

# **Behind the Scenes at the Museum Study Guide**

**Behind the Scenes at the Museum by Kate Atkinson**

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## Plot Summary

The main character of this novel is Ruby Lennox. She takes the reader through her life from conception to being married with children of her own, to having to bury her own mother. When Ruby begins she knows all the things her mother thinks and feels about her life. The fact that her mother's life is not as she had imagined it is not lost on Ruby. As she grows up she can no longer tell what her mother is thinking but she never feels like her mother loves her. She always feels like her mother and father loved her sister Gillian more than her. Then when Gillian is eleven she is killed on Christmas Eve when she is hit by a bus. She feels her only friend in her home is her older sister Patricia, but when Patricia has a baby and she has to put the baby up for adoption and then later runs away from home, Ruby is left alone with just her mother and father. Then when Ruby catches her father having sex with a waitress at her uncle's wedding and then he immediately has a heart attack and dies, that leaves Ruby with only her mother. Later, Mr. Belling, her mother's new boyfriend, gets mad at her and tells her that she killed her own twin sister, Pearl. Ruby does not even remember having a twin, much less killing her. After seeing a doctor, Ruby finally remembers the day that Pearl died. Gillian had been telling Pearl to walk out on the iced over pond, and Pearl had fallen in. Gillian had told everyone that Ruby had pushed Pearl in by accident to keep herself out of trouble for telling her to walk on the ice in the first place. Ruby's mother had blamed Ruby for Pearl's death even though she knew it was an accident. When Ruby graduates from high school she goes to Scotland for a summer job but never returns home. Instead she marries a man there so he can stay in the country and the two of them have two daughters before they finally divorce. Ruby learns her mother is suffering from dementia and comes back to find her a nursing home and while home her mother suffers a stroke and soon after dies. Patricia comes home before their mother dies and the two girls finally realize that their mother did love them and they loved her too.

This novel also has a sub plot that tells about the lives of Ruby's mother, grandmother and great-grandmother. Ruby's great-grand mother Alice leaves her children when they are young because she feels she cannot continue in the life she ends up with. The subplot takes the reader through these women's lives and shows how each of them end up in marriages that are not what they thought they would be. They all feel trapped by their husbands and children, and all live sad unhappy lives because of this. The affect is that all three of these women pass these feelings down to their children. In the end Patricia and Ruby stop this cycle as they realize that their mother did love them as best she knew how to and they are not going to make the same mistakes with their own children.



# Chapter 1-3

## Chapter 1-3 Summary

### Chapter One 1951 Conception

Behind the Scenes at the Museum is a story about Ruby Lennox and her family, both her immediate family and her grandparents and great-grandparents. It is about how the women of this family deal with the deaths of beloved family members, betrayal of the ones closest to them and the consequences of their own decisions that follow them through out their lives as they try to find happiness. This novel follows the main character Ruby Lennox from conception all the way through her life until she has to make the funeral arrangements for her own mother, a woman Ruby struggles her whole life to understand.

In chapter one Ruby has just been conceived, her mother Bunty Lennox does not know yet that she is pregnant. Ruby knows all that her mother feels and thinks about her life and about her husband George. Bunty is not happy about the way her life has turned out. She marries George Lennox after a failed engagement to an American soldier, Buck. Buck is Bunty's true love but when he is wounded by a landmine and sent back to the United States Bunty never hears from him again. Bunty always thinks that if she had married Buck her life would have been much better. Instead she marries George and she not only is expected to be a wife and mother but also to help him take care of the pet store he owns. The Lennox family also lives in the same building that the pet store is located in; they call it Above the Shop. It was not actually above the shop, the kitchen and dining room as well as the backyard are on the same floor as the pet store. Bunty often daydreams about a different life, a life with Buck. Ruby is privy to all these thoughts.

Ruby already has two older sisters, a five year old sister named Patricia and Gillian. Bunty is having a hard enough time being a mother to the two children she already has. She does not treat the girls with much affection, but she does try to do everything she is supposed to do for them, and on this particular day she is taking Gillian to the Museum Gardens. All the books she is reading about raising children say you are suppose to take them out and let them play in the sunshine, so that is what Bunty is going to do whether she likes it or not. When they are done there they go to see Bunty's mother, Nell Cook.

Nell is a lot like Bunty, not very motherly. However, she fixes them something to eat, and even though Bunty is not feeling very good and not much like eating she does eat a biscuit and drinks some coffee. While at Nell's, Gillian is playing with her grandmother's button box and she swallows a glass button shaped like a flower. They leave there and go home to fix dinner for George. The next morning when Bunty still is not feeling any better she realizes that she is pregnant.



### The Footnote (i) Country Idyll

One day Bunty and Ruby are going through some old photos that Bunty got when her Uncle Tom died, and they come across a photo of a woman. Bunty tells Ruby that it is her grandmother, Nell's mother. Ruby is surprised at how much she has changed because in the photos she has seen the woman is ugly and fat, but in this photo she is beautiful. Bunty tells her that this photo is of Nell's real mother, Alice, and that the other photo is of her step mother Rachel. This is the first she has ever heard of Alice. Bunty tells her that Alice died during child birth with Nell.

Alice Barker is Nell Cook's mother; when Nell's mother is still pregnant with her a traveling photographer comes by their country home and wants to take pictures of her and her six other children. Alice is eight months pregnant with Nell at the time. Alice agrees, not knowing how she is going to pay for the photos when he comes back though a few weeks later with the photos, but she gets the children cleaned up and they have their pictures taken. While taking the photo of Alice, the photographer cannot help but wish he could take Alice and run away with her.

On the day the photographer comes to their house Alice is picking up one of the babies and he gets his fingers tangled in her blouse and tears off three of her buttons. After she is gone her daughter Ada finds one and keeps it in her pocket until she can put it on a piece of floss; then she wears it around her neck until Rachel rips it off of her one day. The other one is found by Tom who loses it. The third one is found by Rachel who puts it in her button box and where Nell later finds it and puts it in her own button box, where Gillian finds it and swallows it.

### Chapter Two 1952 Birth

Bunty goes into labor with Ruby although the baby has not been named as of yet. Her father is not at the hospital with Bunty because he is at a bar and does not know Bunty is in labor. When Ruby is finally born the doctors show Bunty her new baby and she makes the comment that it looks like "a piece of meat." Ruby is sent to nursery with the rest of the babies and does not see a lot of her mother while they are in the hospital. Ruby is sure that there is a mix up at the hospital and that she is given to the wrong mother.

Ruby is born just as the King has died and is born into the new Queen's reign. Bunty is in her room with her sister, Auntie Babs, and her twins, Daisy and Rose, and they are talking about what she is going to name the baby. Finally Bunty announces her name: Ruby, Ruby Lennox.

