

The Confines of Womanhood: A Feminist Reading of A Summer Bird Cage

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Abstract

This paper presents a feminist analysis of Margaret Drabble's debut novel, *A Summer Bird Cage* (1962), exploring the societal pressures and constraints imposed on women in 1960s Britain. Through a critical examination of the novel's portrayal of marriage, sisterhood, and independence, this study reveals how Drabble critiques traditional female roles and highlights the struggles women face in navigating patriarchal norms. The analysis demonstrates how the novel's themes of confinement, identity, and autonomy remain relevant to contemporary feminist discourse.

Key Words: Bird Cage, Womanhood, Patriarchal norms, Marriage, Sisterhood, Independence, 1960s British literature

Margaret Drabble's emergence as a prominent voice in post-war British literature was marked by her nuanced exploration of women's inner lives and societal roles. Her novels reflect the complexities women faced navigating independence, career, marriage, and motherhood. Writing in the 1960s, Drabble witnessed significant social change as the feminist movement challenged traditional gender norms.

Drabble's debut novel, *A Summer Bird Cage* (1962), offers insightful commentary on societal pressures surrounding marriage and personal freedom. Narrated by Sarah, a recent Oxford graduate, the novel dissects expectations placed on women in 1960s Britain, particularly the notion that marriage ensures happiness and fulfillment.

The bird cage metaphor captures the central feminist argument: women are confined by societal roles. Louise's marriage to Stephen illustrates the limitations of marriage, while Sarah's ambivalence reflects inner turmoil. Drabble uses these contrasting sisters to explore women's experiences and internalization of societal pressures.

A Summer Bird Cage critiques traditional female roles by highlighting struggles for personal freedom, tension between marriage and independence, and pursuit of identity amidst societal pressures. Drabble's nuanced portrayal underscores women's confinement by societal expectations, even as they seek individual identities.

This paper argues that *A Summer Bird Cage* provides a powerful feminist commentary on the limits of freedom for women in a patriarchal society. Through its exploration of marriage,

sisterhood, and independence, the novel remains relevant to contemporary discussions on gender and identity.

"A Summer Bird Cage," Margaret Drabble's debut novel, offers a keen exploration of the intricate dynamics of human relationships. The novel is narrated by Sarah, who provides an introspective and often wry account of her life and the life of her sister, Louise. Both sisters are Oxford graduates, yet their paths diverge sharply after university. Sarah, the more introspective and uncertain of the two, struggles with finding direction in her life, grappling with questions of identity and purpose. She feels adrift, caught between the expectations of society and her own desires, leading to a sense of restlessness and discontent.

In contrast, Louise, who initially appears to have her life together, marries a successful and wealthy novelist. However, beneath the surface, her marriage is far from ideal. Louise is trapped in a gilded cage, struggling with the realities of her husband's infidelity and the emptiness of her life, despite its outward success. Sarah's observations of her sister's situation lead her to reflect on her own choices and the societal pressures placed on women.

The novel delves into themes of self-discovery, the complexities of sisterhood, and the pressures of societal expectations. Through Sarah's sharp, often cynical voice, Drabble examines the roles women are expected to play and the emotional toll of trying to conform to these roles. Sarah's journey is one of self-awareness, as she comes to terms with her own needs and desires, and the limitations of the life paths traditionally available to women.

Drabble's writing is notable for its psychological depth and precision. She captures the subtleties of Sarah's internal world, providing a detailed and intimate portrait of a young woman at a crossroads in her life. The novel's strength lies in its exploration of the personal and emotional growth that comes with self-reflection and the courage to defy societal norms in search of authentic happiness.

"A Summer Bird Cage," Margaret Drabble's first novel, is a detailed exploration of the complexities of sisterhood, self-identity, and the often oppressive societal expectations placed on women. The story is told through the eyes of Sarah Bennett, a recent Oxford graduate, who finds herself at a crossroads in life, unsure of her future and questioning her place in the world.

Sarah's relationship with her sister Louise is central to the narrative. Louise, the older and seemingly more confident sister, has just married Stephen Halifax, a successful novelist. From the outside, Louise's life appears enviable—married to a wealthy and celebrated man, she seems to have achieved what society often deems the ultimate success for women of her background. However, as Sarah begins to spend more time with Louise after the wedding, she uncovers the deep unhappiness that underlies Louise's seemingly perfect life. Louise is trapped in a marriage devoid of love and fulfillment, suffering under Stephen's infidelities and emotional neglect. Her life, which should have been a dream, feels more like a "bird cage"—beautiful on the outside but confining and suffocating within.

