

The Storm



INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF KATE CHOPIN

Kate Chopin was born in St. Louis, Missouri. While Kate Chopin is one of the best-known women writers of the 20th-century, Chopin was not famous during her lifetime. Furthermore, while Chopin is one of today's the most notable writers in New Orleans, she was born and died in St. Louis, Missouri. Chopin moved to Louisiana when she was 20 years old upon marrying her husband, a New Orleans native. After her husband died and left Chopin with massive debt, Chopin struggled to keep her late husband's general store open. Under a pile of debt and saddled with six children, Chopin returned to native St. Louis to live closer to her mother. When her mother died shortly after that, Chopin sought advice from her doctor for depression. To help Chopin cope with the death of her mother and husband, the doctor recommended Chopin take up writing. Chopin took her doctor's advice to heart, getting straight to work on two novels and numerous short stories. After publishing several stories and two books, Kate Chopin died at the age of 52 from a brain hemorrhage. She left behind several unpublished pieces during her lifetime which would later garner fame, including "The Storm."

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

In "The Storm," Calixta is initially terrified of the incoming thunderstorm. Given the intensity of the storm and the reputation of such weather at the time, Calixta has good reason to feel afraid. Around the Kate Chopin wrote "The Storm," it was not uncommon for a major storm to completely devastate entire communities, leading to massive flooding and thousands of deaths. But weather isn't the only oppressive force in Calixta's life. In Chopin's day, women lived by very restrictive gender norms. Historians frequently refer to the restrictive gender norms placed on women in the American South during the nineteenth century as part of the "True Womanhood" movement. This movement advocated for women's exclusion from politics and the workplace through an appeal to women's purity. The True Womanhood movement opposed the burgeoning (and similarly named) Women's Movement, which championed women's right to vote and railed against gender-based discrimination. According to the True Womanhood movement, women were superior to men because they maintained sexual purity; therefore, the True Womanhood movement claimed, the only way to protect women's purity was to stay home and away from masculine institutions such as government and business. Given the political climate, Chopin never bothered publishing "The Storm" during her lifetime.

Indeed, the story was much racier than the stories Chopin did publish. However, in 1969, decades after her death, Chopin's work finally found an audience of women readers. During the Women's Liberation Movement of the 1960s, audiences had more of an appetite for stories about women's sexuality.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Chopin's wrote in the style of local color, or regional fiction. Through local color, writers highlight the particular features—a way of speaking, the weather, and social customs—of a specific region. Some of the most famous American fiction writers wrote with local color. Two beloved classics that use the technique include Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884) and William Faulkner's "A Rose for Emily" (1930). In "The Storm," use of local color is most obvious in the way of the characters talk. For instance, consider this line from Calixta: "If this keeps up, *Dieu sait!* if the levees goin' to stan' it!" The sentence from Calixta is a mix of French and English specific to where the story occurs, southern Louisiana. For many women writers, local color was a useful way to talk about big concepts within stories with ordinary people and events. With local color as a tool, women could engage big themes about gender, sex, and race through stories of women's everyday lives. For example, Sarah Orne Jewett's *The Country of the Pointed Firs* (1896) and Mary E. Wilkins Freeman's "New England Nun" (1891)—two local color writers said to influence Chopin's work—both used stories about women in ordinary situations as a vantage point to critique societal gender norms. Within Chopin's own catalogue of work, "The Storm"—a sequel to the lesser-known story "At the 'Cadian Ball" (1892)—is one of her most famous stories. "The Storm" shares many of the same themes of Chopin's most beloved novel, *The Awakening*, which Chopin published only a year after writing "The Storm." Both "The Storm" and *The Awakening* detail how restrictive gender expectations make it difficult for women to access feelings of desire.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** "The Storm"
- **When Written:** July 19, 1898
- **Where Written:** St. Louis
- **When Published:** 1969 as part of *The Complete Works of Kate Chopin*
- **Literary Period:** Realism
- **Genre:** Short story
- **Setting:** An unnamed small town in southern Louisiana
- **Climax:** Calixta and Alcée, former lovers who are now

married to other people, have sex during an intense thunderstorm.

- **Antagonist:** Rigid gender norms and expectations of marriage
- **Point of View:** Third-person omniscient

EXTRA CREDIT

Chopin's Childhood. Chopin grew up during the American Civil war. In line with her family, she was pro-Confederate throughout her childhood.

"The Storm" in Real Life. Chopin was no stranger to controversy in her lifetime. After the death of her husband, Chopin caused a stir in southern Louisiana for having a relationship with a married man.



PLOT SUMMARY

As thundercracks overhead, Bobinôt and his young son, Bibi, take a seat inside a general store. Bobinôt tells his son that they should wait until the storm ends to return home. Young Bibi asks if his mother, Calixta, will be afraid of the **thunderstorm**. Bobinôt says that while the rain will frighten his wife, she will be fine because she has the company of the family's maid, Sylvie. Bibi politely corrects his father, explaining that Sylvie is not on duty today. With the news that his wife is all alone in the storm, Bobinôt purchases a can of her favorite **shrimp** as a gift before returning to sit with a remarkably peaceful Bibi.

However, although her family assumed she would be frightened, Calixta doesn't even notice the incoming storm as she's too busy sweating over her sewing. Calixta only notices the clouds when the room she's sewing in turns dark. At the sight of the thick black clouds, Calixta rushes outside together the family's laundry hanging up to dry. As she struggles to seize laundry swept up in strong winds, Calixta notices a man approaching on horseback. To her surprise, it's Alcée Laballière, whom she knew as a young woman but had not encountered much since. With drops of rain plopping from the sky, Alcée asks if he can wait out the storm on Calixta's porch. The very sound of Alcée's voice sparks a bit of arousal from Calixta. When it's clear that the porch won't provide Alcée adequate protection from the storm, Calixta invites him to follow her into the house. Once inside, the pair work together to quickly fortify the house's windows and cracks from pooling water. As they work side-by-side, Alcée notices Calixta's good looks held up over the years.

Alcée joins Calixta by the window to watch the storm. As the rain gathers outside, she grows increasingly nervous for her son and husband's well-being. Alcée attempts to soothe Calixta with kind words about her family and a hug. With each crash of thunder or bolt of lightning, Calixta jumps with fear and settles

more snugly into Alcée's arms. The closeness of their bodies reminds Alcée of their time together in a town called Assumption. With Calixta in his arms and Assumption on his mind, Alcée grows increasingly aroused. When he takes a moment to look into Calixta's eyes, Alcée notices Calixta is also aroused. When Alcée asks Calixta if she remembers Assumption, breaking the conversation Calixta's family in the storm, Calixta leans in for a kiss. The kissing then leads to sex. As the two enjoy a tender embrace, Alcée admires Calixta's beautiful **white** skin, and then leaves as the storm rolls away.

