

Almost Paradise Study Guide

Almost Paradise by Susan Isaacs

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Plot Summary

Almost Paradise is a novel by writer Susan Isaacs. Almost Paradise is the story of Nicholas and Jane Cobleigh, a couple who once loved each other very much despite their different backgrounds and difficult upbringings. However, Nicholas's career as a Hollywood superstar and Jane's emersion from six years of agoraphobia causes so much tension in their marriage that they eventually fall apart, finding other lovers. After a separation of more than a year, Jane realizes that the only thing she wants is to spend the rest of her life with Nicholas. Jane goes to London to convince Nicholas to come back to her, but an accident separates them once again. Almost Paradise is a novel of family, of the impact the past can have on the present, and of how short life can truly be.

Unbeknownst to Jane Cobleigh, her mother was the illegitimate daughter of a fourteen year old Jewish girl. Jane's mother, Sally, left home in her early teens and tried to become an actress in Vaudeville. When this failed to make Sally famous, she joined a burlesque show. Then, at thirty-three, Sally became aware that she could not do this for the rest of her life. By chance, Sally met a young banker who was fascinated with her beauty. In just a few weeks, Sally convinced the man to marry her. Unfortunately, just a few years after Jane's birth, Sally died when she had an allergic reaction to a wasp sting. Shortly afterward, Jane's father remarried a cruel woman. Jane became subject to almost daily spankings, performed by her father but brought on by her stepmother. Then, when she was seventeen, Jane's father began visiting her bed at night.

Nicholas Cobleigh's family has a rich and deeply ingrained history in New York. Nicholas' ancestors, the Tuttles, have been important members of New York society since the time of the Revolution. Nicholas' grandparents had a love that lasted for many decades. However, Nicholas's father, an ambitious lawyer, married his mother as much for her name and her money than for love. The marriage became rocky soon after World War II when Nicholas's father wanted to join the CIA and his wife's father shut down the opportunity. Nicholas' father began to cheat openly on his wife, refusing to respect the vows they made to one another.

In Nicholas' senior year at Brown, he is asked to take a part in the play because he is capable of making a long jump from a balcony to the stage. When Nicholas realizes he will actually have to read lines, not just jump, he is unsure about the role, but Jane takes him under her wing and teaches him how to channel the character. Nicholas enjoys the role so much, that he takes another and another. Soon Nicholas and Jane are great friends, speaking at least once a day. Jane is deeply in love with Nicholas, but Nicholas has a girlfriend and sees Jane only as a friend. That is, until the final days of school when he realizes he will never see her again. Instead, Nicholas asks Jane to marry him and decides to try to make a go of it as an actor.

The first few years of marriage are difficult for Jane and Nicholas because Nicholas's family has cut him off and they must live off of the money he makes driving a taxi. About the time their first child is born Nicholas begins making a living as an actor. Soon after, he moves into movies and quickly becomes a star. About the same time, Jane begins



having panic attacks that cause her to become a prisoner in their Connecticut home. Jane's self-imprisonment lasts for six years. Eventually Jane finds a phobia clinic that helps her escape her phobia. At the request of the psychiatrist who runs the clinic, Jane becomes a spokeswoman for phobias. The publicity drives Nicholas wild, causing a great deal of tension in their marriage.

After more than a year of bickering and unhappiness, both Jane and Nicholas turn to others for what they are not getting from one another. After a year, Nicholas tells Jane that he is leaving her for his twenty-two year old lover. Jane is devastated, but accepts some of the guilt because of her own lover. Then, after a year, Jane realizes that all she really wants is Nicholas back. Jane's brother talks her into flying to London where Nicholas is filming a movie and to confront him in person. However, when Jane arrives at the studio, she is hit by a car and suffers a massive head trauma. Jane dies a few days later.



Prologue and Book 1, Jane: Chapters 1-4

Prologue and Book 1, Jane: Chapters 1-4 Summary

Prologue. Jane arrives in London to reclaim her husband. Jane is nervous, worried that Nicholas will not leave his lover to return to Jane. At the same time, Nicholas is across town at the townhouse where he has been living thinking of Jane. Nicholas remembers the early years in their relationship and it makes him want to speak to her. Unfortunately, Jane is not at either of their east coast homes. The author then tells the reader that both had imagined what their meeting would be like, but it doesn't happen because Jane is struck by a car while attempting to chase down a limo in which she thought Nicholas was riding.

Chapter 1. Jane Cobleigh's grandmother is a nearsighted Jewish girl living on the Lower East Side of New York. Rivka Taubman is only fourteen when she begins spending time with Yussel Weinberg, a local sixteen year old. A short time later, Rivka becomes pregnant, a fact that shames her parents. When her child is born, Rivka's father tries to give her away to a Catholic orphanage, but the orphanage is closed for the holiday and the father cannot read English so he believes he must keep the child. The child, Sarah, grows up to be a very intelligent little girl with great potential. However, Sarah also becomes a great fan of the theater. Sarah, who is very unhappy in her family life, runs off at the age of fourteen with a black face singer, Nat Fields.

Sarah, who has by then changed her name to Sally Tompkins, travels with Nat and his troop for three years. However, when Nat refuses to allow Sally to take a role in a chorus, Sally leaves him. When Sally turns twenty-six and has still not become a star, she decides to join a burlesque show. This lasts for eight years. However, Sally is getting tired and her body is beginning to feel the pressure of performing so many shows a day.

Chapter 2. Richard Heissenhuber is a twenty-six year old banker when Sally meets him in the waiting room of a doctor's office. Richard is immediately smitten with Sally and, despite being engaged to another woman, asks her to lunch. Sally finds Richard amusing and unbelievably naive, and decides that he is her ticket away from the burlesque shows. Sally lies to Richard, telling him that her father was a Shakespearean actor and that she is a twenty-something actress. Even though his parents dislike her, Richard decides to end his engagement and continue seeing Sally. In a few short weeks, Richard and Sally are married.

A short time after they are married, Sally is dismayed to discover that Richard is something of a social disappointment. Richard has no friends to invite over for parties, no friends with wives whom Sally might befriend. In fact, Sally quickly discovers that unless she is willing to stop wearing so much makeup and sexy clothing, she will not



make friends in the conservative Cincinnati neighborhood where they live. This leaves Sally extremely bored. Then, as her pregnancy progresses, Richard stops finding Sally interesting, in or out of the bedroom. The baby, a girl Sally names Jane, is a complete joy to her mother, but just another source of annoyance to her father.

When Jane is nearly three, Richard and Sally are invited to a party at the home of Richard's boss, Ralph Forsyth. Ralph is clearly drunk when he lures Sally away from Richard during the party. They slip into the basement and have an intimate interlude. Several days later, Richard is called into the bank president's office and told that he has risen as high as he could go and would be better off moving to another bank. Several months later, Sally dies after being stung by a wasp.

Chapter 3. Richard and Jane move in with Richard's parents. Jane's grandmother takes over most of Jane's care as Richard shows little interest in the little girl. Jane's grandmother is cruel and goes out of her way to encourage Jane to forget her mother. The winter after Sally's death, Richard's mother introduces him to Dorothy Rhodes, a middle aged spinster who works at the returns desk in a local department store. Richard neither likes nor dislikes Dorothy, but knows that she expects them to be married, therefore they are several months later. Dorothy makes a show of trying to be a good mother to Jane, but as soon as she is pregnant with her own child, her cruelty comes out. Dorothy is harshly critical of Jane and encourages Richard to administer spankings every night for Jane's perceived transgressions.

Chapter 4. As the years pass, the Heissenhubers remain in the blue collar neighborhood that was supposed to be a transitional home and Richard remains in his mediocre job despite the early hopes of his advancement. Jane begins to learn how to avoid Dorothy's disapproval by keeping to herself, but this rarely allows her to escape the nightly spankings that continue into her preteens. Despite this unhappiness, however, Jane maintains a good relationship with her beautiful little brother, Rhodes. Jane also begins acting in high school although she rarely gets the lead because of her exceptional height. Her senior year, Jane has a crush on a young boy and, with encouragement from a friend, approaches him at a party. However, the young boy takes her forward behavior wrong and pushes her too quickly. Jane leaves the party upset only to confront her stepmother when she arrives home. Dorothy accuses Jane of being a tramp and encourages Richard to do something about it. Richard, who has been sneaking into Jane's bed at night for a few weeks, makes a sexual pass at her. This causes Jane to decide it would be best to take Dorothy's suggestion and go out of state for college.

