



# Rejuvenation From Adulthood Blues: An Analysis Of Marian Keyes' *Angels*

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## Abstract

An identity crisis emerges when an individual becomes uncertain about their societal role and lacks clear guidance for shaping their personality. This confusion arises when one loses sight of their life's purpose, initiating an identity crisis. An individual's sense of identity is crucial for understanding their life's meaning. Coined by Erik Erikson, the term 'identity crisis' is explained as a phase where a person grapples with resolving uncertainties during their middle age. This struggle can lead to a sense of detachment and uncertainty, fostering pessimism and disorder. In Marian Keyes' novel *Angels*, the main character, Maggie, becomes ensnared in adulthood blues. She undergoes a miscarriage and misinterprets her husband's grief as infidelity, causing her to lose her self-awareness and descend into chaos. As the story progresses, Maggie eventually regains her self-identity by dispelling her illusions, resulting in a renewed sense of clarity and self-assurance.

**Keywords:** Self-identity, Hallucination, Cognition, Negative traits.

Miscarriage can affect individuals from all walks of life, and its causes are diverse. Women who experience miscarriages often endure significant psychological distress. They grapple with intense emotional turmoil, directing blame towards themselves, which can subsequently lead to arguments, depressive episodes, feelings of isolation, and a sense of betrayal. Observers who are not directly experiencing this turmoil may struggle to grasp the reasons behind the affected person's behavior. Coping strategies differ, with some

individuals attempting to mask their anguish by immersing themselves in busy schedules, while others confront their emotions head-on, experiencing profound emotional breakdowns and shedding tears as they process their grief.

However, a considerable number of individuals endeavor to progress beyond their loss. Those who have experienced miscarriage often find themselves sidelined, discouraged from openly expressing their grief. Society tends to believe that diverting one's attention away from the situation can yield a more positive outcome, aiding in the suppression of distressing events. However, this approach is not an appropriate method for managing depression, as it merely creates a facade to mask genuine emotions. Evading these feelings can exacerbate their persistence, as avoidance can intensify the haunting nature of the thoughts. Concealing the pain within oneself is an unattainable task, particularly for women who find it arduous to suppress their emotional suffering.

As per the laws of nature, women are inherently inclined to vocalize their distress. Once they unburden themselves by sharing their sorrows with a compassionate listener, they often experience a sense of relief and rejuvenation. In times of anguish and loss, having a supportive presence beside them who comprehends their suffering and the weight of their loss proves indispensable. . “One of the biggest differences between men and women is how they cope with stress. Men become increasingly focused and withdrawn while women become increasingly overwhelmed and emotionally involved... She, however, wants to find relief by talking about the problems” (Gray 31).

Expressing one's thoughts and emotions is both beneficial and preferable. When a person vocalizes their experiences, they inadvertently engage in self-listening, recognizing the repetitive nature of their narration. Over time, this repetition can lead them to feel uneasy about reiterating the same topic, prompting them to shift from verbalizing to introspective thinking. This transition encourages them to scrutinize their circumstances, seeking to assign meaning to their challenges. Consequently, they are driven to make informed choices that enhance their understanding of what lies ahead. On the contrary, when individuals suppress their pain and hardships, the need for expression doesn't disappear; rather, it finds alternative outlets. Some may channel their

energy into upholding moral values and principles as a coping mechanism, while others may embark on journeys of self-discovery, exploring new lifestyles and perspectives.

The conflict between reality and imagination possesses the potential to compel individuals grappling with depression to venture into uncharted territories. In the case of Maggie, who battles with depression, this struggle propels her to channel her anguish through unconventional means of expression. Throughout human existence, there are moments when events unfold according to our aspirations, leading to pleasurable experiences that foster contentment and a feeling of achievement. Such is the intricate tapestry of human life, an ongoing phenomenon spanning eras, from the emergence of modern humanity to the present day. Over the ages, individuals have exhibited a pattern of progression, evolving along a particular trajectory until a certain juncture, after which transformations occur. In a similar vein, Maggie, who once found fulfillment in her pursuit of perfection, has also undergone changes as time has progressed, manifesting alterations in her character and behavior that now exhibit a more lighthearted disposition.