Meanwhile, Bobinôt and Bibi start the journey home. As they trudge through mud, both worry how Calixta will react to their filthy clothes. However, to their surprise, Calixta greets them with open arms when they return. With Calixta happy to see her family and the gift of shrimp, all three enjoy each other's company over dinner.

Elsewhere, Alcée writes a sweet letter to his wife, Clarisse, encouraging her to stay longer on her vacation if she so desires, noting that her well-being is his top priority. The tender correspondence pleases Clarisse. Even though Clarisse loves her husband, she's she pleased to have a break from her wifely duties, particularly as they pertain to sex. The story concludes: "the storm passed, and every one was happy."



CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Calixta – The protagonist of the story, Calixta is Bobinôt's wife, Bibi's mother, and Alcée Laballière's former girlfriend. The story details Calixta's transformation from overworked, "over-scrupulous" housewife to a cheerful, reinvigorated woman, which is the result of a chance sexual encounter with Alcée. When Alcée spontaneously drops by the house in search of shelter from the **thunderstorm** while Bobinôt and Bibi are out, the two former lovers use the opportunity to briefly rekindle their love affair. Before she has sex with Alcée, Calixta is stressed out from all of her household duties. She's introduced sewing clothes for her family, so focused on her work that she hardly realizes a storm is approaching. In contrast, Alcée remembers that, in her youth, Calixta was a passionate young woman. As they have sex, Alcée watches Calixta let go of her stress, and she rediscovers the passion of her youth. For the first time in the story, Calixta appears happy—smiling, laughing, and feeling pleasure. Through sex with Alcée, Calixta re-engages with the sensual part of her personality, which allows Calixta to act as a generous and loving person to both herself and Alcée. Furthermore, after Calixta has sex with Alcee, Calixta is far more thoughtful and pleasant towards family, highlighting the story's overarching claim that love only breeds more love.

Alcée Laballière – Calixta's former boyfriend (a relationship

detailed in the story's prequel, "At the 'Cadian Ball"), Clarisse's husband, and the father of at least two children. Alcée is the catalyst for Calixta's transformation, as the pair's sexual encounter reconnects Calixta with her younger self and makes the stressed-out woman more lighthearted and joyful. Chopin uses Alcée's qualities as a gentleman to frame the illicit encounter, writing that as a younger man, "[his] honor forbade" him from having sex with young Calixta. Likewise, with the **thunderstorm** picking up outside, Alcée hesitates to put himself alone with Calixta, and only asks to enter Calixta's porch when the rain intensifies and he must take refuge inside for his safety. Taken together, Chopin presents Alcée as someone who's not actively seeking an opportunity to be alone with Calixta. Alcée is likewise described as a loving, albeit distant, husband and father in regards to his own family: when he leaves Calixta, Alcée writes a tender letter to his wife. In that letter, he permits his wife to stay longer on her trip (presumably her preference), indicating that with his sexual needs met elsewhere, he's willing to give his wife more affection and more freedom.

Bobinôt – Bobinôt is Bibi's father and Calixta's dutiful but perhaps clueless husband. A minor character, Bobinôt appears at the very beginning and towards the end of the story. His absence, stranded at a general store with four-year-old Bibi during the titular storm, means that Alcée and Calixta have the privacy to rekindle their romance. When the rain begins, and Bibi expresses concern for Calixta's well-being, Bobinôt thinks to purchase a gift for Calixta—a single can of **shrimp**. However well-intended, the present is mostly a chore, as Calixta will need to prepare the shrimp for dinner, and thus reflects that Bobinôt sees his wife as an extension of the home rather than a full person. Moreover, at the beginning of the storm, Bobinôt demonstrates a sort of cluelessness Calixta's day-to-day life: he doesn't even know if the family's hired help, Sylvie, is on duty on the day of the storm until Bibi tells him otherwise. But while Bobinôt might be clueless, he is polite and wants to please his wife. In particular, on the way home, Bobinôt takes great care to scrape the mud off his and Bibi's clothes, extending his uncomfortable journey in an attempt to accommodate his wife's preference for a tidy home.

Bibi – Calixta and Bobinôt's four-year-old son, Bibi, has a somber personality. Bobinôt talks with Bibi as if the young boy were an adult, indicating that Bibi is extremely mature for his age. Chopin likewise describes Bibi as "wise," and calm in the face of the **thunderstorm**, which would likely be terrifying for most four-year-old children. Bibi also demonstrates thoughtful insight into his surroundings. Specifically, Bibi appears to know more about Calixta's life than his father, Bobinôt, as indicated by his knowledge of Calixta's schedule (Bibi tells Bobinôt that the maid, Sylvie, came to help Calixta the day before). Like his father, Bibi anticipates that Calixta's anger over his dirty clothes on the way home, indicating that Bibi is aware of

Calixta's efforts keeping the house clean.

Clarisse Laballière – Clarisse is Alcée's wife and a minor character, appearing only in story's conclusion. Although she's a loving wife, she's happy to have some time away from Alcée, and the story implies that she doesn't like being physically intimate with him. Like Calixta, Clarisse uses the time away from her husband to tap into the youthful side of her personality, as she's vacationing near many old friends. However, as an inverse to Calixta, it's the absence of sex with Alcée that allows Clarisse to feel young and happy again.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Sylvie – Calixta's maid.



THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.



SEX, GENDER, AND LIBERATION

Kate Chopin's "The Storm" tells of a brief, passionate encounter between Calixta and Alcée, two former lovers who reunite as a **thunderstorm** rages outside Calixta's home. Alcée stops at Calixta's house seeking shelter from the rain, which has also momentarily prevented Calixta's husband, Bobinôt, and young son, Bibi, from returning home. The separation from her family grants Calixta and Alcée time to be alone. Calixta and Alcée subsequently have sex, allowing Calixta the opportunity to reignite the passionate side of her personality that she's repressed as part of her role as a wife and mother. At the time Chopin wrote "The Storm" in 1898, women (like Calixta) were expected to lead one-dimensional lives as wives and nothing more. For the most part, Calixta embodies this ideal, rigid expectation of womanhood; indeed, if one were to subtract the adulterous sex scene from the story, Calixta is a delicate and wholly self-sacrificing character. But through her encounter with Alcée, Calixta transcends conventional notions of womanhood, tapping into a sensual side to her personality. As such, the sex at the center of "The Storm" is transgressive not just because of the extramarital affair; the sex is transgressive because it allows Calixta to act outside of the boundaries of acceptable female behavior.