Prologue and Book 1, Jane: Chapters 1-4 Analysis

In the prologue, the reader meets the Cobleighs, Nicholas and Jane. Nicholas is a famous movie star whose fame has caused a significant impact on their lives. The couple has been separated for a significant amount of time and both have had lovers outside of the marriage. Jane, however, is hoping that Nicholas is ready to come home to her. This prologue shows that there is still a lot of love in this marriage despite



infidelity on both parts. This prologue causes immediate interest in the story, making the reader wonder what could possibly have happened to make two people who clearly love one another so much come to such a dark place in their marriage. The reader also hopes for a reconciliation, but Jane's accident at the end of the prologue makes this seem unlikely, at least in the immediate sense.

As the next part of the novel begins, the reader is presented with snippets of news coverage at the beginning of each chapter that deals with Jane's accident and her prognosis, as well as the reactions of her family and friends. This lets the reader know that Jane's accident is indeed a serious affair and it also gives some more insight into the relationship between Jane and Nicholas, the Golden Couple as they are often called, to continue building the reader's curiosity as to what could have split these two apart. At the same time, the author uses not only the third person point of view to tell her story, but she also utilizes the authorial voice that allows her to make comments on the events in the novel. This gives the reader much more information than might be available in a straight narration, as well as giving the reader more information about Jane's past than even she might have been aware of.

Jane's heritage is quite different than what she might imagine as an adult. Jane's mother was the illegitimate child of a Jewish teen, a fact that Sally never shares with anyone as an adult. Sally herself is a Vaudeville actress and a burlesque show girl. These things were not well respected careers in Sally's time and were something that she would not have wanted respectable people to know about, including her husband and his family. However, Sally was a kind woman who loved her daughter very much and the reader can imagine that if Sally had lived and was able to raise her child, Jane would have grown up to be a happy and secure woman. Instead, Sally died a tragic death and Jane was raised by her stepmother, Dorothy. Dorothy is a cruel woman who openly dislikes Jane. This could be for a variety of reasons, but the reader suspects it is simply because Jane is not Dorothy's and in a way she is competition for Richard's attention. Not only this, but as Jane ages she becomes more beautiful and much more attractive to men than Dorothy ever was. This too can lead to a great deal of jealousy.

The author skims over most of Jane's childhood, only emphasizing two things. The first is the constant disapproval Jane faced from Dorothy and the nearly daily spankings from her father. These two things have a strong impact on Jane's self-image. The reader might suspect that these events will lead to a great deal of insecurity. The second thing the author emphasizes is Jane's sexual experiences. Jane is nearly raped at a party, causing her to panic and leave. Later, Jane's father makes inappropriate sexual advances on her. These things are very traumatic for Jane and suggests to the reader that Jane will have emotional problems related to these events when she is older.



Book 2, Nicholas: Chapters 5-10

Book 2, Nicholas: Chapters 5-10 Summary

Chapter 5. Nicholas's grandfather, Henry Underwood Cobleigh, is born the son of a tavern owner in Pawtucket, Rhode Island. Henry's father is unable to care for him after the death of his wife, so Henry grows up in an orphanage where he is greatly loved by the nuns. Despite hopes that Henry will become a priest, he leaves the orphanage and puts himself through college and law school. After beginning his legal practice, Henry marries the daughter of Reverend Spenser Howell, a man with a great reputation, but little wealth. This gives Henry the respect and social standing he craves. Henry then takes a job with T.L. Howell and Sons, lying to the owner, Spencer Howell, about his childhood, inspiring Howell to treat Henry as an adopted son. However, Henry desires great wealth and to gain this, he begins arranging kickbacks from lawyers to whom he farms out some of the company's business. Eventually Henry goes too far and the truth comes out. Howell fires Henry and he is blacklisted all over town. Unfortunately for his wife, Henry's wife is expecting their child at the time and she is forced to remain in the marriage.

Henry's son, James Kendall Cobleigh, is neglected by his parents, but much loved by all the neighbors. James is a handsome young man and quickly gains the attention of many of the local girls. James is also very intelligent. James, like his father, attends both college and law school.

Chapter 6. The Tuttle family is one of the first families to settle in Manhattan and has remained one of the most influential families on the East Coast. In 1900, Samuel Tuttle accidentally pushes a young woman off the curb outside Washington Square. The young woman, Maisie, proves to be a beautiful, intelligent woman who instantly wins Samuel's heart. They are married several months later and have four children, the youngest being Winifred Tuttle.

Chapter 7. Winifred is a homely young woman who prefers outdoor sports to the more feminine pursuits. Therefore when it is time for her coming out party, Winifred wants nothing to do with it and only attends because her mother insists. The party is being held at the home of Winifred's brother and his wife in Rhode Island. James Cobleigh's cousin, Bryan, is from a respected Rhode Island family and he gains an invitation to the party for himself and James. James is immediately drawn to Winifred, seeing in her more substance than he sees in most debutantes. They spend the entire evening together. Later, despite the fact that her parents do not approve, Winifred chooses a college near Harvard so that she can be near James. A year later James and Winifred are married.

The first year of their marriage is bliss for Win and James. However, as World War II gears up, James becomes more and more distracted. Even as his first child is being delivered, James is obsessed with the news from Europe. Then shortly after Nicholas'



first birthday, James is invited to join the OSS, a precursor to the CIA. James goes to France the first time not long after and meets Denise, a member of the French resistance with whom he falls madly in love.

Chapter 8. A short time after the attack on Pearl Harbor, James leaves for France again, leaving Win home with two children. James, who pretends to be a French baker, acts as a spy throughout the war. James also spends this time with Denise. James wants to divorce Win so that he might marry Denise, but Denise makes him wait until after the war to inform Win. While James is away at war, Nicholas and his younger brother, Thomas, have a quiet childhood spending much of their time at the Tuttle farm in Connecticut. Nicholas loves the outdoors and the farm, but Thomas is more of an indoors person. Win spends most of the war volunteering for one committee or charity after another and fighting to find a proper nanny for her children.

Chapter 9. When James returns from the war he is prepared to ask Win for a divorce and return to France. However, when he returns, James finds that he enjoys the amenities of marriage to a Tuttle too much to walk away. Instead, James plans to join the CIA, but then learns that Samuel has pulled strings to keep James in New York so that Win will remain close to her parents. This causes James to be filled with resentment and he soon begins to have an affair. Despite his affairs and resentment, James and Win have three more children in the years after the war. When Win becomes pregnant with their sixth, James insists she have an abortion. Win refuses. Then, when Nicholas is ten he breaks his arm and his jaw while playing soccer. Due to the fact that neither of his parents can be reached, Nicholas ends up abandoned in the hospital for several hours. When he finally goes home, Nicholas is doted on, but seeks comfort only from his absentee father.

Chapter 10. As a teen, Nicholas attends an exclusive boarding school in Massachusetts. It is there that Nicholas discovers girls when he begins dating the daughter of a disapproving Army Colonel. Heather proves to be quite a handful for Nicholas. Nicholas also has a roommate at school who is the son of a self-made millionaire. Charlie is always getting into trouble, often taking Nicholas with him. One night the two of them become drunk on a bottle of vodka. The boys, too drunk to know better, wander out into the hallway and are caught. The next morning Nicholas' mother and Charlie's father come to the school for a conference with the headmaster. Charlie's father, aware of the headmaster's greed, manages to talk him into allowing the boys to stay in school. A short time later, Samuel Tuttle dies. Soon after, when Nicholas is only seventeen, James takes him to the opera and introduces him to Lucy Bogard, a soprano who is clearly James' lover. The following day, Lucy invites Nicholas to her apartment to help her choose a Christmas gift for her nephew. This proves to be a lie, however. Lucy has invited Nicholas to her apartment to seduce him.

Book 2, Nicholas: Chapters 5-10 Analysis

Nicholas' grandfather and father prove to be selfish men who desire wealthy and respect. However, they both go about it the wrong way, using people and acting out in



what would have been considered immoral ways in their time. Henry was the worst, a man who thought nothing of asking for kickbacks and marrying a woman for her name rather than for love. James follows in his father's footsteps, despite the fact that it appears early in his life that his intentions are purer. James appears to love Win when he first marries her, but this soon fades as James finds excitement in going to war and having an affair with a Resistance fighter. When James returns home and there is no longer that excitement of first love or war, he becomes bored with his life and acts out. James begins having dangerous affairs that could ruin not only his marriage, but his reputation and his career. If not for Samuel Tuttle, James might have done just that. However, it is also because of Samuel that James is not able to pursue his chosen career, perhaps part of the reason for his profound unhappiness.