Sarah's narration is sharp, witty, and often laced with cynicism. She reflects on her own life in contrast to Louise's, questioning the paths available to women like them. Sarah is acutely aware of the societal pressures that push women into certain roles—wife, mother, or career

woman—yet she feels alienated by these choices. She is caught in a state of inertia, unable to commit to a traditional career or relationship, yet uncertain of what she truly wants for herself. This internal conflict drives much of the novel's emotional depth, as Sarah navigates her feelings of inadequacy, jealousy, and confusion.

Drabble uses the contrast between the sisters to explore larger themes of identity and autonomy. Louise's marriage is emblematic of the sacrifices women often make to conform to societal expectations, sacrificing personal happiness for outward respectability. Sarah, on the other hand, represents a more modern struggle—she is unwilling to settle for a life that does not fulfill her, but she is also unsure of how to define herself outside of those traditional roles. This tension between conformity and self-determination is a central theme of the novel.

The novel also delves into the complexities of female friendship and rivalry. Sarah's feelings toward Louise are complicated; she admires her sister's beauty and poise but also resents the ease with which Louise seems to navigate life. Their relationship is a mix of love, envy, and competition, reflecting the nuanced and often contradictory nature of sisterly bonds.

Drabble's portrayal of these characters is marked by psychological depth and realism. Sarah's journey is one of self-awareness and growth, as she gradually begins to understand her own desires and the limitations of the societal roles available to her. The novel does not offer easy answers; instead, it presents a nuanced exploration of the struggles faced by women as they try to carve out identities that are true to themselves in a world that often seeks to define them.

In the end, "A Summer Bird Cage" is a story about the search for self-identity and the courage it takes to live authentically. Through Sarah's eyes, Drabble captures the emotional complexity of young women navigating a world that offers them limited options, and the psychological toll of trying to reconcile societal expectations with personal fulfillment. The novel's title, a metaphor for the gilded yet confining life Louise leads, encapsulates the central tension of the book—the struggle to break free from the expectations that cage one's true self.

"A Summer Bird Cage," Margaret Drabble's debut novel, is a penetrating exploration of the intricacies of sisterhood, selfhood, and the societal constraints that shape women's lives. The narrative unfolds through the perspective of Sarah Bennett, a recent Oxford graduate who finds herself at a pivotal moment of uncertainty, grappling with her identity and her place in the world.

At the heart of the story is the complex relationship between Sarah and her sister, Louise. Louise, the elder of the two, has just married Stephen Halifax, a successful novelist, and seems to have secured the kind of life that society lauds—one marked by wealth, status, and a seemingly perfect marriage. However, as Sarah spends time with Louise post-wedding, she uncovers the reality of her sister's life, which is far from the idyllic picture it presents. Louise's marriage is hollow, defined by Stephen's infidelities and emotional coldness. Her life, which should symbolize success, feels more like a "bird cage"—attractive yet suffocating, restricting her true self.

Sarah's narration is incisive and tinged with cynicism as she reflects on her own life in contrast to Louise's. Unlike Louise, Sarah is not willing to accept the conventional paths laid out before her—marriage, career, or motherhood—yet she struggles to define what she truly wants.

This internal conflict is a key driver of the novel, as Sarah wrestles with feelings of inadequacy, envy, and uncertainty about her future. Her struggle is emblematic of a broader tension between societal expectations and personal desires, a theme that Drabble skillfully weaves throughout the novel.

The contrast between the sisters highlights the broader themes of identity and autonomy. Louise's life represents the sacrifices many women make to fit into societal molds, often at the expense of their own happiness and selfhood. Sarah, on the other hand, embodies the modern dilemma of seeking self-fulfillment in a world that offers limited space for women to define themselves on their own terms. She is caught in a space where traditional roles feel inadequate, yet the path to selfhood is unclear and fraught with challenges.

Drabble also examines the complexities of female relationships, particularly the mix of love, rivalry, and ambivalence that characterizes the bond between sisters. Sarah's feelings toward Louise are layered and multifaceted, reflecting the nuanced and often contradictory nature of these intimate connections.

The novel's strength lies in its psychological depth and the realistic portrayal of its characters. Sarah's journey is one of growing self-awareness as she begins to confront the limitations of the roles society imposes on women and the space she needs to carve out for her own selfhood. The novel does not offer simple resolutions; instead, it presents a rich exploration of the internal and external forces that shape women's lives.