### Footnote (ii) Still Lives

In Still Lives we go back to when Nell is a young woman still living with her step mother Rachel and her sister Lillian and their brother Albert. Nell falls in love with one of Albert's friends, Percy Sievewright, and the two become engaged. Not long after they set a wedding date Percy dies when his appendix bursts; he is only twenty-six. A year or so later Nell meets another of Percy and Albert's friends from football, Jack Keech, and it is



not long before they too are engaged. When the war begins Albert, Jack and another friend of theirs, Frank Cook all join the military. Frank is sure he is going to be killed while fighting in the war, and Nell is worried about Albert and Jack. When Jack leaves she gives him a rabbit's foot that Rachel gave her for luck. Frank is the first to come home on leave and he spends a lot of time with Nell and Lillian while he is home. The two sisters write letters to all three men while they are gone. When Jack comes home Nell can see a difference in him and she also notices that he seems to have more in common with Lillian. Not long after they all go back to war Albert is killed and then soon after that Jack too is killed. Just before he is killed he gives his rabbit's foot to Frank because he is afraid of dying.

Frank comes home from the war and ends up marrying Nell. By the time Nell and Frank have their first child Lillian has already given birth to a son who she has named Edmund. Lillian will not tell anyone the name of the baby's father, and Nell is relieved when the baby is born and he does not look like Jack Keech, but instead he looks just like their brother Albert. Frank and Nell always wonder if the father is not Jack Keech.

### Chapter Three 1953 Coronation

The Lennox family is hosting a party at Above the Shop for the new Queen's Coronation. Bunty is excited to get to show off her television set, since she is only one of two families in town that have one, but she does not like having all these people in her home. She has been cooking and saving her butter rations for several weeks to prepare for this. Most of the guests are their family members; Nell, Bunty's mother and some of George's family is there too, not to mention some the other business men from town and their families. Bunty thinks there are too many children running around. Patricia is trying to tell everyone what everything means about the coronation. She has gotten a lot of books about it from school. Gillian is running around in front of the television trying to make sure everyone's attention is on her, not the television. Ruby is trying to make her way outside to ride on Gillian's toy horse; since Gillian is busy, she will not notice Ruby on the horse. Gillian catches her and knocks her off the horse causing her to hit her head, and drop her favorite teddy bear. Later when Ruby is in bed she remembers about her teddy bear and looks out her bedroom window to see if the bear is in the back yard with the horse, she sees her father out in the yard with a woman who is not her mother, and she decides she should wait and get the bear in the morning.

### Footnote (iii) Business as Usual

During the Second World War Bunty is working in a clothing store for Mr. Simon and Mrs. Carter. When the war begins, Bunty's brother Clifford is called up. Frank is so proud of his son, but when he leaves, Frank gives him the rabbit's foot that Jack gave him. At the same time their sister Babs and her fiancé Sidney get married before he leaves. Bunty is at Bab's wedding reception when Sandy Havis asks her to dance. Sandy is home on leave and has already decided he is going to have sex with someone before he is sent back and he has set his sights on Bunty. She refused him for most of the evening but after having too much to drink herself she gives into Sandy and he asks



her to marry him when he comes back. She agrees and stayed faithful to him until he returns. When he does come back, she cannot believe she has done what she has done, much less agree to marry him. Three weeks after he leaves, he is killed.

One day Bunty and her sister Betty are home and the sirens go off. They all go into the shelter until the all clear is given. She is worried about a neighbor lady and her infant son. The woman has lost her husband in the war and has gone crazy, Bunty is sure the woman did not go to any shelter but instead stayed in her home during the bombing. When they come out of the shelter they find the woman and her baby dead, still in their bed. Bunty goes to check on the people she works for at the clothing store, their shop has been hit. There is a sign that reads "Business as Usual. Bombed but not Beaten."

Not long after that raid a young man shows up at Nell's house—was Edmund, Lillian's son. Nell has not seen her sister since she left the country with her son years ago. When Nell sees Edmund she faints because he looks so much like her brother Albert that she thinks it is his ghost. Edmund tells them that his mother is fine and that she has another son named Nathan. Lillian took Edmund to live in Canada when she left all those years ago and that is where they have remained. Edmund leaves, he is meeting a nurse at the local bar, called Betty's Bar, but he tells his family he has to catch a train and that he will come back the next time he gets leave.

Soon Bunty meets Buck, an American soldier from Kansas. She falls in love with Buck and soon they are engaged, but when Buck gets his foot blown off after stepping on a land mine he is shipped back home. He tells Bunty he will send for her, but she never hears from him again. When she meets George she feels like her chances for finding a husband are running out and she says yes when he proposes. On her wedding day her brother Clifford gives her the rabbit's foot and her mother gives her Alice's locket.

## Chapter 1-3 Analysis

Ruby is just conceived and she is able to know all the things her mother thinks and feels although Ruby is never able to understand why her mother feels the way she does; Ruby just knows that is how Bunty feels. The fact that Ruby is able to know how her mother feels about being pregnant follows Ruby throughout her life. Ruby never feels like her mother loves or wants her. Ruby feels Bunty's dissatisfaction with her own life means Bunty did not really ever want her. Bunty is not happy with her life, but she still loves her children; however, the pain Bunty feels over her unfulfilled life makes her children feel they are the reason for her unhappiness. The truth of the matter is Bunty is in love with Buck the American and when Buck never comes back for her or sends for her Bunty settles for George Lennox. Bunty feels like she is running out of chances to marry and with the war going on she feels George might be her last chance. Bunty always wonders if her life would have been better with Buck and does not really give George a chance. George is always trying to make Bunty something she is not. George thinks he is getting a wife who will help him with his shop because that is what Bunty does when George meets her. Bunty works in a dress shop, but that is not what Bunty wants to do when she gets married, Bunty wants to be taken care of and she always



resents George for making her work in the shop. George is also always running around on Bunty. As early as age three Ruby is catching George with other women, although Ruby does not realize what she is seeing.

#### Footnote

When Bunty's mother, Nell, is a child she is told her mother, Alice, died giving birth to her. After Alice dies her cousin Rachel comes to help with the children and ends up marrying Alice's husband Fredrick. When Nell is a young woman she falls in love with a young man named Percy Sievewright who dies shortly after asking her to marry him. Nell spends the next few years mourning over Percy and comforting his mother. Nell spends most of her time at Percy's mother's house having tea with her and talking about Percy and wondering what his life would have been like had he lived. Then a few years later Nell becomes engaged to another man named Jack who joins the war. When Jack comes home on leave it is clear to Nell that Jack has feelings for Nell's sister Lillian, however Jack and Nell remain engaged. Not long after Jack returns to the war he is killed. Lillian soon tells Nell she is pregnant but will not tell Nell who the father is. Nell is relieved when the child is born and he does not look anything like Jack, but instead looks like their brother Albert who had also recently died. Nell always feels like Jack is probably the father of Lillian's baby. She knows that the last time Jack is home that things are different between the two of them. Nell can also see that there is something between Lillian and Jack. Things will never be the same between Nell and Lillian after Jack returns to the war. Nell ends up marrying Frank Cook who is a friend of Jack's. Nell is always unhappy in her marriage because Jack is the real love of her life.