Nicholas is the first of six children in the Cobleigh family. James is an absentee father most of Nicholas' childhood, turning him into something of an idol for Nicholas. Nicholas admires his father because he does not see the truth, but sees what his father wants him to see. Win is also something of an absentee mother, giving birth and then handing the children quickly off to nannies. Win cannot keep a nanny for long, however, and so these caretakers change very quickly, especially when Nicholas is very young. For this reason, despite living in a household with two parents, Nicholas has a very unstable family life. There is always a new caretaker and his parents are rarely around. A perfect example of this instability is when Nicholas breaks his jaw at ten and no one can find his parents to come pick him up. Nicholas ends up lying in the hospital watching the treatment of burn patients, a horrible sight to which he never should have been subject .

As Nicholas grows older he begins to discover girls, alcohol, and general disobedience. Nicholas appears to be a normal teenager, experimenting with these things like all boys do. Nicholas' teen years are much more stable than his younger years, and much more exciting than Jane's. However, the oddness of Nicholas' childhood continues when he is seduced by his father's lover. The reader must wonder if this is something Nicholas' father arranged for him because it almost seems like something James might have done. The reader must also wonder how experiencing his first sexual encounter in this way, with this woman, might impact Nicholas' attitude toward sex in the future. The reader must also wonder how living with such a father, who treats women so casually, might have led to Nicholas' affair in his marriage to Jane.



Book 3, Jane and Nicholas: Chapters 11-14

Book 3, Jane and Nicholas: Chapters 11-14 Summary

Chapter 11. Despite going to the same college and attending some of the same classes, Jane and Nicholas do not actually meet until the end of their junior year. Jane, a member of the drama club, is playing Gertrude in Hamlet when the director, Professor Ritter, asks Nicholas to play Fortinbras because he can leap from a balcony. Nicholas does not want the part because he does not think he can act, but accepts when the professor becomes insistent. Jane is appointed to coach Nicholas. Jane falls immediately in love, but Nicholas is pinned to a girl named Diane whom he expects to marry after graduation. Nicholas enjoys acting in Hamlet so much that he decides to audition for a role in the fall production despite Diane's annoyance at the idea. Nicholas and Jane begin seeing each other every day, working together on their parts in the play. Then, when Nicholas spots Jane walking across campus with a very attractive man, he becomes angry. Nicholas treats Jane poorly at the next rehearsal until he learns the man is her younger brother, Rhodes.

Nicholas agrees to perform in another play despite his slowly declining grades. At home that Christmas, Nicholas discovers his mother is once again in the hospital receiving shock treatments for depression. Later, Nicholas has a confrontation with his father when Nicholas tells him that his grades are not good enough to get into Harvard or Columbia law schools. At the same time, Jane spends a lonely Christmas alone in the dorms rather than go home to Dorothy. Later, that spring, Nicholas tells Jane that he has decided to forgo law school and try to make it as an actor. Jane thinks he is crazy, just as everyone else does, but thinks he is good enough to make it. Finally, on the night before their final performance and graduation, Nicholas walks Jane back to her dorm. Jane tries to say goodbye because this is the last time they will be alone together, but Nicholas cuts her off. Then, while walking to his own dorm, Nicholas realizes that he does not want this to be their last time alone, that he loves Jane. Nicholas quickly returns to the dorm and asks Jane to marry him.

Chapter 12. Nicholas' father tries to talk him out of marrying Jane, but Nicholas refuses to listen, just as James refused to listen to Samuel all those years ago. Despite this, all of Nicholas' siblings have accepted Jane into their family. Now Nicholas wants to meet Jane's family, but she resists, insisting that meeting her parents is unnecessary. Nicholas is just as insistent, however. Dorothy goes out of her way to try to impress Nicholas on their visit, just as she goes out of her way to ignore Jane. Rhodes, however, proves to be a delight to both of them. While in Cincinnati, Nicholas arranges a visit with his cousin, Clarissa Tuttle Robinson Gray. During the visit, Rhodes and Clarissa's husband, Philip, disappear into the billiards room. When Jane and Nicholas go to get him, they find him and Philip in a clutch. Jane is deeply concerned about this and approaches Dorothy, asking her to keep Rhodes from going to dinner with Philip that



night. Dorothy becomes angry and tells Jane to get out of her house. Jane and Nicholas leave. They marry in a civil ceremony a day later.

Chapter 13. Jane and Nicholas each have jobs with different theatrical groups that summer, forcing them to be a state apart. However, Nicholas does not want to be separated and suggests that he give up his job to go with Jane. Jane insists that she give up her spot and go with Nicholas. They finally agree to the latter. Jane gets a job in the publicity office of the theater while Nicholas works as a stage hand. However, the main actor becomes annoyed with Nicholas and he nearly loses his job, but the publicist saves it for him in order to keep Jane employed. In the fall, Jane and Nicholas move to New York where they take a cold-water flat in Hell's Kitchen. It is a miserable place that is a shock to Nicholas, whose family has cut him off and left him working as a taxi driver. Money becomes a tense subject between them until Jane gets a job with a teen magazine, making things a little easier. Along with driving a taxi, Nicholas takes acting lessons and goes to auditions as often as he can. His first role in a play is as a cruel lawyer playing a mother and daughter against one another. Jane helps him figure out the character and improve his portrayal.

Chapter 14. During their first year of marriage, James calls Nicholas and tells him that Win has thrown him out. Nicholas and Jane go to have dinner with James, who is very angry and bitter, only to learn that James invited all six children and Nicholas was the only one to accept. A short time later, on the opening night of his first play, Nicholas is overcome with nerves, but works through it, gaining great reviews from his family and the newspaper critics. A short time later, Jane learns that she is pregnant. Money becomes even tighter, especially when Jane must quit her job, leaving them desperate. Nicholas even asks his family for money, but is denied. A short time after Jane tells this to Rhodes, Philip Gray sends them a check for two thousand dollars.

Book 3, Jane and Nicholas: Chapters 11-14 Analysis

The author describes the many times that Jane and Nicholas run into one another while on the campuses of Brown and Pembroke, once again injecting that authorial voice that allows the reader to know something of which perhaps none of the main characters are truly aware. Eventually they come together, as though fate has designed it, sharing their passion for acting. Nicholas was not interested in acting at first, in fact never would have considered it if not asked to participate because of his athletic abilities, but soon finds a passion for it. This passion is perhaps influenced most by Jane who helps him discover something about himself he did not know existed.

At first, Jane and Nicholas' relationship is purely platonic. Jane is a large girl, a plain girl, who is not really the type to whom Nicholas has previously been attracted. In fact, Nicholas is pinned to a girl who comes from a family similar to his own, a girl who is petite, beautiful, and less than intelligent. The contrast is clear from the beginning, Jane's inexperience but incredible intelligence and passion. Nicholas does not even consider Jane as a romantic potential until he realizes he might never see her again. Suddenly Nicholas knows he does not want to be separated from her and asks her to



marry him. It is all very romantic, but leaves the reader wondering how this spontaneous proposal might lend some power to the separation the reader knows will later take place between Nicholas and Jane.

The visit to Jane's family before Nicholas and Jane get married is important. First, the reader sees how Dorothy has grown even more hateful toward Jane, treating her poorly even when Jane brings home a member of the Tuttle family as her fiancé. This animosity is underscored when Dorothy accuses Jane of being at fault in her father's sexual assaults against Jane. Dorothy is clearly a cruel, dark woman who resents her stepdaughter's existence. The second thing is Rhodes meeting with Philip Gray. This is the early 1960s, a time when homosexuality was still a dark secret about which most people pretended not to be aware. Therefore, Jane's reaction to Rhodes' clear attraction to Philip Gray is perfectly understandable, if a little offensive to some. Jane is afraid that Philip will take advantage of Rhodes, will hurt him. However, it seems that Rhodes and Philip are doing quite well when Rhodes comes to see Jane a year into her own marriage and his relationship. This is important to note because this relationship will be a big part of Rhodes' life as the plot continues to develop.



