

Anywhere but Here Study Guide

Anywhere but Here by Mona Simpson

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Plot Summary

Anywhere but Here is Mona Simpson's tale of Ann August, a young girl growing up with a narcissistic, manipulative, dramatic, irresponsible, twice-divorced mother named Adele. Ann is trapped in a complicated dance, craving affection and depending upon a mother who is emotionally abusive. The novel includes several scenes of subtle but disturbing sexual abuse of children. The novel is suffused with the adult Ann's affection for and tolerance of her mother's foibles, even though they make Ann's childhood difficult.

Beginning when Ann is just a toddler, her mother Adele dreams of making Ann a child star. Adele longs to escape Bay City Wisconsin for a wealthy, glamorous life in Hollywood, and sees Ann as her tool to do so. Adele persists in the belief that Ann will be a child star, even though the agents she consults are not encouraging. The story opens with seven-year-old Ann living with her doting, supportive grandmother and her manipulative, self-centered, controlling mother in the grandmother's modest home on Lime Kiln Road. Next door Ann's aunt Carol and her husband Jimmy live with their two sons, a noisy, contentious family completely unable to protect Ann from her mother's abuse.

When Ann is nine, the mother and daughter take ice skating lessons together. Adele meets Ted, the ice skating pro, and soon they are dating. Adele marries Ted and with Ann they move into a windowless ranch house. Ted and Adele live far beyond their means, buying expensive cars and fancy clothes but living in a house without any furniture. Ted begins to work more hours, and the couple drifts apart. Their financial problems drive another wedge between them, but the biggest factor in their break-up is Adele's delusions of grandeur and longing for a more glamorous life in California. Adele scams an elderly owner out of a Lincoln Continental, steals Ted's credit card and heads to California with Ann.

In California, Adele takes a job as a speech therapist with the Los Angeles school district. Instead of living within her means, she continues to mismanage her money. Adele rents a tiny furnished studio in Beverly Hills so that Ann can attend Beverly Hills High School with the children of wealthy producers and movie stars. Eventually the two move into a two-bedroom townhouse, but again they cannot afford furniture. When Adele loses her job, she works as a housekeeper for the parents of Ann's friend Peter Keller, living in the Kellers' guesthouse. Mrs. Keller fires Adele, but she and Ann continue to rent the Kellers' guesthouse throughout Ann's high school years. Adele has a series of relationships with men in her unsuccessful quest to find a rich husband.

Finally when Ann is 17, she goes on her first audition and wins a minor role in a TV series. The job lasts only for one year, but it is enough to get Ann into a good college and pay for her education. Once she has escaped her mother's control, Ann does not return for five years. Instead, she spends holidays and vacations with her grandmother and extended family in Wisconsin. Still, when Ann receives a large residual check, she gives it to her mother to buy a little retirement cottage. Instead, Adele spends the money

on a luxury car and continues her irresponsible lifestyle, renting a house on the beach from the Kellers. Despite her unbalanced mother and chaotic childhood, Ann is able to make a successful life for herself.



Part One: Ann

Part One: Ann Summary

Anywhere but Here is the poignant, hilarious, touching story of the childhood of Ann August. As the story opens, Ann's mother has decided to leave her second husband and move from Bay City, Wisconsin to L.A. to make her 12-year-old daughter a star. They have packed everything they own into Adele's pristine, white Lincoln Continental.

In Chapter 1, Anywhere, Ann and her mother Adele are traveling from Bay City, Wisconsin to Los Angeles, California where Adele hopes Ann will become a child star. Along the way they stay in cheap Travel Lodge motels and eat in the attached coffee shops, so they can charge everything on a Mobile credit card stolen from Ann's stepfather, Ted. They make a detour to visit Arizona because Adele has seen the beautiful homes of Scottsdale in magazines. Once there, Adele wants to stay in an expensive hotel called the Luau, while Ann lobbies for them to save money by staying in a Travel Lodge on the edge of town. Finally, Adele reluctantly agrees. However, Adele causes an accident on the way, rear-ending another car. Seeing their damaged car, a policeman and his wife invite Ann and Adele to stay with them, but Adele declines. Instead, she asks the police officer to drive them back to the Luau—so Adele manipulates the situation to get what she wanted, all along. They explore the town, with Adele buying a handmade bell and ordering expensive custom-made perfume that she never picks up. Before they leave Scottsdale, Adele pretends to be a wealthy woman and cons a local real estate agent into showing them a mansion. Adele agrees to buy the mansion, planning to sign a contract the next morning. Instead of meeting the real estate agent for breakfast, they pay the hotel bill and leave before dawn.

Driving across Nevada, Adele sparks an argument with her daughter. In a scene that has been repeated all the way across the country, Adele simply stops the car, opens the door and forces Ann to get out. Adele drives out of sight, leaving her young daughter on the side of the road, in the middle of nowhere. Usually when this happens, Ann cries uncontrollably until her mother finally returns. Ann is horribly upset and angry at being abandoned, but also realizes she has no one to care for her except her mother. Ann becomes contrite and the two get along for a while. However, this time is different. When Adele forces her daughter out of the car, Ann realizes that she is only about a mile from a gas station. She walks back to the station and borrows a dime from a teenage boy lounging outside. Ann uses the dime to place a collect call to her grandmother. Ann chats with Granny, pretending her mother is in the restroom fixing her makeup. When Ann hangs up, the teen boy whistles at Ann's legs and offers her a ride, but she is wise enough to decline. When Adele returns, she is shocked to find that Ann is not where she was abandoned. Eventually she backtracks and finds her daughter. It is the last time that Adele ever abandons her child on the side of the road.

In Chapter 2, Bel Air Hotel, Ann and her mother finally arrive in California. Adele has made reservations at the exclusive Bel Air Hotel, which she read about in magazines.



However, before they check in, Adele insists that they wash and change into cute matching gingham dresses. She makes Ann strip and wash her entire body, in the restroom of the Hamburger Hamlet restaurant. Then they have to scrub the car inside and out until it glistens. Adele has encouraged Ann to choose a stage name for her to use in California, so she calls her daughter Heather.

At the Bel Air Hotel, the two have to share a room with only one bed — an arrangement Adele likes and Ann hates. Adele wants to stay in and order room service, but Ann convinces her to go to the posh restaurant on the patio. Adele spends hours getting dressed in a beautiful black gown, heels and an elaborate hairdo. She confides to Ann that she hopes to meet a rich man to marry at dinner. Adele is shocked by the high prices in the restaurant, ordering only a cup of soup and a glass of wine. Ann is hungry and defiantly orders a steak with baked potato and all the trimmings. Ann is relieved when Adele finishes the steak, because she won't have to listen to her mother whine about the bill anymore. After dinner, Ann orders coffee — another reminder that Adele's little girl is growing up.

Chapter 3, *The House on Carriage Court* recounts Ann's earlier years. Until she is nine, Ann lives with her mother at her grandmother's house. Then Adele decides to take ice skating lessons to firm her thighs. A short time later, she goes to Las Vegas with the ice skating instructor Ted, and comes back married to him. The little family moves into a windowless house on Carriage Court. The new house has pristine, expensive new appliances, but no furniture except two beds and a single chair. Adele gets a job, and Ann is always in trouble, usually for not cleaning the house while her mother works.

After three years of marriage, Adele decides to divorce her husband and move to California with Ann, even though the family is happier than they have ever been. She puts a down payment on a slightly used white Lincoln Continental, and phones Los Angeles about a job for her and an agent for Ann. While packing, Adele finds 12-year-old Ann's photos of naked younger children and berates her.

Part One: Ann Analysis

This section illuminates Ann's precarious relationship with her shallow, narcissistic mother Adele. Like any child, Ann craves her mother's attention and love. She is completely dependent on her mother financially and emotionally. Adele has shown that she is entirely capable of abandoning Ann, just driving off and never returning. Yet, being close to Adele carries dangers of its own, including being touched in ways that make Ann uncomfortable. Adele is unstable, neurotic, pretentious, manipulative and overly involved with her daughter's life in an inappropriate way. Adele depends upon Ann for all the companionship, love and passion that she needs because Adele is unable to sustain an adult friendship or romantic relationship. Ann tries to act as the adult in their relationship, moderating her mother's moods and encouraging her to make wise decisions, especially about money. Adele pretends they are equal partners, asking Ann's opinion on whether they should stay at the expensive hotel. However, Adele



manipulates Ann into agreeing and blames Ann for her own bad driving when Adele rear ends a car.