# Chapter 4-6

## Chapter 4-6 Summary

Chapter Four 1956 The Naming of Things

Ruby does not remember what happened or how she ended up at her Auntie Babs house, but she knows by what is in her suitcase that she is going to be staying at her Auntie Babs for a while, a week at least. Ruby is the only one from her family who is there at Auntie Babs and Ruby has to share the attic bedroom with the twins, Daisy and Rose. Ruby is not sure why she has been sent to stay with her aunt and cousins but she wishes she could go home. While there Ruby tries to learn how to read and write. Ruby thinks if she can learn to write she can send a letter to Patricia to come and rescue her. Daily life with Auntie Babs is much like it is with her own mother, Ruby notices that Bunty and Auntie Babs have the same schedule for cleaning and that neither of them seem to have any time for her. On Sunday Ruby goes to church with her aunt and the twins. When they arrive at church Ruby thinks this church does not seem like the churches she has been to before. After the singing is over the preacher tells the congregation that he is going to talk to the dead. At one point he comes over to Ruby and tells her that her sister is speaking to him and that she wants Ruby to know she was ok. Ruby is confused because she knows her sisters are not dead, but her aunt seems to be very upset by what the preacher has said. Ruby decides not to ask anyone about what the preacher has said.

The rest of the time Ruby spends with her aunt is like the first week, and she spends the nights scared of what is lurking on the stairs and of the twins. Ruby is convinced the twins are from another planet and that they are waiting for Ruby to go to sleep so they can do something to her. Finally after about a week and a half, Ruby's Auntie Gladys comes to take her back home. When Ruby gets home her mother is waiting in the kitchen for her. Bunty tells Ruby that they are going to try and put the accident behind them. Ruby has no idea what accident her mother is talking about. Ruby is very glad to be back home with her sisters. Patricia helps Ruby sew up her teddy bear's leg and Gillian is even being nice. Gillian is letting Ruby play with her toys.

Footnote (iv) Bonny Birds

After Alice Barker is gone, her husband Fredrick calls Alice's cousin Rachel Storm to come and help him in taking care of the children. When she first comes to the Barker house she is wanting to have Alice's husband for herself. Rachel does not like Alice and does not think that Alice is doing a very good job of taking care of the house or taking care of her husband. Rachel does not like Alice's children either. Rachel thinks the children are skinny and not very healthy, and not well behaved. Soon Fredrick gives Rachel Alice's wedding ring; Fredrick says it is to make Rachel respectable because she is now pregnant with his child. When the baby is born they name him Samuel. Samuel is a small, sick baby and not long after he is born all the older children get the



chickenpox. Rachel tries to keep the children away from Samuel. One day Samuel dies from a seizure. Soon after Samuel dies, Ada, Alice and Fredrick's oldest daughter, gets diphtheria and dies. Lawrence, the next to the oldest child, leaves home two years later. One year later Fredrick dies of hypothermia when he gets too drunk and passes out on his own porch. Rachel moves the family into town.

#### Chapter Five 1958 Interlude

When a customer bangs on the door of Above the Shop it wakes up the Lennox family. Bunty is usually the one who makes sure everyone is up, but on this morning Bunty is not there. George gets up and helps the customer and gets the girls up for school. Patricia is getting ready for school and Gillian is whining because she wants Patricia to walk her and Ruby to their schools. Patricia is not going to bother with the smaller girls and she leaves them at the breakfast table. Gillian and Ruby stay home from school that day because no one takes them; George is too busy to notice that they have not gone to school. When Patricia comes home from school and Bunty is still not back yet, Patricia tells George he should maybe look for a note from Bunty. George tells the girls to look for the note. The girls find the note in George and Bunty's bedroom, and they open the letter, being careful not to tear the envelope so their father will not know they have read the letter. Bunty tells George she is leaving because she cannot take it anymore. Bunty thinks that George is running around on her and she also tells him that life has not been the same for her since P... And Bunty says she just needs some time away from all of them.

The girls take the letter to George. George realizes that he is suppose to take the girls and their cousin, Lucy-Vida, on holiday for a week starting the next day. He spends the next few hours trying to figure out how he is going to do all of this without Bunty's help. George does not have anyone to watch the pet shop while he is gone. Finally he tells the girls he has a plan, and they all take off for their beach vacation.

George stops at a house the girls have never seen before and when the woman comes to the door the girls have never seen the woman before either. George tells the girls the woman is Auntie Doreen. In the beginning all the girls except for Patricia like Doreen. Auntie Doreen is a lot of fun for the girls. They play games and play on the beach. In the end Auntie Doreen wins over Patricia. On the last night of their vacation George joins them. When George and the girls get back to Above the Shop, Bunty is back. George makes the girls promise not to tell Bunty about Doreen.

#### Footnote (v) Rain

Nell is on a trip with her son Ted and she is reminded of her brother Albert who died, and her boyfriend Jack who was also killed. Nell is reminded of her honeymoon with Frank. There was a thunderstorm on their honeymoon night and it is starting to rain now. Nell is trying to remember what Jack and Albert looked like and smelled like, but too many years have passed since they died.

#### Chapter Six 1959 Snow Feathers



It is Christmas Eve 1959 and Ruby is very excited because her family is going to watch a Christmas pantomime that evening. Ruby's grandmother, Nell has had to move in with Lennox family because Nell is not in good health and her mind is going. Ruby and Gillian now have to share a room. Bunty is getting dinner ready before they leave for the pantomime. Gillian is not home, she is at music class, and Patricia is in her room. George and Bunty are fighting like always and Ruby is hoping that this fight will not keep them from going to the pantomime. After dinner the Lennox family goes to a pantomime, and they all enjoy the show. After the show is over the Lennox family is outside the theatre and George is trying to catch a taxi. Gillian sees some of her friends from school, and she starts across the road to say hi, and Gillian is hit by a bus. Later that night Patricia and Ruby are at home with their grandma when Bunty and George call and tell them that Gillian has died.

Ruby, Patricia and Nell are left alone on Christmas. George and Bunty disappear until just before New Years Day. Ruby, Patricia and Nell open the presents under the tree, leaving Gillian's, and they have Christmas diner. The three of them try to get back to life as usual without their parents or Gillian. When Bunty and George return, Bunty is not herself. Bunty stays in her room, crying for Gillian. She often says "My Gillian, My pearl."

Footnote (vi) The Sunday School Outing

In this footnote we go back to when Bunty is a little girl. Her church is having a Sunday school outing and all the children are meeting at the railway station. All the parents are suppose to be sending food for the children to eat for lunch. Bunty's mother did not have her food ready yet and Bunty and her brother and sister are having to wait for the food to finish cooking before they can leave. By the time the food is done and Bunty and the other children are allowed to leave, they have to run to catch the train. Bunty is the youngest and she is not able to keep with the older, faster kids. All the other kids make the train except for Bunty.