Book 3, Jane and Nicholas: Chapters 15-20

Book 3, Jane and Nicholas: Chapters 15-20 Summary

Chapter 15. Nicholas is thrilled with the birth of his first child, Victoria. Jane, however, has a panic attack in the park when she realizes that she has effectively given up her dream of becoming an actress in order to support Nicholas' dream. Nicholas is now making a living as an actor. A string of successful roles, and a meeting with a well-established co-star, leads Nicholas to the offices of Murray King, a theatrical agent. Murray agrees to take Nicholas on as a client and immediately secures him a role in a commercial.

Chapter 16. Jane has become close to most of Nicholas' family, including his mother and grandmother. However, Win often frightens Jane because of her history with depression even though she seems to have gotten better since kicking James out. At the same time, Nicholas' career is progressing. Murray advises Nicholas to take the lead role in Romeo and Juliet even though it is an off-Broadway production because of the director. This role proves to be exciting for Nicholas, returning him to teen-like behavior and leading to the conception of his and Jane's second child.

Chapter 17. When Maisie dies, she leaves the Connecticut farm to Nicholas. This means no more rent, making their financial situation much easier. After moving into the house, Nicholas begins to explore the idea of making movies. Jane does not support the idea preferring the theater, and Nicholas has recently failed a screen test. However, Nicholas likes the idea of making movies and the money that comes with it. Since beginning his acting career, Nicholas has noticed odd side effects, such as the women who throw themselves at him constantly. At the same time, Jane has become a superstar housewife, learning how to cook and charming everyone who comes to the house. Nicholas is content in his home life, but anxious to move his career to a higher level. Therefore, when Rhodes visits and offers to have Philip put in a good word for Nicholas with a Hollywood producer, Nicholas jumps at the chance.

Chapter 18. When Nicholas travels to Hollywood to star in his first movie, he finds he enjoys the weather and the laid back attitude. Nicholas is bored much of the time because of all the leisure time between shots, but he likes the better developed character he is playing. The entire thing is enjoyable except for his finicky co-star. At the same time, Jane is alone with the children. One night while taking the girls to get ice cream, Jane has a panic attack while driving home.

Chapter 19. Murray talks Nicholas into staying in the play he is currently working on so that he will be free when the movie makes its premiere that fall. Murray then suggests that Nicholas get another agent to handle his movie work, but Nicholas refuses. At the same time, Jane is at her friend Cecily's house. Jane has stopped driving since the



panic attacks have increased and feels comfortable only in her own home and Cecily's. However, as Jane speaks with Cecily about Cecily's new lover, Jane feels an attack coming on. That fall, Nicholas attends the screening of his film with his parents and Jane. Nicholas is nervous, but everyone is awed by his performance, including his parents. However, Nicholas feels as though Jane is not impressed.

Chapter 20. Jane is preparing a large meal for fifty guests, teasing Nicholas about his newfound popularity. Nicholas' film career is exploding and he is constantly being sought out by reporters, producers, and other Hollywood types. Rumors have also begun circulating about Nicholas, particularly rumors about his sexual prowess. This has caused Jane some unhappiness and caused her to seek out ways to keep Nicholas happy at home. A few months later, while visiting Murray, Nicholas is recognized in the bathroom and annoyed when the man gets into his face while he is using the urinal. This simply goes along with the downside of fame, the letters Nicholas gets from fans that are both positive and negative. A few years later, Jane has become a complete recluse. Nicholas manages to keep it secret from the public, but it causes a great deal of tension in the family. In fact, while filming a movie in Yugoslavia, Nicholas begins an affair with his co-star, Laurel Blake.

Book 3, Jane and Nicholas: Chapters 15-20 Analysis

Nicholas and Jane are very happy their first few years of marriage. Despite their plan for both of them to take acting lessons and to pursue acting careers, Jane ends up taking a backseat to Nicholas. Nicholas is very talented and Jane is clearly very happy for him, even helping him flesh out his roles, but she never really had intended to give up her own career for him. When she realizes this, Jane has a panic attack while alone with her new baby in the park. It is a difficult thing for Jane and clearly she does not know how to respond to this emotional overload, so she has a panic attack. This leads to more and more until finally Jane becomes a prisoner in her own home, afraid to leave because she is afraid of having another attack in public. Jane has no idea what is setting off these panic attacks; they seem to come for no clear reason. However, the reader might look back on Jane's childhood, on the mistreatment of both her stepmother in verbal attacks and her father in physical attacks. Jane has never even told Nicholas about the things her father did to her; therefore, it is clear she has not worked these things out for herself, leading to the attacks.

At the same time Jane is receding more and more into the background, Nicholas begins to move further and further into the spotlight. Nicholas does well enough on the stage to support his family with his earnings, but he is ambitious and wants more. Not only does Nicholas want to have a successful acting career, but he has also gotten into business and is doing well with the money he has earned thus far. Nicholas continues to pursue his career, moving into the movies because he feels that the characters in the movies are more dimensional, have more substance, than characters in the theater. This goes against what Jane wants for him, causing a small amount of tension, but it makes Nicholas happy. However, Nicholas quickly finds the side effects of fame difficult. At first, while still in the theater, Nicholas finds himself struggling with female co-stars constantly



making passes at him. Nicholas finds it easy to resist these women because he is not attracted to them and he loves his wife. However, as Nicholas moves into the movies and Jane becomes a prisoner at home, Nicholas finds it more and more difficult to resist the loneliness of long absences from home. The reader can see where this is leading and therefore is only mildly surprised when Nicholas finally gives in to Laurel Blake.

Despite their love for one another, the reader can see that Nicholas and Jane are quickly heading for trouble. Jane's agoraphobia and Nicholas' infidelity will have a toll on the marriage. The reader knows that Jane and Nicholas eventually separate and take lovers, therefore the reader wonders if this affair with Laurel is the beginning of the end. The reader must also wonder how much of what is happening in Nicholas and Jane's life at this point has to do with their childhood, such as Nicholas' neglect by his parents and observing his father's blatant infidelity or Jane's emotional and physical abuse at the hands of her parents.



Book 3, Jane and Nicholas: Chapters 21-25

Book 3, Jane and Nicholas: Chapters 21-25 Summary

Chapter 21. Rhodes comes to Connecticut because he has become unhappy with Philip's controlling nature and has decided to leave the relationship. At the same time, Nicholas is in Yugoslavia continuing his affair with Laurel. Nicholas is sickened by his behavior, especially since his brother Edward is there and a part of the cover-up. However, he finds he cannot resist. A few weeks later, Cecily comes to visit. While she is there, Rhodes calls Jane out, trying to force her to get help for her agoraphobia despite the fact that she has already been in therapy several times. Finally Cecily joins the argument by stressing to Jane how short life is.

After leaving Yugoslavia, Nicholas and Laurel are in Paris, where Nicholas is supposedly checking out locations for his next film. When the phone rings, Nicholas finds himself trying to concentrate on a conversation with his financial lawyer while Laurel performs on him. When the lawyer mentions having seen Nicholas' children recently, Nicholas is filled with guilt. Nicholas ends the relationship, but when Laurel becomes angry he finds himself bribing her to stay quiet.

Chapter 22. Nicholas and Jane argue because she was unable to attend the Academy Awards with him again. A short time later, Jane calls Dr. Judson Fullerton, a psychiatrist who recently opened a phobia clinic. Nicholas is not happy about it, however, because he is worried that the psychiatrist or his volunteers will slip to the press about Jane's disorder. However, Nicholas must leave the following day to begin work on a film he is producing and starring in about a missionary who brought reindeer to the Eskimos in Alaska. However, shooting goes badly and the film goes over budget, causing Nicholas to develop an ulcer.

Chapter 23. Jane works with phobia clinic volunteer, Ellie Matteo. They take it a step at a time, first helping Jane stand in the doorway, then walking to the driveway. Soon Jane is able to travel in a car to therapy and walk up the driveway to the mailbox. Nicholas, however, is not as happy about her recovery as he ought to be. Jane is frustrated with her progress, upset when she has a setback while walking from one end of town to the other. Judson assures her this is normal, but does recommend she see another psychiatrist to discuss some of her sexual issues. Finally, when Jane is recovered from her phobia, she insists Nicholas take her out to a restaurant. Nicholas is unhappy with the idea of being seen publicly with Jane.