The choice of hotel illustrates everything about Adele's relationship with Ann. As a preteen, Ann really does not fully grasp the issues at stake and cannot make an informed decision on her own. Instead, she is working only with facts supplied by her mother. Still, Ann suspects that they have little money and it will be much safer to save for their arrival in California. Adele wants to splurge on the Luau, even though she cannot afford a luxurious hotel with room service. When Ann refuses to be manipulated, Adele causes an auto accident. She refuses the policeman's gracious invitation to stay in his home, because she does not want to allow other adults to see the unhealthy relationship she has developed with her daughter. Even though the police officer could have taken them to the inexpensive Travel Lodge just as easily, Adele uses the accident as an excuse to do what she wants to anyway—stay at the Luau Hotel for a week. This allows Adele to blame Ann for the auto accident and for the expensive stay at a lavish hotel, which Adele wanted all along. Adele is so convincing in her myriad lies that for an hour or two while they are touring the mansion, Ann actually believes they will live there. Then Adele mentions her husband and Ann realizes it is all a sham. The mansion symbolizes the wealthy and secure home life that Adele believes she is entitled to because she is better than other people.

The scene where Adele forces Ann out of the car and abandons her for the last time is pivotal to their relationship. For the first time, Ann is able to think rationally as an adult rather than simply reacting emotionally as a child. As she is older, Ann now has options. She can call her grandmother and could even ask Gramma to come get her—although Ann decides not to do so this time. Ann also has the option of accepting a ride from the teen boy, who whistles at her legs. When Adele finally finds her daughter, their relationship has changed forever. Adele realizes that it is only a matter of time before Ann is able to escape her manipulations. Adele also feels threatened by her daughter's emerging sexuality at a time when Adele's sex appeal is waning. This event foreshadows Ann's eventual escape from her mother, relying on her intelligence to propel herself into a sane adult world.

Ann's discomfort sharing a bed with Adele foreshadows the subtle sexual abuse revealed later in the novel. Adele wants to sleep in her daughter's bed, but pretends to the desk clerk that this is an inconvenience, because she realizes that her desire is not normal. This intrusion makes Ann defiant and angry, which is why she insists on eating out that night. Adele's use of the stage name Heather for her daughter symbolizes Adele's belief that they have been transformed by moving to California. For Ann, it simply underscores the many lies that make up their lives. The cycle of abuse is continued when 11-year-old Ann fondles younger children and takes photos of them.

In Adele's mind, California (like the mansion on Scottsdale) symbolizes the lavish, carefree life that she is meant to live, adored by the public. Yet, on some level Adele realizes that she cannot escape her manipulative, narcissistic personality and therefore cannot escape her problems. She warns Ann that in California they will have little



money and have to live in an apartment. Still, Adele hopes that the people they meet will see only their flashy car.



Part Two: Lillian

Part Two: Lillian Summary

Chapter 4, The Age of the Year, focuses on the earlier life of Ann's beloved Gramma, Lillian. As a girl Lillian has seven aunts, all sisters of her mother. Lillian has a gift for making pie crust. On Saturdays, she goes to the home of each aunt in turn, making pie crust while the aunt chats and does sewing or laundry. The sisters are close, and use Lillian as a messenger to carry recipes, notes, gossip and questions from one to the other.

Lillian's mother is ashamed of her husband, a welder. Lillian has only one sibling, a fair-haired brother named Milton. One day while the rest of the family is away, Mother takes 7-year-old Milton into her lap and begins kissing him as if he is a man and fondling him. Shocked, she comes to her senses and releases the boy after a minute or two. Later, Mother merely considers it an accident and believes that Milton was the aggressor. Still, when he grows up and joins the merchant marines, Mother wonders if he is fleeing from the memories of that childhood abuse. Decades later, when Lillian's father dies, they must hire a private detective to find Milton, a drunk merchant marine living above a tavern in San Francisco.

The family takes in a foster child, a deaf girl just Lillian's age named Penny, who is half Oneida Indian. Later Penny and her father live with Aunt Clara until he gets a job in the circus. Milton develops a crush on Penny. Lillian has a crush on Art, a neighbor boy just one year older, who sometimes babysits for Lillian and Milton. Art ignores Lillian until she blossoms into a beauty as a senior in high school. Lillian has been accepted into a college. The day after her 17th birthday, Art invites her to go swimming alone with him. Lillian agrees. She does not really know how babies are made, and is hurt, excited and confused when Art has sex with her. Although they only do it once, Lillian becomes pregnant and all hopes of attending college are crushed.

Lillian's mother is furious with her. She refuses to attend the wedding, and will not allow Art in her house. Lillian gets married in a navy blue dress that she already owns, and the young couple moves 60 miles away to Bay City with baby Carol. Art works long hours as a photoengraver for the local newspaper, and raising minks. Eventually they buy a large parcel of land on Lime Kiln Road and build a house. When Carol is eleven, they have another daughter. Adele is a beautiful, spoiled tomboy, getting everything the young couple could not afford to give Carol. When World War II begins, Carol enlists in the WACS. After the war she comes home to work in a beauty parlor in town and marries Jimmy. By the time Adele graduates, the family has the money to send her to college, where she becomes a sorority beauty queen. Her mother is shocked when Adele poses topless for a catalog. Adele goes to graduate school and refuses to come home even to care for her father, who is dying of colon cancer. She marries Hisham, a political science professor from Egypt.



While visiting Hisham's family in Egypt, Adele conceives Ann. It is a difficult pregnancy and the baby is underweight. The couple return to Bay City, where Hisham sells cars and then vacuum cleaners. By the time Ann is four years old, Hisham has left to seek his fortune as a songwriter in California, leaving behind only unpaid bills for hand-tailored suits and expensive luggage. Lillian quietly pays the bills.

Part Two: Lillian Analysis

Seeing the family history through Lillian's eyes permits an adult view of Ann's birth, Adele's neurosis, and illuminates the causes. Lillian is raised in a much more innocent time, ignorant of how babies are made until she becomes pregnant. Despite this ignorance, or perhaps because of it, inappropriate sexual behavior towards children runs in the family. Lillian's mother fondles her brother Milton when he is a child.

Significantly, Lillian's mother is ashamed of her husband, a welder. This classism and longing for a more glamorous life is a common thread that runs through generations of women. Lillian must give up her dreams of going to college when she becomes pregnant with a local man's child. Lillian's dissatisfaction may have transmitted itself subconsciously to her own daughters, especially Adele. Lillian's oldest daughter Carol feels that her husband Jimmy is a little beneath her. Lillian's younger daughter Adele has such delusions of grandeur that she will only be satisfied with a husband who is one of the world's wealthiest men. Although her father eventually buys substantial property in Bay City, Adele is humiliated that he works as a photoengraver and raises mink for extra money.



Part 3: Ann

Part 3: Ann Summary

In Chapter 5, South of Wilshire, Ann and Adele stay at the Bel Air Hotel for three weeks before moving to the smaller, shabby Laskey Hotel. At the Bel Air, Adele passes time by pretending to be rich, calling real estate agents to show her mansions for sale. In reality, she cannot afford to buy any house, even the least expensive. Finally, school starts. Adele is shocked to find that the job she has accepted as Special Ed teacher is in an all-black elementary school in Watts. The first day, someone vandalizes her precious white Continental in the school's secured parking lot. The second day, Adele goes to the school district headquarters and demands a transfer to a school in a white area, which she receives.

Ann wears a navy blue wool dress with a red belt to school the first day, only to discover that all the other kids are wearing bell-bottom jeans and tee shirts. She doesn't want to be friends with the only two girls who will sit near her. Ann and her mother move to a modest one-bedroom apartment with no furniture. They soon move to a furnished studio apartment in an unfashionable area south of Wilshire Boulevard. Eventually a boy named Daniel Swan starts walking Ann home.

Their first Christmas in L.A. is dismal, with Adele forcing Ann to clean the apartment all day, leaving no time for festivities. The pair receive Christmas presents from their Wisconsin relatives, which they open weeks early. Adele calls the relatives on Christmas day, pretending that she sent gifts that were lost in the mail. It is a charade that Adele will repeat every year.

Chapter 6, Las Vegas, Disneyland, Egypt, is a flashback to Ann's earlier life. After years without word from Ann's father Hisham, he suddenly calls one day and invites Ann and Adele to Disneyland. Hisham, an aspiring songwriter, leaves several years prior to seek his fortune in California. He only gets as far as Las Vegas, where he is working as a waiter and sharing an apartment with three other men. Adele cautions Ann not to tell Gramma that Adele shares Hisham's bed while they are there. Since Ann and Adele are four days late arriving, Hisham has gambled away all the money for the trip to Disneyland. Instead, Hisham gives Ann a cheap package of hairbands for her beautiful, long black locks.

Three years later, after Adele has been married to Ted for two years, they hear from Hisham again. He has married an older, well-to-do woman named Uta and is living in Reno. He asks everyone to call him John and is applying for citizenship. The new wife orchestrates a trip to Disneyland for Ann and her granddaughter, who is the same age as Ann. Ann is ultimately disappointed, not knowing how to relate to this stranger who is her father. She never hears from him again.