## Chapter 4-6 Analysis

When Ruby is sent to stay with her Auntie Babs she is confused as to why she is her aunt's house and the rest of her family is not. When she comes home her mother tells her they are going to try and put the accident behind them, but Ruby does not remember any accident. When Ruby is at her Auntie Babs the medium Ruby meets at Auntie Babs's church tells Ruby that her sister wants her to know she is ok. The twins Rose and Daisy tell Ruby the medium is talking to the dead, but when Ruby gets home, both of her sisters are alive. Ruby is even more confused; she does not know what the medium could have been talking about. Later in the book we learn that Ruby did have another sister that she has forgotten about. As a matter of fact Bunty still has pictures of Ruby's sister around the house, but since it is Ruby's twin sister Ruby just thinks the photos are of her. Ruby even thinks that maybe Bunty loves her more than she loves Gillian or Patricia because it appears there are more photos of Ruby. Ruby also notices when Bunty is trying to remember the girl's names, Bunty always says an extra P name



before she gets to Ruby, but Ruby does not make the connection to her dead twin. Bunty however can not forget about her daughter and one day Bunty leaves George and the girls because she can no longer deal with all that her life has become. When George is left to care for not only his daughters but also his niece for a week, he turns to one of his girl friends, Doreen for help. The girls love Doreen and one day the girls ask Doreen if she has children of her own and she tells them that she had one child once and that she can no longer have children. Later we learn that this child Doreen is speaking of is the child she had with Bunty's cousin Edmund Donner. Edmund was killed before Doreen could tell him about the baby. When the week is up Bunty is at home waiting on George and the girls when they return, and George makes the girls promise not to ever mention that Doreen was with them.

On Christmas Eve, George and Bunty tragically lose another child. Gillian is killed when she is hit by a bus when the family is leaving the theatre. This time it is George and Bunty who do not come home and Patricia and Ruby are left with their grandmother Nell for the next week. Bunty is back to the same state of mind she was in after Ruby's twin died.

#### Footnote

Rachel has come to the farm to help the Barker family. Rachel is Alice Barker's cousin. Rachel has never liked Alice; she resents Alice because she thinks Alice has had an easier life than Rachel has had. Fredrick is happy to have the help but the children just want their mother back. Rachel did not really like Alice in the first place and Rachel thinks Alice has not done a very good job of taking care of her family or her home. Rachel is going to do a much better job with all of them than Alice has done. Rachel also thinks the children are not taught to behave very well, so she is very hard on the children, causing them to hate Rachel even more. When Rachel gets pregnant with her own child she is sure this child will be so much better than any of Alice's children, but when the baby is born he is always sick. Not long after the baby is born all the older Barker children get the chicken pox, and one day when Rachel is being really nasty to Ada, Ada walks past the baby and rubs one of pox spots and touches her finger to the baby. Not long after that the baby dies, and even though he never had one chicken pox spot Ada always thinks it was her fault the baby died. Ada dies of diphtheria not long after that.



# Chapter 7-9

## Chapter 7-9 Summary

Chapter Seven 1960 Fire! Fire!

After Gillian dies, Ruby and her family go to the cemetery to visit Gillian's grave, and Ruby sees that the headstone reads "Safe in the Arms of Jesus." Ruby begins to think of Gillian in heaven and what she must be doing there and if Gillian is happy in heaven. Ruby starts going to church with her friend Kathleen and Kathleen's mother. Ruby finds comfort in praying for Gillian, praying that she is happy. Ruby spends so much time praying for Gillian that her knees begin to get sore and Bunty takes Ruby to the doctor to find out what is wrong with her. Ruby has not told her mother she has been praying for Gillian. The doctor tells Bunty that Ruby has housemaid's knee, and that Ruby should just take it easy. When Ruby comes home that day she helps her father in the pet store. That night after the Lennox family goes to bed, Ruby is awakened by Patricia. The house is on fire and the two girls are trapped in Ruby's room. Patricia climbs out the window to go get help. Soon the firemen arrive and get Ruby out of her room through her bedroom window. When Ruby makes it down into the back yard Bunty, George, Nell and Patricia are already out of the house and waiting for her. Bunty pulls Ruby to her and for the first time Ruby feels close to her mother. The next morning the Lennox family looks at the damage the fire caused. The pet store is a complete loss, as well as the kitchen and dining room. The upstairs is not damaged by the fire but by the smoke and the water used to put out the fire. Bunty and George move the family to a "nice little semi." But until they can move the Lennox family stays with Auntie Gladys.

Footnote (vii) Zeppelin!

Tom, Nell's brother, has just gotten married to Mabel. Tom has not been sent off to war because his employer is a member of the Society of Friends and goes in front of the board and tells them that he needs Tom to stay and work for him. This request buys Tom a six-month exemption, and Tom knows after that he will probably have to go to war. Tom is afraid to go to war, and the people in town talk about him being a coward for not joining up like his brother Albert did. People even come up to him on the street and tell him they think he is a coward.

One day while coming home from visiting his sisters, Tom is hit by a bomb. The bomb blows Tom's hand off, and all Tom can think is that there is no way he will have to join the war now.

Chapter Eight 1963 The Rings of Saturn

Patricia and Ruby become closer and Patricia talks to Ruby about wanting to lose her virginity to her new boyfriend, Howard. Ruby is too young to understand what Patricia is trying to say but Patricia is desperate for someone to confide in. The tension between



Bunty and Patricia only grows when Patricia comes home one morning after being out too late with Howard. Bunty and Patricia have an argument about Patricia's late night and Ruby is left to console her mother. The Lennox family manages to somewhat celebrate Ruby's birthday, a first for the family because Bunty does not make the cake herself but instead buys a cake from the bakery.

On Easter the extended family comes to the Lennox home to celebrate the holiday, and Uncle Ted, Bunty's brother, announces that he is getting married. While the men are downstairs congratulating him, the women have gone upstairs to plan the wedding and talk about bridesmaids. Ruby walks past the bedroom door where the ladies are and sees Auntie Babs showing the ladies where the doctors had to remove her breast to try and get rid of the cancer. Ruby did not know until that moment that her aunt had even been sick.

The Lennox family gets new neighbors, the Ropers. The Ropers have a daughter that is Ruby's age, Christine, but Ruby does not like her much. Christine is bossy; Ruby thinks Christine reminds her of Gillian, only Christine is not as pretty as Gillian was. One day Ruby and Bunty are in town and the two of them run into Mr. Roper. Ruby notices that she has never seen her mother act like that with a man before.

Nell dies and the family does not really react to this event. The last thing Nell says to Ruby is "mind your boots Lily." No one knows what that means, but then again Nell has not been herself for the last few months. They have a funeral with no candles or real flowers and all Bunty says is "That was my mother."

Not long after Nell dies, Ruby catches Bunty and Mr. Roper in the garage. Mr. Roper sees Ruby and speaks to her, Ruby just leaves the garage quickly without saying a word. Bunty nor Ruby ever speak of this event.

George takes the family to a Chinese restaurant. Bunty is not impressed, and she does not seem to enjoy the food. Ruby seems to be the only member of the family who enjoys the outing. Soon after this, the New Year is marked by the passing of Auntie Babs and the twins, Daisy and Rose come to stay with the Lennox family for a short time.

