***Walk Two Moons***

***Chapter 40***

***Summary and Analysis:***

***Brief Summary***

Just then, [Gramps](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Walk-Two-Moons/character-analysis/#Gramps), [Gram](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Walk-Two-Moons/character-analysis/#Gram), and Sal cross into Idaho. Gram is tired and has a worrisome cough. They plan to spend the night in Coeur d'Alene, a hundred miles from Lewiston.

Sal continues her story. The new message is the same as the first: "Don't judge a man until you've walked two moons in his moccasins." Mrs. Partridge explains that the messages come from the newspaper, and she was leaving them as "grandiful surprises...like fortune cookies." When Phoebe asks Mrs. Partridge about meeting Phoebe's brother, Mrs. Partridge says Mike recently came to her house by mistake; she thought he was Phoebe's brother by the way his face felt. Phoebe and Sal spit into the street and enjoy it.

Sal goes to talk with Mrs. Cadaver and finally learns how she met Sal's father.

Ben is waiting for Sal on her front steps. He has brought her a chicken as a gift. They kiss, and Ben says he named the chicken Blackberry.

Sal tells her grandparents the story is finished. Gram looks gray as they speed toward Coeur d'Alene.

***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 and her grandparents reach Idaho, and Sal begins to believe that they will indeed reach Lewiston on the next day, her mother's birthday. Gram's voice and breathing sound troubled, and Sal and Gramps begin to worry about her. At Gram's prompting, Sal launches into the end of Phoebe's story. On the stoop, Mrs. Partridge explains that she has been leaving the messages, which Margaret writes for her, out of a sense of fun. As Mrs. Partridge returns to her home, the two girls walk to the street. Gathering their courage, they spit into the street. Phoebe turns and walks back into her house, and Sal, following Phoebe's lead, turns and walks into Mrs. Cadaver's house. After Mrs. Cadaver tells Sal how she met her father, Sal returns home, where Ben is waiting for her. Ben has bought her a chicken, which he tells her, after kissing her, he has named Blackberry. Sal, having finished her story, sits back, but then worriedly notices how ill Gram looks. The car speeds toward Lewiston. Mrs. Winterbottom's quest for reconciliation with her past and self-renewal challenges the roles of all her family members, especially Mr. Winterbottom. For the first time, he realizes how much the functioning of the household depends on her, and, as the days pass and she does not return, he becomes more and more aware of how much he depends on her emotionally, finally breaking into tears, though Phoebe has never before seen him cry. When Mrs. Winterbottom returns, he worries that she may be having an affair—he becomes visibly upset when Prudence tells him Mrs. Winterbottom is bringing a man with her when she returns home and frets over his wife's reaction to the house. When she does finally arrive, his voice and hands tremble, and he defied Mrs. Winterbottom's understanding of him by avowing that he does not care whether she is respectable, he only cares whether or not she feels she can communicate with him. Mrs. Winterbottom's decision to leave has forced him to reexamine his role as father and husband.

The two girls, before facing up to their respective challenges, mimic Phoebe's mother by spitting into the road. This act symbolizes Phoebe's decision to accept and even embrace Mrs. Winterbottom's defiance of the role and behaviors she herself, with the reinforcement of her husband and daughters, has thus far in her life prescribed for herself. Moreover, it shows Phoebe, with Sal's support, relinquishing some of her own overly developed sense of propriety. The significance of Phoebe's decision also indicates the significance of Sal's decision to talk to Margaret Cadaver. Although Sal downplays this decision by withholding the details of the encounter from us at this point in the narrative, this confrontation takes as much courage and resolve as her decision to travel to Lewiston to see her mother. The girls' spitting recalls a compact, in which two partners spit in their palms and shake. Together, the two girls agree that they must, on their own but with the support of the other, face their dragons.

***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.