Chapter 7, A Shopping Center Somewhere in the Valley takes place in California. To escape their tiny studio apartment south of Wilshire, Ann and Adele drive around at night, ogling expensive houses in Beverly Hills. On the way back they stop to get an ice cream cone. Since Adele is wearing fancy clothes, they stop at Will Wright's, the most expensive place. Lonnie Tishman comes up and introduces himself to them. He invites Adele on a date to a cheap restaurant. The two return after the date and spend the night on the sofa bed in the tiny studio apartment, just a foot from Ann's bed. Soon Lonnie moves in and Adele stops pretending he has Hollywood connections. She still hopes that he will put together a deal to build a shopping center and be able to give Adele some money. Meanwhile, Tishman is not even contributing to the rent on the studio.

In a pivotal event, after an argument with her mother one morning, Ann walks out of the apartment with her backpack, school clothes and a little money. She wanders to a cafe several streets away. Lonnie and Adele let her go. Eventually, just as Ann is panicking, with nowhere to live, her mother drives up. Adele tells her that Lonnie is gone, moved out of the apartment permanently.

In Chapter 8, A Doctor's Apartment, Ann and Daniel Swan begin to bake cakes for school projects, and become quite accomplished at it. Ann writes her Gramma with questions about baking and icing. They make a set of cakes depicting the Milky Way galaxy for the school bake sale. Adele hopes to meet an eligible single man at the bake sale. She meets Dr. Josh Spritzer, the orthodontist father of Ann's classmate Amy. Dr. Spritzer confirms Ann's fear that she needs braces to straighten her teeth. Adele and Dr. Spritzer go on a date, which ends with Adele spending the night in his apartment. The next morning Ann and Adele go out to breakfast at a cafe on the beach. Ann leaves her mother alone, riding to school with some friends she meets at the beach.

Adele and Ann are comfortable visiting Daniel's family at their elegant home on San Ysidro Drive in Benedict Canyon. There, Daniel tries to teach Ann to play the piano. He is rude and condescending to Riley, the maid's son, even though Riley has already acted in several commercials. Daniel calls his mother the Witch and his father the Failure. Adele makes friends with Daniel's mother, bonding over their financial problems.

Part 3: Ann Analysis

Adele's lack of willingness to help the students who need it the most further reveals her shallowness and selfishness. She clearly values her car more than the future of the special needs students she is supposed to teach. Adele also betrays her self-absorption by not planning any Christmas festivities for her daughter, and pretending that she has bought and sent holiday gifts to her relatives in Wisconsin. This action reveals Adele's mental problems. She sincerely expects her family to believe that her gifts are consistently lost in the mail, year after year.

Despite his dream of striking it rich in California, Hisham/John makes it only as far as Nevada. His fate symbolizes all the broken dreams of ordinary people, the fate that Ann and Adele still hope to avoid. On the first trip, living in a shabby apartment shared with



three other men and working as a waiter is bad enough. On the second trip, Hisham/John has completely given up on his dream and hums other people's songs, instead of his own. Ann longs for a relationship with the father who left her when she was four and treasures even the cheap package of hairbands he has given her.

Adele's delusions of grandeur and her pretensions come into play in the relationship with Lonnie Tishman. Adele believes that he is the son of a wealthy clan of real estate developers because of his last name. Adele also convinces herself that Tishman has connections to movie producers and agents. She invents convoluted fantasies to explain why he is reluctant to spend any money on them and soon moves into their tiny studio apartment. Tishman believes that they are well off because Adele tells him that Ann is a child star. Even when Adele begins to see through Tishman's lies (and her own fantasies) she is afraid to split up with him because she imagines that he has Mafia connections. Ann is beginning to doubt her mother's promises but still fears her mother's threats. The scene when Ann walks out on her mother and Lonnie is the first time that she asserts her independence, with some success. At least Tishman leaves. When Ann leaves Adele alone on the beach, riding to school with her friends in Chapter 8, that underscores her growing sense of independence.

Many people besides Ann and Adele have failed to have their dreams of wealth realized in California, including Daniel Swan's family. Although they live in a huge, custom-built home in the expensive neighborhood of Benedict Canyon, they are broke and living on credit cards. Mrs. Swan, a real estate agent, worries how she will buy Christmas gifts for all her clients while Mr. Swan travels to Mexico several times per year, trying to put together a real estate deal. They cannot even afford living room furniture for the house. Even Riley, whose dreams of being a child actor have come true, must live as an interloper in the Swan's house and see his mother work as the Swan's maid. Adele is almost as delusional about Dr. Spritzer as she was about Lonnie Tishman, claiming that she can tell he loves her after one date by the way he has sex with her.



Part 4: Carol

Part 4: Carol Summary

Chapter 9, Happiness and Accidents, reveals the adolescence and young adulthood of Adele and her older sister. Carol reminisces about an idyllic vacation the two spent together on Mackinac Island, when she was a young mother and Adele was still in college. For perhaps the only time in their lives, the sisters were both accepting and supportive of each other, declaring a truce in what Carol sees as an ongoing competition.

Carol also recounts the saga of her son Hal, the baby who went to Mackinac Island with them. Hal was never athletic like her younger son Benny and therefore is a disappointment to his father Jimmy. Although Hal is smart, he never got good grades in school and starts hanging around with a bad crowd. Years later, Carol learns that Hal starts using drugs while still in high school. After high school, Hal marries his girlfriend Merry, over his parents' objections. Soon she is pregnant with their daughter Tina. Hal flunks out of college, so he joins the military. A training accident leaves him with an injured leg and a slight limp. Hal is discharged from the military after only a few months, and returns home to Bay City. This causes shame for Hal and the family, since many of Hal's classmates are fighting in Vietnam. In Bay City, Hal and Merry continue using cocaine and heroin, until he is arrested for dealing drugs. Carol and Jimmy are shocked to hear of the arrest on the TV news because they did not even know their oldest son had a drug problem.

Jimmy gets a mortgage on the house to pay Hal's bail. This is the first time that Hal's father has shown confidence in him and it transforms Hal's life. He pleads guilty to the drug offense, but refuses to incriminate anyone else. Hal is sentenced to two years in jail, but can leave during the day to work and support his family. Jimmy gives Hal a job selling water softeners, so that Hal can get out of jail every day and earn some money. Merry brings their daughter to the store for lunch every day so that the toddler can see her father. After finishing his sentence, Hal becomes a successful sales person for the company. Eventually he and Merry divorce, although they continue to co-parent their daughter.

When Gramma hears of Hal's arrest on TV, she suffers a stroke. She eventually recovers, but suffers several more strokes over the years. Carol takes care of her mother every day until her death. In fact, it is only after Hal's arrest and the first stroke that they truly become close, more like sisters than mother and daughter.

Part 4: Carol Analysis

This section, told from Carol's point of view, reveals that when younger, Carol craved Adele's attention and approval and perhaps still does. Carol recognizes Adele's overly



dramatic personality and her sister's unhealthy relationship with Ann. However, Carol believes that much of Adele's attention-seeking behavior is an attempt to compete with her older sister. This conclusion is not supported elsewhere in the novel and Carol admits that although she is eleven years older, it is most often Adele who takes the lead. Carol's story underscores the fact that while most of Adele's problems are self-inflicted, the family in Wisconsin is going through genuine hardships that Adele is completely unconcerned about. She is oblivious of Hal's inspirational turnaround, from drug addict to solid citizen. Adele is not around when her mother has a stroke and requires constant care. The final sentences of the chapter, where Carol says she got over Hal's drug problems but never got over Benny, foreshadows the death of her younger son.



Part Five: Ann

Part Five: Ann Summary

Chapter 10, Home, recounts scenes from Ann's earlier life on Lime Kiln Road. Adele and her best friend Lolly take four-year-old Ann shopping in Milwaukee with them. Ann sees a pair of sparkly red shoes exactly like her mother's and wants them. Adele tells her she cannot have the shoes. Returning home, tiny Ann pitches a fit and demands the red shoes. When she is told she cannot have them, Ann runs away from home, walking across the yard. Adele drags her screaming daughter back, injuring her on the way. Later that night, Adele gives Ann the red shoes, which she had bought while they were still in Milwaukee. Then Adele takes Ann on a drive to the orphanage. Sitting outside the forbidding gray building, Adele tells her daughter that if Ann does not behave, Adele will abandon her and she will have to live at the orphanage.

When Ann starts school, Adele packs enormous sack lunches for her — huge sandwiches, three or four pieces of fruit, candies, coffee cake, pie. Ann gets in trouble with the nuns for throwing most of her lunch away. Eventually Ann realizes that some of the other students are hungry, and begins to share her lunch with them, especially Theresa Griling. On Halloween, nine-year-old Ann and her friend Theresa Griling are molested by a group of boys after Benny abandons them. One of the boys uses scissors to hack off Ann's long, lovely black hair. Benny returns, but watches, refusing to help the girls. When Adele finds out that Ann has been assaulted, she screams and berates her daughter. Adele claims that without her signature long, dark hair, Ann will never be a child star. Again, Adele threatens to abandon Ann.