Footnote (viii) New Boots

Lillian and Nell want to go to the fair and Rachel tells them they cannot go. Lillian is upset because Rachel will not give her a reason for not letting them go to the fair, so she decides she is going to sneak out the window and climb down the tree and go to the fair anyway. The two girls have just gotten new boots and Nell is worried that Lillian is going to scuff hers. She keeps telling her to "mind her boots." Nell is too afraid to go with Lillian so Lillian goes ahead without her. Later that night Lillian comes home and tells Nell what a wonderful time she had. Nell wishes she could be more like Lillian

Chapter Nine 1964 Holiday!



The Lennox and Roper families have decided to take their two families on vacation together, and they are off to Scotland. The car ride to Scotland is mostly uneventful except for the occasional Roper child getting sick and needing to stop and throw up. The arguments from the Lennox car are about whether or not Mr. Roper even knows where he is going; they are all coming from George. When the two families finally arrive at the farmhouse they are going to be staying for the next two weeks, the families are surprised to learn the owners of the farm are named von Leibnitz, a not a very Scottish sounding name. Once everyone decides on sleeping arrangements, the families sit down for dinner with the von Leibnitz family. This time it is Patricia who gets sick and leaves the table. The two families take a day trip to Fort Williams and they spend a lot of time playing games, watching the von Leibnitzes milk cows, and playing the piano. Patricia continues to be sick for the rest of the vacation and one day the families decide to take a day trip on the sea. While on the sea the weather gets a little rough and Bunty, Christine, and most of the rest of the Roper children get sea sick. When they all get back to the farmhouse Mrs. Roper takes the sick children upstairs and the rest of the families stay downstairs playing Cluedo. At some point, everyone except for Bunty and Mr. Roper go upstairs. Ruby hears her father yelling at Bunty calling her all kinds of names. Bunty and Mr. Roper have been caught again but this time George is the one who catches them. In the middle of all the yelling Bunty turns to Patricia and gets on to Patricia about her posture and Patricia tells Bunty that she only came downstairs to tell her that she is pregnant. At that moment Mrs. Roper comes in yelling for an ambulance, as it turns out Christine's appendicitis is what was making her sick all day. George takes Mrs. Roper and her other son Kenneth to the hospital and Bunty and Mr. Roper take Mr. Roper's baby David to go find Patricia. Ruby stays with the von Leibnitz family at the farmhouse. Soon after that the Lennox family leaves Scotland without the Ropers and goes home.

Bunty and George decide to stay together and Patricia is sent to a Methodist mother and baby home. Patricia puts her baby up for adoption, and when she comes back home is a different person and she never goes back to school. On day in May, Patricia walks out and never comes home again. The Ropers move away.

Footnote (ix) In the Realm of Aire and Angells

Edmund Donner is Lillian's son and Bunty's cousin. After he left Bunty's house that day he went back on duty. The plane he is the bomb aimer on is shot down and Edmund is killed along with the crew on the plane. When he leaves Bunty's house he meets up with a nurse named Doreen O'Doherty at Betty's Bar. Edmund is thinking about Doreen just before his plane comes under attack. Doreen does not know what has happened to Edmund until she calls his station commander six weeks later and finds out Edmund has been killed. Doreen is trying to contact Edmund to tell him she is pregnant with his child. Doreen gives the baby up for adoption then later finds out she cannot have anymore children.



## Chapter 7-9 Analysis

After Gillian dies Bunty has a difficult time dealing with her life and spends a lot of time in her room. Bunty's life had been difficult enough before Gillian's death but now she also has her mother living with them because Nell is suffering with dementia and cannot care for herself. George is still having affairs and Bunty has no one to turn to for support. The reality of her choices is more than she can bare coupled with the loss of now two of her daughters. In addition to all of this Patricia is now a teenager and is becoming more sullen and unruly. Ruby spends a lot of time praying for Gillian, Ruby is very worried that Gillian is not happy in heaven or that she is making the people in heaven unhappy. Ruby and Patricia have become closer now that they are the only sisters remaining, and Patricia has confided in Ruby that she wants to lose her virginity to her new boyfriend, Howard. When a new family moves in next door, Bunty turns to the husband Mr. Roper for comfort and it is not long before Ruby catches her mother and Mr. Roper becoming very friendly in the garage. George, however, does not find out what is going on between Bunty and Mr. Roper until the two families go on vacation together and George catches the two lovers together. While George is in a fit of rage and demanding to know what is going on, Patricia comes in and tells them that she is pregnant and then runs off. After they find Patricia and return back home, George and Bunty decide to remain together and Patricia goes away to have her baby and then gives it up for adoption. When Patricia returns home after having her baby, she is even more withdrawn than before and finally she just leaves and never returns.

### Footnote

Edmund Donner comes to visit Nell's family. Nell has not seen Edmund or his mother, Lillian, since she left years ago. After Edmund is born, Lillian and Edmund live with Nell and her new husband Frank Cook. It is very difficult for both Lillian and Nell; they are not as close as they had been since Edmund came along. Nell and Frank both think that Edmund looks so much like Albert, Lillian and Nell's brother, that maybe Edmund is Albert's son. Lillian finally moves away with young Edmund and never returns to York. Lillian later marries and has another son named Nathan. Lillian always wants to see and talk to Nell again, but she cannot face having to tell Lillian that Jack Keech is Edmund's father. The two sisters never see each other again. After Edmund visits with his family for a while and fills them in on what Lillian has been doing all these years he tells them he has to leave or he will miss his bus. The truth is he is meeting a woman, Doreen O'Doherty, at a bar. Doreen is the same woman that George Lennox will cheat on Bunty with years later. When Edmund leaves, Bunty and Betty talk about how handsome Edmund is and how they would like to marry him.





# Chapter 10-13

## Chapter 10-13 Summary

### Chapter Ten 1966 Wedding Bells

Bunty is busy shopping for a wedding gift for Ted and Ruby is helping work at the shop. When the family pet store burns down they reopen a medical supply store instead of another pet store. Bunty is also busy making sure Ruby has everything she needs for the wedding because Ruby is going to be one of the bridesmaids. On the day of the wedding all the men in attendance are upset because, as it turns out, the wedding date is also the date for the final of the World Cup and that England is playing against their "sworn enemy- the Hun." After the ceremony all the men have run off to a side room where they find a television and are all watching the World Cup. Ted's new bride is crying because she cannot find him to cut the cake or do any of the reception activities, Bunty is in the restroom drunk and Ruby is running around between the bride and Bunty trying to help them both. When the bride finds all the men watching the TV television she makes them all come into the main room and begin the reception but Ruby is still looking for her father. Soon Ruby finds George in the television room with a waitress, having sex. When the waitress sees Ruby she stops what she is doing, and before Ruby can say anything both Ruby and the waitress realize there is something wrong with George. The waitress says she thinks he is dead. At that moment Bunty comes into the room. Everyone is too shocked at the fact that George has died to realize what he had been doing when he died except for Ruby and she does not say anything to anyone, even though she thinks it has to be obvious to Bunty. At the funeral Ruby faints, and is haunted by her father's funeral for several days to come. Patricia does not come home for the funeral.