In the novel *Angels*, the central character Maggie is portrayed as an educated, meticulous woman with a strong sense of organization. However, this cautious nature also brings about a significant amount of anxiety. The pursuit of perfection demands heightened effort, creating a cycle where the more one strives for flawlessness, the more demanding the process becomes. In a world driven by survival instincts, individuals go to great lengths to establish a sense of security and comfort in their surroundings.

For the perfectionist, adaptability and staying up-to-date are essential qualities, as they must harmonize with their environment. Maggie stands out as a dependable daughter in contrast to her siblings, especially in the eyes of Mrs. Walsh. She exemplifies perfection in Mrs. Walsh's perspective, making her the natural choice for seeking advice on various matters. In numerous instances across the novels, Maggie is the first to offer her unwavering support in times of crisis, a pillar of strength for the Walsh family.

Maggie assumes the role of a steadfast support system for her sisters during their periods of adversity. However, Maggie's own experience of miscarriage has left a profound psychological mark on her. Across prior novels such as *Watermelon*, *Rachel's Holiday*, and *Anybody Out There*, Maggie consistently embodies

responsibility and nurturing tendencies. She has also become something of a favored figure for Mammy Walsh, engaging in household chores and offering assistance to her sisters in various capacities.

Maggie is blessed with a compassionate and understanding husband named Garv, who consistently lends his support in a multitude of situations and remains a steadfast presence by her side. His benevolence extends to assisting her sister Anna in securing a respectable job. During times when Rachel grapples with drug addiction, Maggie's husband stands as a guiding force, steering her towards a path of improvement. Evidently, Maggie has assumed a maternal role for her sisters, surpassing even the affection of Mammy Walsh.

However, her experience of miscarriage shatters her emotional equilibrium, prompting a significant shift in her demeanor. She undergoes a profound transformation, deviating from the moral values that had hitherto defined her life. The protective circle she had woven around herself begins to unravel, leading her to take an impromptu journey to Los Angeles. This escape provides her with the necessary breathing space to mend and rediscover her sense of self amidst the turbulence of her emotions.

Cognition revolves around the process of thought. The events that unfold in our surroundings are often influenced by our own patterns of thinking. Societal beliefs often stem from myths that are passed down from generation to generation, originating with the wisdom of our elders. These beliefs dictate a set of guidelines and behaviors that individuals are expected to adhere to. When an individual deviates from these established norms and lives according to their own principles, it can appear quite unconventional to those who continue to uphold the established code.

This act of defying conventional norms often occurs when an individual faces a loss or experiences pain, a state commonly known as an identity crisis. The challenges that manifest within their circumstances can prompt them to veer away from established norms and adopt an alternative lifestyle. During this period of transition, their psyche may struggle to reconcile with reality, leading them to yearn for a more dramatic existence that seems to offer an escape from their problems. This illusionary approach serves as a temporary respite, enabling them to momentarily detach from their troubles.

To confront the truth, individuals can rely on cognitive behavioral theory to reorient their thought processes toward a more grounded perspective. This theory posits that the cognitive processes occurring within the mind can induce chemical alterations that contribute to feelings of depression. Serotonin, often referred to as the “happy chemical,” is a neurotransmitter found in the brain that contributes to feelings of happiness in humans. Insufficient levels of serotonin can lead to the onset of depression, addictive behaviors, and even thoughts of self-harm. Individuals grappling with depression often turn to antidepressant medication to regulate and restore the balance of serotonin in their brain, thereby ameliorating their emotional state.

