

"Checkouts"

From: A Couple of Kooks: And Other Stories about Love

By: Cynthia Rylant

Published: September 1, 1990



Author's Biographical Information

- ❖ Cynthia Rylant was born in 1954.
- ❖ When Rylant was in university, she attended a college English class and said she was “hooked on great writing... I didn’t know about this part of me until I went to college - didn’t know I loved beautiful stories.” This began the start of her writing career.
- ❖ Rylant is known to enjoy writing about friendship, love, grief, and mystery.
- ❖ She often uses her own childhood life to relate to her stories. She explained how “I get a lot of personal gratification thinking of those people who don’t get any attention in the world and making them really valuable in my fiction – making them absolutely shine with their beauty.”
- ❖ Rylant enjoys exploring the seashore, drinking tea, and taking naps.

Other Works by the Author

Cynthia Rylant has published works for readers of all different ages.

Some of her elementary books include:

- ❖ *A Blue-Eyed Daisy*
- ❖ *A Little Shopping*
- ❖ *An Angel for Solomon Singer*
- ❖ *Birthday Presents*
- ❖ *Christmas in the Country*

Some examples of her high school stories are:

- ❖ *Kindness*
- ❖ *A Couple of Kooks and Other Stories About Love*
- ❖ *Boris*

Setting

The story takes place at the supermarket located in Cincinnati. It is set in current day. Both of the main characters come from middle class families. The girl is unfamiliar with the city because she was forced to move to Cincinnati against her will. She found an outlet for her stress by shopping in the supermarket. This activity was able to help remove the pressure from her mind and change it into a peaceful "reverie." This setting is crucial because it facilitates the meeting of the girl with the orange bow and the bag boy. It also makes the story more plausible, as many young boys work as bag boys in the current day. Lastly, this setting lessens the romantic mood of the story and foreshadows that the girl and bag boy will not be together.



Introduction of Primary Characters

The girl with the orange bow: A dynamic, round character

Direct Characterization: An example of character's likes would be when she thinks about the grocery store. The author states, "She liked to grocery shop. She loved it in the way that some people love to drive long country roads, because doing it she could think and relax and wander" (Rylant 283).

Indirect Characterization: Other character's opinions of the character would be she is attractive because the bag boy found her interesting and beautiful from her thick, red hair to her brown eyes (he dropped the jar of mayonnaise because she smiled at him). This character's opinion leads to people believing that she is attractive.



Character's effect on other characters: The girl's reaction to the bag boy's clumsiness leads us to believe she has affection towards clumsiness because she fell in love at first sight.

Bag boy: A dynamic, round character

Direct Characterization: An example of a character's thoughts would be when the bag boy wanted a second chance after he embarrassed himself in front of the girl so that he could learn about her likes and dislikes. He thinks, "He wanted a second chance. Another chance to be confident and say witty things to her..." (Rylant 283).

Indirect Characterization: The bag boy was embarrassed by his actions of dropping the jar of mayonnaise in front of the girl. He is nervous and shy around her and acts differently when she is near. This displays his personality towards people he wants to impress, such as the girl.

Overall Synopsis

- ❖ A girl was forced to move out of her old hometown to Cincinnati, a place that she knows nothing about. For weeks the girl went through old photographs, longing for what she left behind.
- ❖ In order to be by herself and spend time alone, she helped grocery shop in her family. On one particular day when she was in the supermarket, the bag boy accidentally dropped her jar of mayonnaise and at the moment, she fell in love with him.
- ❖ Her feelings were mutual, and the bag boy found himself wondering who she was.
- ❖ Unfortunately, their schedules didn't fit together, so they never got to know each other. They were both quiet and shy and with such similar personalities, the girl and the bag boy weren't able to face one another.
- ❖ The girl and the bag boy realized that they were never meant to be together and eventually ended up dating other people.

Plot Diagram for "Checkouts" by Cynthia Rylant

Time: Current day
Place: Cincinnati, Ohio
Social Milieu: Middle class, the girl is unfamiliar with the new city.

Inciting Incident: While he was bagging the groceries, the bag boy dropped the girl with the orange bow's jar of mayonnaise.

The girl loved the bag boy from the moment they looked at each other in the eye and the bag boy fell for the girl the moment she smiled at him.

The girl left the supermarket lovestruck and loved his imperfection. She thought his clumsiness was attractive.

For the next few weeks the girl and the bag boy continued to go to the grocery shop, keeping an eye out for each other, but their schedules never matched up.