### Footnote (x) Lillian

When Lillian gets pregnant with Edmund she tells people she is a war widow and tells them her husband's name is Valentine. She lives with Nell and Frank and works in town. Nell tells her that people know she was never married and does not know how she can hold her head up in town. Lillian does not care, she does what she has to do for her son. Nell is still upset that Lillian will not tell her who the father of Edmund is. Nell and Frank often wonder if Nell and Lillian's brother Albert fathered the baby because Edmund looks so much like Albert. Lillian and Nell are not as close as they used to be and it is very hard for Lillian to continue to live with Nell and Frank and so Lillian takes Edmund and she moves to Montreal. She and Edmund stay there for two years and then they move to Vancouver where she meets her husband Pete Donner. She marries him and they move to Saskatchewan. Lillian and Pete have a son they name Nathan who dies in an accident on the farm, but not before he is married with children of his own, a daughter, Allison and a son, Andy. Andy marries a woman named Tina and after Pete dies and Lillian is old and ready to die, Tina takes care of Lillian. Just before Lillian



dies she gives Tina a photo of Edmund's father and tells Tina the man's name. After Lillian dies, Andy and Tina decide to name their new son after Edmund's father, Jack

#### Chapter Eleven 1968 Wisdom

Ruby and Bunty are all that is left of the Lennox family now, and Bunty is dating a man named Mr. Belling. Ruby does not really like Mr. Belling so she spends a lot of time in her room daydreaming. One Sunday afternoon Mr. Belling slaps Ruby in the face because she mouths off to her mother, Bunty only says "Long past time someone put you in your place." The following Tuesday Mr. Belling comes by to pick up Bunty and while he is waiting on Bunty, Mr. Belling gets into an argument with Ruby and ends up telling Ruby that she killed her sister when she was a child. Ruby tells him that she could not have done, that Gillian was run over and Patricia is not dead, she has just run away. Mr. Belling tells her he is not talking about either of them, he is talking about Ruby's twin sister Pearl. Later Ruby asks her mother about what Mr. Belling has told her and Bunty confirms that it is true, Ruby did have a twin sister who died and that Gillian had told them that Ruby had accidentally pushed Pearl in the water. Bunty tells Ruby that Mr. Belling had no right telling her any of that and Bunty never sees Mr. Belling again. Bunty also tells Ruby it was an accident and that Ruby was only four when it happened and it was not her fault. The next day Ruby comes home from school and takes a bunch of pills in an attempt to kill herself. When Ruby wakes up she is in a hospital and the doctor at the hospital helps Ruby remember what happened when Pearl died. Gillian and Pearl had been playing on a frozen pond and Gillian was trying to get Pearl to walk out farther on the ice and when Pearl did she fell through the ice. Patricia tried to save Pearl but it was too late, as Pearl was going under the water she looked at Ruby and yelled for Ruby to help her. After the accident Gillian lied to her parents because she was afraid she would be blamed for the accident so she told them Ruby had pushed Pearl into the water. Ruby had blocked out the entire accident and the memory of Pearl for all these years.

#### Footnote (xi) The Wrong Life

In this footnote we find out what really happened to Alice Barker. When the traveling photographer returns to bring Alice the photos he had taken of her and her children a few months back, Alice has already had her daughter Nell. The traveling photographer asks Alice to run away with him. He tells her if she decides she wants to, she should meet him later that night. Alice knows she is not happy with the life she is living and she thinks about killing herself several times that day and by the end of the day Alice has made her mind up to go with the photographer. After her husband and children have gone to bed, Alice packs a bag, kisses the children, leaves her locket under Ada's pillow. Then Alice leaves her wedding ring lying on her pillow next to her husband and she leaves. Not long after she is living with the photographer, Monsieur Armand, Alice knows she has made a mistake. Many times Alice wants to return to her children, but circumstances will not allow it. When she is finally able to return, the children no longer live in her old house. Alice moves into town and lives alone, Monsieur Armand having died, for the rest of her life not knowing that her children are living in the same town.



Alice has seen her daughters, Nell and Lillian, only they have changed so much Alice does not know them.

#### Chapter Twelve 1970 Broken English

Ruby goes to Scotland after she graduates high school. She only plans to be there for the summer to work at a hotel with her friend Kathleen. Ruby, however, never leaves Scotland while there for the summer she meets a young Italian boy who asks her to marry him. Ruby says yes, thinking he has fallen in love with her, only to find out that the young man, Gian-Carlo Benedetti, has been staying in Scotland with his cousins and is about to be deported and is only marrying Ruby to stay in the country. Ruby and Benedetti have two daughters together before Ruby leaves him. Patricia calls Ruby and they reconnect. At some point Patricia comes to visit Ruby and so does Bunty and the three remaining Lennox women finally are a family again. Patricia has married and has two children.

#### Footnote (xii) 1914 Home

When Lawrence leaves home he goes to the Amazon, where he stays. While he is there he is remembering the night his mother left. He had been up sick that night and had seen his mother sneaking off with the photographer. When he gets up the next morning he thinks he must have been dreaming, because his father tells all of the children that she died. Lawrence tells his sister Ada what he saw and Ada tells him that their mother would never do that, so he must have not seen her.

#### Chapter Thirteen 1992 Redemption

Ruby comes back to York to make arrangements for Bunty, she is getting older and needs to be in a nursing home. After Ruby finds Bunty a nice one and gets her settled in, Ruby gets a phone call from the nursing home saying that Bunty has had a stroke. Ruby calls Patricia and the two girls stay with Bunty until she dies. After the funeral the two girls go to visit their old house Above the Shop. The shop has been turned into a clothing shop and the Above the Shop part is a cafe. The girls finally go up stairs and have a cup of tea. In the end Patricia goes back to her family, determined to find her son she gave up for adoption, and Ruby goes back to Scotland to her daughters.

## Chapter 10-13 Analysis

When Bunty's brother Ted gets married, Ruby walks in on her father, George, having sex with one of the waitresses from the wedding. Before Ruby can react, George has a heart attack and dies. Just as quickly Bunty comes into the room looking for George and Ruby. Ruby never tells her mother what she saw when she walked in, for that matter Ruby has never told her mother about any of the other times she has caught George with other women. Ruby, at least on two other occasions, catches her father in these circumstances. Once when she is too young to know what is going on, Ruby sees George with some woman in the Lennox's backyard during the Queen's coronation. Then when Doreen takes the girls to the beach, Ruby gets up early and catches her



father and Doreen coming out of Doreen's bedroom. By the same token Ruby does not say anything to her father when she catches Mr. Roper and Bunty in the garage either. Ruby knows her mother knows what George was up to, Bunty is always making references to it, but this time Bunty does not act like she knows. However, there George lies with his pants unzipped, surely Bunty is not that blind. Ruby is haunted by her father's funeral, and Patricia does not come back for either. Ruby and Bunty get a lot of phone calls with no one on the other end, Ruby hopes it is Patricia. After George dies Bunty starts dating a man named Mr. Belling. Mr. Belling seems to want to step in and fix all of Bunty's troubles. One day he takes it upon himself to tell Ruby the story of Pearl. Pearl is Ruby's twin who died. Ruby has blocked out all memory of Pearl and the accident, but after Mr. Belling tells her about it Ruby tries and fails to kill herself. Ruby goes to a hospital and the Doctor there helps Ruby remember Pearl. All these years Bunty has blamed Ruby for Pearl's death, as Gillian told everyone that Ruby pushed Pearl into the pond and Pearl had drowned. However, what really happened was Gillian was trying to get Pearl to walk out too far on the frozen pond and Pearl fell through the ice. Gillian blames it on Ruby to keep herself out of trouble. Bunty knows it was an accident but she cannot help but blame Ruby.