In many ways, Calixta embodies the ideal of loving wife and mother. When Calixta first appears, she's so immersed in her wifely duties—sewing clothes for her husband and son—that she barely notices an epic storm on the horizon. Even then, Calixta's first response to the darkening sky is to think of her

family's laundry hanging outside to dry. Calixta's behavior falls in line with the gender expectations of the era, during which women were seen mainly as an extension of their husbands rather than people in their own right. Further, the fact that Calixta's husband and young son are out at the time of the storm while she is at home also reflects genders roles of the time, as men were expected to provide for their families, while women tended to the domestic sphere. Taken together, each of these elements demonstrates traditionally material elements of Calixta's personality. Thus, although the story ultimately climaxes with a betrayal of the marital agreement when Calixta and Alcée have sex, Calixta is nonetheless portrayed as a good wife and mother.

Yet Chopin takes care to show that, even though she is now a wife and mother, Calixta maintains the passion of a young woman. Calixta is notably introduced unbuttoning the "white sacque at the throat." Chopin immediately establishes her protagonist as a passionate woman who cannot be contained by her restrictive, feminine dress. That this clothing is white—traditionally the color of purity—further suggests that Calixta bristles against the pressure to maintain a sense of propriety. The appearance of Alcée reminds Calixta of her life before she was a wife and mother. He asks her if she remembers a town called Assumption, where "he had kissed her and kissed and kissed her," revealing that the two have a romantic history. This story is, in fact, a sequel to an earlier story by Chopin, "The 'Cadian Ball," which detailed more of the relationship between Alcée and Calixta. Knowledge of that earlier tale is nevertheless unnecessary to recognize that the relationship with Alcée reflects that Calixta has had an entire life filled with experiences beyond the confines of her marriage.

Sex with Alcée allows Calixta to libertate her sensual self and merge her younger, passionate self with her more mature, dutiful self. When Alcée first encounters Calixta, she's described as "a little fuller of figure than five years before when she married; but she had lost nothing of her vivacity." In other words, Calixta's former self is still present under the surface of an older body. Sex with Alcée further provides Calixta an opportunity to reengage her sensual self that, as a wife and mother, she is expected to have lost. When Alcée and Calixta first begin their physical encounter, Alcée reminisces about the person Calixta once was, remembering her as a "passionate" young woman. But, as they continue to embrace, Calixta reveals she still contains a "generous abundance of passion." It's important to note that the presence of the sensual part of Calixta's personality does not erase her sense of self as a wife and mother; after the encounter with Alcée ends and Calixta's family returns home, Calixta meets her family with an open heart, having "nothing but satisfaction at their safe return." As a character, she thus contains multitudes: sensuality, generosity, passion, and capacity for maternal love.

However, just as Calixta is renewed by sex with Alcée, Alcée's

wife, Clarisse, is restored by the absence of sex with Alcée. When Clarisse receives Alcée's kind letter, encouraging her to stay on her vacation as long as she'd like, she thinks fondly towards her husband and is also grateful for the break from having to be physically intimate with him. Thus, while the sex with Alcée renewed Calixta, the absence of sex with Alcée has the same effect on Clarissa. Readers get the sense that Clarisse is a good wife (Chopin describes her as "devoted") who simply needs a break. For example, Clarisse describes sex with Alcée (the couple's "intimate conjugal life") as "something which she was more than willing to forego for a while." For Clarisse, the time away from her husband is the "free breath" which allows her to recapture a bit of herself before she became a wife.

"The Storm" did not appear in print until 1968, long after Chopin's death; Chopin assumed that the sexually explicit content meant no editor would publish the now-classic short story. She likely was right: stories about women's sexual pleasure—particularly stories authored by women—were rare to see in print during Chopin's lifetime. Yet what makes "The Storm" risqué is more than the sex itself. "The Storm" suggests that women are more than wives and mothers, and as such can—and perhaps must—look outside their families to find fulfillment and happiness.



SEX AND NATURE

"The Storm" details two parallel events: a tremendous **thunderstorm** and a passionate sexual encounter between Alcée and Calixta. The

thunderstorm is so intense that all characters must take shelter. This leaves Calixta alone at her home with her former lover Alcée, who is traveling nearby when the storm breaks. Meanwhile, the thunderstorm leaves Calixta's son, Bibi, and husband, Bobinôt, stranded at a store. Beyond serving as a plot device for situating each character, the thunderstorm also allows for a brief encounter between Alcée and Calixta to naturally emerge. Chopin uses the downpour as a narrative frame for sex between the two former lovers; as the thunderstorm intensifies, so does the physical action between Alcée and Calixta. Then, when the storm rolls out, the two lovers go their separate ways. In drawing a parallel between the sex and the storm, Chopin develops an allegory through the thunderstorm in which she implicitly argues that sexual desire is a part of human nature. Further, Chopin describes Calixta's body through metaphors of nature, putting a fine point on the naturalness of women's sexuality in particular.

Sex between Calixta and Alcée occurs in stages alongside the stages of the concurrent thunderstorm, with particular attention to how Calixta embodies each stage. "The Storm" details the normal stages of a thunderstorm: heat followed by cool gusts of wind with large droplets of water that intensify to sheets of rain before giving way to sunshine. Calixta's body likewise runs through each of these stages alongside the storm

itself: as the storm gathers, Calixta feels “very warm” and sweaty. When first encountering Alcée, Calixta is affected by both the wind and the sound of Alcée’s voice, breaking her from the heat “as if from a trance.” As the storm begins to intensify and Alcée first embraces her, Calixta’s body is described as “palpitating.” As the storm “roars,” Calixta laughs in delight of sexual pleasure. At each stage of the story, the changes in weather mirror a change in Calixta’s body. If the reader accepts that weather events are a natural part of life, they may also understand Calixta’s desire and pleasure as likewise natural.

Chopin also deploys weather-related metaphors to describe sex between Alcée and Calixta and nature-related metaphors to describe Calixta’s body. For instance, Chopin describes the act of sexual intercourse as the “crashing torrents,” or violent rainfall. The storm clears, with “growl of the thunder was distant and passing away,” just as the two lovers finish and slide into a state of “drowsiness and sleep.” After the storm, as Alcée rides away, Chopin describes how “sun was turning the glistening green world into a palace of gems” such that it mirrors Calixta’s “beaming face.” Chopin describes Calixta’s skin is a “creamy lily,” her passion “a **white** flame,” her eyes like “water,” and lips a “pomegranate.” While not exactly related to storm allegory, these descriptions fall in line with the general theme of sexual desire as a part of natural life. Again, if a reader accepts that weather occurs without any means of control, they may accept that sex between Calixta and Alcée is likewise an uncontrollable (and perhaps not immoral) consequence of human nature. Moreover, the story implies that because Calixta and Alcée are creatures within nature, the pair’s actions are simply a part of the natural order.