Chapter 24. Jane meets with Judson to ask to become a volunteer, but Judson suggests she might be more help to the clinic by becoming a spokesperson for phobias. Nicholas does not like the idea and becomes angry when Jane does an interview in the New York Times without telling him. Their argument escalates to accusations. Jane tells



Nicholas that she gave up her career for him, so the least he can do is be supportive. Nicholas claims that Jane could not act anyway. Later Jane tells Cecily about some other hurtful things Nicholas has said to her since the beginning of her career as a spokesperson.

Chapter 25. Jane goes on a talk show called "Talk" with Judson to talk about phobias. Jane is a natural because of her experience as an actress. Afterwards, Judson, on whom Jane has something of a crush, asks her to his loft for a drink. While in his loft, Judson seduces Jane.

Book 3, Jane and Nicholas: Chapters 21-25 Analysis

Nicholas ends his affair with Laurel and returns home. Things are good for a while, even though Jane is still a prisoner in her own home and that fact is causing tension between her and all members of her family, including Rhodes. Rhodes is clearly concerned for Jane, but it seems much of Nicholas' unhappiness comes from how Jane's absence in public impacts his public image. As a star, Nicholas has become something of a selfish person. This increases as Nicholas discovers that not all he touches is gold and he has a few professional setbacks.

Jane finally finds an answer to solve her agoraphobia and seeks out this help. Nicholas is unhappy with it from the beginning, afraid that Jane's therapist will reveal something of her disorder to the public. However, when this does not happen, Nicholas continues to appear unhappy with the changes taking place in Jane as she recovers. It soon becomes clear to the reader that Nicholas liked having Jane stuck at home, dependent on him. Now that Jane is becoming self-reliant again, Nicholas is unhappy and he takes it out on Jane.

Nicholas is outraged when he discovers that Jane has gone public with her phobia. Although Jane never says anything to paint Nicholas in a bad light, he not only continues to be unsupportive of her role as a public spokesperson for phobias, but he also becomes cruel, often calling her names. This goes back to the way Dorothy treated Jane, increasing her unhappiness in the marriage. It also shows some hints of Nicholas' own childhood, of the way his father treated his mother when he was not allowed to lead his life in the way he wanted.

The end is coming, the reader can see the writing on the wall. Finally curiosity as to how Jane and Nicholas could be separated is satisfied. However, the reader still wonders how things grew so bad so quickly and how this might have been avoided. At the same time, the reader wonders how Jane could turn to such a cold man, a man not unlike her own father, as her new lover. Judson could not be any more unlike Nicholas. Perhaps that is part of his appeal.



Book 3, Jane and Nicholas: Chapters 26-30

Book 3, Jane and Nicholas: Chapters 26-30 Summary

Chapter 26. At the same time Nicholas' parents reunite after sixteen years, Nicholas meets Pamela while teaching a seminar at NYU. Pamela is in Nicholas' seminar and clearly in awe of him. Then, when Nicholas finds her walking on the street, he goes home with her and they quickly become lovers. A short time later, Jane and Nicholas have another fight. Nicholas accuses Jane of marrying him for his money. At the same time, Pamela threatens to end their relationship out of fear that Nicholas will throw her over for Jane and his daughters. Instead, Nicholas insists on renting an apartment for them.

Chapter 27. On her thirty-ninth birthday, Jane reflects on how passionate her relationship with Judson continues to be, eight months later. Jane and Nicholas barely speak to one another during her birthday celebration. A short time later, the producer of "Talk" offers Jane a guest host spot and soon after Jane signs a five year contract to be the permanent host of "Talk." Several months later, Nicholas tells Jane about Pamela and asks for a separation. In her grief, Jane tells Nicholas about Judson.

Chapter 28. Almost a year later, Nicholas is darkly unhappy. Nicholas and Pamela are living in Santa Barbara in a house Nicholas finds annoying. Murray comes by the house one afternoon while Pamela is out by the pool and confronts Nicholas. Murray says that Nicholas is unhappy and should reunite with Jane. Nicholas claims the marriage is dead, even though he has yet to ask for a divorce, and that he cannot forgive Jane for cheating on him. Murray makes it very clear that he disapproves of Nicholas' choices and that he thinks they are based in his elevated ego. A few months later, Nicholas celebrates his fortieth birthday in London where he is beginning to film a movie about William the Conqueror. Nicholas becomes drunk because he is darkly unhappy, not only in his private life, but also because Laurel Blake is playing his wife in the film. At the same time, Nicholas has been thinking a lot about Jane.

Chapter 29. Jane ends her affair with Judson months after she realizes she should have. Judson does not care about her and Jane knows she does not care about him, either. A month later, Jane has lunch with Rhodes and tells him that she wants Nicholas back, but she is afraid he does not want her. However, there have been a great many of phone calls, initiated by Nicholas, that give her hope. Rhodes encourages Jane to fly to London to confront Nicholas. Jane, who has never flown before, nearly has a panic attack on the plane. However, she arrives safely. The following morning, Jane takes a limo to the studio and is about to direct the car inside when she sees another limo in which she thinks Nicholas is riding. Jane jumps out, walks into traffic, and is immediately hit by a car.



Chapter 30. Nicholas is on set when Murray comes to speak to him, an act that is so out of character for Murray that Nicholas knows something is wrong. Nicholas is shocked to learn of Jane's accident. At the hospital, the doctors are not encouraging when they describe Jane's condition. When Nicholas sees Jane, he is shocked by her appearance. Nicholas spends the day calling friends and family, arranging travel for his daughters. At the end of the day, Nicholas leaves with Murray. When he arrives at the townhouse, Pamela is waiting for Nicholas. Nicholas tells Pamela he wants her to leave, that their relationship is over.

The next day, Victoria and Elizabeth arrive. Victoria is standoffish until Nicholas tells her his relationship with Pamela is over. Rhodes arrives the following day while Jane is in surgery. Rhodes feels guilty that he told Jane to fly to London instead of calling Nicholas.

When Jane comes out of surgery, she wakes long enough to tell Nicholas that she loves him. However, the pressure increases in her brain and the doctors tell Nicholas that she will most likely not make it.

Book 3, Jane and Nicholas: Chapters 26-30 Analysis

At the same time Win forgives James and takes him back, proving their undying love for one another despite everything, Jane and Nicholas both seek out lovers. Jane begins her affair with Judson just days before Nicholas meets Pamela. Whenever they are together, all Jane and Nicholas do is fight. Nicholas is cruel in his unhappiness, accusing Jane of things he clearly did not believe earlier in their marriage. It seems that Nicholas needs to lash out, to hurt Jane as much as he is hurting. The reader is not clear why Nicholas is hurting, except for the fact that Jane is no longer broken, therefore her entire existence is not about taking care of Nicholas. Nicholas has become a self-absorbed star and he misses the wife Jane had been when imprisoned by her phobia.

Jane experiences things with Judson that she has never experienced with anyone else. In a way, this helps Jane move beyond the sexually based emotional problems she had had by helping her see she is not unnatural, that she is not frigid or abnormal. However, when Judson refuses to listen to her talk about her father's abuse against her, Jane begins to realize that Judson is a sadistic man who is only sleeping with her for sexual pleasure and to hurt his wife. This helps Jane move beyond the affair, helps her see more clearly her life and her future. Jane realizes that Nicholas is the only man she wants and that she wants to grow old with him. It is this that inspires Jane to speak to Rhodes about Nicholas and inspires Rhodes to send Jane to London. Rhodes has always been something like Jane's conscience, the one who always tells her how it is.

A year after leaving Jane, Nicholas is bitterly unhappy. It is clear to the reader by his behavior with Murray and his tendency to drink too much that Nicholas is not the man he once was. Nicholas has begun thinking about Jane constantly, remembering the good times early in their relationship and the beginning of their marriage. This shows

the reader that Nicholas is not satisfied in his relationship with Pamela and that he is still in love with Jane. This leads to the phone calls that give Jane hope for her marriage.

Jane's accident is an illustration of several themes in this novel. Jane's accident is an illustration of the destruction of her marriage, of the irreparable damage done in the fighting and with the affairs. Her accident is also an illustration of the theme of how short life can be. Jane and Nicholas have forgiven each other and clearly will get back together when Jane recovers. Unfortunately, the chance has passed them by because Jane's injury is too grave and she dies. Nicholas is now alone, left to face life alone, without Jane.