Experiencing a miscarriage had a profound impact on Maggie, leaving her deeply traumatized and prompting her to question the loss she had endured. The previously meticulous aspects of her life, including her dietary choices, work environment, and personal time management, spiraled into disarray. Her innate perfectionism crumbled under the weight of her sorrows, leading to a sudden decline in serotonin levels, subsequently triggering a state of depression. Serotonin, often referred to as the “happy chemical,” regulates the balance between feelings of joy and sadness within the human body. In the midst of her emotional turmoil, Maggie’s suspicions began to extend to her husband, causing her to misinterpret his grief-stricken response as an act of betrayal. Her ability to fathom the depth of sorrow he harbored within him was compromised as she grappled with her own tumultuous emotions.

One of the biggest differences between men and women is how they cope with stress. Men become increasingly focused and withdrawn while women become increasingly overwhelmed and emotionally involved. At these times, a man’s needs for feeling good are different from a woman’s. He feels better by solving problems while she feels better by talking about problems. Not understanding and accepting these differences create unnecessary friction in our relationships. (Gray 31)

The above statement highlights the distinctive manner in which men and women express their grief. Women often seek an empathetic ear to share their sorrows, not necessarily seeking solutions but desiring someone who will listen and understand. On the other hand, men typically require time and personal space to recuperate from their emotional pain. They often opt for solitude, distancing themselves from social

interactions. In some instances, they may even withhold their feelings from their spouses, leading to confusion and suspicion on the part of their wives. This behavioral difference can sometimes lead wives to mistakenly speculate that their husbands might be involved in extramarital affairs.

Similar dynamics unfold between Maggie and her husband. The miscarriage casts a heavy shadow over their family, ushering in a period of profound upheaval. Overwhelmed by her anguish, Maggie finds herself yearning for the solace of Garv's affection and support. However, unbeknownst to her, her husband is grappling with his own internal struggles in response to the situation. The abrupt alteration in her husband's emotional availability prompts Maggie to perceive his behavior through a negative lens.

Misinterpreting her husband's grieving phase as an affair, Maggie begins to distance herself from Garv. Unfortunately, this emotional detachment paves the way for a genuine affair to develop with another woman. Despite Garv's earnest attempts at reconciliation, Maggie's misconceptions create an insurmountable barrier between them. Her battle with depression impairs her ability to comprehend and engage in productive communication, rendering her closed off to reasoning and understanding. Consequently, the strain on their relationship becomes unbearable for Maggie, leading her to ultimately give up on her marriage. The overwhelming series of emotional blows also takes a toll on her mental well-being, causing her to experience a rapid decline in her mental stability.

Maggie, once a dedicated and diligent worker at her office, experiences a significant decline in her work-related enthusiasm. This abrupt shift in her emotional state within the workplace creates a sense of discomfort, rendering her unable to maintain the level of concentration she exhibited in the past. It is a natural progression for a woman to find her focus wavering in the aftermath of a profound heartbreak. The miscarriage not only shatters her aspirations but also upends her life entirely.

Maggie finds herself grappling with conflicting emotions. She struggles to console herself over her own loss, while simultaneously finding it challenging to comprehend her husband's mourning process. He adopts a facade of calmness, striving to preserve a sense of normalcy in their lives. However, his seemingly indifferent demeanor contributes to Maggie's growing sense of unease, further exacerbating her turmoil. As a result of

these conflicting emotions and the strain she is under, her once gentle and tender nature transforms into a more unpredictable and assertive disposition.

The unexpected turn of events proves highly unwelcome in Maggie's life, throwing her off balance almost immediately. In the wake of these upheavals, she arrives at a decisive conclusion: to separate from her husband. This decision is rooted in her overwhelming need to find justification for severing their relationship. Ultimately, the catalyst for her departure emerges when she faces the devastating news of losing her job. Initially, shock courses through her as she grapples with the realization that she has been dismissed from her position. "I was a pretty good worker – not so good that I was ever in danger of winning the Employee of the Month Award, but fairly reliable and productive. 'You want me to go?' I asked faintly. 'Yes'. 'When?' 'Now would be good.' Oddly enough, it was losing my job that finally made me decide to leave Garv" (*Angels* 20-21).