After Ruby graduates from high school she moves to Scotland. The move is suppose to be just for the summer but Ruby meets a man and marries him and they have two children together. Ruby is going down the same path her mother went down. The man Ruby marries does not really love her; he is only wanting to marry Ruby so he can stay in the country. Ruby has learned from her mother and decides not to stay in this unhappy relationship and leaves her husband. In the meantime Ruby and Patricia have reconnected; Patricia now lives in Australia and also has two children. Bunty and Ruby go to visit Patricia in Australia and Bunty gets to see her grand children. Later when Bunty is unable to live by herself Ruby comes back to York to help find her a nice nursing home, but on Bunty's first night in the home she suffers a heart attack. Ruby and Patricia are there with their mother when she dies. The Lennox girls meet a nurse, Sister Blake, at the hospital. Sister Blake stays with Ruby and Patricia while they are there with Bunty. Sister Blake is the child that Doreen gave up for adoption, the child she had with Edmund Donner.

#### Footnote

When Lillian leaves York she marries a man and has another child she names Nathan. Nathan has a son and a daughter, the son is named Andy. Andy and his wife Tina are the ones taking care of Lillian now that she is old and about to die. Lillian tells Tina about when she was young, and about Edmund's father. After Lillian dies, Tina has the baby and they name the baby after Edmund's father Jack Keech. This is the first time we have known for sure who Edmund's father is. After Jack is killed Lillian tells everyone she is a war widow, and that is not too far from the truth. She leaves York because she cannot take all the talk and she does not want to have to ever tell Nell what she has done. Lillian writes Nell many letters over the years but never mails any of them.

All the Barker children are told that their mother died during child birth, but the truth is she has run away in the middle of the night with a photographer. Alice is no different

than the rest of the women in her family; they all feel like they are trapped in lives that are not right for them. The only escape Alice can see is to run. Not long after she does, Alice realizes that is yet another wrong decision, only by this point there is nothing she can do about it. The photographer has taken her too far away and they do not have the money to return. By the time Alice is able to return to her children, they are grown and have moved from her old farm house, and Alice is unable to find them. Alice dies alone with nothing but photos of children. It seems Alice started this trait of making bad decisions, but her children and grandchildren keep it going. When Ruby realizes that staying in a bad situation only makes things worse and gets out, her life finally starts on the right track.



# Characters

## Ruby Lennox

Ruby Lennox is the main character of this novel. When we first meet Ruby she has just been conceived. She knows all the things her mother feels and thinks. She knows her mother is not happy with the way her life has turned out. However, once she is born she can no longer tell what her mother feels any more.

When Ruby is four years old her twin sister Pearl dies while they are at their uncle's house. She drowns in his pond and Ruby watches from the bank while her twin yells for her to help her. When her parents arrive, her sister Gillian tells them that Ruby was the one to push her into the water. The truth is it was Gillian who was telling Pearl to walk out on the ice. After her sister's death, Ruby is sent to stay with her aunt. Ruby has not only blocked out the memory of the accident but also of Pearl all together. Years later when she finally remembers the event she asks her mother why they never talked about Pearl and her mother said they all did; only Ruby did not. Ruby does not even remember hearing her name.

When Ruby is a teenager she catches her father having sex with a waitress at her uncle's wedding. Before she can react to what she has just seen, he has a heart attack and dies. This is not the first time she has caught her father with another woman, she was just too young to realize it before. Once when she is about two she is looking for her teddy bear and she looks out the window and he was out there with someone else that night. Another time when Ruby's mother leaves them for a week, her father asks his girlfriend to watch the girls for him. He had promised to take them to the beach for the week and with their mother gone he asks his girlfriend Doreen to do it. On their last night there he is suppose to be sleeping on the couch and Ruby gets up before anyone else and catches him coming out of the bedroom with Doreen. She hides and never tells anyone what she has seen.

On Christmas Eve in 1959 Ruby's sister Gillian is killed. The Lennox family is going to the theatre to watch a pantomime. When they are leaving Gillian runs out into the street, waving to some of her friends from school, and is hit by a bus. Some years later her only remaining sister Patricia runs away from home, leaving Ruby all alone with her mother.

Ruby leaves and goes to Scotland after she graduates high school. There she meets and marries a man so he can stay in the country. She has two little girls with him, and then they get divorced. She comes back home to take care of her ailing mother and while getting her set up in a nursing home, her mother suffers a stroke and soon after dies. While going through their mother's things, Patricia and Ruby realize that their mother did in fact love them and they loved her. Ruby goes back to Scotland with her daughters.



## Bunty Cook Lennox

Bunty is Ruby's mother. Bunty's first love is an American serviceman named Buck. The two are to be married until Buck gets his foot blown off by stepping on a land mine. When he is sent back to the States he tells Bunty he will send for her, but he never does. Bunty ends up married to George Lennox. She always wonders what her life would have been like if she had married Buck instead.

Bunty spends several years in depression over the loss of her daughters, and her remaining daughters suffers for this. When their home burns they move to a new house and Bunty has an affair with the next door neighbor, Mr. Roper. While the two families, the Lennoxes and the Ropers, are on holiday in Scotland, George catches Bunty with Mr. Roper. Bunty and George work things out and stay married. Then while at her brother's wedding, George has a heart attack and dies.

Bunty dates a man named Mr. Belling who does not like Ruby. One day when he is mad at Ruby he tells her about Pearl. Bunty and Ruby finally talk about Pearl and Bunty leaves Mr. Belling.

In her later years Bunty starts to show signs of dementia. Ruby comes home to help find her mother a nursing home, and Bunty has a stroke and dies a few days later.

## Patricia Lennox

Patricia Lennox is Ruby's oldest sister. Patricia tries to save Pearl when she falls in the pond by diving in the water to find her. She is still diving under the ice when her parents get to the pond. When she becomes a teenager Patricia becomes pregnant, and is sent away to have her baby. She gives the baby boy up for adoption. A few years later Patricia runs away from home, no one knows where she has gone for years. When Ruby is married with children of her own, Patricia finally calls her and Ruby and Bunty make a trip to Australia to visit Patricia and her family. When Bunty has her stroke, Patricia comes back to be there with her mother when she dies.

## Gillian Lennox

Gillian Lennox is one of Ruby's sisters. When Ruby's twin sister Pearl dies at their uncle's pond, Gillian is the one who was telling her to walk out on the ice, and then when she fell though and died, Gillian tells her parents Ruby pushed Pearl into the water.