In conclusion, "A Summer Bird Cage" is a narrative about the quest for selfhood within the confines of societal expectations. Through Sarah's sharp and reflective lens, Drabble captures the emotional and psychological struggles of young women navigating a world that often tries to limit their space for personal growth and self-definition. The title, serving as a metaphor for the restricted life Louise leads, underscores the central conflict of the novel—the fight to break free from the cages that society builds around one's true identity and to find a space where selfhood can flourish.

"Published in 1963, 'A Summer Bird-Cage' captures the frustrations of educated women during a time of societal change. Many women who had graduated from Oxford and other universities felt suffocated by the limited options available to them. They yearned for more than the traditional roles of wife, mother, and homemaker. The novel's protagonist, Sarah, embodies this discontent. Through her writing, she expresses her despair at the lack of purpose and direction in women's lives. The novel masterfully explores the tensions between individual desire and societal expectation, offering a powerful commentary on the constraints faced by women during this era."

Men are alright, they are defined and enclosed but will in order to live must be open and raw to all comers. What happens otherwise is worse than what happens normally the embroidery and the children and the sagging mind. I felt doomed to defeat. I felt all women were doomed. (S.B.C., 28-29)

The novel *A Summer Bird Cage* (1963) introduces the style and situations typical of Margaret Drabble's early work. Sarah Bennett, the main character, is a straightforward,

lighthearted, and funny first-person narrator who quickly builds a connection with the reader. Sarah is a young woman with intelligence, beauty, and a sharp sense of humor. However, alongside her high hopes and ambitions, she feels a troubling sense of restlessness—uncertain about who she is and what she wants to do. This uncertainty leads her to search for a deeper understanding of herself and her place in the world.

Margaret Drabble's first novel, *A Summer Bird-Cage*, presents a seemingly straightforward plot centered on Sarah, a recent Oxford graduate. As an educated woman, Sarah envisioned a future filled with a fulfilling career, meaningful friendships, and true love. She anticipated transitioning smoothly into a new chapter of life, where she would enjoy the same equality with men that she experienced at university. However, the reality she encounters is starkly different: after a year of working in London, she finds herself struggling just to make ends meet. The unhappy marriages of her sister and friend further reveal to her that the ideals of love and marriage are often unattainable. For women like Sarah, life after graduation seems to regress, as the institution of marriage becomes a birdcage that confines their aspirations. Confronted with the disparity between her dreams and reality, Sarah wrestles with her sense of selfhood and the spatial limitations imposed by society. She strives to delay her own entrapment in this metaphorical cage, though she is fully aware that marriage may be inevitable.

Sarah faces the question of whether women should marry for love or money. Her older sister, Louise, married Stephen, a successful and wealthy novelist with four books to his name. To Sarah, Stephen seems like a deeply cynical man, a social satirist who asserts that “everyone is either ridiculously rich, or poor, or mediocre or ridiculously classy. He leaves no possibility of being in the right, unless he means to leave himself as a standard, which would be logical, as he is almost entirely negative” (Drabble, 1963, p.7). Sarah struggles to understand why Louise, with her extraordinary beauty, would choose to marry someone like Stephen.

Over time, Sarah realizes that Louise and Stephen's marriage wasn't based on love, but on a commitment to the institution of marriage itself. They didn't marry because they saw each other as soul mates; instead, they each had their own personal motives. The reality of Louise and Stephen's relationship exposes a truth about marriage that Sarah hadn't anticipated. Louise consciously married Stephen for financial security, all the while maintaining an affair with a handsome actor she truly loved. Despite her deep feelings, Louise knew she would never marry him.

In the course of time readers come to know that Stephen married Louise not because of love, but because she possessed the qualities he found indispensable in a wife—beauty, popularity, and a certain level of notoriety. Louise was the ideal partner for Stephen, perhaps because “she never looked ridiculous,” and “perhaps he wanted a wife to be a figurehead to his triumphal car, a public admiring ornament to his house” (Drabble, 1963, p.7).

Through the marriage of Louise and Stephen, Drabble illustrates that marriage is far from an ideal destination for women who marry for reasons other than love. Louise chose financial security over love, ultimately sacrificing her true happiness. Her practical decision-making leads to confusion and discontent in her life. For Sarah, who values her independence and sense of self, marriage seems like a restrictive cage. When confronted with the idea of marriage, Sarah

starts to seek a different path to happiness—one that involves steering clear of marriage to avoid the same fate as Louise and Gill. This perspective, though extreme, aligns with the views held by feminists during the second wave, who challenged traditional roles and sought new ways for women to achieve fulfillment and maintain their identity. Sarah also minutely observes her friend Gill's love marriage with Tony and after that she questions institution of marriage itself.

