

POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER IN KATHLEEN GLASGLOW'S NOVEL *GIRL IN PIECES*

Malisa Surayya MS, Purwarno Purwarno
Faculty of Literature, Universitas Islam Sumatera Utara
Medan, Indonesia
e-mail: purwarno@sastra.uisu.ac.id

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Abstract

This study aims to reveal the Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder in Kathleen Glasgow's Novel *Girl in Pieces*. It focuses on the PTSD experienced by the protagonist, Charlie Charlotte Davis. The main purpose of this study is to determine the factors of PTSD and the symptoms of PTSD experienced by Charlie Charlotte Davis. This study applies the theory of PTSD proposed by Rosenberg. In analyzing the topic, the researchers use qualitative research method to process and arranges the data. The types of data of the study are from two data sources, i.e. primary data and secondary data. The primary data are from the text of the novel *Girl in Pieces*. The researchers find sixteen data to be included in the analysis. The secondary data are taken from books and other sources related to the analysis such as articles on PTSD, literary theory, the author's biography, internet sites and other relevant information to the analysis of this study. The results of the study show that the factor of PTSD suffered by Charlie are due to psychological factors, such as her beloved father's death which always makes Charlie remember the sad event, her reminiscences about the past of herself and her beloved late father, which always haunt her that she always blames and harms herself, and always avoids memories that trigger her trauma. She also avoids people's questions that might make her remember the unpleasant events.

Keywords: avoidance symptoms; factors of PTSD; intrusion symptoms; symptoms of PTSD; psychological factors; sociological factors

1. Introduction

Every human can be affected by Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), based on age, gender, social level and occupation. According to National Institute of Mental Health (2020), some people develop Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) after experiencing a shocking, scary, or dangerous event. It is natural to feel afraid during and after a traumatic situation. Fear is a part of the body's normal "fight-or-flight" response, which helps us avoid or respond to potential danger. People may experience a range of reactions after trauma, and most will recover from their symptoms over time. Those who continue to experience symptoms may be diagnosed with PTSD.

PTSD can occur at any age, including children. Many terrible events could come from family, community, or friendship circles; for example, seeing with our own eyes the murder of someone, losing a person we love the most in our lives. Besides, it could be due to an act of bullying that can make us feel afraid or always overshadowed by the event and make us affected by PTSD. Scott (2001:98) states that people with PTSD usually experience ongoing depression, generalized phobias, social phobias, and excessive fear.

Girl in Pieces (2016) is a novel written by Kathleen Glasgow. It is the debut novel of Kathleen Glasgow published in the United States by Delacorte Press, an imprint of Random House Children's Books, a division of Penguin Random House LLC, New York. *Girl in Pieces* is a haunting story of a 17-year-old girl named Charlie who is suffered through an incredible number of terrible events that causes her to suffer PTSD. This amazing novel shares Charlie's story on her struggles to find ways to overcome her PTSD, which becomes the main focus of study.

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is a mental disorder that may occur in people who have experienced or witnessed traumatic events such as natural disasters, serious accidents, terrorist acts, or rape, or who are threatened with death, sexual violence, and have witnessed unpleasant events that could have come from people whom they love. According to Carlson and Ruzek (2013) based on the medical world and mental health experts, it is known that PTSD is a mental disorder that specifically arises due to traumatic experiences.

There are some reasons why the researchers are interested in carrying out their study on this topic. The first reason is that this topic is the dominant theme in the novel. Besides, PTSD is a stress disease that is very possible to happen in the daily lives. People often experience a number of unpleasant events in their lives. PTSD also causes people to be more introverted, difficult to get along with, difficult to feel love from others, often blame themselves and sometimes can also hurt themselves. Therefore, PTSD is considered a serious problem since it can endanger people's life. Besides, the factors and symptoms of PTSD are also reflected in this novel. Thus, it is a very interesting topic to be researched as it will be a number of useful significances for the readers.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

According to Carlson and Ruzek (2013), based on the medical world and mental health or mental health experts, it is known that PTSD is a mental disorder that specifically arises due to traumatic experiences. According to Suthamnirand et al. (2014), the main symptom of this disorder is still remembering events well as if the event is still happening, trying to avoid things related to the event, as well as emotions and negative thoughts because of it, which occur for more than 1 month after the traumatic event. Scott (2001: 98), states that people with PTSD usually experience persistent depression, generalized phobia, social phobia, as well as excessive fear. According to Hamblen (2006), the causes that influence the onset of PTSD in someone are how severe the traumatic event is, the reaction to the traumatic event, and the duration of the event that causes the trauma.

