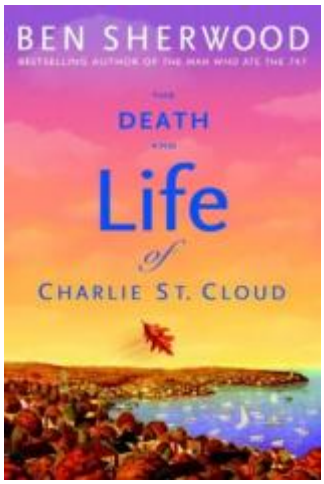
bookreporter

The Death and Life of Charlie St. Cloud

by Ben Sherwood



About the Book

Ben Sherwood captured our imaginations with his magical debut novel, **The Man Who Ate the 747**. Now he brings us the unforgettable story of **Charlie St. Cloud**, who survived a tragic accident that would make him see the world in a whole new way. Though his little brother Sam did not live through the horrific collision on that moonlit night, Charlie has discovered a miraculous way to keep him close. Then Charlie meets Tess, a woman so beautiful and fearless that she makes him yearn to embrace the land of the living once again. But she doesn't realize she's in terrible jeopardy, facing impossible dangers that only Charlie can help her defeat. With a love that transcends everything you may have believed about life and death, Charlie embarks on a spellbinding adventure to save her, and revive his own heart as well.

The questions, discussion topics, and author biography that follow are intended to enhance your reading of Ben Sherwood's **The Death and Life of Charlie St. Cloud**. We hope they will enrich your experience of this enchanting novel.

Discussion Guide

1. The Death and Life of Charlie St. Cloud opens with fireman Florio Ferrente's recounting of several lifesaving miracles. What role does Florio believe Divine intervention plays in his rescue work? Do you believe in miracles?

2. The novel's title and epigraphs capture the notion that conventional definitions of life and death are tremendously limited, and many of the characters find themselves "in between" these realms, literally or figuratively. Which of the book's characters do you perceive as being most alive—in any sense of the word?

3. What does the sustained baseball ritual at sunset between Charlie and Sam tell us about the power of love, and fear?

4. Discuss the significance of the events leading up to the car accident. Is it possible to explain the true "cause" of the crash? How do these ideas affect Charlie in the years after that night?

5. Compare the various spirits Charlie observes while he's on the job in the cemetery. What seems to determine their demeanor?

6. In what ways do Tess and Charlie bear similar emotional scars when they meet? Why does Tess crave self-sufficiency at all costs? What motivates her to set off on such a daunting around-the-world mission?

7. Ben Sherwood worked as a television news producer for many years. Do you detect any journalistic

influences in the novel, or do you think Sherwood's fiction reflects the opposite of a reporter's point of view?

8. How does Charlie's experience and special gift compare with your own beliefs about the afterlife?

9. In each character's storyline, what distinctions are made between accident and fate, between chance and destiny? What ultimately saves Tess? From what was Charlie saved?

10. The novel contains several bullfighting references, especially in the name of Tess's boat, Querencia (the spot in the ring where the bull feels protected and secure). Why is the matador analogy an apt one for Charlie and Tess? What defines your querencia?

11. One of the main characters in Ben Sherwood's previous novel, **The Man Who Ate the 747**, goes to incredible lengths in a case of unrequited love, while the novel's protagonist finds his life transformed when he unexpectedly meets his soul mate. In what way does The Death and **Life of Charlie St. Cloud** enhance and deepen these relationship ideas?

12. Although this novel is given a realistic setting and is populated by ordinary men and women, the plot is quite extraordinary. Why did the author choose such an idyllic small-town backdrop?

13. What is the effect of ending the novel with a point of view other than Charlie's? Describe Florio's role and approach as narrator. Does Florio's function as storyteller have much in common with his earthly vocation?

14. If you were able to visit a lost loved one or friend in the same way Charlie connects with Sam, whom would you like to see? In the novel, spirits take on an idealized appearance. How do you think your loved one would appear to you? How would you spend your time together?

15. Sherwood dedicated to this novel to his new wife and to the memory of his father. In what ways are the ideas of love and loss related?

Author Bio

Ben Sherwood is also the author of THE MAN WHO ATE THE 747, a national bestselling novel that was translated into 13 languages and is being adapted both as a major motion picture and a musical. An award-winning journalist, he has worked for NBC and ABC News, and his writing has appeared in *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, and *Los Angeles Times*. Educated at Harvard and Oxford, he is currently at work on a third book of fiction. He and his wife divide their time between New York and Los Angeles. Visit his website at www.bensherwood.com.

Critical Praise

"Deeply romantic yet profound . . . full of suspense, intrigue, and the twists and turns of true love. . . . In Tess Carroll Sherwood has created a real woman of beauty and strength, a woman readers will relate to and cherish. I loved it!"

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