom grows angry, saying he can’t imagine that Mrs. Winterbottom didn’t trust him enough to share this information. Mrs. Winterbottom asks Phoebe if she’s angry. She confirms that she is. She says someone should call her when they “decide how many people are in this family.” Sal and Phoebe leave the house and step onto the porch just as Mrs. Partridge is leaving an envelope on the porch.

***Brief analysis (Chapter 36-40):***

There are a myriad of little details throughout the story that are brought up again and again. For example, one of the journal entries is about a girl who tells another girl that kisses taste like chicken. When Sal and Ben kiss while visiting Ben’s mother at the hospital, Sal says that it was a “real kiss” and that it “didn’t taste like chicken.” This interweaving of details is an important part of the story, and the author handles them well.

When Sal and Phoebe go outside after Mrs. Winterbottom’s announcement, Phoebe is obviously angry. After they talk to Mrs. Partridge for a moment, Phoebe walks across the yard and spits into the street. She invites Sal to join her, and the two girls spit several times. For Phoebe, it might be a small act of rebellion against the orderly, proper life she’s lived up to this point. Sal says she finds she has more courage after spitting. Though she hasn’t been raised as properly as Phoebe, it seems obvious that spitting is not a ladylike thing for her to do either.

Troubled mothers haunt the pages of Walk Two Moons. Sal's mother, we know, felt inadequate next to her husband and was deeply troubled by her miscarriage and hysterectomy. Phoebe's mother not only feels troubled by the way in which her family never seems to notice her, but by her stifling desire to hide her past in order that she appear "perfect" to her family. Ben's mother, though the novel does not tell us the source of her problems, floats absently through the lawn at the mental hospital, reminding Sal of her own mother. The fathers in the novel seem troubled in their own ways—Mr. Winterbottom is emotionally withdrawn and rigid, Sal's father is clearly still grieving over his wife, but not to the point of emotional breakdown. Thus, Creech suggests that the mental strain of being a wife and mother exceeds the strain of being a husband and father, or that this strain arises from a wife and mother's tendency to define herself only in terms of those two roles. The Finneys provide an exception to these patterns, but, significantly, Mrs. Finney, Mary Lou's mother, works.

Both Sal's mother and Mrs. Winterbottom endured problematic births. Sal's mother lost her baby and nearly lost her life in childbirth, and Mrs. Winterbottom bore an illegitimate son whom she had to give up for adoption. The actual bearing of children is, after all, one of the few responsibilities of childrearing that can be fulfilled only by women. Significantly, childbearing is also often the riskiest and most ideologically charged of these responsibilities. Sal's mother almost loses her life in childbirth, and Mrs. Winterbottom must bear the shame and confusion of being a young, unwed mother. These trying experiences lie at the core of the two women's malaise and, in their own forms, activate the two women's quest for self-renewal.

***Summary in detail:***

Sal continues her story. Phoebe describes how, anticipating [Mrs. Winterbottom](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Walk-Two-Moons/character-analysis/#Mrs._Winterbottom)'s return, Prudence and Mr. Winterbottom deep-cleaned the house and then "messed things up" so that Mrs. Winterbottom wouldn't think they could "function without her." Sal reluctantly agrees to be Phoebe's "witness" for her mother's homecoming.

Mrs. Winterbottom brings Mike Bickle, the lunatic, with her. Mrs. Winterbottom now has short hair and a new style: "She looked magnificent, but she did not look like Phoebe's mother." Mrs. Winterbottom "look[s] frightened...of her husband." Phoebe nearly faints, while Prudence acts flirtatiously toward Mike. Agitated, Mr. Winterbottom demands an explanation.

Mrs. Winterbottom tearfully asks Mr. Winterbottom's forgiveness—she has always tried to be perfect but has failed to be respectable. Mike is her son; he adopted by another family before her marriage. When Mike found Mrs. Winterbottom, she "had to go away and sort things out" because she has "lived such a tiny life." Mr. Winterbottom isn't concerned with respectability; he says he feels he doesn't know his wife and is concerned she kept Mike a secret. Sal feels deeply sad for everyone present and says she should go. Mr. Winterbottom says "Sal is like another member of the family." Phoebe is mad at her mother, and she escorts Sal out, saying "when you all decide exactly how many people are in this family, let me know." On the porch, Phoebe and Sal see Mrs. Partridge putting "a white envelope on the steps."

***Analysis in Detail (Chapter 39 and 40):***

As Sal notes, it is "fitting" that Phoebe's story reaches its climax and ends just as she and her grandparents drive into Idaho. To this point, the novel has consisted of two primary narrative threads, the first being the experiences Sal is having with her grandparents on the road trip, the second being the story of [Phoebe Winterbottom](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Walk-Two-Moons/character-analysis/#Phoebe_Winterbottom) that Sal tells during the car ride. Now that Phoebe's story has been told until its resolution, the first narrative thread is free to come to the forefront. This is important because Sal's journey is fast approaching its own climax: she will soon reach the place, Lewiston, Idaho, where her mother died. It was necessary for Sal to tell Phoebe's story because it mirrors and helps contain her own story; just as Sal noted in Chapter 1, her own story is hidden "beneath" Phoebe's story, like the brick fireplace that Sal's father uncovered by removing the plaster around it. In a similar fashion, Sal has gradually been revealing her own story by the very act of telling Phoebe's story as well as by relating the experiences and emotions she experiences on the trip with her grandparents.

These two chapters reveal that nothing is what it seemed to be. Mike Winterbottom is not a lunatic, but rather Phoebe's own brother. It is Mrs. Partridge, not Mike, who is responsible for the messages. And it is blind Mrs. Partridge, in another case of dramatic irony, who understood the true relationship between Mike, Phoebe, and Mrs. Winterbottom—long before Phoebe, with all her anxious efforts, learned the truth. [Creech](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Walk-Two-Moons/author/) demonstrates that our assumptions and the stories we tell ourselves are often wrong, and that the truth can be more fantastic than what the imagination can produce.

The idea of lunacy, which is explored through Phoebe's conception of Mike as well as Ben Finney's mother, is another example of incorrect assumptions. When Phoebe first sees her brother Mike, she assumes he is a lunatic and is going to hurt the family. While this is not literally true, it is true that Mike's presence disrupts the family, but not in a harmful way, and he is certainly not "a lunatic" or out of his mind in any way. However, Ben's mother is, in fact, mentally ill, and once Ben shares that fact with Sal (and the reader), the idea of lunacy shifts—Ben's mother is ill, not frightening, and Phoebe's assumptions about lunatics are revealed as stereotypical and melodramatic.