In “The Storm,” Chopin uses a thunderstorm as a plot device to bring two former lovers alone for a sexual encounter. By situating Alcée and Calixta within the event of the storm, Chopin implicitly argues that the sex between the two, even though they are married to other people, is a natural event. In other words, sex, like weather, is an uncontrollable expression of human nature. As such, through allegory, Chopin makes a broader comment on the naturalness of desire and sex. As Chopin ties the stages of the storm particularly close to Calixta’s feelings of attraction and describes her aroused body through metaphors of nature, Chopin stresses that women’s sexuality is a natural part of life.



MARRIAGE AND INFIDELITY

“The Storm” details a passionate encounter between former lovers Calixta and Alcée. Set long after the pair share a kiss in a different Chopin short story, “The Storm” tells the story of two people with unrequited sexual chemistry. At this point in their lives, Calixta has a husband, Bobinôt, and Alcée has a wife, Clarisse. Both are also parents to young children. When Alcée seeks shelter at Calixta’s home during a **thunderstorm**, the pair rekindle their

romance. Thrown together by a chance encounter, Calixta and Alcée revisit the passion they both felt as younger people. The experience leaves both Calixta and Alcée with increased tenderness towards their families which, in turn, leaves “everyone was happy.” “Everyone” here refers to both married couples: Alcée and Clarisse, as well as Calixta and Bobinôt.

When readers first met Calixta, she prioritizes her home and family over her own well-being. Leading up to her sexual encounter with Alcée, Calixta is working hard to maintain the family home, sweating profusely over a sewing machine. She responds to the storm not by seeking safety for herself, but rather by attempting to gather laundry left outside. When lightning strikes violently nearby, shaking the “very boards” Calixta and Alcée stand on and splitting a nearby tree, Calixta responds by fretting about her son, Bibi, who happens to be safer than herself. As such, it’s clear that Calixta is completely preoccupied with maintaining the home at the risk of her own safety. The storm triggers an outburst from Calixta, who’s initially unable to handle the stress of it. She is so distraught, she begins to cry, unable to “compose herself.” Without Alcée’s assistance, it’s unclear if Calixta could face the storm at all. Taken together, these details reveal that Calixta is clearly stressed out. Fixated on keeping up her home, Calixta is quickly thrown into a frenzy over the developing storm. Because she’s so single-minded in this regard, she’s unable to handle the thunderstorm without Alcee’s help. As a result, she places herself in a dangerous situation. Without taking care of herself first Calixta is unable take care of anyone.

Readers get the sense that Calixta’s level of stress is generally high, leading her to snap at her family over minor infractions. As they trek back through wet fields, both Bobinôt and Bibi are preoccupied with Calixta’s reaction to tracking mud into the house, “expecting the worst.” The stress causes Bibi to carry a sense of “pathetic resignation,” while Bobinôt is the “embodiment of serious solicitude.” The pair expect Calixta—as an “over-scrupulous housewife—to respond with anger when they return home. Due to Bobinôt’s fear of Calixta’s anger, he stops to periodically scrape mud from their clothes, even though they are tired and soggy. Bobinôt and Bibi’s general displeasure to return to Calixta indicates a high level of tension within the home, with Calixta ready to snap at any disruption in the cleanliness of her domain.

As they have sex, Calixta and Alcée focus on their own happiness rather than the service of their families. Afterwards, they are kinder to their spouses. The moment of intimacy allows Alcée and Calixta to escape the daily grind as the two take a moment to “swoon together at the very borderland of life’s mystery.” With Calixta, Alcée accesses new “depths of his own sensuous nature.” Afterwards, the once-stressed Calixta is left in a much better mood, “beaming” and “laughing.” As a happier woman, Calixta is kinder to her family; when Bobinôt and Bibi return, Calixta appears renewed, with “nothing but

satisfaction at their safe return.” Alcée also appears driven by consideration keep his family healthy and happy. This motivation inspires Alcée to send a “loving letter, full of tender solicitude” to his wife, Clarisse, encouraging to take a longer vacation if she’d like, and reminding her that her happiness and well-being is a priority for him. Attending to their own sexual desires appears to spark an expression of love and care from Alcée and Calixta towards their families.

At the end of the story, both Clarisse and Alcée and their respective families are happy. At the center of Clarissa and Alcée’s good moods is the fact that the both took the time to tend to their own personal desires. Through its happy ending, Chopin’s story of an extramarital affair makes the radical claim that sex outside of marriage isn’t as sinful or shameful as readers may think. Instead, both Calixta and Alcée appear devoted as ever to their respective spouses and exhibit a clear sense of generosity of spirit following their sexual encounter. Thus, rather than destroying relationships, love breeds more love.



SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.



THE THUNDERSTORM

The thunderstorm that unfolds alongside the story’s action symbolizes the sexual encounter between Alcée and Calixta, two former lovers who are married to other people, ultimately implying that sex and sexual desire are natural and positive aspects of human nature. Caught within the wild rush of a severe thunderstorm, the sexual chemistry between two former lovers reaches a peak. Specifically, Chopin describes Calixta’s energy alongside the stages of a thunderstorm. First, right before the storm hits, the weather is hot and Calixta’s sweats over her sewing machine. Like the incoming clouds, Calixta is full of pent-up tension. Then, as the thunderstorm rolls in and the lightning strikes, the presence of Alcée triggers a charge of sexual arousal for Calixta. When the clouds burst into heavy rain, Calixta’s tension gives way to pleasure. As the thunderstorm ends and the rain slows, Calixta collapses in exhaustion alongside Alcée, indicating a complete release of tension. With the thunderstorm over and tensions released, a relaxed Calixta happily returns her attention to her family, obviously refreshed. In nature, thunderstorms provide a vital function by releasing energy into the atmosphere. Like a thunderstorm, sex between Alcée and Calixta serves as a means to release bound-up energy, and actually gives the two lovers *more* energy to then interact with their respective families. In “The Storm,” Chopin makes the radical claim that, just as thunderstorms maintain

ecosystems, sexual affairs can provide an outlet necessary for the maintenance of marriage. Further, Chopin’s use of a cyclical natural event to symbolize the relationship brings up the possibility that the incident will, like a thunderstorm, reoccur.



SHRIMP

The can of shrimp symbolizes Calixta and Bobinôt’s traditional marriage, complete with rigid gender roles. At the realization that Calixta is home alone during such an intense **thunderstorm**, Bobinôt purchases a can of shrimp as a gift for his wife to make up for his absence. Chopin penned the story in 1898, a time in which traditional marriage norms dictated that women devote their lives to keeping up the home and leave public-facing duties (like business and politics) to the men. With the can of shrimp, Bobinôt signals that he and Calixta exist within the confines of traditional marriage norms: Bobinôt goes to town and purchases the shrimp, acting as the provider for his wife, while Calixta cooks his bounty within the home.