In Chapter 11, Lime Kiln Road, Ann and Adele move into a two story townhouse-style apartment in California. Again, the apartment is bare because they cannot afford any furniture. In Ann's room there is a cubbyhole left by the carpenters. She puts her precious tin jewelry box on the shelf. One day Ann accidentally jostles it with her elbow and it falls between the beams of the building, where it is forever irretrievable.

The phone call that Ben has been killed in a traffic accident comes while Ann and Adele are still living in the tiny furnished studio apartment. Adele wakes Ann in the middle of the night to tell her, screaming with the phone to her ear. Carol wires them money to return to Bay City for the funeral — their first visit home. Ben was riding in a truck driven by their neighbor Jay Brozek when they struck a tree. Ben was killed. Jay, who was driving drunk, was merely scratched. Returning home, Wisconsin seems very provincial and safe, inhabited by unsophisticated, ignorant people. At the funeral, all Adele can talk about is how much money Jimmy and Carol will get if they sue the Brozeks. Showing remarkable forgiveness, Ben's parents allow Jay Brozek to be one of the pallbearers, saying that is what Ben would have wanted. Jay bonds with Ben's girlfriend Susie in their shared grief. Adele skips the ceremony at the cemetery to go to court, where her divorce from Ted is finalized.



Returning home days early, Ann cannot shake the feeling that Carol thinks she has just paid for a convenient divorce for Adele. Yet, Adele is as pretentious as ever, making sure they are dressed in the best and sipping cocktails in the airport, even though Ann is only 15 years old. When Adele calls her current paramour from Wisconsin, Dr. Josh Spritzer, he is not interested in talking to her. Perhaps because of this lack of attention, Adele sabotages Ann's first date with an older boy named Ronnie. First, Adele sets out to buy a wildly expensive Christmas tree. When the tree flies off the car and is smashed on the highway, Adele calls Ann at home and threatens to commit suicide. Ann is all ready for the date when she takes the call. Despondent, Ann calls all the police departments and hospitals in the area. Finally, she changes out of her nice clothes and collapses in bed. When Ronnie knocks on the door, Ann is too depressed to answer. Just as he is about to leave, Adele drives up with an even bigger Christmas tree. She invites Ronnie in and insists that he help them get the tree off the car. By the time they are finished, it is too late to go to the movies. Adele co-opts the date by taking Ronnie and Ann out for hot chocolate.

In Chapter 12, A Backhouse on North Palm Drive, Adele loses her job during the fall teacher's strike. Ann's friend Peter Keller, who is a year behind her in school, invites them both for Thanksgiving dinner. Soon Adele is working as the family's maid and the two are living in the family's back house behind the pool, a gameroom that was originally built as a studio for Mrs. Keller, who is an artist. Adele makes a very poor maid, and the Kellers fire her, but allow them to rent the back house. The Kellers help Adele to get a job as a speech therapist in a convalescent home. Ann gets a job at a clothing boutique and begins stealing clothes for herself and her mother. Dr. Josh Spritzer seems to be losing interest in Adele, in spite of the nice clothes she now wears. Adele and Ann drive past his condo almost every night. Adele begins to date Jack Irwin, a wealthy man whose elderly mother lives at the convalescent home. Soon she has to break it off with him, though. Adele simply cannot bring herself to have sex with someone so ugly.

When friends from school drop Ann off, she pretends she lives in the mansion in front, not the tiny converted guesthouse in the back. This is more difficult because she is not allowed to use the front gate. Young Peter Keller is madly in love with Ann, although she is in love with Daniel Swan. Soon Peter and Ann begin to have sex in the back house or the maid's room of the main house. Peter's parents suspect and send him away to an expensive private prep school in the East. Peter and Ann continue having sex furtively on Peter's school vacations until Ann leaves for college.

In Chapter 12, A Doctor's Office, Adele learns from Mrs. Keller that Josh Spritzer is seeing another woman. She threatens to tell his psychiatrist all about Dr. Spritzer. Instead, Adele can only get an appointment with Dr. Spritzer's son's psychiatrist, Dr. Hawthorne. Soon, Adele stops going to work. She arranges elaborate fruit baskets and vegetable trays in the refrigerator, which no one ever eats. She lounges around the house all day in a floor-length peach negligee penning love letters on red paper. An entire drawer is stuffed with bills, but Adele tells Ann not to worry. She is going to marry Dr. Hawthorne within three or four weeks and they will have plenty of money. Like all the kids at Beverly Hills High School, Ann passionately wants a car for her birthday. Adele



gives her a set of keys, but says the delivery of the car has been delayed. In reality, of course, there is no car.

Adele's appointments with Dr. Hawthorne have ended. Adele is sure that this is because he wants to marry her, no matter what he says. When her letters are returned unopened, she takes out her frustrations on Ann, beating her. Sometimes Ann hides in her closet or in the alley behind the house. Other times, she fights back. One day Ann comes home from school to find her mother having a wedding dress altered for her upcoming nuptials with the psychiatrist.

Ann calls Dr. Hawthorne and makes an appointment to talk with him. He tells her that Adele is completely wrong — he has no personal feelings for her at all. That is why he has refused to see her again. He promises to see Adele one more time to explain this to her yet again. His secretary will call when there is an opening in his schedule. The agent Ellen Arcade finally calls Ann to audition for the part of an Iranian girl on TV. It is Ann's big break. On the day of the audition, Adele receives a call from Dr. Hawthorne. He has an appointment open and wants to see her. Adele tells Ann she must cancel her audition, that she probably will not get the part anyway.

Ann hitchhikes to the audition. With no time to fix her hair or makeup, she jams a colorful cap on her head and does a hilarious, exaggerated impression of her mother. She has to walk all the way home because she does not have 40 cents for the bus, and no one will lend it to her. Ann wins the part, although the role has been changed to Marie Iroquois, an American Indian. Being on TV is less exciting than Ann expected. Mostly they just want lots of shots of her long black hair. Sometimes she gets to say something funny. She saves her money for college. While Mrs. Keller is away, Mr. Keller asks her if she needs money for college. Just before she leaves for college, with the Marie Iroquois role ended, Ann has her hair cut into a chin-length bob, over her mother's objections.

As she packs for college, Ann looks through the suitcase of memorabilia that she and her mother have brought from Wisconsin. It contains everything precious to them—family photos, keepsakes from her father and grandmother. It also contains nude photos of Ann taken by a professional photographer when she was seven.

Part Five: Ann Analysis

Adele sees the house on Lime Kiln Road as ordinary and her heart's desire is to escape it, to become someone special. Especially after moving to California, Ann sees the small white-frame house as an idealized version of home, a place where she felt safe and comfortable. The episode with the red shoes shows that Adele is emotionally unsuited to be a parent. She tempts Ann with the red shoes, then refuses to buy them. Adele has no idea how to help her tiny daughter control her tantrum. When Adele finally gives the shoes to Ann, both are disappointed. Worse yet, Adele uses the occasion to threaten Ann with abandonment—an abandonment that is echoed when Adele leaves her daughter on the side of the road repeatedly.



Many of Ann's memories are less than idyllic. She has fond memories of Christmas, even though the family bickers. They take in two girls from the orphanage for the holiday, then spend all day screaming at each other because Adele wants to sell the back acreage of the farm. At night in bed together, after opening up all the presents, Adele rubs her daughter's back. Ann craves her mother's touch until it becomes too intrusive, with Adele fondling her daughter under her pajamas. The jewelry box symbolizes the loss of Ann's innocence, but it also foreshadows Ann's loss of Ben, her childhood love.

When a neighborhood hooligan cuts Ann's hair, the loss is symbolic. Adele has told Ann that her thick black hair is the best type, and both of them believe that she will become a child star on TV due to her hair. When the boy cuts it, he is symbolically destroying her dreams—and her mother's dream of being special. The red shoes are also highly symbolic. At the age of four, Ann does not have any desire for sparkly red high-heeled shoes until her mother shows them to her while on a shopping trip in Milwaukee. Then, after taunting her daughter with the shoes, Adele denies her. This symbolizes Adele's self-absorption, her manipulation of Ann and her emotional blackmail. After returning home, tiny Ann has a tantrum because she wants the red shoes, but her mother continues to deny her heart's desire. Finally, Ann runs away from home and Adele brings out the shoes, complaining that Ann has spoiled the surprise. In fact, Ann would not have wanted the shoes if Adele had not shown them to her. Adele created the desire specifically so she could thwart it and then taunt Ann. Adele uses her daughter to create dramatic, emotional scenes, like a spoiled child playing with a doll.