Characters

Jane Heissenhuber Cobleigh

Jane is born to a disinterested father and an outrageous mother. Jane's mother loves her dearly and would have been a supportive parent if not for her early death when Jane is only three. This leaves Jane with a set of grandparents who disliked her mother, and therefore go out of their way to try to rid Jane of all her mother's characteristics, and a continuously disinterested father. Then comes her stepmother.

Jane has a very difficult childhood and her only true solace is drama. Jane acts all through high school and college and intends to become an actress after school. However, when Jane meets Nicholas, she falls instantly in love. After it becomes clear that there is only enough room in their marriage for one actor, Jane steps back and allows Nicholas to shine. Nicholas soon becomes a famous movie star, leaving Jane at home to care for the children.

Jane begins having panic attacks soon after the birth of her first child. Over time, the attacks worsen, especially as Nicholas begins spending more and more time away from the family. This eventually causes Jane to become a prisoner in her own home as she becomes afraid to leave the house. For six years, Jane remains a prisoner in her home, causing tension between her and her children as they argue with their mother for not attending their school performances or even their birthday parties. It also causes tension between Jane and Nicholas when he repeatedly has to go to acting award shows with his mother or his children.

Jane finally seeks help for her phobia and quickly overcomes it. This allows Jane the freedom to pursue a life outside of the home. Nicholas is unhappy with this and becomes irate when Jane decides to go public with her experiences. Fighting ensues and soon Nicholas and Jane are torn apart, both turning to others. In the end, however, they begin to find their way back to one another when Jane is injured in a car accident.

Nicholas Cobleigh

Nicholas is the neglected son of an unhappy Wall Street lawyer and a socialite. Nicholas' mother has little to do with her children's upbringing because she quickly hands them off to nannies the moment they are born. Nicholas' father is also absentee, first spending the war years in France and later spending all his free time with his various mistresses. This leads Nicholas to become somewhat self-sufficient and something of a caregiver to his younger siblings.

When Nicholas and Jane meet, Nicholas is on the fast track to repeating the same life his father and grandfather lived. However, when Nicholas discovers the theater, he falls quickly in love with it. Love for Jane comes swiftly thereafter. Jane and Nicholas marry and pursue acting careers, but Jane quickly puts her career on the back burner so that



Nicholas might be able to pursue his. Nicholas quickly begins making a living in the theater and soon turns to Hollywood.

Jane is unhappy with Nicholas' choice to become a movie star, but Nicholas loves it because the characters seem to have more depth and it is easier for him to portray them. However, fame has side effects and Nicholas soon finds himself the target of lonely co-stars and overly enthusiastic fans. Nicholas finds it easy to fend off most of the sexual passes at first. However, when Jane becomes a prisoner of her phobia and Nicholas finds himself alone once again for months on end while filming on location, he begins an affair with his co-star that ends badly.

Nicholas grows self-absorbed as his career continues, becoming stressed when he makes a few missteps in his choices. This leads to additional stress at home; therefore, when Jane overcomes her phobia and decides to become a spokesperson for phobias against his wishes, Nicholas explodes. The marriage quickly disintegrates, leading Nicholas to leave Jane for a younger woman. The affair lasts two years and ends when Jane is hit by a car.

Murray King

Murray King is Nicholas' agent and closest friend. Murray is a simple man who guides Nicholas' career in the theater, but finds himself out of his league when Nicholas moves into movies. However, Nicholas refuses to hire another agent and Murray remains Nicholas' agent until the end of the novel. In fact, Murray also becomes Jane's agent when she is offered a job hosting a talk show. It is Murray who informs Nicholas of Jane's accident and remains with him the first day she is in the hospital.

Rhodes Heissenhuber

Rhodes Heissenhuber is Jane's half-brother. Rhodes is an exceptionally good looking man whose mother teaches him that he is exceptional; therefore he grows up with something of an inflated sense of self. Jane, however, keeps Rhodes down to earth and they often talk to one another in a way that might appear cruel on the outside, but is really their way of keeping one another humble and realistic. Rhodes is Jane's conscious. When Jane is locked in the house due to her phobia, it is Rhodes who pushes Jane to continue seeking help despite previously failed attempts. When Jane decides she wants Nicholas back, it is Rhodes who encourages Jane to fly to London to confront him rather than have the conversation on the phone.

Winifred 'Win' Tuttle Cobleigh

Winifred 'Win' Tuttle Cobleigh is Nicholas' mother. Win is an unattractive young woman who has little interest in doing the feminine things that her mother wants from her. Win assumes she will never be married, therefore she is thrilled when James Cobleigh takes an interest in her. Win's relationship with James is perfect for the first few years,



especially after they are married. However, when James leaves to be an OSS agent during World War II, he falls in love with someone else. That, coupled with the interference of Win's father in James' continued career with the OSS, causes James to begin having open affairs. Win puts up with it for many years, suffering terrible, dark bouts of depression. Finally Win kicks James out after most of the children are out of the house. For sixteen years they are separated and Win recovers generally from her frequent bouts of depression. Then Win takes him back and they share several years of wedded bliss once again.

James Cobleigh

James Cobleigh is Nicholas' father. James was born to parents who had recently found themselves ousted from their plum social standing to obscurity. James is neglected by a mother too depressed to care and an indifferent father. However, James is a good looking boy, therefore he finds a great many neighbors willing to care for him as he would later find many women willing to offer him anything he wants.

James meets Win while attending her debutante party. James is a law school student at Harvard and is quite ambitious, but it seems he falls for Win because of love. Later, however, when James falls in love with another woman and plots to divorce Win, it seems that perhaps Win's father was right, that James only wanted Win's money and her name. A disappointed man who is bored with everyday life after the excitement of being a spy in the war, James begins to cheat openly on Win. After time, Win eventually kicks James out.

James is miserable after Win kicks him out. It seems apparent that he still loves Win in his own way and misses their life together. This, however, does not keep James from continuing to take multiple lovers. James and Win never divorce and after sixteen years of separation get back together.

Richard Heissenhuber

Richard Heissenhuber is a lack-luster guy who is destined to live a mundane life. After college, Richard is engaged to a proper girl he met in college, but when he meets Sally Tompkins at the doctor's office, he becomes obsessed with her sexual attributes. After just a few weeks, Richard decides to marry Sally so that he might have access to those attributes. The marriage is happy for a few months, but Richard eventually realizes that Sally and he have little in common. Despite this, Richard settles down to a life with Sally until, after four years of marriage, Sally unexpectedly dies from a wasp sting.

Richard remarries a spinster to whom his mother introduces him less than a year later. The marriage is not a happy one, but it also is not volatile. Richard and Dorothy simply do not interact very much. Richard places Dorothy in charge of Jane and gives her spankings whenever Dorothy suggests it is necessary, which is nearly every day. When Jane is seventeen, she begins to take on many of her mother's attributes. Richard



begins slipping into Jane's bed at night and attempts to assault her, leaving Jane with unresolved emotional issues as she grows into adulthood.

Dorothy Rhodes Heissenhuber

Dorothy Rhodes is a bitter store clerk who works at the returns desk in a Cincinnati department store when Richard meets her. Dorothy is determined to get married and therefore Richard feels pushed into a marriage with her. Dorothy gets pregnant almost immediately and gives birth to Rhodes, making him the center of her world with her determination that he will be more successful in life than his father. Dorothy continues to be a bitter woman, however, treating Jane badly all through her childhood and leaving her with emotional damage as an adult.

Sally Tompkins Heissenhuber

Sally Tompkins, born Sarah Taubman, is a precocious teen who runs away from a home where she is unwanted and tries to become a star. After years on the Vaudeville circuit, Sally becomes a burlesque dancer. When Sally turns thirty-three, she realizes she cannot dance much longer and decides she must find another way to survive. When Sally meets Richard, a surprisingly naive man, she quickly seduces him into marriage. Unfortunately, Sally finds marriage boring. The only bright spot is Jane, her lovely daughter on whom Sally dotes. Jane's childhood might have been a happy one if Sally had not died of an allergic reaction to a wasp sting.