It’s also telling that Bobinôt considers the can of shrimp an adequate *gift* for his wife, demonstrating that he thinks of Calixta in a functional sense. In other words, to Bobinôt, Calixta is an extension of the domestic space. After all, Bobinôt is essentially buying Calixta a means to a chore, as she—not Bobinôt—will prepare the shrimp dinner. On her end, Calixta, relaxed from her sexual encounter with Alcée, happily accepts and makes the shrimp for dinner. Calixta’s enthusiastic acceptance of Bobinôt’s can of shrimp indicates an acceptance of the arrangement between herself and her husband. In other words, so long as Calixta can find sexual pleasure outside her marriage, she’s satisfied with what Bobinôt brings to the table.



THE COLOR WHITE

“The Storm” complicates the traditional symbolic significance of the color white—a common symbol for purity—by making it also represent sexual passion. First, Chopin describes the sensual areas of Calixta’s body—namely her throat and her breasts—as white, conflating the color with bodily pleasure. Second, Chopin uses white to describe Calixta and Bobinôt’s bedroom, where Alcée and Calixta have sex. Third, Chopin describes Calixta’s sexual desire for Alcée as a “white flame.” Through each mention of white, Chopin engages color traditionally associated with sexual innocence to describe the occurrence of sex itself—and extramarital sex, at that. Chopin also describes lightning striking a tree with a reference to pale colors, noting that “[i]t filled all visible space with a blinding glare.” In doing so, Chopin develops the symbol of Calixta’s sexual desire, the **thunderstorm**, through associations to purity. As most readers will automatically associate white with virtue, Chopin implicitly associates Alcée

and Calixta's affair—steeped in white—with virtue, too. Thus, rather than cast sex between Alcée and Calixta as sinful transgression, the brief affair is described as a blameless, beautiful act of pure love.



QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Penguin edition of *The Awakening and Selected Stories of Kate Chopin* published in 1976.

Part 1 Quotes

“Mama'll be 'fraid, yes,” he suggested with blinking eyes. “She'll shut the house. Maybe she got Sylvie helpin' her this evenin',” Bobinôt responded reassuringly. “No; she ent got Sylvie. Sylvie was helpin' her yistiday,” piped Bibi.

Related Characters: Bobinôt, Bibi (speaker), Sylvie, Calixta

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 267

Explanation and Analysis

With dark clouds gathering overhead, Bobinôt decides that he and his young son Bibi will stay at Friedheimer's general store to wait out the thunderstorm. From this conversation, readers know that Bibi's mother and Bobinôt's wife, Calixta, will be home alone during the storm. With the men of the family in public and the wife alone at home, the placement of these family members mirrors the restrictive gender norms of the time. Specifically, marital and gender norms dedicated that women stay at home, leaving the public facing business to men.

This short exchange also displays Bobinôt's clueless and Bibi's attentiveness. Precisely, Bobinôt does not realize that Calixta's maid, Sylvie, is not with Calixta today. Bobinôt's mistake here reveals a general obliviousness concerning day-to-day events of his wife's life. As he corrects his father, readers catch a glimpse of mature Bibi's attentiveness in regards to his mother.

Part 2 Quotes

“Calixta, at home, felt no uneasiness for their safety. She sat at a side window sewing furiously on a sewing machine. She was greatly occupied and did not notice the approaching storm. But she felt very warm and often stopped to mop her face, on which the perspiration gathered in beads. She unfastened her white sacque at the throat.

Related Characters: Bibi, Bobinôt, Calixta

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 267

Explanation and Analysis

In the previous section, Calixta's husband Bobinôt and child Bibi assume that, with a storm on the horizon, Calixta will be worried sick about her family. However, that's not the case: Calixta is too preoccupied with housework to even notice the presence of an incoming thunderstorm. With her family at the store, Calixta is at home tending to her family's clothes. According to the strict gender norms of the time, this is where Calixta belongs. She's even wearing the clothes of a proper lady: a “sacque” or a multi-layered gown that buttons up the neck, covering most a woman's body. However, despite her best effort keeping up the house and dressing the part of a housewife, this passage indicates that Calixta does not fit within her role. Calixta's body fights against the confines of her stuffy home, as she sweats profusely. Calixta's body mirrors the clouds overhead, humid and ready to bust out. Sweating through layers of fabric, she must unbutton the collar of her restrictive garment to give herself a little relief. As such, the gown symbolizes the suffocating restrictions of traditional gender norms, which fail to contain passionate Calixta. That the dress is white, a color typically associated with sexual purity, suggests that the expectations of sexual virtue are particularly troublesome. Indeed, Chopin describes a sensual part of Calixta's body—her throat—as needing to escape, foreshadowing her sexual encounter with Alcée.

“My! what a rain! It's good two years sence it rain' like that,” exclaimed Calixta as she rolled up a piece of bagging and Alcée helped her to thrust it beneath the crack.

Related Characters: Calixta (speaker), Alcée Laballière

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 268

Explanation and Analysis

Driven indoors by the intensifying rain, Alcée and Calixta find themselves alone for the first time since before their marriages, and prepare to endure the storm. Chopin's description of the two in this scene foreshadows their impending sexual encounter and, in doing so, indicates that stamping out sexual desire isn't as easy as closing and fortifying a door to keep the rain out. As an allegory for the sex between Alcée and Calixta, this stage of the thunderstorm here reflects the growing sexual tension between the two former lovers. In this sense, readers may reasonably infer the ways the characters describe the storm to have a second meaning. In this example, readers may conclude that when Calixta says she hasn't seen rain this powerful in years, she also means that she hasn't felt this sexually aroused in years, indicating a sexual dissatisfaction in her marriage. Chopin also foreshadows the sex that happens moments later through sexually suggestive language, such as the word "thrust" when the two characters fortify the door.

☝ He pushed her hair back from her face that was warm and steaming. Her lips were as red and moist as pomegranate seed. Her white neck and a glimpse of her full, firm bosom disturbed him powerfully. As she glanced up at him the fear in her liquid blue eyes had given place to a drowsy gleam that unconsciously betrayed a sensuous desire.

Related Characters: Calixta, Alcée Laballière

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols:  

Page Number: 268

Explanation and Analysis

The storm grows stronger outside, causing Calixta to feel anxious for her family's safety, and Alcée steps in to comfort her with a hug. But as he holds her, tension about the violent thunderstorm shifts into highly charged sexual energy. With their bodies touching and her chest on display, Alcée finds himself increasingly attentive to Calixta's good looks. When

their eyes meet, Calixta shows signs of arousal, indicating to Alcée mutual sexual attraction. Chopin suggests that Calixta's good looks carry a wild, natural quality: her lips juicy like fruit, her blue eyes like water, and her skin humid like Southern air. By using language typically reserved for describing nature to describe Calixta's body in a moment of sexual arousal, Chopin implicitly argues that sexual desire—and particularly female desire—is natural. Further, through the mention of white (a color that readers of the time would largely associate with virtue), Chopin implies that women's sexual desire is not only natural but good. The belief that women naturally desired sex was at odds with the strict gender norms at the time she wrote the story. In Chopin's time, people commonly regarded female sexual desire as both unnatural and immoral—an idea that "The Storm" radically seeks to overturn.