Back in Bay City, Ann must confront the difference between Adele's hopes and reality. While Jimmy and Carol own a house and a trailer, Adele is living with her daughter in a tiny furnished studio. Adele has left Ted to pay her bills, including making the payments on the Lincoln and paying all the credit card charges for their trip west. While Adele pretends to be superior to her relatives, in fact she has much less. Most of all, Ann and Adele have not taken Hollywood by storm, as Adele expected. They cannot even afford to return to Wisconsin—Carol has to pay for the trip.

Ann's sexual relationship with Peter echoes her disturbing yet innocent sexual exploitation of younger children. She is not physically or emotionally invested in the act and feels no desire for Peter, even though he adores her. Peter's naivety, vulnerability and hairless body evoke images of a much younger child. Ann goes through the motions out of a sense of pity or obligation, rather than any real passion.

The so-called relationship with Dr. Hawthorne signals Adele's transition from merely neurotic to delusional. She quits her job and is actively preparing to assume the role of a cultured, wealthy wife to a man who has never called her on the phone or taken her on even a single date. Adele's failure to protect Ann from the photographer who wanted to feature her in kiddie porn shots at the age of seven is the final betrayal. Adele's grandiose visions are so profound that she cannot even take this simple step to protect her daughter. In fact, Adele aids the photographer in exploiting Ann and keeps the photographs forever. Family friend Mr. Keller does far more to provide for Ann and

protect her, than her own mother does. By contrast, Adele repeatedly threatens to commit suicide if Ann follows her dreams by going to college in the East.



Part Six: Carol

Part Six: Carol Summary

Chapter 14, the Stone and the Heart, is from Carol's point of view. While Adele is waiting to marry Dr. Hawthorne, she calls often to borrow money from the family. Once, she claims to have cancer. Doubting her sister, Carol calls the doctor. She learns that years ago Adele has breast implants, and one has leaked. She has a cosmetic procedure to make both breasts the same size. That one time, Carol does not lend her sister money. Ann visits Bay City on her vacations from college, but stays away from her mother in California.

When the phone rings at one in the morning, Carol and Jimmy know it is bad news. The hospital tells them Benny has been in a serious auto accident. They have to decide immediately whether to treat him at the small Bay City hospital, or fly him to a bigger hospital in Milwaukee. Carol decides not to risk the flight, to keep Benny in Bay City. While the doctor is trying to put a pin in Benny's badly damaged left leg, he dies of heart failure. A year later, Jimmy has bypass surgery on his heart.

Every day for almost a year Carol spends four hours meticulously cleaning Benny's room. She stands in the sunlight and holds the souvenir rock from Pike's Peak that belonged to Benny. One morning the rock shatters in her hand. Carol decides it is better not to clean the room after that. The next day she feels a lump underneath her left breast. It feels like the rock is inside her now. She ignores it and travels to Canada on retreats with nuns. After some time Carol returns, knowing that she must have the breast cancer treated.

Months pass without Carol and Jimmy making love. Carol is still bald from the cancer, and only has one breast. Finally late one night they share a container of ice cream in a picnic on the lawn. They lie on the blanket and Jimmy gently pulls off Carol's nightgown, dislodging her wig. They make love. The next morning, standing at the kitchen window, Carol decides it is time to let Jimmy sue the Brozeks. When they win, Jimmy retires and spends all his time building things, adding a swimming pool, solar panels and a breezeway on their house in Florida.

Part Six: Carol Analysis

Again, the story told from Carol's point of view underscores Adele's self-absorption and dysfunctional behavior. While all of Adele's problems are self-inflicted, Carol is grappling with real challenges including cancer and the loss of a child. Far from helping the family through these difficult times, Adele is living in a fantasy world expecting to marry Dr. Hawthorne and constantly borrowing money from the hardworking family she scorns.

With remarkable generosity, Carol and Jimmy forgive Jay Brozek for driving drunk and causing the accident that kills Benny. Carol reasons that Benny had done the same



thing himself many times and could as easily have died if he was driving. They also realize that Benny would not want them to ostracize his friend. The Brozeks urge Carol and Jimmy to sue them, because their insurance company will pay the damages. Initially, however, Carol is reluctant to profit from her son's death in any way. Only when she comes to terms with the loss and chooses to continue living by treating her cancer can she face the prospect of suing the Brozeks.



Part Seven: Ann

Part Seven: Ann Summary

After five years Ann returns to visit her mother in California. Adele has been talking about buying a little house and retiring for ages. She has been buying elegant vintage furniture for it. Ann receives an unexpected royalty check from the TV show, and gives the money to her mother to buy a little house. Now, Ann is visiting the charming cottage on the ocean in Malibu. It is elaborately decorated, and Adele has stocked every possible type of food. The beautiful carrot cake she has purchased is covered with ants. After a few days, Ann realizes that her mother could never afford this expensive location on the money Ann sent her. Instead, Adele has spent the entire check on a luxury station wagon and is living in a house owned by the Kellers. Daniel Swan is attending UCLA. He visits with the mother and daughter. He and Ann try to make love in the swimming pool but they are interrupted by Adele.

Part Seven: Ann Analysis

Even after five years apart, Adele still tries to control Ann, although her methods are more subtle. Perhaps trying to make up for all the times there was no food in the house when Ann was a child, Adele stocks every imaginable fruit and lots of other food. However, the carrot cake is symbolic of Adele's tainted love for Ann. Although it is sweet and inviting, in reality the cake is infested with crawling and dead ants—as destructive as Adele's love for her daughter.

Despite Ann's generous efforts at providing for her mother, Adele continues to manufacture her own crises by spending the money on lavish cars and antiques, instead of buying a house. This allows her to continue her drama-filled life, but it also allows her to remain financially needy and dependent upon her daughter, to prolong Adele's manipulation of Ann. Adele also manages to sabotage Ann's love affair with Daniel Swan, at least temporarily.



Part Eight: Carol

Part Eight: Carol Summary

Chapter 16, A lot of People's Secret, is told from Carol's point of view. It recounts the story of Carol's history during World War II. As a young girl growing up, Carol is shy and naive. When she is eleven, her younger sister Adele is born and Carol must care for the baby, including getting up with her in the middle of the night. Carol's father protects her from even playing with boys while in elementary school, and neither of her parents tell her about the facts of life. It was a more innocent time, when even after high school girls and boys go to dances separately, then out for a hot fudge sundae with their own group of same-sex friends.

When World War II starts, Carol sends an application and is soon accepted into the WACS. After basic training she is stationed near Chicago, Illinois, where there are five male soldiers for every female recruit. Carol begins an active dating life and even has sex with a boyfriend before he is shipped out. Then, Carol's group is sent to Normandy. There she meets Paul Morgenstern, a frail, delicate young Parisian Jew who is a member of the Resistance. His family are all gone, killed or in concentration camps. Carol falls in love with the young man and they marry after she has been discharged from the air force.

On their honeymoon in Paris, Paul leaves Carol in a candy shop and meets with members of the Resistance. He is given a pistol and travels to nearby Germany, where he sees Adolf Hitler in a parade. Paul's orders are to kill Hitler, but at the last minute he finds that he cannot do so. Instead, he is distracted, stroking the beautiful blond hair of a little girl standing in front of him. He throws away the gun and returns to Paris. Together, Paul and Carol take a ship to Texas. There, they board a train for Bay City, Wisconsin where they will surprise Carol's family with the news that she is married.

Paul has been ill on the ship, and collapses on the train. He dies, but they still cannot get off until the next stop. Finally the body is removed in a small town in Oklahoma, while three female passengers help Carol. They put her up in a hotel while the body is cremated and help her scatter the ashes. Carol has three more days on the train to think about her situation. Finally, she decides not to tell anyone in Bay City that she has been married. She returns to Bay City and her conventional life, eventually marrying Jimmy. Years later, when her father dies, he leaves Carol enough money to have her nose fixed. Even though she is already a married woman, she travels alone to Chicago to have the surgery, telling the doctor she wants a nose that looks like Katherine Hepburn's.



Part Eight: Carol Analysis

Again, despite Adele's theatricality, the real drama of the story is in Carol's seemingly ordinary life. As a young WAC, Carol is involved in the epic events of World War II. She falls in love with a brave but tragic figure, a Jewish French Resistance fighter who is hiding out on a farm. Paul's inability to kill the ultimate villain, Adolf Hitler, is highly symbolic. Although Hitler is the most evil figure of the century, Paul is unable to summon the violence to shoot him. Instead, he chooses beauty, peace and life over violence and evil, being entranced by a young girl's hair at the crucial moment in time.

Carol shows great maturity in making the decision not to tell her family about Paul and his tragic death. While Adele would have used the incident to garner attention and sympathy for decades afterward, Carol realizes that she must return to a so-called ordinary life in Wisconsin. Her quiet acceptance of tragedy in the face of great love demonstrates the courage of ordinary, average people, especially during times of war or strife. It is a type of drama far beyond Adele's understanding.