Gill's marriage, which began with high hopes and dreams, tragically ends in divorce, serving as a warning to young women about the potential pitfalls of matrimony. Gill chooses to marry for love, but her experience proves that this approach is no guarantee of happiness. Her relationship with her husband, Tony, initially seems perfect, but it gradually deteriorates into petty arguments and more serious issues. Tony's restrictive behavior and belittling comments make Gill feel useless and trapped, as evident in her painful recollection:

"Tony made me feel so useless. Once I said to him, 'I feel like a still life, I want to do something', and he gave me a little bit of canvas and a few paints and said, 'you paint me then.' It was awful, I was so offended, it was just the same as when my mother used to give me a handkerchief to iron with my toy iron on washday, so I could be grown up like her... It used not to matter but it does now. Everything matters so much" (Drabble, 1963, p.38)

In contrast, Sarah's friend Louise prioritizes security in her relationships, highlighting the different approaches women take in pursuit of happiness.

Gill's stifling marriage serves as a stark reminder that even the most promising relationships can crumble under the weight of patriarchal oppression. Tony's assumption of central authority at home, coupled with his financial inability to support the family, creates a toxic dynamic where Gill faces both material hardships and emotional oppression. As a man, Tony feels entitled to act as the lord and master, asserting his absolute right to issue commands, while Gill is denied the freedom to work or pursue her aspirations. Their dire financial situation only exacerbates the issue, leaving Gill feeling trapped and confined, like a bird in a cage. Sarah is left questioning the reliability of love, realizing that when true affection fades amidst domestic struggles, marriage can become a prison for women. Ultimately, Gill's marriage fails due to Tony's male chauvinism, highlighting the importance of a secure career over an unstable marriage in achieving true stability.

As Sarah ponders on the lives of Louise and Gill, she becomes resolute in her quest for self-fulfillment, recognizing the vital importance of independence in a world where traditional marriage and gender roles often stifle women's potential. Through her observations, she gains a deeper understanding of the societal pressures that can lead to unfulfilling lives. She sees how marriage, whether driven by love or financial necessity, can become a prison for women, stripping them of their autonomy and individuality. With this realization, Sarah rejects the conventional notion of marriage, embracing the belief that true freedom lies in pursuing one's own desires and aspirations. As she charts her own course, Sarah holds firmly to the conviction that "The principle of marriage not binds those who don't want to be bound" (Drabble, 1963, p.130), and she is determined to remain unbound and true to herself.

Ultimately, Sarah lands a fulfilling role at the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), a position that empowers her to sustain herself financially and nurture her passion for writing. By deferring marriage, Sarah successfully maintains her economic independence and spiritual freedom, albeit temporarily. Nevertheless, her journey towards self-actualization and harmonizing her dual selves is far from complete. Sarah acknowledges that matrimony may be an inevitable part of her future, but she intentionally postpones surrendering to its constraints, seizing every opportunity to embrace her true identity and cultivate her individuality. In doing so, Sarah buys herself time to explore her aspirations, develop her sense of self, and reconcile her dual desires for independence and connection. With each step, Sarah moves closer to realizing her full potential, unencumbered by the societal expectations that once threatened to define her.

Feminists strongly recommend women to run away from 'cage' but don't foresee the prospect after runaway. People applaud when Nora slammed door and bid farewell to the past life but no one predicts what might happen to Nora after hence. Sarah decided to reject marriage, the reality is that single girls' situation is even worse for they are seen as poorer than those who get married. In the male-dominated society, the self-independence and self-realization are maintained at the expense of their self-abstinence and their self-restrain

Feminists fervently advocate for women to break free from the shackles of societal expectations, exemplified by the iconic Nora Helmer from Henrik Ibsen's play "A Doll's House," who boldly slams the door on her stifling marriage and forges a new path. However, this rallying cry often overlooks the uncharted territory that lies beyond the threshold. While Nora's departure is met with applause, her uncertain future is left unexplored. Similarly, Sarah's decision to reject marriage is seen as a courageous stance, but the reality is that single women like her face even greater challenges, perceived as inferior to their married counterparts in a society dominated by patriarchal norms. In this context, self-independence and self-realization come at a steep price, requiring women to sacrifice their desires and aspirations, exemplifying the paradox of self-abstinence and self-restraint that Nora and Sarah must navigate. Just as Nora's slamming of the door symbolizes her liberation, Sarah's rejection of marriage represents her own quest for freedom, but both women must confront the uncharted consequences of their choices.