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is a psychiatric disorder that may occur in people who have experienced or witnessed a traumatic event such as a natural disaster, a serious accident, a terrorist act, war/combat, or rape or who have been

threatened with death, sexual violence or serious injury (Sunardi, 2007). People with PTSD may relive the event via intrusive memories, flashbacks and nightmares; avoid anything that reminds them of the trauma; and have anxious feelings they do not have before that are so intense that their lives are disrupted.

PTSD is a controversial concept that historically was viewed with suspicion by scientists and professionals, and only accepted as a scientifically valid phenomenon when it was included as a diagnosis in 1980 in the Third Edition of the American Psychiatric Association. The PTSD symptoms appear to involve changes in the brain and body's stress and mood regulation systems that have been identified in scientific neuroimaging research and that may have a genetic basis. PTSD often also involves serious problems with other forms of anxiety (such as panic or phobias), depression, anger and impulse management, and stress-related medical illness.

2.1.1 Factors of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

The nature of the traumatic stressor and how directly it is experienced can account for much of the differences in stress response. If the level of stress is high enough, then, the average person can be expected to develop some psychological difficulties (which may be either short-lived or long term) following a traumatic event. That is why the cause of post-traumatic stress disorder is related to so many factors.

According to Rosenberg and Kosslyn (2010: 317), there are two factors of PTSD, namely psychological factors and social factors. The two factors take a big role to lead someone to PTSD. Both of these factors can influence each other in particular ways and lead to PTSD.

a. Psychological Factors

Psychological factors that exist before the traumatic event occurs affect whether a person will develop PTSD. Such factors include a history of depression that the person has or other psychological disorders that they already have. Also, the beliefs the person has about himself or herself and the world can create vulnerability for PTSD; it makes them unable to control the stressors.

b. Social Factors

Social factors have a big role both before the traumatic event and afterward. Also, these social actors determine whether PTSD develops. The social factors include the additional stress of lower socioeconomic status and the level of social support provide to the person as a trauma victim.

Like other stressors in life, socioeconomic factors can affect an individual's ability to cope. People who need to worry about the food, clothing, and housing needs of themselves or their family members have fewer emotional resources to deal with traumatic events, and therefore are less likely to get through the difficulties without suffering from PTSD compared to more fortunate people. The level of social support to the person with a trauma can lower the possibility to develop PTSD. People who receive support from others immediately after a trauma have a lower risk of developing PTSD. According to Hatta (2016), a person can get PTSD after he or she has experienced events such as: being raped or sexually assaulted; hit or damaged by someone in the family or a victim of violent abuse; in an airplane or train accident; in a hurricane, or fire; in war; in the event where a thought arises one may be killed, or after seeing events. Sufferers of PTSD often have nightmares or frightening thoughts about their

experiences. They try to distance themselves from what reminds them of the experiences and may feel angry and distrustful or take things lightly about other people.

Brewin, et.al. (2000) state that the risk factors for experiencing PTSD are living in a traumatic and dangerous event, having a history of mental illness, getting injured, seeing people injured or killed, feeling scary, helpless, or extreme fear, not getting social support after the event dealing with additional stress after the event, such as cases of illness, loss of a loved one, and injury, or loss of a job or home.