Laurel Blake

Laurel Blake is a model turned actress who is hired to play Nicholas' wife in a movie being filmed in Yugoslavia. One night toward the end of shooting, Nicholas and the crew are waiting for the weather to clear so they can film the final two scenes of the movie. Laurel comes to Nicholas' trailer and seduces him, doing something that multiple co-stars have failed to do since the beginning of Nicholas' career. However, the affair ends badly with Nicholas finding himself forced to buy Laurel off. Therefore when Laurel is hired to again play Nicholas' wife in *William the Conqueror*, Nicholas is not happy, especially when Laurel tries to reignite their former affair.

Pamela MacLean

Pamela MacLean is a doctorate candidate at NYU when Nicholas meets her. Nicholas finds Pamela exciting and quickly begins an affair with her. The affair continues for two years, during which Nicholas leaves Jane and buys a house with Pamela in Santa Barbara. However, Nicholas soon finds himself thinking about Jane frequently. Nicholas is very unhappy. Therefore, when Jane is in an accident and Nicholas realizes he still loves her, he ends his affair with Pamela. Nicholas recognizes the affair as a mistake and regrets all the lost time.

Dr. Judson Fullerton

Dr. Judson Fullerton is a psychiatrist who runs a phobia clinic. It is this clinic that helps Jane overcome her phobia and allow her to begin leaving the house. Although Judson is clearly an apathetic, uncaring man, Jane quickly develops a crush on him. With her marriage falling apart, Jane begins to have an affair with Judson. The affair is highly satisfying sexually, providing Jane with experiences she never had with Nicholas, but soon grows stale as Jane begins to see exactly what kind of a man Judson is. Jane ends the affair and flies to London a month later to try to win Nicholas back.



Objects/Places

Wedding Rings

Jane and Nicholas buy wedding rings from a department store the day they marry, three months ahead of schedule. Over the years, Nicholas buys Jane many new wedding rings that are more expensive than the original, but it is the original ring Jane is wearing when Nicholas sees her in the hospital in London after her accident. Nicholas immediately asks Murray to retrieve his, which is hidden in a wooden box where he keeps his cufflinks.

Painting

Win buys an expensive painting shortly after James returns from World War II. This painting becomes something of an illustration of the way Win throws her family's money into James' face.

Wasp

A wasp stings Sally on the chest when Jane is three, causing an allergic reaction that kills Sally before help can arrive.

French Cookbook

Jane is a terrible cook when she and Nicholas first get married. Nicholas gives Jane a French cookbook in the hopes of helping her improve her cooking. The book not only improves Jane's cooking, but she becomes a very proficient cook, often giving dinner parties during her phobia spawned self-imprisonment.

Film Scripts

Nicholas often shares potential film scripts with Jane for her opinion. Early in the marriage, Nicholas values Jane's opinion greatly, but as tension enters their marriage, it becomes a point of contention between them.

Sock and Buskin

Sock and Buskin is the name of the drama club of which Jane is a member at Pembroke.



Brown University

Brown University is an elite university in Rhode Island. Nicholas attends Brown as did his father and grandfather. Jane attends Pembroke, the women's college at Brown, and this is where she and Nicholas meet.

Tuttle Farm

Samuel and Maisie Tuttle buy a farm in Connecticut in the early years of their marriage. This farm is a place of great pleasure for Nicholas as a child. When Maisie dies, she leaves the farm to Nicholas and this is where Nicholas, Jane, and their children live the majority of their lives together.

Hell's Kitchen

Hell's Kitchen is a notorious section of New York City where Jane and Nicholas rent their first apartment as a married couple. The apartment is a tiny cold-water apartment that is a shock to Nicholas who grew up wealthy.

Cincinnati

Jane is born and raised in Cincinnati. Jane does not return to Cincinnati after her first year of college because of her strained relationship with her parents except for a brief visit before her marriage to Nicholas.

New York City

Nicholas grows up in New York City and comes back to live here after college in order to make a go at acting in the theater. Later, Jane and Nicholas share an apartment in New York City where they both return after spending time with their separate lovers.

London

Nicholas is in London working on the film, "William the Conqueror," at the end of the novel. It is for this reason that Jane flies to London in order to attempt to reconcile with Nicholas. It is also in London that Jane is injured when she is hit by a car.



Themes

Impact of Fame

From the very beginning of Nicholas' career as an actor, even before he becomes famous, Nicholas finds himself dealing with the impact of fame. From the very beginning, Nicholas finds himself dealing with co-stars and other women who want to share his bed. At first Nicholas is confused by this, unsure what so many women think they will get from this experience. Nicholas remains faithful to Jane, content to preserve his marriage. However, as his fame begins to grow, especially after he begins making movies, Nicholas finds more and more women seeking him out, even going so far as to spread rumors that they are his lovers. In the end, Nicholas finally gives in to some of this pressure, having an affair with his co-star that ends badly.

Fame has impact on everyone in the family, not just Nicholas. As Nicholas deals with the sexual side of fame, Jane finds herself being observed by strangers and overhearing gossip about her husband that is blatantly untrue. When Jane recovers from her phobia and becomes a spokeswoman for phobias, she is booked on many television shows and sought by numerous publications in part because of who her husband is. Even the job Jane is offered as host on a talk show is given to her because of who her husband is.

When Jane is injured after being struck by a car, Nicholas rushes to the hospital. While discussing Jane's prognosis with the doctors, a woman rushing into the emergency room stops and stares at Nicholas as though she is suddenly in the presence of God. Fame has become an annoying side effect to Nicholas of a career he once enjoyed, but has discovered has become a dark source of stress. At the same time, fame makes it even more difficult for Nicholas to deal with his wife's injuries due to the press coverage.

The Past

The author begins Nicholas and Jane's stories not from their first meeting, but from the births of their grandparents. This is an interesting way to begin such a novel, a superlative way that at first seems unnecessary. However, as the novel progresses, the reader begins to see how the past plays itself over and over again, impacting the lives of both Nicholas and Jane.

In Nicholas's case, both his grandfather and his father are womanizers who treat the women who love them very badly. Henry marries for status, not love, and treats his wife with indifference after he is caught taking kickbacks. James marries for love, but the excitement of war and the inability to live his life as he wants leaves James a bitter man, causing him to take out his unhappiness on his wife and cheating on her openly and often. Therefore, when Nicholas grows up to marry a woman he loves, but then turns on



her when he becomes unhappy. Nicholas cheats on Jane twice, not nearly at the same level as his father, but an act that is just as painful.

Jane's grandmother on her mother's side was a fourteen year old child when she gave birth who was broken and allowed her parents to treat her daughter badly. Jane's grandmother on her father's side is a cold, humorless woman who dislikes Jane's mother and therefore does all she can to drain any similarities to Sally out of Jane. Jane's mother, on the other hand, is a character, a woman who desperately wanted to be an actress but who was realistic enough to know it was never going to happen. Sally was gentle and kind with Jane, but she had a side that was uninhibited in a time when this was not encouraged. In her place, Jane was raised by a cold, frigid woman who left Jane emotionally scarred in a way that more than likely had a great deal to do with her later phobia induced imprisonment. This is also true of her sexually oppressed father who tried to molest her at seventeen.

Life is Short

The novel begins with Jane going to London to take back her husband and with Nicholas thinking about Jane, about the past, and wishing he could change things. Then Jane is in an accident that leaves her in critical condition in the hospital. The novel then goes on to tell their story, beginning before their births and taking the reader all the way to Jane's accident.

As the novel unfolds, the reader becomes bogged down in detail, in the stories of both Jane and Nicholas's ancestors and the mistakes they made in their lives. The novel moves in closer as it reaches the point in which Jane and Nicholas meet in college. The reader learns all about their early romance, their marriage, the birth of their children, and the events that lead to the demise of their marriage. For two years of a nineteen year marriage, Jane and Nicholas turn on one another and then turn to others. Then Jane makes the sacrifice; she ends her affair and travels to London even though she has never flown before and still occasionally suffers panic attacks, to repair her marriage. Unfortunately, Jane is hit by a car before she speaks to Nicholas.

At Jane's bedside, Nicholas is suddenly overcome with emotion, realizing that he still loves Jane and that he wasted so much time for so many stupid reasons. For two years they fought and took other lovers, losing the connection that once drew them together. Now Nicholas can see how stupid it all was and he wants to take Jane back and make it up to her for the rest of his life. Unfortunately, Jane will not recover from her injuries. This allows Nicholas to see that life is painfully short despite how long it may appear.