Part Nine: Adele

Part Nine: Adele Summary

Chapter 17, The Course of Miracles is the only way to live, from Adele's point of view. With Ann grown, Adele settles into a somewhat peaceful middle age. She still has her beautifully decorated rented cottage. One summer she rents a house at the beach for Ann and her friends, and watches happily as Ann dances on the beach. Adele thinks that she must not have been such a bad mother, because look how well her daughter turned out.

Part Nine: Adele Analysis

The final chapter presents Adele's distorted view of the world. She is in denial about Ann's dysfunctional childhood. In particular, instead of giving Ann credit for rising above very difficult circumstances, Adele claims that Ann's childhood could not have been that bad, since Ann turned out so well. This argument lacks logic. Some of Adele's memories are actually fabrications. For example, she remembers Ann taking ballet lessons and going to cotillion, two events that never occurred. Adele has settled into a fake spirituality, using it as another tool to try to control her daughter.

Despite Adele's distortions, there is a kernel of truth in her version of the story. Ann has succeeded as an actress partly due to the contacts she made at Beverly Hills High. Her part in the TV show helped Ann get into a good college and the contacts she made have furthered her career. Despite being a manipulative witch who created a dysfunctional childhood for her daughter, Adele was also successful in launching Ann into a successful life and teaching her to triumph over adversity.



Characters

Ann August

Anywhere but Here follows the life of Ann August from the age of four to her early twenties, through a turbulent childhood with a difficult, emotionally unstable mother. Ann and her mother have a profoundly dysfunctional relationship. Ann is emotionally abused by her mother and there are disturbing scenes of mild sexual abuse or fondling, as well. In some ways, Ann overreacts to her mother's unpredictable behavior by taking on the role of an adult in the relationships. For example, when the two are traveling to California, it is 12-year-old Ann who wants to economize on hotels and worries about money.

As a young child, Ann is completely dependent on her mother financially and emotionally. It is particularly difficult for the young Ann to cope with her mother's unpredictable behavior, since Ann cannot tell when her mother is lying. When Adele tells a real estate agent in Scottsdale that she is wealthy and wants to buy a mansion, Ann briefly believes her mother. It is only when Adele mentions a fictitious rich husband that Ann realizes it is all an illusion.

Adele further damages her daughter by constantly threatening to leave her. Adele even goes as far as making Ann get out of the car on their cross-country trek, and driving out of sight. Eventually, Ann figures out that Adele always returns. She also realizes that she can take control of the situation herself, by walking to a nearby gas station and calling her grandmother collect. This simple action changes the balance of power in the relationship. During the novel, Ann's character is developed from a dependent child to a young adult who can cope with adversity and take care of herself, even in the face of her mother's crazy lifestyle. Despite the many challenges of her childhood, or perhaps because of them, Ann remains a reliable person of good character with common sense, who is able to care for herself in a chaotic world.

Adele August

Adele's character is the real story behind Anywhere but Here. She is by turns captivating, charming, insightful, intelligent but pathologically narcissistic and self-centered. Adele imagines that she is superior to all of those around her, destined by her DNA to achieve greater things than other people. In fact, Adele's subconscious insecurities lead her to secretly fear that she is a drab, unattractive, uncultured person destined to a lonely life. Adele overcompensates by convincing herself she is wonderful, destined for fame and great wealth. This belief produces delusions of grandeur, where Adele thinks she is too good to be worried about mundane concerns like making a living, cooking meals, grocery shopping and paying bills.



Instead, Adele lives her life as if she is Cinderella and a handsome, wealthy prince is going to rescue her any day. The prince never appears, and Adele is left with the chaotic, tumultuous life that she has created. She is too good to buy cheap or used furniture, so Ann spends her entire childhood in homes without any furnishings except a bed. Adele is too disorganized and scattered to grocery shop or cook dinner, so the family wastes money eating out every night. Adele spends money on expensive clothes because she wants to project the image of a wealthy, beautiful woman, even though she cannot pay the rent. She lies constantly, telling her family year after year that the holiday gifts she sent them have been lost in the mail. Despite an occasional flash of compassion for the less fortunate, Adele devotes most of her waking hours in an effort to control and manipulate her only daughter.

Gramma Lillian

Ann's deepest emotional connection is to her grandmother, Lillian. Gramma has endured disappointments of her own, including not being able to go to college because she became pregnant at the age of 17. Perhaps because of this, Lillian spoils her younger daughter, giving Adele everything she could not afford for her older daughter Carol. This tactic makes Adele believe that she is inherently better than other people. Adele develops an inflated sense of entitlement, leading her to believe that everything in life will be handed to her automatically. Lillian sees to it that Adele goes to college, where she is a sorority beauty queen who does nude modeling in her spare time.

Gramma takes care of Ann whenever she becomes too much trouble for Adele, which is better for both of them. Gramma supplies the stable influence and emotional security that young Ann needs. Together, the two go rock hunting in Michigan and even in Canada. Gramma has a talent for baking, especially making pastry for pie. Ann inherits this ability and bakes cakes for school projects. This strengthens the bond between the two as Ann writes to Gramma for advice on cakes and icing. Although Gramma does her best to protect Ann from Adele, she never intervenes to remove Ann from Adele's custody, or to protect Ann directly when Adele hits her.

Aunt Carol

Ann's aunt Carol has had the most interesting life of anyone in the novel. In her twenties, Carol is one of the few women to volunteer for World War II, serving in Chicago and later in France. There, she meets and marries a dashing young member of the French Resistance, who dies a tragic death. Carol's sense of propriety leads her not to mention this dramatic event to her family when she returns to Bay City. While Adele is over-dramatizing and miring herself in financial and emotional problems, Carol quietly copes with major life events including her own cancer, the death of one of her two sons and caring for Gramma after multiple strokes. When Ann leaves California to attend college in the east, it is Carol's home that she returns to on holidays and vacations.



Hisham

Ann's father Hisham is an Egyptian political science professor when he meets and marries Adele. Ann has no memory of him, because he deserts the family when she is just four years old. Adele and Ann visit Hisham in Nevada. Later, when Hisham is married to a wealthy older woman, the couple takes Ann and Adele to Disneyland in California. Hisham is an aspiring songwriter who works as a waiter until his second marriage.

Gail Letterfine

This real estate agent shows Adele and Ann the most expensive mansion in Scottsdale, Arizona. She believes Adele's claim to be the wife of a wealthy man, especially since Adele is staying at the expensive Luau hotel.

Ted

Adele marries her second husband Ted, an ice skating pro, when Ann is nine years old. Ted tries to be a good stepfather, but he is as irresponsible with money as Adele. The family lives in a windowless single-story house without any furniture. Eventually Adele leaves Ted, stealing his credit card to finance her trip to California.

Lonnie Tishman

Lonnie Tishman is one of a series of men that Adele dates in California, in her quest for a wealthy husband. Adele initially tells herself that he is part of a wealthy real estate family. It soon becomes clear that Lonnie has no money at all and he is living in the tiny furnished studio with Adele and Ann. Then Adele convinces herself that Lonnie is a member of the Mafia and it is too dangerous to break up with him.

Dr. Josh Spritzer

Adele meets orthodontist Josh Spritzer, the divorced father of one of Ann's classmates, at a school bake sale. Adele claims that she can tell by the way Dr. Spritzer makes love to her on their first date, that he loves her. However, his inattentive ways soon prove otherwise. Adele starts stalking Dr. Spritzer, driving past his condo and his ex-wife's house almost every evening. Eventually a friend tells Adele that the doctor has been cheating on her all along.

Daniel Swan

Ann's first love is classmate Daniel Swan. Although Daniel's family lives in a mansion in Beverly Hills, they are deep in debt and like Ann's family, own no furniture. Daniel calls

his mother The Witch and his father The Failure. He does not judge Ann when he learns that she lives in a tiny furnished studio apartment with her mother. Eventually, as young adults, Ann and Daniel try to have sex in a swimming pool, but Ann's mother interrupts.

Riley

Daniel Swan's housekeeper's son, Riley is years younger than Ann and has already appeared in several TV commercials. When Ann lands a role on TV, she and Riley act in a commercial together. Eventually Riley starts a rock band and Ann is sure he is destined to be rich and famous.

Peter Keller

Ann and her mother live in the small two-bedroom guesthouse/game room/artist studio behind the Kellers' pool and tennis courts. Ann feels safe with Peter Keller, who is a year younger than she is. Throughout her high school years, the two have sex together. For Ann it is a coupling without passion. Peter's parents send him to military school in the east, but they continue the furtive sexual activity on vacations until Ann leaves for college.

Dr. Hawthorne

One of Adele's most grandiose delusions is that her psychiatrist, Dr. Hawthorne, is going to marry her. Adele even sets a wedding date, three weeks away, although the two of them have never been on a date. In fact, Dr. Hawthorne has never even phoned Adele. Eventually, he drops Adele as a client due to her illusions, but it is not until he begins to return her love letters unopened that Adele realizes he is really not interested.