Part 3 Quotes

☝ Bibi was the picture of pathetic resignation. Bobinôt was the embodiment of serious solicitude as he strove to remove from his own person and his son's the signs of their tramp over heavy roads and through wet fields. He scraped the mud off Bibi's bare legs and feet with a stick and carefully removed all traces from his heavy brogans. Then, prepared for the worst—the meeting with an over-scrupulous housewife, they entered cautiously at the back door.

Related Characters: Bobinôt

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 271

Explanation and Analysis

After the storm, Bobinôt and his young son Bibi begin the muddy journey back home. As they trudge through the aftermath of the recent thunderstorm, Bobinôt takes care to clean off debris from Bibi's clothes. Even though the storm has passed, they're both in a terrible mood. Instead of anticipating Calixta's relief that they made it through the storm safely, they expect anger over their dirty clothes. Likewise, even though they believe Calixta was home alone during the storm, Bobinôt and Bibi seem more concerned with her anger over cleanliness than her safety during the storm, as indicated by the pace at which they walk home. With dread over Calixta's anger hanging over their heads, the pair are in no hurry to return home, with Bobinôt stopping periodically to scrape off the mud. Note that Bobinôt describes Calixta as "over-scrupulous," indicating

resentment regarding Calixta's preoccupation of housework. Also, in this passage, readers may get the sense that living with Calixta has made Bibi a very serious young boy, as indicated by his "pathetic resignation" upon thinking of his mother's response to his dirty clothes.

☞ "Oh, Bobinôt! You back! My! but I was uneasy. W'ere you been during the rain? An' Bibi? he ain't wet? he ain't hurt?" She had clasped Bibi and was kissing him effusively.

Bobinôt's explanations and apologies which he had been composing all along the way, died on his lips as Calixta felt him to see if he were dry, and seemed to express nothing but satisfaction at their safe return.

"I brought you some shrimps, Calixta," offered Bobinôt, hauling the can from his ample side pocket and laying it on the table.

"Shrimps! Oh, Bobinôt! you too good fo' anything!" and she gave him a smacking kiss on the cheek that resounded. "*J'vous reponds*, we'll have a feas' to-night! umph-umph!"

Related Characters: Bobinôt, Calixta (speaker), Bibi

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 271

Explanation and Analysis

As Calixta's husband and son return home through the mud after the storm, they both dread Calixta's reaction to their mud-soaked clothes, expecting that she will be very upset. However, relaxed and reinvigorated from sex with Alcée, Calixta greets her family with affection, which they clearly find surprising. Bobinôt finds himself at a loss for words, as all of the "explanations and apologies" that he had been composing on the walk home "died on his lips." Clearly, Calixta's transformation from uptight to easygoing is the result of her brief affair. Without any idea about the affair, Bibi and Bobinôt's lives are improved by Calixta's relaxed and tender mood, as the story makes the point that love only creates more love. Further, Calixta's profuse gratitude for the shrimp indicates that, with her sexual needs met elsewhere, Calixta can appreciate what Bobinôt brings to the table—even if it's as meager as a can of shrimp.

Part 4 Quotes

☞ Alcée Laballiere wrote to his wife, Clarisse, that night. It was a loving letter, full of tender solicitude. He told her not to hurry back, but if she and the babies liked it at Biloxi, to stay a month longer. He was getting on nicely; and though he missed them, he was willing to bear the separation a while longer—realizing that their health and pleasure were the first things to be considered.

Related Characters: Clarisse Laballière, Alcée Laballière

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 272

Explanation and Analysis

After having sex with Calixta, Alcée writes a "tender" letter to his wife, which once again supports the story's claim that love breeds more love—sex with Calixta, backed by genuine care and affection, allows Alcée to pour more genuine care and affection into his family. His wife, Clarisse, is in Bioloux, Mississippi with their children, presumably on vacation. As part of his letter, Alcée tells his wife that she is welcome to stay Biloxi a "month longer" if she so pleases. Because it seems that Alcée is making a concession, suggesting that he knows his wife would prefer more time apart, this passage implies that Alcée is typically more eager for his wife's company than perhaps Clarisse would like. As such, it appears that the time with Calixta was good for Alcée, as he now prioritizes the "health and pleasure" of his family over expecting them to constantly fulfil him. Thus, it appears that the brief affair has made Alcée a more considerate husband and father. However, the passage also subtly brings up the possibility that Alcée is "willing" to forgo more time with his wife because it may afford him another chance to sleep with Calixta.

Part 5 Quotes

☞ And the first free breath since her marriage seemed to restore the pleasant liberty of her maiden days. Devoted as she was to her husband, their intimate conjugal life was something which she was more than willing to forego for a while. So the storm passed and every one was happy.

Related Characters: Alcée Laballière, Clarisse Laballière

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 272

Explanation and Analysis

The story ends with Alcée's wife, Clarisse, reflecting on nice letter she received her husband in which he gives Clarisse permission to stay in Biloxi, Mississippi. This pleases Clarisse and indicates that, able to meet his sexual with Calixta, Alcée can give Clarisse what she wants: time apart from her husband. With time to herself, Calixta feels youthful and renewed. Thus, like Calixta, Clarisse appears happier when able to tap into the younger side of her personality. However, unlike Calixta, the ability to tap into the younger side of her character results from the *absence* of sex with Alcée. Specifically, Clarisse is happy to have a

break from "intimate conjugal life," or having sex with Alcée, which they both seem to consider one of her duties as a wife. In this passage Clarisse thus describes sex with Alcée essentially as a chore, consequently implying that Clarisse and Alcée don't share a passionate relationship.

The story concludes with "the storm passed, and everyone was happy." Since the thunderstorm symbolizes Alcée and Calixta's sexual encounter—positioning it as a positive, healthy, and natural occurrence—it thus appears that the sex between Alcée and Calixta, not the storm itself, made everyone's life bit more pleasant.



SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

PART 1

At a general store called Friedheimer's, Bobinôt and his young son, Bibi, decide to wait out an incoming **thunderstorm**. When Bobinôt, who is "accustomed to converse on terms of perfect equality with his little son," explains to Bibi that the two will return home after the storm passes, Bibi wonders aloud if his mother, Calixta, will be okay at home. Bobinôt responds that Calixta will be okay as she has the family's hired help, Sylvie, with her. Bibi corrects his father, explaining that Sylvie was at the house yesterday—not today.