Style

Point of View

The novel is written in the third person point of view with an authorial voice. There is no one character who is the narrator of the novel. Instead, the author is the clear narrator of this novel, telling the story with references to things that neither of the main characters could possibly know, such as the true identity of Jane's mother, who later lied to everyone about her birth parents, or details about Jane's accident that Jane could not have known and Nicholas was not yet in a position to know.

The point of view of the novel is a type of narration that allows the reader an intimate look at all the main characters, but also provides insight into the events in the novel that might not have been available with another point of view. While the authorial voice can be intrusive in some writing, in this novel it provides an overview of events as well as important information that the reader would never have had otherwise. This voice allows the reader to feel as though privileged to information that even the main characters are not allowed, but information that gives such amazing insight into the characters that the reader understands how they tick much better than the characters themselves do. For this reason, the point of view of the novel works well with the plot.

Setting

The novel is set all over the world, but most of the important events take place on the East Coast. The novel begins in London, where Jane Cobleigh has flown to reunite with her estranged husband only to be hit by a car before she can see him. The novel then moves back in time, taking the reader to New York City and the events that led to the birth of Sarah Taubman, Jane's biological mother. The novel then moves to Cincinnati, then to Rhode Island, back to New York, then to Connecticut. All these settings have little in common, such as the middle class home Jane shares with her family in Cincinnati to the boarding school in Massachusetts where Nicholas attends high school. However, all these settings create a world of wealth, of poverty, of fame that tells the story of Jane and Nicholas Cobleigh's life.

The setting of the novel moves in time, beginning in the 1900s and moving to 1980. The setting also moves from mansions to universities to Hell's Kitchen. The setting is a backdrop to the lives of the characters being portrayed, from Nicholas' aristocratic grandparents to Jane's middle class parents. As Nicholas becomes famous, the setting for Jane stays steady, leaving her always in the house at the Tuttle farm in Connecticut, while Nicholas finds himself in places like Santa Barbara, Yugoslavia, and London. This serves to show the reader how exotic Nicholas' life has become, leaving Jane as his steady rock back at home, until Jane suddenly is not there anymore. The setting serves as a backdrop, but it also becomes something of a symbol of the relationship between Jane and Nicholas, of the timelessness of love despite the shortness of life.



Language and Meaning

The language of the novel is simple English. The novel was written for adult audiences, therefore the language tends to be more sophisticated than language in a young adult novel or novels written for other audiences. However, the language of this novel supports the education level of the main characters, who tend to be highly educated and intelligent.

The language of this novel is basic, but intelligent, creating a world that is both realistic and authentic to the main characters. The author writes a great deal about the human condition, about things that are not normally discussed in polite company, and she does it with a language that is neither vulgar nor imprecise. This gives credit to the reader as an intelligent person who has the maturity to understand the concepts expressed as well as the themes being explored in the novel. For this reason, the language of the novel works well with the plot.

Structure

The novel is divided into three books. The first book tells the story of Jane's grandmother and mother, as well as the story of Jane's childhood. The second book tells the story of both sides of Nicholas' family as well as the story of his parents' marriage and his childhood. The third book tells the story of Nicholas and Jane's relationship from their first meeting to Jane's death. The novel is told in a linear fashion, spanning more than eighty years.

The novel has a single main plot and multiple subplots. The main plot of the novel deals with the relationship between Jane and Nicholas. Several subplots cover the lives of Nicholas and Jane's grandparents and parents. Another subplot deals with the relationship between Jane and her parents, as well as Nicholas and his parents. Other subplots deal with Nicholas' fame and his struggle with temptation. All the plots of the novel come to a satisfying conclusion at the end of the novel.



Quotes

"Things happened. So much had happened in their own lives they had little faith that the future would be predictable and neat." Prologue, pg. ix

"These parents knew their children's lives would be better than their own. Her family had no such ambition. Sarah was their shame. All hope had died at her conception." Book 1, Jane: Chapter 1, pg. 5

"The woman who had been Sarah Taubman and Sally Tompkins and Senorita Rosita Carita and Mrs. Richard Heissenhuber died in her husband's arms a full five minutes before the ambulance came screaming up the street." Book 1, Jane: Chapter 2, pg. 33

"James Kendall Cobleigh was born on a cold, clear April night in 1912 to parents who did not want him. It was a pity. He was a beautiful baby." Book 2, Nicholas: Chapter 5, pg. 92

"For the first time, James had a friend who loved what he loved." Book 2, Nicholas: Chapter 8, pg. 129

"It was not until the day before technical rehearsal for *The Other Sister* that Nicholas bothered to consider that Jane had a life outside Sock and Buskin." Book 3, Jane and Nicholas: Chapter 11, pg. 199

"They were married at four the following afternoon by a justice of the peace who charged them ten dollars above his usual fee, explaining that this was a courtroom of the state of Maryland, not a church, and while he'd be glad to perform a real old-fashioned ceremony straight from an old Book of Common Prayer a nice young couple had left behind years and years ago, it would be extra." Book 3, Jane and Nicholas: Chapter 13, pg. 241

"Whatever the reason, Jane was no good at goodbyes." Book 3, Jane and Nicholas: Chapter 17, pg. 302

"Her life was strictly a holding action. She kept the children and the house, read, cooked, sewed, but primarily waited for Nicholas to come home." Book 3, Jane and Nicholas: Chapter 18, pg. 327

"Nicholas looked around, hoping he was the only one who was troubled. He wasn't. The truth was written on everyone's face. Ice wasn't even half filmed, but the whole company knew exactly what he knew: Nicholas Cobleigh had failed." Book 3, Jane and Nicholas: Chapter 22, pg. 389

"Jane popped into his mind more often in England than she had when they were both in the States. It was an intrusive kind of popping; he often resented her for it." Book 3, Jane and Nicholas: Chapter 28, pg. 468

"Life is too short." Book 3, Jane and Nicholas: Chapter 30, pg. 499



Topics for Discussion

Who is Rivka Taubman? Why does the author feel it is important to tell Rivka's story? What kind of a parent is Rivka? How much of this reflects Rivka's own childhood? How might life have been different for Rivka and her daughter? Why does Sarah run away from Rivka? Where does she go? What profession does she pursue? Why does this not work out as Sarah had hoped? Where does Sarah end up? Why?

Who is Henry Cobleigh? What were the circumstances of his birth and childhood? How did this impact Henry's adulthood? Why did Henry take kickbacks? What was the purpose of this? What did Henry place at risk by doing this? What eventually happens to Henry? Why? How does this impact Henry's child, James? What kind of a man does James grow up to become? How much of this is because of his childhood? How much of this is because of James' basic nature?

Who is Dorothy? Why does she dislike Jane? How does Dorothy treat Jane throughout her childhood? Does the fact that Dorothy never struck Jane herself lessen the impact of the abuse she heaped on Jane? Why does Richard spank Jane so often in her childhood? What was the intended result of these beatings? Why did Richard begin getting into bed with Jane? What was the impact of this on Jane?

Why does the author tell the story of Nicholas' broken jaw when he was ten? What does this story say about Nicholas as a child? What does it say about Nicholas' parents? What impact did this experience have on Nicholas as an adult? How might it explain some of Nicholas' behaviors as an adult? What other events in Nicholas' childhood had an impact on his behaviors as an adult?

What is a phobia? What kind of phobia does Jane have? When did it start? What set it off? What impact does Jane's phobia have on her family, on her marriage? How does Jane overcome her phobia? Why does Nicholas not like that Jane has recovered from her phobia? How does he respond when Jane wants to go public with her experiences? Why? Why does Jane go against Nicholas' wishes? What does this lead to for Jane?

Why does Nicholas find himself overwhelmed with attention from women when he begins his acting career? Where does this attention come from? How does Nicholas respond to this attention? Why? When does the attention become overwhelming for Nicholas? Why does Nicholas have an affair with Laurel Blake? How does it end? How does that make Nicholas feel? How might it have affected Nicholas' future actions if the affair had ended differently? How does this affair compare to the affair Nicholas later has with Pamela MacLean?

Who is Dr. Judson Fullerton? Why does Jane begin seeing him? Why does Jane develop a crush on Judson? What happens when Judson comes on to Jane? How does Jane feel about this affair? Why is Jane upset when she learns that Nicholas has been unfaithful when she is also unfaithful? Why does Jane finally end the affair with Judson?



Why does Jane decide to get Nicholas back? What might have happened had Jane not been hit by a car?