2.1.2 Symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

Levers (2012) states that who continue to develop PTSD (Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder) after stress and traumatic events show characteristic signs of the disorder, which include re-experience (symptoms of experiencing relapse of the traumatic event), avoidance of the environment, and hyper arousal (*agitated*). Lever's claim is supported by Phoenix Australia (2021) in which it is said that PTSD, or posttraumatic stress disorder is a set of reactions that can occur after someone has been through a traumatic event, and the main symptoms of PTSD are:

- a. Re-living the traumatic event through distressing, unwanted memories, vivid nightmares and/or flashbacks. This can also include feeling very upset or having intense physical reactions such as heart palpitations or being unable to breathe when reminded of the traumatic event.
- b. Avoiding reminders of the traumatic event, including activities, places, people, thoughts or feelings that bring back memories of the trauma; negative thoughts and feelings such as fear, anger, guilt, or feeling flat or numb a lot of the time. A person might blame themselves or others for what happens during or after the traumatic event, feels cut-off from friends and family, or loses interest in day-to-day activities.
- c. Feeling wound-up. This might mean having trouble of sleeping or concentrating, feeling angry or irritable, taking risks, being easily startled, and/or being constantly on the lookout for danger.

According to Robin (2012:311), the symptoms of PTSD are grouped into four major categories: intrusion symptoms, avoidance symptoms, mood, and cognitive changes symptoms, and arousal and activity symptoms. A person must have each of those four major categories to be diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder.

a. Intrusion Symptoms

People with PTSD sometimes re-experience the traumatic event. The person often recalls the event or has nightmares, intrusive images, and physiological reactivity to reminders of that trauma. These memories or trauma can come back without being expected by the person that has PTSD. The person may be intensely upset by reminders of the event and has a strong emotional and physical reaction to cues that resemble or symbolize an aspect of the trauma. Sometimes, memories or trauma can feel so real like it is happening again to the person as a flashback inside their mind; this is called a dissociative reaction.

b. Avoidance Symptoms

This symptom is about avoidance of stimuli associated with the event or a general numbing of responsiveness. Some may try to avoid all reminders of the event or situations that trigger memories of the trauma, such as a place, item, and a topic that is

related. Other people try to avoid thinking about the trauma; some may remember only disorganized fragments of the event as a blurry memory. The person is using avoidance to try to prevent reminders, the strategy often fails, and so re-experiencing occurs.

c. Mood and Cognitive Changes Symptoms

The third symptoms are other signs of mood and cognitive change after the trauma. These can include the inability to remember important aspects of the event, persistently negative cognition, blaming self or others for the event, pervasive negative emotions, and lack of interest or involvement in significant activities, feeling detached from others, or inability to experience positive emotions.

d. Arousal and Activity Symptoms

These symptoms include difficulty in falling asleep or staying asleep, irritability, difficulty in concentrating, hyper vigilance and an exaggerated startled response. Laboratory studies have confirmed these clinical symptoms by documenting the heightened physiological responses of people with PTSD to images of combat. It is not unusual for people with PTSD to experience other mental health problems as well, like depression or anxiety. Some people may develop a habit of using alcohol or drugs as a way of coping.

3. Research Method

This research is analyzed by applying the theory proposed by Rosenberg (2010). In conducting this study, the researchers use qualitative research method to process and arrange the data. According to Moleong (2007: 6), qualitative research is a research that aims to understand the phenomena experienced by research subjects. It is more appropriate and suitable to be used for researching matters relating to research on the behavior, attitudes, motivations, perceptions and actions of the subject. In other words, this type of research cannot use quantitative methods.

The researchers conduct this research through several stages, such as taking the data from the novel entitled *Girl in Pieces* written by Kathleen Glasgow, finding and marking some words and sentences related to PTSD experienced by the protagonist in the novel, and finding and retrieving supporting data from other sources such as PTSD articles published in scientific journals, books, and other information suitable to improve the analysis.

4. Discussion

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is a mental health problem that can occur at any age. It can occur because the sufferer has previously experienced very traumatic experiences, such as death, natural disasters, serious events, etc. Besides, it can also be self-harm. In this part, the discussion focuses on the stress experienced by the protagonist of the novel named Charlie Charlotte Davis.

4.1 Factors of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

4.1.1 Psychological Factors

Psychological factors that exist before the traumatic event occurs affect whether a person will develop PTSD. Such factors include a history of depression that the person has or other psychological disorders that he already has. In the novel, the protagonist, Charlie suffers PTSD due to some psychological factors such as when she is a child; she

is different from other children due to her strange appearance and her body is covered with scars made by her. Such memories or psychological factors have triggered Charlie to develop PTSD.

Charlie experiences trauma since her childhood which can be seen in the following quotations.