Objects/Places

Bay City, Wisconsin

Ann has fond memories of the house on Lime Kiln Road in Bay City, Wisconsin where she lived with her Gramma and mother until she was nine years old. Throughout her life, Ann thinks of this modest house as the home that she has lost forever, and can never return to. Adele cannot wait to be away from Wisconsin, believing herself to be too good for the small town. While Ann shares some of her mother's ambitions, she also remembers the modest house as the only place she was ever happy.

Hollywood, California

California symbolizes all the hopes of wealth and success for Ann and her mother. Adele believes that they will be met with wild acclaim as soon as they arrive in Hollywood, and Ann will immediately become a child star while Adele will wed a wealthy movie producer or agent. In reality, the two are less beautiful and talented than many other aspiring actors, and struggle financially, socially and emotionally throughout their life in California.

Scottsdale Mansion

While visiting Scottsdale, Adele dupes a real estate agent into showing her a beautiful mansion complete with outdoor pool. Adele convinces the agent that she intends to buy the mansion, then sneaks out of town in the predawn hours. At 12 years old, Ann is still young and naive enough that she momentarily believes her mother's lies and is shocked that they will not live in the mansion.

Ice Cream

Adele keeps no food in their shabby apartments and the two eat out almost every night. They also go out for ice cream almost every night, even though it is far more expensive. This symbolizes all of Adele's self-inflicted emotional and financial problems. Adele is spending money she cannot afford, which produces an endless cycle of debt and borrowing from family. Ice cream also symbolizes Adele's strategy in life, to pursue momentary pleasures over long-term responsibilities, in the hope that something will miraculously improve tomorrow.

Lincoln Continental

Just before taking off for California, Adele arranges to buy a pristine white Lincoln Continental from a widow in Wisconsin. Adele agrees to make monthly payments on the



car, although she has no intention of doing so. Instead, she drives her daughter to California in the car, leaving her ex-husband Ted to make the car payments. Adele hopes that in California the pair will be judged by their flashy car, instead of their tiny, shabby apartment.

Furniture

Ann seldom lives in a home with furniture. The house her mother shares with Ted is unfurnished, because after squandering their money on fancy cars they cannot afford furniture. In California, the family also does not own furniture and several of the places they live in are bare except for a bed and the fancy radio they steal from Ted, Adele's second husband. This lack of furniture symbolizes the moral decay that lies at the center of Adele's life. Although she tries to impress others and herself with a showy exterior, in reality the center is hollow, empty of any sense of responsibility or the underpinnings of a normal, sane life. Adele's delusions of grandeur play a part here, as well. She refuses to buy the second-hand furniture that she could afford, preferring to sit on the floor or use the stairs for a dining table rather than settle for an ordinary existence.

Expensive Hotels

Despite their financial problems, Adele insists on staying at expensive hotels like the Luau Hotel in Scottsdale and the Bel Air Hotel in Beverly Hills. This contributes to the family's financial ruin, but allows Adele to temporarily believe that she is special and superior to other people, including her extended family.

Beverly Hills High School

In California, rather than moving to an area that she can afford, Adele insists on living in a wildly expensive neighborhood so Ann can attend prestigious Beverly Hills High School. Adele is not concerned about her daughter's education. Instead, she wants the prestige that comes from hobnobbing with the children of wealthy movie producers, businessmen and Hollywood stars.

Tin Jewelry Box

As Ann is leaving Wisconsin for California, her cousin Ben thrusts a tin jewelry box he has made into her hands. The jewelry box symbolizes all of the hopes for Ann's future because Ben assumes she will have jewelry and other keepsakes worth protecting. The things Ann keeps in the box symbolize those relationships she treasures the most, her grandmother's love and her friends. When the box is accidentally lost in the California townhouse, it foreshadows Benny's death.



Cottage in Malibu

Ann sends her mother a large royalty check to purchase a retirement cottage. Instead, Adele uses the money to buy a luxury station wagon to haul around future grandchildren and expensive antique furnishings for her rented cottage. Again, Adele's delusions of grandeur come into play. Adele refuses to buy a cottage unless it has a view of both the ocean and the mountains. Such a home would cost several million dollars and is far out of her price range, so Adele buys nothing at all.

Tin Jewelry Box

Before Ann leaves Wisconsin, her best friend and cousin Ben gives her a tin jewelry box that he has made. The jewelry box symbolizes all her hopes for a bright, shining future in California. Eventually Ann puts her most precious possessions into the box — a ring symbolizing love, a handkerchief from her grandmother, a list of her friends. In the apartment in California, Ann jostles the jewelry box with her elbow and it falls between the beams in an unfinished wall. This symbolizes Ann's loss of everything that she holds dear, the underpinnings of a normal, fulfilling life. Ann has inadvertently lost her most precious possessions, just as Adele has mindlessly sacrificed her daughter's innocence and vulnerability to her own selfish emotional needs.



Themes

Lies and Secrets

Ann's entire existence is based on Adele's need to pretend to be something that she is not. Adele's deep-rooted fear that she is ordinary and low-class forces her to put on airs and act pretentious, even when it places the family in financial jeopardy. For Adele, the many lies and pretensions are simply acting, expressing a greater truth not bound by reality. They also permit her to avoid judging herself harshly, something she fears even more than being judged by others.

Everyone in the family has secrets often protected by lies. Lillian, Ann's beloved Gramma, conceals the fact that she got pregnant the first time she had sex as a naive 17-year-old girl. This forced Lillian to give up her dream of going to college. Ann's aunt Carol conceals the fact that she was married to a man who died tragically right after World War II. For many months, Carol also conceals the fact that she has a breast lump.

One of the secrets the family attempts to conceal is inappropriate touching, often by women. Lillian's brother Milton is fondled by their mother while he is still a young boy. He, in turn, fondles a foster child the family takes in. Adele fondles her own daughter and helps a photographer take provocative nude photos of Ann when she is only seven years old. Adele also tries to manipulate ten-year-old Ann into walking around naked in front of her stepfather and his male friend. Around that same time, Ann fondles younger children from school and even takes photos of them nude.

Adele's entire existence is one huge lie. She pretends to herself that she does not need to watch her spending because any day now she is going to marry a wealthy man. She pretends that she wants to marry for Ann's sake, when in fact it is simply because Adele craves the status and attention that wealth will bring. At one point, Adele even convinces herself that her therapist, Dr. Hawthorne, will marry her in three weeks, even though the two have never been on a single date. Later in life, Adele adds layers of lies, pretending to herself that Ann had ballet lessons and went to cotillion. The major difference between these lies is that Adele believes her fantasies. Lillian and Carol know the truth about their own lives, although they may not share it with others. Ironically, Adele's delusions of grandeur lead her into financial problems and a very humdrum existence. Lillian and especially Carol have incredible adventures in their lives, despite their seemingly ordinary circumstances.

California

Adele has fantasized all her life about escaping her drab existence in Wisconsin by going to California. Her first husband, the Egyptian political science professor Hisham, shares this dream. He eventually abandons the family to seek his fortune as a



songwriter in California. Hisham only gets as far as Nevada before he must take a job as a waiter and develops a gambling problem. When he finally marries a wealthy older woman, he takes Ann on a trip to Disneyland in California, the only time she has contact with her father. Adele's dream of moving to California may be fueled in part by her desire to see Hisham again. Ann certainly hopes for a reconciliation with him.

Adele transfers her dreams to her daughter Ann, encouraging the girl to dream of an acting career. Although Adele criticizes Ann's beauty, body and abilities, she still clings to the dream that her daughter will instantly become a child star if only they can move to California. In Adele's imagination, California comes to symbolize all the dreams of her future, her potential. Unfortunately, they prove to be empty dreams. Although Adele has convinced herself that she and Ann are so amazingly beautiful, so talented and sophisticated that they will be welcomed with open arms and met with wide-spread acclaim in California, this proves not to be true. Instead, they are simply two fairly good-looking people in a world of those who are more beautiful, more accomplished and most of all, more wealthy.

Strong Women

All of the strong, forceful characters with the ability to shape their own future in the novel are women. Ann's beloved Gramma is the matriarch of the family who controls the financial resources. Her aunt Carol has led a far more interesting life than even her husband knows. The most powerful and disturbing character in the novel is Ann's mother Adele. Adele's unbalanced personality and her emotional problems drive much of the action of the story.

Men are characterized by their absence or lack of power. Ann's grandfather, the love of her mother's life, dies before Ann is born. Carol marries a contentious but ultimately weak man, Jimmy, who relies on her to make the most important decisions of their life. Her first husband Paul is passionate but ultimately physically frail. Carol's son Hal is influenced by drug-user friends and Benny is killed by a drunk driver. Ann's father Hisham is notable through his absence. Ann has no real memories of him. The only reminder that she ever had a father is the hole in the hedge, where he lost control of the riding mower the one time he tried to mow the grass. Adele's life is framed by her fruitless search for a wealthy, powerful husband that she feels is worthy of her. She dates a succession of men who are ineffective, uninterested or both. Even Adele's second husband Ted is passive and becomes less competent as the marriage goes on.