Similarly, Sarah's decision to reject marriage is seen as bold, but single women like her face even greater challenges. They are viewed as less desirable than married women in a society controlled by men. To be independent and true to them, women like Nora and Sarah must give up their desires and dreams. This is the difficult choice they must make.

In the past, women's educational pursuits were often undermined by societal expectations. Despite gaining degrees, their career aspirations were frequently dismissed. Formal education failed to translate into meaningful professional opportunities, as the patriarchal mindset dictated that women prioritize marriage over career advancement.

As a result, even educated women felt limited in their choices, with teaching, secretarial work and nursing being the only viable options. Many ended up marrying wealthy men, as was the case with Sarah's sister Louise, who wed a renowned novelist. Here's a rewritten version of the text with some changes in wording and phrasing, while keeping the original quote and page number:

For those eager to work, options were scarce. Only a few vocations were deemed suitable: teaching, secretarial work, and nursing. Consequently, many women, including Sarah's sister Louise, who married a celebrated novelist, opted for marriage to secure their futures.

Sarah reflects: "I thought about jobs and seriousness, and about what a girl can do with herself if over-educated and lacking a sense of vocation. Louise had one answer, of course. She was getting married." (6)

Sarah and Louise grew up in a patriarchal household where their father wielded absolute authority, dictating every aspect of family life. Their mother, conditioned to obey, sacrificed her own aspirations and desires for her husband and children, exemplifying the selfless yet stifling role expected of women. Sarah empathized with her mother's plight, recognizing her father's brutish behavior and how he callously disregarded her mother's opinions, leaving her feeling powerless and marginalized.

Despite never having the opportunity to attend college, their mother fervently encouraged her daughters to pursue higher education and chase their dreams, unlike her own restricted experiences. She recognized the transformative power of education, which could empower them with awareness, self-realization, and independence. For Louise, education instilled a strong sense of self-worth, even if it didn't lead to financial independence. She valued herself highly and refused to be suppressed or dictated to, having developed a strong sense of autonomy and self-respect.

Louise married Stephan for security and financial stability, initially reveling in the luxuries of her new life. She showcased her opulent home, adorned with antiques, expensive possessions, and fine art, to her sister and friends, eager to display her newfound status. However, her excitement soon dissipated, revealing a life of monotony and despair. As she accompanied Stephan to Paris, she lost her autonomy, forced to maintain a polite facade for his acquaintances, business associates, and friends. This suffocating existence was a stark contrast to her independent nature, and she felt trapped, like a bird in a gilded cage.

Louise felt smothered in her new married life, her potential squandered in a loveless marriage. Societal expectations had conditioned her to rely on her husband economically, compromising her dignity and autonomy. She refused to suffer in silence, having always lived life on her own terms, and began to contemplate a different future, one where she could reclaim her independence and rediscover her true self.

Betty Friedan's seminal book "Feminine Mystique" (1963) aptly captured the discontent of married women, dubbing it "the problem that has no name" (19). This phenomenon wasn't unique to American housewives; women worldwide shared the same sentiments. Louise, trapped in a loveless marriage, exemplified this malaise. She felt suffocated, having lost her individuality in the opulent yet stifling atmosphere of her home.

Seeking distraction, Louise hired a secretary, but her emptiness persisted. She embarked on an affair with John, not intending to marry or pursue a serious relationship. This act was a desperate attempt to fill the void in her life. Sarah admired Louise's boldness, fascinated by her ability to redefine marriage on her own terms. Sarah noted, "To force marriage into a mould of

one's own, while still preserving the name of marriage—it seemed an enterprise worth consideration" (164).

Ultimately, Louise broke free from her suffocating marriage, moving out of Stephen's house never to return. She reclaimed control of her life, shattering patriarchal expectations by having an affair with John Connel. This marked a significant shift in societal attitudes, departing from the days when an unfaithful wife was publicly shamed with a scarlet letter A. Women in the late 1960s and 1970s began to challenge patriarchal norms, refusing to be bound by them.