The anticipation to see the bag boy allowed the girl to transition from her old life to her new life in Cincinnati. She no longer dwelled on what she used to do and waited for what was ahead.

Four weeks later, the girl and the bag boy met up again at the grocery store but kept to themselves and made no indication that they had been desiring to see one another.

Main Characters: The girl with the orange bow and the bag boy

Characteristics-

The girl with the orange bow: shy, secretive, imaginative
The bag boy: nervous, clumsy, bashful

Exposition: The girl and the bag boy meet again at the movie theater with separate dates. They smile at each other before looking away and accepting the fact that they were never meant to be.

A week later the girl ended up going on a date with someone else and the bag boy gave up his job and started working at the bookstore, a place that constantly had many girls.

After their departure from each other, the girl and the bag boy both hate themselves for avoiding each other. They regret their own ignorance.

Climax: The girl didn't go to the bag boy's checkout and the bag boy didn't acknowledge the girl when she left.

Explanation of Point-of-View

- ❖ The point of view is written in third person omniscient, which enhances the feelings of both dynamic characters.
- ❖ Without writing in third person limited, then the readers know that the characters both have feelings for each other, and not just one character's thoughts about the other.
- ❖ If the short story was written in third character limited, there would be the girl falling in love with the boy and having her wonder if he had feelings for her back, but this point of view assures the feelings of both characters, which makes the story more enjoyable to the reader.

Example of a Technique

Irony:

- The two young adults, the bag boy and the girl with the orange bow are both in love with each other after the first time they met.
 - Did not see each other for the next four weeks... schedules did not line up.
 - When they were both in the supermarket for the second time, they did not look at each other, and the bag boy did not check her out. After that day, they did not pursue their love. An intelligent boy started flirting with the girl, and the boy quit his job at the supermarket for a better one at the bookstore. He met a girl there. Later, they see each other in a line for the movies, with their dates. They make eye contact before looking away. It was the end of their encounters.
 - They both wanted to be with each other but they didn't have the courage to speak to each other.
- It is ironic because even though they were both in love with each other, they ended up with other people, unlike what the reader would normally have expected.

Explanation of a Symbol

Symbol: *the jar of mayonnaise*

- The bag boy dropped it while putting the jar in the girl's checkout bag.
- This symbolizes his clumsiness and awkwardness, but also his feelings towards the girl. He's affected by her presence and dropping the jar is a clear proof to this point.
- The jar represents how the girl and the bag boy fell in in love with each other, but it also shows their shy, bashful personalities..
 - She admires his awkwardness and falls in love with him.



Explanation of a Theme

Theme: *If one doesn't take initiative to get what one wants, one will never get it.*

- The bag boy drops the jar of mayonnaise.
 - After he dropped the jar, he could have taken initiative to talk to the girl with the orange bow. However, because he didn't take this opportunity, he didn't get to know the girl.
- Neither the girl with the orange bow nor the bag boy takes the initiative to talk to each other. The girl purposely avoids the bag boy's checkout aisles; the bag boy does not reach out and say hello to the girl. Because neither took the initiative to talk to the other one, neither of them got what they wanted-to ask out the other person.

These two events in the short story prove the theme that if one doesn't take initiative to get what one wants, one will never get it.



Rating for "Checkouts"



Rating: *two stars out of three stars*

- ❖ This story did not have enough conflict to receive a three star rating, but it did provide an entertaining plot of two young city kids that are too naive to take initiative on what they want. They were both so embarrassed from their first encounter that they didn't have the will to speak to each other.
- ❖ There could have been more background information.
- ❖ This young love story gives an excellent message to the readers, telling explaining that goals will not be accomplished unless people reach for them.
- ❖ The fact that characters do not have names gives the story universality.

Citations

Works Cited

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Responsibility Chart

Emily H. (Reporter)

- Characters/5 points: 30 minutes
- Rating/5 points: 20 minutes
- Point of View/10 points: 20 minutes
- Images/9 points: 10 minutes with Harshal

Harshal S. (Captain)

- Title Page/1 point: 20 minutes
- Theme/10 points: 35 minutes
- Setting/5 points: 20 minutes
- Images/9 points: 10 minutes with Emily

Responsibility Chart (cont.)

Jocelyn L. (Recorder/Editor)

- Plot Diagram/10 points: 50 minutes
- Summary/5 points: 15 minutes
- Biography/5 points: 15 minutes
- Other Works/5 points: 20 minutes

Stephen T. (Monitor)

- Symbol/10 points: 25 minutes
- Citations/10 points: 30 minutes
- Example of Technique/5 points: 25 minutes