

# Popular Mechanics

Psychological Lens Character Analysis Presentation

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# Short Story Summary

*Popular Mechanics* by Raymond Carver depicts a heated argument between a man and a woman. The man aggressively packs his belongings to leave the residence they both reside in while the woman berates him in the process. The argument escalates as the man and the woman begin a physical struggle between themselves as they both want sole ownership of their baby. The story ends with the argument being “decided” as both parents pull on the baby’s limbs. One could assume that the baby dies due to the physical trauma caused by both parents.



# Character Summary



The woman is the mother to the baby, which is the point of focus in the story. Throughout the story, she is very emotional and struggles to reason during this time of distress. The woman wants to prevent the man from taking the baby only because she wants to keep the child for her selfish desires; she only wants the baby so the man won't be able to take him. This desire demonstrates itself through her Id, Superego, and Ego. The woman is a static character, as her ideologies do not change throughout the events that take place.

# Beginning Summary

The reader is introduced to the woman and the man arguing while the gloomy atmosphere sets the mood. The argument gets heated as the man begins packing up his belongings while the woman verbally berates him: “He was in the bedroom pushing clothes into a suitcase when she came to the door... He kept on putting his things into the suitcase.” (Carver 1).



# Beginning-ID



The woman impulsively acts defensively towards the man and attempts to prevent him from recognizing the fear and panic behind her eyes. As he's packing his stuff, she impulsively berates him to make herself feel more self-assured: "I'm glad you're leaving! I'm glad you're leaving! she said. Do you hear?" (Carver 1). Her insults are impulsive and satisfy her immediate needs, even though they aren't morally correct.

# Beginning-Superego

The woman notices their baby's picture on the bed as the argument begins to deescalate. She decides to pick it up and hide it from the man, as she views that as the morally correct decision: "Then she noticed the baby's picture on the bed and picked it up." (Carver 1). Hiding the baby's photo is morally correct to the woman as, in her mind, it'll prevent the man from thinking about taking away their baby from her.



# Beginning-Ego



The woman begins to experience the consequences of her actions after the man completely ignores her constant barrage of insults and stares away from her: “She began to cry. You can’t even look me in the face, can you?” (Carver 1). The woman does not genuinely want the man to leave, but she doesn’t want to show anyone her weaknesses. Her ego is tasked with satisfying the urge to protect herself and her family in a socially acceptable way.

# Middle Summary

As the man notices that the woman is trying to hide the baby from him, he becomes enraged. He begins to demand to have the baby, to which the woman refuses: "I want the baby. I'll get someone to come for his things." "You're not touching this baby," she said." (Carver 1). As the argument slowly begins to cross a line from verbal to almost physical, the woman attempts to keep the baby out of the man's reach, and the two start a physical struggle for the child.





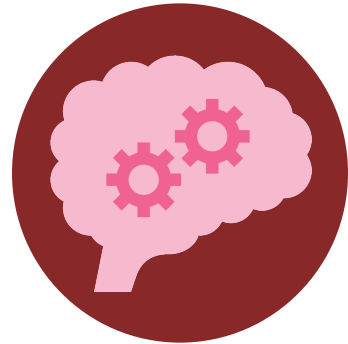
# Middle-ID



Overpowered by anger and the desire to keep the baby out of the man's hands, the woman grips the baby and holds him over in a corner behind the stove, trying to place him out of the man's reach. The man begins to reach for the child, which makes the woman's ID take over as she attempts to hog the baby, knocking down objects in the process: "The baby was red-faced and screaming. In the scuffle they knocked down a flowerpot that hung behind the stove." (Carver 1). Her Id satisfies the urge to prevent the man from grabbing onto her the baby and taking him away.

# Middle-Superego

When the man says he wants the baby and moves towards the woman, the woman's Superego takes over to protect the baby. Therefore, she believes it is morally incorrect for the man to take the infant from her, so her Superego tells her to intervene. The woman thinks that he is a danger to her and the baby, so she decides that she needs to keep the baby. Consequently, she attempts to get him to leave: "Get out of here!" (Carver 2).



# Middle-Ego



The woman realizes that she cannot keep the child from the man despite her superego's need to protect the baby. She tries to figure out what to do and how to prevent him from acquiring the baby. Her ID and superego are generally evenly balanced, and she attempts to move the baby further away from the danger and keep the infant with her: "She took a step back into the kitchen." (Carver 2). She manages to momentarily save the baby from the man's grasp to satisfy her moral and instinctual needs.

# End Summary

The fight becomes more intense and physical, and the baby is agitated and hurt by the mother and father. They grab pull the baby back and forth and become more angered. The man tries to acquire the infant: "He crowded her into the wall then, trying to break her grip." (Carver 2). Finally, they both firmly grip and pull the baby, which leads to a dire ending.



# End-ID



The woman acts defensively with the help of her Id each time the man reaches for the baby. As the fight progresses, the man tightens his hands on the baby. The woman and man both pull the baby towards themselves: “[The woman] would have it, this baby. She grabbed for the baby’s other arm.” (Carver 2). She tries to defend herself and get the infant back from the determined and angered man.

# End-Superego

As the quarrel continues, the woman realizes that the baby might be getting hurt by their rough actions and accuses the man: “You’re hurting the baby...” (Carver 2). Her moral intuition tells her that the infant needs to be treated gently, so when she notices the red-faced, screaming baby, she is inclined to act. She also wants to acquire the baby from the man and blames him for hurting it, attempting to instil guilt and protect the child.



# End-Ego



Despite the woman's efforts, the man does not let go. She tries her best to grasp the infant's arms. However, the man notices and reciprocates the action: "He felt the baby slipping out of his hands, and he pulled back very hard. In this manner, the issue was decided." (Carver 2). Based on this textual evidence, one could assume that the baby was hurt or even killed by his parents. In this case, the woman's ID wins over her superego's urges because instead of protecting the baby from being hurt, her instincts to win the fight lead to a terrible conclusion.

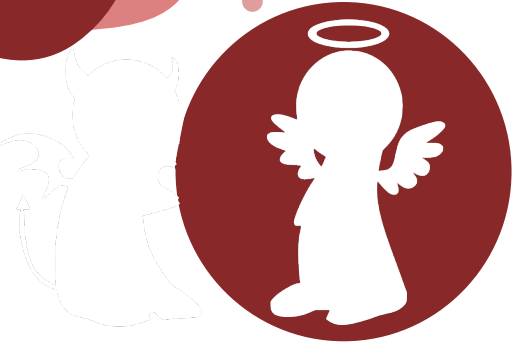
# What does the ID, Superego and Ego reveal about the character's identity?

## ID

The woman's ID reveals that her anger and frustration easily influence her. It also demonstrates that her primitive instincts lead to aggressive actions and language, which sometimes overpower her rational and moral thinking: "I'm so glad you're leaving! She began to cry." (Carver 1).







## Superego

The Superego shows that the woman has moral standards and expectations and instinctually wants to protect the baby: “Oh, oh’ she said, looking at the baby.” (Carver 1). The fight leads to many moral dilemmas and reveals that she believes she deserves the baby and that the man is harmful to the infant.

## Ego

The woman’s Ego demonstrates that despite wanting to make the right moral decisions, her primal aggressive and protective instincts overpower her values: “Get away, get away!’ she cried.” (Carver 2). There are many examples when she does morally wrong things because she is too focused on satisfying her ID’s needs.



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