

The Bell Jar – Chapter 5

The next day Esther is allowed to take a day off to recover completely. She receives a phone call by Constantin, a UN interpreter and acquaintance of Mrs Willard's. They arrange a meeting.

Constantin's call reminds Esther of Mrs Willard and Buddy. She is expected to marry him but she makes clear she would never do so: "I did look down on Buddy Willard, and although everybody still thought I would marry him when he came out of the TB place, I knew I would never marry him if he were the last man on earth." (49) She calls Buddy a "hypocrite". (49) Simply the fact he has caught TB prevents her from telling him the truth.

Esther then goes on to tell how she has not correctly tipped the bellhop and a taxi driver. Obviously she is not familiar with some conventions.

She then reads the story of a fig-tree in a book of short stories the girls have been given as a present. The story is about a man and a woman who fall in love with each other but then are forced to go separate ways. Esther sees parallels between the characters in the story and Buddy and herself: "We had met together under our own imaginary fig-tree [...], and then something awful happened and we went our separate ways." (52)

Buddy who once has called poems "a piece of dust" (52), now tries to convince Esther that doctors and poets can "get along fine after all" (52) and that he is very interested in poetry.

As far as Buddy is concerned, Esther has added to her self-esteem: "I reckon a good poem lasts a whole lot longer than a hundred of those people put together." (53)

Esther's and Buddy's mother have always been good friends and after college "both married their professors and settled down in the same town." (54) They represent a very traditional image of women having married husband who are superior to them with respect to age and profession.

Esther then recalls a surprise visit of Buddy and how she "felt like a prize idiot." (55) She has had to cope with the fact that Buddy is going to a dance with Joan, "a big wheel" (55) at college. Joan's mother has arranged this with Buddy's mother.

Esther then pretends that she has "a date coming any minute" (56) and asks Buddy to leave. Whereas in his opinion he is allowed to date other women he cannot put up with Esther dating other men. He leaves a letter with a question he doesn't feel talking about any more.

Finally Esther recalls Buddy kissing her for the first time in the chemistry lab. Buddy is amazed but Esther found it "a dry, uninspiring little kiss". (57)