The above lines suggest that Maggie is earnestly yearning for a respite from her usual, demanding routine. Her mode of grieving takes on an almost hedonistic quality, where she immerses herself in the present moment to escape the weight of her past experiences. The further she distances herself from her usual responsibilities, the greater the sense of relief and security she derives.

In certain instances, when individuals who have held themselves to high standards of perfection face extensive hardship, they might place blame upon themselves for their perfectionism. This leads them to question if they have squandered their lives by adhering to the facade of being virtuous. Often, these personalities align with the superego archetype, and when confronted with a catastrophic event, their once unblemished veneer of perfection becomes questionable. This process can lead them to uncover aspects of their hidden id personalities, which emerge in response to these adverse circumstances.

To escape from the harsh realities, individuals often initiate a fresh chapter in their lives by embracing their latent id personalities. In daily interactions, it is not uncommon to come across people who undergo profound transformations following a significant tragedy. This response is both usual and understandable, as maintaining an unchanged demeanor in the aftermath of a major pain tends to suppress the emotional turmoil within, potentially leading to its internal escalation and subsequent mental distress.

Among the vast expanse of existence, acceptance stands as a monumental feat. Rejecting or overlooking something comes naturally, but embracing reality presents a formidable challenge. Opting for obliviousness might seem like the simpler path to navigate life, but confronting the truth is akin to consuming a freshly picked bitter gourd. Within the context of the novel *Angels*, Maggie displays a readiness to lay blame on Garv, yet she remains hesitant to engage in a deeper inquiry into his perspective:

We didn't exchange a word for the rest of the evening. Perhaps I should have been shrieking for details – who was she? How long? But at the best of times that wasn't my way and after all we'd gone through over the past while, I'd no fight left in me... I'd been born without the diva gene, so when devastation hit me I usually kept it inside, turning it over and over, trying to make sense of it. (*Angels* 14)

The preceding text offers insight into Maggie's personality – she displays introverted tendencies and exhibits reluctance when it comes to addressing the issues that trouble her. Simultaneously, she doesn't possess the willingness to merely let go; instead, she feels compelled to repeatedly ponder over matters in her quest for the truth. While the path to uncovering reality necessitates open communication, Maggie chooses to internalize her inquiries, allowing negativity to taint her perception of the events unfolding around her.

Maggie finds herself utterly adrift, her senses dulled by the weight of her distress. Unbeknownst to her, she has become ensnared by the grip of stress and depression. In a puzzling turn of events, Maggie experiences hallucinations, mistaking her condition for a bout of flu. Seeking solace, she embraces an extended period of rest, only to be met with the startling revelation that her perceived physical ailment is in fact a manifestation of the mental strain she is grappling with:

I'd never believe it was possible to become sick from sadness. I'd thought that was a nonsense concept confined to melodramatic Victorian novels. But sometime over the course of the following week I understood that there was nothing wrong with me- nothing physical, in case. My temperature was normal, and how come no one else had caught my flu? Whatever was



wrong with me, it was emotional. Mourning sickness. My body was fighting my separation from Garv as though it was hostile Organism. (*Angels* 41)

In this scenario, the cloud of negative thoughts stemming from depression cast an illusion of illness, masking the underlying truth. In reality, Maggie is in a state of mourning due to her husband's separation. The emotional chasm that has grown between them sends sharp pangs into her heart, with the reverberations unconsciously manifesting as physical sensations. Unbeknownst to Maggie, the source of her affliction is rooted in grief until she directly encounters its effects. The negative thought patterns generated by depression inadvertently materialize as physical symptoms, which she only comprehends upon experiencing them.