A girl is born. I start with myself: a girl with clumpy hair in a yellowy, fuzzy cardigan on the first day of a new school, all her scars hidden under the sweater and her jeans. What a sad girl she is, mouth clamped shut, eyes burning, a force field of anger and fear vibrating inside her. She watches the other kids, how easily they move around each other, laughing, adjusting, headphones, whispering. She wants to say *My father is in the river down the street* but she says nothing (Glasgow, 2016: 311).

The data above show that Charlie has had a trauma that causes her to suffer from PTSD. The traumas that she cannot express have developed into the disease she is suffering now, namely a trauma from the past. She has not been able to forget her bad experience on her first day of her new school because it has made an impression on her life. She cannot forget how she sees her beloved father commits suicide in the river and at that time she could not do anything to stop her father's action.

The psychological factor experienced by Charlie is also seen from the data below.

Felix said to do something I loved. Or felt complicated passion for. Ariel said to use myself. Louisa gave me the story of her life. *A drunk and a drunk met and they made a mess me: me. I was born with a broken heart* (Glasgow, 2016: 311).

The quotation above shows that Charlie is born with a broken heart, it is caused by a sense of disappointment in her very sad life. Charlie thinks so that she could accept all of this with sincerity, but still she could not forget things that have happened to her.

4.1.2 Social Factors

Social factors have a big role both before the traumatic event and afterward. Also, these social actors determine whether PTSD develops. The social factors include the additional stress of lower socioeconomic status and the level of social support provided to the person as a trauma victim. Social factors can also be from the experiences of the social environment or the community telling stories about dark stories in their lives, and the person concerned listens to stories continuously which will make the person traumatized by PTSD because of hearing these stories. It is shown in several paragraphs in the novel. Charlie has impaired social factors and it can be seen in the following quotations.

The girls here, they try to get me to talk. They want to know *what's your story, morning glory? Tell me your tale, snail.* I hear their stories every day in Group, at lunch, in Crafts, at breakfast, at dinner, on and on. These words that spill from them, black memories, they can't stop. Their stories are eating them alive, turning them inside out. They cannot stop talking (Glasgow, 2016: 9).

In the quotation above, we can see that Charlie often listens to stories of black memories every day; the stories come from the people around her. Things like that make it hard for Charlie to forget the dark events that have happened to her.

Another social factors experienced by Charlie is also seen from the data below.

By eight-thirty we're in Group and that's when the stories spill, and the tears spill, and some girls yell and some girls groan, but I just sit, sit, and that awful older girls, Blue, with the bad teeth, every day, she says, *Will you talk today, Silent sue? I'd like to hear from Silent Sue today, wouldn't you, Casper?* (Glasgow, 2016; 11).

The quotation above shows that Charlie does not want to tell her story in public; she is not comfortable with it. For her it really hurts and it will open old wounds. At Charlie's recovery place, other patients often tell about their dark memories to make them feel calmer, and that is also part of therapy. That is what Charlie often hears so that sometimes Charlie feels sick of the dark story.

4.2 Symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

4.2.1 Intrusion Symptoms

People with PTSD sometimes re-experience the traumatic event. The person often recalls the event or has nightmares, intrusive images, and physiological reactivity to reminders of that trauma. These memories or trauma can come back without being expected by the person that has PTSD. The person may be intensely upset by reminders of the event and has a strong emotional and physical reaction to cues that resemble or symbolize an aspect of the trauma. Sometimes, memories or trauma can feel so real like it is happening again to the person as a flashback inside their mind; this is called a dissociative reaction. Charlie experiences symptoms of PTSD as a result of the trauma she suffers and these symptoms are shown in several paragraphs in the novel *Girl in Pieces*. This can be seen in the quotation below.

Before he got sicker, my father used to take me on long drives to the north. We would park the car and walk the trails deep into the fragrant firs and lush spruces, so far that sometimes it seemed like night because there were so many trees, you couldn't see the sky. I was small then and I stumbled a lot on stones, landing on mounds of moss. My fingers on the cold, comforting moss always stayed inside me. My father could walk for hours. He said, "I just want it to be quiet." And we walked and walked, looking for that quiet place. The forest is not as quiet as everyone thinks (Glasgow, 2016: 29).