The story's introduction reveals a lot about Bobinôt and Calixta's marriage. Readers first encounter Bobinôt and Bibi at the general store, presumably making purchases for the household. That leaves wife and mother, Calixta, at home. This arrangement mirrors the strict marital norms at the time, which designated women to the domestic sphere, yielding the outside world to men. Further, Bobinôt's ignorance of his wife's day-to-day schedule indicates that, as a husband, he pays little attention to his own home as it is his wife's domain. The beginning of "The Storm" also helps situate the story in regards to the prequel, "At the 'Cadian Ball," which tells the story of how young Calixta ends up selecting Bobinôt for marriage. That story, which is set in southern Louisiana, also features Friedheimer's, which reveals that this story is set in Louisiana as well, though the setting is never stated outright.



Bobinôt purchases a can of **shrimp** for Calixta, as they're her favorite. As the storm begins to descend on the general store, Bobinôt and Bibi sit and watch on as the wind picks up outside. Despite the violent storm, "wise" Bibi is not scared. As Chopin describes it, "Bibi laid his little hand on his father's knee and was not afraid."

When confronted with a situation in which his wife is likely alone and afraid, Bobinôt's response is to buy a can of shrimp which she will later prepare for dinner. This detail indicates that Bobinôt sees his wife as an extension of the home—even his so-called gift to her is just a domestic chore. Meanwhile, Bibi's disposition in this scene confirms the boy's unusually mature personality. Not only is Bibi able to speak on a high level, but he also appears unafraid a violent storm, which makes him seem much older than four.



PART 2

Back at home, Calixta is hard at work "sewing furiously." The house is stuffy and uncomfortably warm, causing sweaty Calixta to unbutton the stiff, **white** collar of her dress as she sews. She's so consumed by her work that she doesn't realize that a storm is brewing, and that her husband and son, Bobinôt and Bibi, could be in danger out in the elements. Only when the room turns dark does Calixta notice the incoming storm and hastily closes the windows. She rushes outside to gather the laundry hanging to dry.

Like the clouds building heat and tension overhead, sweaty Calixta appears ready to burst. With housekeeping making her physically miserable, drenched in sweat hunched over a sewing machine, Calixta is the very image of an overworked, pent-up housewife. The confines of the home make Calixta uncomfortable, as indicated by the need to release her throat from the restrictive collar of her traditional gown. Chopin notes that her collar is white, the classic color for this constricting garment. As white is often associated with purity, Calixta's fussiness with traditional feminine clothing implies a more general discomfort with conventional expectations of female virtue.



As rain begins to fall, Alcée Laballière arrives on horseback. The sight of Alcée surprises Calixta: she's barely seen him "since her marriage, and never alone." In need of shelter from the approaching storm, Alcée asks Calixta he can stay on her porch until the storm passes. She agrees, saying, "Come 'long in, M'sieur Alcée." With bolts of lightning appearing overhead, Alcée's voice shocks Calixta, as though she's called out of a "trance."

Readers of the story's prequel, "At the 'Cadian Ball," would know that Alcée and Calixta share sexual chemistry. But even if the reader is unfamiliar with the couple's romantic history, Chopin lets the reader know right away that Calixta feels a sexual pull towards Alcée, noting that his voice pulls her out of a "trance." The thunderstorm serves both as a plot device used to bring together old lovers and as a symbol for their encounter. An allegory for the encounter between the two, as the thunderstorm builds, so does the tension between the two former lovers. Importantly, Chopin portrays both characters respectful to their marriages. As a wife to another man, Calixta "had not seen [Alcée] very often since her marriage, and never alone." This suggests that the two respect their roles as husband and wife to other people. As further evidence that Alcée is a gentleman, even with the storm picking up outside, he hesitates to put himself alone in Calixta's company. Alcée only asks to enter Calixta's porch (referred to as "gallery" in the story) when the rain intensifies.



Although he intends to stay outside, Alcée finds that the porch offers no protection from the intense rain, so, with "water beat[ing] down in driving sheets" he and Calixta take refuge inside the house. As Alcée and Calixta work together to fortify the door to prevent water from pooling inside the house, taking care to "thrust" a rug under the door, Calixta notes that she hasn't witnessed such heavy rain for two years.

Although Alcée first intends to stay on the porch, away from the more intimate sections of Calixta's home, the storm is too strong. Upon entry to the house, Alcée does not appear motivated to come in so that he can be alone with Calixta. Instead, Alcée seems motivated by a desire to help Calixta in the face of the tremendous thunderstorm. Still, as the rain intensifies, Alcée and Calixta's bodies draw close to "thrust" a rolled-up rug under the crack of the door to keep rain from spilling into the house—a piece of storm preparation Chopin describes as "necessary." Chopin doubles down on the symbol of the thunderstorm through the use of sexually charged language to describe the storm (like the word "thrust"). Readers may interpret Calixta's observation that this is the most powerful storm in years as Calixta's saying she hasn't been this sexually aroused in years.



Although Calixta is now "a little fuller of figure" than she was before her marriage five years ago, she is still beautiful. With wild blonde hair and blue eyes, she "ha[s] lost nothing of her vivacity." She and Alcée are in the all-purpose room of the house (which functions as both the living and dining room); the door to the adjacent bedroom is open, and the "**white**, monumental bed" looks "dim and mysterious" in the darkened room.

As readers from the prequel already know, Alcée's observation regarding Calixta's "vivacity" suggests that the younger Calixta was much less buttoned-up than the married woman she is today. It's also significant that Chopin uses white to describe an intimate space of Calixta's home. Here, the bed sits off to the side, just like the sexual tension between Calixta and Alcée. The bed in this scene, glowing in the distance, foreshadows the sex that's about to occur. As the bed glows with the color of virtuosity, Chopin suggests that the intimate bond between Calixta and Alcée is likewise innocent.



With the widow and doors fortified, Alcée takes a seat while Calixta tidies nervously, declaring: “If this keeps up, *Dieu sait!* if the levees goin’ to stand it!” To comfort her, Alcée replies that “Bobinôt’s got sense enough to come in out of a cyclone.” The room is “stiflingly hot,” and Alcée peers out the window with Calixta. Suddenly, a bolt of lightning strikes a tree that’s not too far off; everything goes **white**, and a deafening crash follows, which shakes the house. Startled, Calixta and Alcée jump into each other’s arms. Calixta is inconsolable, and Alcée pulls her closer.

Holding Calixta in his arms reminds Alcée of their past as young lovers and awakens his longing for her. As Alcée comforts her, Calixta peers up at him with eyes that “unconsciously betrayed a sensuous desire.” Wanting to kiss her, Alcée asks if Calixta remembers their time in the town of Assumption, when “he had kissed her and kissed her and kissed her.” Back then, though, “his honor forbade him to prevail” against her “defenselessness.” Now, Alcée thinks that Calixta’s lips look “free to be tasted.”