According to Dr. Joseph Murphy the things which we think subconsciously will happen in the real world: "Your subconscious mind is the seat of your emotions. It is the creative mind. If you think good, good will follow; If you think evil, evil will follow. This is the way your mind works" (Murphy 17). Maggie finds herself caught in a similar predicament, as she unknowingly internalizes the concept of mourning sickness within her subconscious, and this very belief begins to materialize in her experience.

Maggie possesses a tendency to seek support from others, often leaning on them during periods of depression. She adopts a strategy of keeping her mind consistently occupied, ensuring that thoughts of the past remain at bay. Contemplating her estranged husband, Garv, intensifies her emotional turmoil, reaching a point where her suffering becomes agonizing. This anguish is so acute that it drives her to physically manifest her distress, causing her to grind her teeth until they ache and scratch her arms to the point of bleeding. The manifestation of eczema underscores her inability to rein in the overwhelming itchiness, providing her with a momentary diversion from her heartache. "But what goes in must come out and my pain invariably re-emerged in the form of scaly, flaking, weeping eczema on my right arm- it was a cast- iron barometer of my emotional state and that night it tingled and itched so much that I scratched until it bled" (*Angels* 14).

Maggie embarks on a relentless quest for love through various avenues. She attempts to find solace by indulging in shopping sprees, followed by seeking refuge in parties and revisiting past relationships. In a surprising turn, she even explores a lesbian relationship, all in her pursuit for comfort. Her methods, however,

yield a series of unsettling outcomes, leaving her feeling disoriented. Maggie's nature is not one of openness; instead, she seeks escape and diversion from the harsh realities she faces. This quality propels her to part ways with her husband, a decision she doesn't lament. She places significant trust in her own perceptions and hesitates to address her doubts head-on, preferring to distance herself from him instead. The further she strays from reality, the more her true understanding eludes her. Amidst this turmoil, Maggie loses her bearings and finds herself on an unfamiliar path. Her trajectory becomes uncertain as she drifts away from her former self, moving towards an alluring yet uncertain future.

Maggie's confusion leads her to explore a lesbian relationship with Lara. During an intimate moment, she comes to realize her misconception and recognizes her lack of genuine interest in women. Her attempts to extricate herself from the situation illustrate how the yearning for love can distort one's perception and obscure their true inclinations. This narrative also underscores how the pursuit of affection can cloud one's self-awareness, leading them to misinterpret their own feelings.

As her awareness dawns and she comprehends that Garv is the sole person capable of truly understanding her, Maggie embarks on a journey of relinquishing her ego. This marks the commencement of her efforts to bridge the gap between them, paving the way for resolution and the reclamation of her sense of self. Throughout her recovery period, she endures significant challenges, each contributing to her personal growth. This adversity serves as a catalyst for her self-discovery, allowing her to uncover her authentic identity. As Maggie confronts her difficulties head-on, she not only reclaims the pieces of her life but also undergoes a transformative process that propels her forward. The resolution of her problems serves to reaffirm her self-worth. While problems may cast a shadow over our existence, they lack the power to shatter our lives irreparably. The key lies in addressing these challenges with a clear heart and an unwavering mind, finding solutions that lead to personal progress.

The process of overcoming depression offers the opportunity to reclaim a lost sense of identity. Maggie had become adrift, losing her sense of direction in life. Her search was centered on finding a protective cocoon of love and care from her environment. Within her confusion, Maggie grappled with a lack of maturity that hindered her ability to analyze the world around her. Engaging in the pursuit of parties and yearning for

companionship, Maggie sought solace and escape. Her longing for companionship was fueled by an aversion to loneliness, driving her to continuously search for a suitable partner. Yet, when her expectations fell short and her illusions shattered, Maggie's perceptions shifted, and she finally recognized reality. As her false fantasies dissolved, Maggie initiated a reconciliation with her husband, Garv. This marked a turning point, allowing them to rekindle their long-lost relationship. With renewed determination, they embraced the opportunity to rebuild their bond and chart a path toward a content and joyous life together.

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