Intrusion symptoms are often felt by PTSD sufferers, without realizing they often experience flashbacks, nightmares, which can make it difficult for the sufferer to forget the dark events experienced. Flashback experienced by Charlie can also be seen from the following data.

That time, I tried so hard to fucking die. But here I am. On the street, where I used to live, I called it my street feeling. It's like electrical wire is strung tight through my whole body. It meant I could ball my fists and fight for the forgotten sleeping bag by the river against two older women. It meant I could do a lot of things just to make it through the night to another endless day of walking, walking, walking (Glasgow, 2016: 40).

Based on the data above, we can see that Charlie often experiences flashbacks of memories or things she has done or bitter moments in her life. Flashback cannot be determined when the time will come, it will come by itself, Charlie will suddenly remember it all.

Another intrusion symptoms experienced by Charlie can be seen from the evidence below.

What I don't write is: I'm so lonely in the world I want to peel all of my flesh off and walk, just bone and gristle, straight into the river, to be swallowed, just like my father (Glasgow, 2016: 29).

The evidence above shows that Charlie is remembering things that she has never told anyone else; her desire to peel all her flesh and walk in the river to drown, as her father has done, thus costing her beloved father's life. In other words Charlie remembers how much she wants to kill herself by doing the same as her father, because she feels so lonely in the world.

4.2.2 Avoidance Symptoms

This symptom is about avoidance of stimuli associated with the event or a general numbing of responsiveness. Some may try to avoid all reminders of the event or situations that trigger memories of the trauma, such as a place, item, and a topic related. Other people try to avoid thinking about the trauma; some may remember only disorganized fragments of the event as a blurry memory. The person is using avoidance to try to prevent reminders, the strategy often fails, and so re-experiencing occurs.

Barbero thinks I'm afraid of him, but I'm not. There's only one person I'm afraid of, and he's far away, on the whole other side of the river, and he can't get to me here (Glasgow, 2016: 20).

It can be seen from the data above that Charlie is showing avoidance symptoms and she has thoughts and feelings related to the traumatic event. As Charlie says from the data above, she is afraid of someone far from the other side of the river approaching her; Charlie means the shadow of her father who dies by committing suicide in the river. She is afraid of it because something like that could bring back memories of her past trauma, and she does not want that to happen.

The avoidance symptoms experienced by Charlie is also seen from the data below.

Every day, she asks me this. One day a week, someone else asks me- Doc Dooley, maybe, if he's pulling a day shift, or the raspy-voiced, stiff-haired doctor with too-thick mascara. I think her name is Helen, I don't like her; she makes me feel cold inside. One day a week, on Sundays, no one asks us how we're feeling and that makes some of us feel lost (Glasgow, 2016: 29).

Based on the data above, it is very clearly shown by Charlie that she shows Avoidance Symptoms, namely she avoids people/doctors who often ask her every day about her day and whatever she feels for one day. Charlie really does not like the doctor, because asking will make Charlie recall the trauma wounds she has tried to forget, even though the question from the doctor is part of Charlie's trauma therapy.

Another avoidance symptoms experienced by Charlie can be seen from the evidence below.

My brain starts to circle, circle, even as I keep drawing Blue. There are things happening that I don't want to think about, not right now. Words happening, like *sorry*, and *attic* and *underpass* and *hurting me* (Glasgow, 2016: 38).

The above evidence shows Charlie does not want to be influenced by her bad thoughts that appear at the time she does not want. It is very annoying for Charlie, because she could not concentrate well. These bad thoughts are like telling Charlie to hurt herself and blame herself for the incident that befalls her beloved father. She really does not like and avoids such thoughts and this is very clear that Charlie has Avoidance Symptoms.

4.3 Mood and Cognitive Changes Symptoms

The third symptoms are others signs of mood and cognitive change after the trauma. These can include the inability to remember important aspects of the event, persistently negative cognition, blaming self or others for the event, pervasive negative emotions, and lack of interest or involvement in significant activities, feeling detached from others, or inability to experience positive emotions. Charlie experiences symptoms of PTSD as a result of the trauma she suffers and these symptoms are shown in several paragraphs in the novel *Girl in Pieces*. This can be seen in the quotation below.

