

Women's Empowerment

LeSueur poses the question as to whether women's empowerment is more fully realized through collective efforts versus individual actions. When Clara passes, all the women from the street and the sewing project pay tribute by washing her and finding an appropriate dress for burial purposes. They even compared her to "a palace wall of silver" (LeSueur 178). As the event of birth unfolds; the Girl begins labor and she isn't concerned whether an ambulance comes or not. The issue of her personal health is suppressed because of the feelings of safety from the group. Just as life has left, it is also about to begin. There is something much bigger manifesting among the women who initially have come together to pay homage to Clara.

Sara and Amelia announce they want to have a memorial; then a mass meeting in order to let their voices be heard in the whole city (79). Women began telling one another about occurrences in the relief office and how their collective experiences involved a common societal oppressor. They seem to get excited and motivated; asking who killed Clara and more importantly, who was killing them (180). This exhilaration and inspiration was totally empowering for the Girl and all the other women.

Amelia delivers the Girls' baby right on Belle's bed while she is holding Butch's Mother's hand. The Girl says "the women surrounding her seemed to breathe with her, a kind of great wind through their bodies like wind in woods" (181). These are all examples of women's closeness and recognition of community. They were all so thrilled when she delivered a baby girl. Without the support and skills of women this new baby

may not have had a chance in life. The Girl says “she turned golden as Clara, even her wet hair” (181). So, she named her Clara. The Girl describes a kind of humming all around her; and how she sees her mother in all the women; the bearing and suffering in us all, and how it made her feel fierce (181). Here again is another demonstration of female collective empowerment.

The umbilical cord was kept because Butch’s Mother said this way the child would always be able to find her way home. She also kept the afterbirth because of the protein content. Nothing was wasted and everything about this birth had value, worth, and connectedness. “As the Girl looked at her new baby she saw the tiny face of her Mother and then gave her a full breast of milk”(182). This was so beautiful because throughout the book these women never had enough milk when they needed or wanted it most. This was a complete symbolization of the societal ills of this era. Yet, in the end she had everything she needed, milk, support of the women, a new baby from the love of her life. This chapter was so full of events which capture newly grasped communal camaraderie, that it is without a doubt that women’s empowerment is more fully realized through combined efforts.