With the **thunderstorm** at its peak, Calixta and Alcée find themselves in the “dim, mysterious chamber” and lie together. The couple’s sexual desire ignites like a “**white** flame,” and they have passionate sex. Calixta’s body “know[s] for the first time its birthright,” while Alcée reaches “depths of his own sensuous nature that had never yet been reached.” As the storm fades, Calixta and Alcée fight the urge to fall asleep. When the rain stops, Alcée mounts his horse and rides off; the two share a parting smile, and Calixta laughs.

While she never mentions the location of the story outright, Chopin’s characters speak in a dialect specific to Louisiana commonly known as Louisiana French. For example, the phrase “Dieu sait!” is a French expression meaning “God Knows.” Combined with the mention of the levees and the shrimp, readers can correctly assume that the story takes place in Southern Louisiana. The use of specific regional dialect is characteristic of local color, a style of writing in which an author relies on region-specific features (such as dialect, cuisine, and weather) to tell a story. On another note, this passage contains further evidence that Calixta and Alcée respect their marriages: Calixta worries for her family’s safety, while Alcée is quick to defend her husband, explaining that Bobinôt is capable enough to navigate the storm. Relatedly, Chopin once again mentions the color white to further frame the meeting between Alcée and Calixta as an innocent endeavor.



With the mention of past kissing, readers now know for sure that Alcée and Calixta share an intimate past. Also, from Alcée’s recollection of his “honor,” it’s clear that they didn’t have sex when they were young. This suggests that, for the younger Alcée, to sleep with single Calixta without the intention of marriage would be moral wrongdoing. The implication of Alcée’s recollection is that, as already-married adults, Calixta and Alcée can now enjoy sex free from the expectation of marriage.



The mention of white in this scene once again suggests that the sex between Calixta and Alcée is a beautiful act of love rather than a morally transgressive one. Moreover, with sex occurring parallel to the storm, Chopin depicts sex between Calixta and Alcée as a natural act, implicitly arguing that sex and sexual desire is an integral part of human nature. This passage also suggests that Alcée’s sexual relationship with his wife leaves something to be desired, as he’s able to tap into “never yet [...] reached” levels of pleasure with Calixta. It’s also significant that, as they part, Calixta appears refreshed. In contrast to the wound-up, overworked Calixta from the story’s beginning, post-sex Calixta is comfortable and cheerful, once again positioning the extramarital affair as a positive and invigorating rather than shameful.



PART 3

Making their way home from the general store, Bobinôt and Bibi try to clean themselves up. As they tromp through soggy fields, Bobinôt frets that Bibi has ruined his best pair of pants and has mud on his shirt. As they trudge along, Bibi is “the picture of pathetic resignation.” They reach the house and “[prepare] for the worst,” ready to be scolded by Calixta, the “over-scrupulous housewife.”

However, to Bobinôt and Bibi’s surprise, Calixta responds with joy at their arrival. Bobinôt finds himself at a loss for words; he had many excuses and apologies rehearsed for his wife, but she seems nothing but delighted that they’ve returned unharmed. She kisses both “effusively” and graciously accepts her husband’s gift of canned **shrimp**, which she prepares for dinner. All three—Bobinôt, Bibi, and Calixta—enjoy themselves over dinner and laugh so much that their cheer might be heard “as far away as [Alcée] Laballière’s.

Described as “the picture of pathetic resignation,” Bibi is again described as a somber child. This particular instance of seriousness appears as a direct result of anticipating his mother’s anger, suggesting that perhaps Bibi’s personality is reflective of the tense environment he must endure at home. Bobinôt also anticipates Calixta’s wrath—in this passage, he desperately tries to scrape the mud off their clothes as to not upset her further—which once again suggests that Calixta is typically strict and tightly wound.



Able to reconnect with her sensuality through sex with Alcée, Calixta more readily expresses affection for her family. Calixta’s good mood catches her family by surprise, indicating that Bobinôt and Bibi are accustomed to dealing with a strict, high-strung housewife. As she is better able to care for her family, the romance between Calixta and Alcée serves to lift the family as a whole, once again depicting sex as a positive, healthy act. Further, Calixta’s profuse gratitude for the feeble gift of canned shrimp indicates that, with her sexual needs met elsewhere, Calixta can better appreciate what Bobinôt has to offer as a husband.



PART 4

Meanwhile, Alcée writes a “tender” letter to his wife, Clarisse, who, along with their children, is vacationing in Biloxi, Mississippi. In the letter, Alcée tells his wife that, although he does miss her, she and “the babies” should feel free to stay longer in Biloxi so long as they’re happy. He explains that he’s “willing” to withstand the distance because his family’s “health and pleasure” are his highest priorities.

After sleeping with Calixta, Alcée is inspired to express affection towards his wife in a letter, suggesting that love only creates more love. Thus, like Clarisse, Alcée appears happy within this own family so long as he doesn’t depend solely on his spouse for physical intimacy. As indicated his offer for the family to stay longer in Biloxi, Alcée seems to realize that his family wants to spend more time away. Readers thus get the sense that Alcée is perhaps a somewhat needy husband who wants more attention than his wife wants to give. As such, readers may infer that the time with Calixta allows Alcée to meet all his needs, which may otherwise go unmet within his marriage. Moreover, Alcée might see his family’s extended stay in Biloxi as more opportunities to have sex with Calixta. If this is the case, Alcée may view sex with Calixta as an act that improves the “health and pleasure” of his vacationing family.



PART 5

Alcée's wife, Clarisse, is happy to receive the letter. She, too, is doing well, as "many of her old friends and acquaintances" are nearby. Clarisse thinks warmly of her husband but is delighted to have a break from wifely duties, and particularly from "their intimate conjugal life." The story concludes with a summation of everyone's mood: "the storm passed, and every one was happy."

Able to meet their sexual needs elsewhere, Alcée and Calixta are both able to give their spouses what they desire. Like Calixta, Clarisse appears happier when able to tap into the younger side of her personality. However, unlike Calixta, the ability to tap into the younger side of her character results from the absence of sex with Alcée, again indicating that her husband wants more of her time than she cares to provide. Specifically, Clarisse is happy to have a break from "intimate conjugal life," or having sex with Alcée. This implies that, for Clarisse, sex with Alcée itself is essentially a chore that she is obligated to fulfill as a wife. Readers may remember that, earlier in the story, Alcée is able to experience new levels of pleasure while having sex with Calixta, which suggests that his love life with his wife is unfulfilling. It's reasonable to assume, then, that the restrictions of marriage squeeze the pleasure out of Alcée and Clarisse's sex life. The story concludes with "the storm passed, and everyone was happy." But, of course, it was not the storm that improved everyone's mood—it was sex between Alcée and Calixta.





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