The title "A Summer Bird Cage" perfectly captures the author's intention to show how marriage can feel like a prison for women. Sarah sees examples of unhappy marriages all around her, including her sister Louise's and her own mother's. Her mother gave up her dreams and desires to become a wife and mother, which was expected of her at that time.

But times are changing, and women are starting to stand up for their rights. They're realizing they don't have to justify their existence just because they're married or have children. Sarah's generation is different from her mother's. They have more freedom to choose their own paths, pursue careers, and get educated. Sarah and her sister Louise are both Oxford graduates, which show how far women have come.

The novel was written during a time when women were starting to fight for their rights. Radical Feminists believed that marriage was unfair to women and kept them trapped. But women like Sarah and Louise are breaking free from these old ideas. They're taking control of their lives and making their own choices.

Sarah says, "The days are over, thank God, when a woman justifies her existence by marrying. At least that is true until she has children" (68). This means she's happy that women are no longer defined just by their marriage and children. They're more than that, and they deserve to be happy and fulfilled. The novel shows how women are changing and growing, and how they're fighting for their rights and freedom.

The conversation between Sarah and her mother highlights the significant social changes that occurred during their time. Sarah's mother reflects on the opportunities afforded to her daughters, which were unavailable to her:

"Haven't I just said that you must lead your own life? After all, that's why we sent you off to Oxford, it was always me who said you two must go --- I don't know what I wouldn't have given for the opportunities you've been given. Your father wasn't too keen, believe me. In my day, education was kept for the boys, you know." (57)

This poignant exchange underscores the transformative shift in women's access to education and independence. Sarah's mother acknowledges the sacrifices she made and the limitations she faced, emphasizing the importance of her daughters forging their own paths. The quote highlights the generational differences and the progress made towards gender equality, as Sarah and her sister Louise pursue opportunities that were previously denied to their mother.

Sarah's ambivalence towards marriage is evident in her thoughts: "It is only now, at the time of writing (or rather, indeed, rewriting) that it occurs to me that I may have been simply delaying the problem of marriage...in fact I suppose that I will marry Francis. I have always supposed so. It's unlikely that I could ever love anybody else. But don't take this as meaning that all was straight and tidy between us--- all was on the contrary tears and separation, and I had never so much as mentioned the idea of marriage to my family" (68). Her uncertainty stems from witnessing unhappy marriages, leading her to question the institution altogether: "I began to wonder if I myself would ever dare to get married. There were so many dangers" (171).

Sarah values her independence and freedom, hesitant to relinquish control over her life. Her self-sufficiency is evident in her preference for carrying her own luggage and doing things the "hard way" (8). She admits, "I'm a menace on holidays or journeys, I can't enjoy myself unless I do everything the hard way." This autonomy is threatened by the idea of marriage, leading to her ambivalence.

One evening, Sarah observes John putting his arms around Louise, further solidifying her doubts about marriage. Her observations of others' relationships illuminate her own views, revealing a deep-seated fear of surrendering her independence.

Sarah sometimes feels lonely, but she reminds herself that she enjoys being single. She thinks: "I felt acutely lonely: everyone had lovers and babies and husbands but me. But the loneliness didn't make me feel miserable: I almost enjoyed it, as the dreary edge was taken off the sensation by the darkness and glamour of the night, and the strangeness of being with my sister and her man. Nothing so strange is ever really unbearable" (163).

Sarah believes her life is fulfilling without a husband and children. She's ambitious and knows she needs to move to a big city for job opportunities. Her mother encourages her to go, wanting Sarah to have the freedom she never had. So, Sarah moves to London, where she starts a new life.

Sarah lives with Gill in a flat, which is unusual because they're both single women. Most women at that time were expected to get married and have children to be happy. But Sarah wants to be independent and make her own choices. She values her freedom and personal space.

When Sarah has a small argument with Stella, it shows that she's determined to maintain her independence. Seeing her friends' unhappy marriages makes her even more sure that she doesn't want to get married. Sarah, Louise, and Gill are strong women who want to live life on their own terms. They don't want to follow societal expectations and instead prioritize their own happiness and selfhood.

The novel shows that these women are brave and want to be themselves, without conforming to traditional norms. They want to discover who they are and live life authentically, without sacrificing their individuality. Here are the last four lines:

Through their experiences, the novel highlights the importance of self-discovery, and individuality. These women refuse to compromise their values and aspirations, instead forging their own paths and creating lives that truly reflect their selves. In doing so, they pave the way

for future generations of women to embrace their independence and selfhood. They create a new legacy of strong, independent women who value their personal space and selfhood.

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