Style

Point of View

Author Mona Simpson uses point of view deftly to give a fully-rounded view of Ann's life with Adele. If the entire story was told through Ann's eyes, it would not be possible to reveal the complete truth, or to know as many different facets of the characters' personalities. This is Ann's story and the longest sections are in her point of view, beginning with the move to California. With the exception of the final chapter, every other section beginning with the first is from Ann's point of view, and those sections contain 12 of the 17 chapters. The narrative of Ann's life beginning with the trip to California is interrupted by sections in another character's point of view. Chapter 4, the section in Lillian's point of view, reveals the family history of Ann's grandparents and great-grandparents, as well as Adele's childhood. Carol's sections, chapters 9 and 14 fill in Adele's young adulthood and the events that take place in Wisconsin while Ann is living in California. Chapter 16 is also Carol's point of view, recounting the secrets of Carol's tragic war-time marriage.

Perhaps the most notable section is the final chapter, from Adele's point of view. This masterful section reveals that Adele has not really changed her manipulative, controlling ways, despite her claims of spiritual growth. They serve as something of an apology for Adele, revealing events from her perspective. Yet, ultimately, the chapter leaves the impression that Adele has not really matured and that even as an adult, Ann is wise to avoid her mother.

Setting

Setting is a critical factor in the organization of the novel, with most chapters named after a different location, usually in California or Wisconsin. All of the chapters from Ann's point of view are titled with place names, illustrating the geographic changes in her life. The initial chapter takes place "anywhere", some random location on the highway between Wisconsin and California where Adele abandons Ann on the side of the road. Other chapter headings and important locations include Las Vegas, Disneyland, South of Wilshire and Lime Kiln Road.

The fictional Bay City, Wisconsin features prominently in the narrative. Ann feels most at home at her grandmother's house on Lime Kiln Road. However, Adele feels confined by the small town and wants to travel to California so that Ann can be a child star. As Ann and Adele move from place to place, locations become extremely important in Ann's development. Initially, the title "Anywhere but Here" refers to Adele's longing to leave the small Midwestern town where she was born. Eventually, however, it refers to Ann's intense desire to be anywhere her manipulative, emotionally abusive, narcissistic mother is not.



Adele settles on California as the epicenter of her dreams. She always refers to the entire state, not Hollywood or Beverly Hills. Once in California, however, Adele is careful to settle only in the best, wealthiest, most exclusive neighborhood. Even though she has to live in the unfashionable area south of Wilshire Boulevard, Ann is determined to keep her daughter in Beverly Hills High School.

Language and Meaning

The author uses language effectively to evoke both time and place. Use of words like noon dinner and mangle as a noun produce a feeling of times past in Lillian's narrative of her youth. This makes Lillian's incredible naivety about life and sex seem more probable.

All of the characters use words and phrases typical of Wisconsin early in the narrative, including "comemeer" for "come here" and "prettinear" for pretty near or almost. Once Ann and her mother have been in California for several years, these words vanish from their vocabulary. When they return for Benny's funeral, Ann and Adele notice the Wisconsin accent with the drawn-out o's for the first time, because they no longer have that same accent.

The most masterful use of language is Adele's dialogue, which runs like a constant thread through the narrative. Emphasis is provided by words in all capital letters rather than italics, highlighting Adele's overly dramatic delivery. Adele has the habit of saying "Umhummm" rather than yes when she is lying and calling Ann "Honey" in the middle of the nastiest manipulative tirades. Adele also has unique word choices such as "skeddadle" and "fabulous."

The novel's title, *Anywhere but Here* comes from an essay by Ralph Waldo Emerson, who claims that is the motto of the traveler. Simpson uses this technique to illustrate Ann's tortuous travel through her stormy adolescence.

Structure

The basic structure of the novel focuses on Ann's experience, from the move to California through her post-college visit to her mother's cottage in Malibu. Yet, within that basic structure there are myriad flashbacks and flash-forwards that reveal essential facts necessary to understanding the story. At times the narrative recounts an event in Ann's life and then goes back months or years to explain a key factor in understanding that event. These flashbacks occur within chapters, but the chapters are also out of sequential order. The first chapter concerns the drive to California and the second narrates the stay at the Bel Air Hotel. However, the third chapter jumps back in time to Adele's marriage to Ted, her second husband and their life with Ann in a modest house in Bay City.

More than half the novel is contained in sections narrated by Ann, because this is her story. The interruptions in the sequence of the narrative by Lillian's and Carol's history



further illuminate Ann's and Adele's characters. The most powerful of the flashbacks is when, while packing for college, Ann uncovers the naked photos of herself taken when she was just seven years old. She relives the scene of her mother stripping her so the photographer can take the provocative photos. By saving this scene until nearly the end of the novel, author Mona Simpson makes it the most powerful, climactic scene of the narrative. Although disturbing fondling events are hinted at earlier, this is the first full reveal of them.



Quotes

"The fights came when I thought she broke a promise. She said there's be an Indian reservation. She said that we'd see buffalo in Texas. My mother said a lot of things. We were driving from Bay City, Wisconsin, to California, so I could be a child star while I was still a child." (p. 3)

"Strangers almost always love my mother. and even if you hate her, can't stand her, even if she's ruining your life, there's something about her, some romance, some power. She's absolutely herself. No matter how hard you try, you'll never get to her. And when she dies, the world will be flat, too simple, reasonable, too fair." (p. 17)

"People come from all over the world for the Taliesin bells. We're lucky to have one. They're collector's items." I've heard my mother say that fifty times. She believed every word Gail Letterfine told us, as if we were the only people in the world who lied." (p. 19)

"I wanted to get away from her. There was nowhere I could go. She'd have me six more years." (p. 28)

"But I was thinking about us on our hands and knees, our butts sticking out the car door, scrubbing the melon juice stains off the leather. The afternoon cancelled out now. My mother was not that way. She could hold contrasts in her mind at once." (p. 30)

"We had cornflakes before bed. We didn't talk. The train whistled, gone as soon as it was there, shaking the ground, moving north. The upstairs smelled of fresh-cut pine. It had been like that for years." (p. 52)

"My mother and I should have been girls who stayed out on the porch a little longer than the rest, girls who strained to hear the long-distance trucks on the highway and who listened to them, not the nearer crickets." (p. 61)

"Now, if we get the car, " she went on , "we'd still have the house and remember, Honey, we're at the top, here. There, you'd always be one of the poorer kids. I won't be able to compete with the families who have fathers. So, you have to think what you want, Honey. It's up to you." (p. 115)

"Didn't you go to Disneyland too once with your mom and dad? I thought you and your om flew out there. She was like that, whatever we did, you had to do, but better. So, if we drove the trailer out, you flew. But it was the same Disneyland we saw once we got there." (p. 283)

"Because it was not easy anymore. The night my mother pushed my pajama top down off my shoulders and felt the soft hairs under my arms, I became less than a baby, a blob, a primitive living thing she could do anything to as long as she fed me with tickles." (p. 344)



"We had habits, but we never admitted them. We ate out every night, but every night, it was as if my mother felt freshly surprised that driving in the car and finding a restaurant was, at ten o'clock, our only alternative." (p. 437)

"I remember them posing me with the beach ball, remember lying on the carpet, arching up, for them to slide the swimsuit off. I don't know, I just have been six or seven." (p. 442)

"It must be something in the genes, our genes, that pushes us ahead. My sister is the totally opposite of me. And yet, it's the gene characteristic that's so incredibly, magnificently universal. That makes me believe there has to be a master plan, a universal power." (p. 530)



Topics for Discussion

In the first chapter, Ann's mother frequently abandons her daughter on the side of the road, driving out of sight. Ann's mother returns eventually to find Ann sobbing and contrite. What could happen to a child abandoned on the side of the road? Is this good parenting?

Ann accepts many unusual events, such as using a stolen credit card and lying to real estate agents. Why does she accept it when her mother does this?

When Adele abandons her 12-year-old daughter on the side of the road, Ann walks to a gas station and calls her grandmother collect. This shifts the balance of power in the family subtly. How does this change Ann's relationship with her mother?

What do Ann and Adele hope will happen when they arrive in California?

Why does Adele date so many different men? Is she really looking for a father for Ann, or does she have her own reasons?

What does Ann's father do when she is four years old that changes her life forever?

When Ann is four, her mother taunts her with a pair of tiny, sparkly red shoes. Is Ann happy when she finally receives the shoes?

In California, do Adele's dreams come true?

After Ann goes away to college, why does she not return to visit for five years? When Ann does return, has anything really changed, or is Adele the same?