I close my eyes, drink the last of the bottle, smash it against the wall. I am dark, dark, all dark. I have to cut it out, this thing in me that thought I could better. I have to remember how stupid I was, how fucking stupid (Glasgow, 2016: 293).

These symptoms usually occur after someone experiences a very imprinted trauma in her life that makes a change of mood, mind and behavior that is sometimes not in accordance with what she wants, such as hurting herself, blaming herself and lack of enthusiasm for life towards a positive direction. It can be seen from the data above that Charlie appears to be in reduced interest or involvement in significant activities.

Mood and Cognitive Changes Symptoms experienced by Charlie can also be seen from the following data.

There are too many people in my head. I claw at my body to get them out, to peel out the blackness spreading inside me. I'm running blind, ghosts swallowing me (Glasgow, 2016: 291).

Through the data above, it appears that Charlie experiences negative emotions. This symptom causes Charlie to always have bad emotions and always think of hurting herself. It can be seen from Charlie who wants to scratch her body in order to vent all her emotions.

Another Mood and Cognitive Changes Symptoms experienced by Charlie can be verified from the data below.

I have nothing now. Not Riley, not Mikey, not Ellis, not my drawing. I suck in my breath, try to stem a fresh wave of sobs. I'm so tired again. Tired of *trying* (Glasgow, 2016: 309).

Mood and Cognitive Changes Symptoms causes Charlie not to be able to control herself when she feels emotions, or when she does not have the desire to do significant things. The evidence above shows that Charlie is tired of it all. She is too tired to try again, because the symptoms take over her emotionally.

4.3.1 Arousal and Activity Symptoms

These symptoms include difficulty in falling asleep or staying asleep, irritability, difficulty concentrating, hyper vigilance and an exaggerated startle response. Laboratory studies have confirmed these clinical symptoms by documenting the heightened physiological responses of people with PTSD to images of combat. It is not unusual for people with PTSD to experience other mental health problems as well, like depression or anxiety. Some people may develop a habit of using alcohol or drugs as a way of coping. This can be seen in the quotation below.

Everything is too quiet. I trace a finger along the walls. I do this for hours. I know they're thinking about putting me on sleep meds after my wounds heal and I can be taken off antibiotics, but I don't want them to. I need to be awake and awake. He could be anywhere he could be here (Glasgow, 2016: 14).

The quotation above shows Charlie's sleepless behavior because if she falls asleep, she will be given medication by a psychiatrist and she cannot sleep just in case. Charlie's attitude is included in the arousal and activity symptoms.

Charlie's arousal and activity symptoms can also be seen from the following data.

I close my eyes, drink the last of the bottle, smash it against the wall (Glasgow, 2016: 293).

Based on the data above, we can see that Charlie likes to drink alcohol when she is under stress from her trauma. Apart from hurting herself, Charlie also vents her emotions by getting drunk. For someone who is affected by PTSD, such a thing is a natural thing, because only in this way can she express her pent-up emotions and so that she can get rid of the feelings/thoughts that haunt her about the previous trauma.

Another Charlie's arousal and activity symptoms can also be seen from the evidence below.

Riley and Wendy stole somebody named Luis's car, bought some more drugs who knows where, and started driving out to the casino (Glasgow, 2016: 298).

We can see from the quote above that Charlie and her friends besides drinking alcohol, also use drugs; in this way she tries to get through the trauma she experiences. Such things could at least make Charlie feel less burdened by her evil thoughts and by the dark memories she has.

5. Conclusion

The protagonist by the name of Charlie suffers from PTSD due to psychological factor that is her depression history in her life. The psychological factor experienced by Charlie has the characteristics that she does not like to be asked about how her day is, or forced to tell about her past with other people. Charlie always remembers things related to her sad events, especially about her father's death. She often stays away from

something that can spur her to remember her past. She often blames herself, does self-harm, and gets drunk. Besides, she also uses drugs to make her mind calm. The symptoms experienced by Charlie are a whole of a variety of symptoms namely intrusion and avoidance symptoms. Charlie often reminisces about the past of herself and her beloved father, blames herself, makes self-harm, and always avoids memories that are related to her trauma. She also avoids people/questions that might make her remember the unpleasant events in her life.

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