When Gillian is eleven years old she is run over by a bus, and killed, outside of a theatre where her family has just spent Christmas Eve watching a pantomime.



## George Lennox

George Lennox is Ruby's father. He takes over his father's pet store business when he dies. On several occasions Ruby catches her father having affairs, although she is too young to realize it. When Ruby is a teenager she walks in on her father having sex with a waitress at her Uncle Ted's wedding reception. He has a heart attack and dies at the wedding.

## Nell Barker Cook

Nell is Ruby's grandmother. When Nell is a young woman she is engaged to Percy Sievewright. He dies when his appendix bursts at the age of twenty-six. Some time later she meets one of his friends, Jack Keech, and they become engaged before he is sent off to the war. She gives him a rabbit's foot to keep him safe. When he comes home on leave he discovers he has feelings for her sister Lillian, he however does not tell this to Nell. Not long after he returns to the war he is killed. She later becomes engaged to his friend Frank Cook and they are married. Nell always wonders if the baby boy her sister has not long after Jack leaves is his, but never knows the truth because Lillian leaves the country with the baby and never returns.

Nell lives with Ruby and her family when she cannot take care of herself any more and dies while living there.

## Alice Barker

Alice Barker is the great grandmother of Ruby. When Alice's children are all small she runs away with a traveling photographer. Her children are told she died during child birth. Years later when she tries to return to her family she cannot. When she is finally able to come back, her children have moved and she is never able to find them. On the day her son Albert dies during the war, she sees his ghost. Alice dies alone with only the photos the traveling photographer had taken of her children.

## Lillian Barker Donner

Lillian is Nell's older sister. They fall in love with the same man, Jack Keech. Nell is engaged to Jack before he leaves for the war, but when he returns he falls in love with Lillian. After he dies Lillian has a son but refuses to tell anyone who the father is. She lives with Nell and Frank for a while then she moves to Canada with her son and never again comes back to see her family.





## **Edmund Donner**

Edmund is the son of Lillian and Jack Keech. He is killed before he finds out that Doreen is pregnant with his child.

## **Doreen O'Doherty**

Doreen O'Doherty is the woman Edmund Donner is going to meet on his last night in town. She later finds out she is pregnant with his child and when she tries to contact him to tell him, she finds out he was killed three weeks after she saw him. She gives the baby up for adoption.

She is also the woman that George is having an affair with. She is the woman that the girls spend the week with when Bunty runs off.

## **Albert Barker**

Albert Barker is Nell and Lillian's brother. He is killed on July 1, 1916. His ghost appears to Frank and to his mother Alice on the day he dies.

## **Frank Cook**

Frank is Nell's husband, Ruby's grandfather. He is killed when a bomber plane misses its target and hits him by mistake.

## **Mr. Roper**

Mr. Roper is a neighbor of the Lennox family after Above the Shop burns. Bunty is having an affair with him.

## **Mr. Belling**

Mr. Belling is dating Bunty after George dies. He is the one who tells Ruby about Pearl.

## **Uncle Tom**

Uncle Tom is Nell's brother. The Lennox family is at his house when Pearl dies in his pond.



## **Uncle Ted**

Uncle Ted is Ruby's mother's brother. It is at his wedding that Ruby catches her father, George, having sex with the waitress just before he dies.

## **Tessa Blake**

Tessa Blake is the nurse who stays with Ruby and Patricia when Bunty is dying. She is also the daughter of Edmund and Doreen O'Doherty. Doreen gives her up for adoption when Edmund is killed.

## **Trina Donner**

Trina Donner is married to Andy Donner the son of Edmund. She is the one who tells Ruby and Patricia that Jack Keech is Edmund's real father.

## **Rachel Storm Barker**

Rachel is Alice Barker's cousin. She comes to help take care of Alice's children and husband when Alice leaves. Later Mr. Barker marries Rachel, or at least gives her a ring and calls her his wife.



# Objects/Places

## Above the Shop

Above the Shop is what Ruby and her family call their home. They live in the same building as the business her father owns, a pet shop. They do not really live above it since the kitchen and dining room are on the same floor as the pet shop but the rest of the house is upstairs and so they call it Above the Shop. This is where Ruby lives from the time she is born until a fire destroys the main floor of the building when Ruby is 8 years old.

## Scotland

Scotland is where the Lennox family go on Holiday with the Roper family from next door. This is where George catches Bunty and Mr. Roper having an affair and this is also where Patricia tells them she is pregnant.

## The Amazon

The Amazon is where Nell's brother Lawrence runs away to when he cannot take living with Rachel anymore. He stays there for several years before returning home.

## Australia

Australia is where Patricia runs away to after she is sent away to have her baby boy that she gives up for adoption. She never comes home from here but marries and has other children; she only comes back when she hears her mother is dying.

## Auntie Bab's House

Auntie Bab's house is where Ruby is for two and a half weeks after her twin sister Pearl drowns in the pond at Uncle Tom's house. However, Ruby does not know why she has been sent there, neither does she remember having a twin or that she is dead. Ruby hates it at Auntie Bab's house because she is always afraid and does not know why and because she does not like her twin cousins, Daisy and Rose.

## York

York is the town that Rachel moves the children to when she sells the farm after Fredrick dies.



## **Auntie Mabel and Uncle Tom's House**

Auntie Mabel and Uncle Tom's House is where the Lennox family go to celebrate the New Year when Pearl drowns in the partially frozen pond outside their house. Gillian is telling her to walk out on the water, and when Pearl falls through, Gillian tells everyone that Ruby pushed her in the water.

## **The**

The "Nice little semi" house is where Bunty and George move the girls to when the Above the Shop burns. It is in Acomb. This is where Bunty lives until Ruby moves her into the nursing home that she has a stroke in. Bunty later dies from the stroke.

## **The Theatre Royal**

The Theatre Royal is where the Lennox family go on Christmas Eve to see a pantomime. When they are standing in front of the Theatre Royal, Gillian is hit by a bus.

## **Canada**

Canada is where Lillian goes with baby Edmund when she leaves home. Lillian will never return to her family.

# Themes

## Death

Death is a dominating theme in "Behind the Scenes at the Museum." The main character, Ruby Lennox, deals with the deaths of many of her family members in this novel. At one point at her Uncle Ted's wedding, Ruby catches her father, George, having sex with a waitress in a television room. Before she can grasp what it is that she has just witnessed, her father dies of a heart attack in front of her. She is left with the waitress to tell her mother, Bunty, who has just stumbled in wondering where her husband is. Ruby never tells her mother what she has just walked in on, but the fact that her father's pants are still unzipped cannot be lost on her mother.

Later when Ruby's grandmother becomes too ill to care for herself, Ruby is forced to share a room with her eleven year old sister, Gillian, so their Grandmother can move in with them. On Christmas Eve her sister, Gillian is killed when a bus hits her outside the theatre where the family has just watched a pantomime. Not long after this her Grandmother dies also. Years later when Ruby is grown, with children of her own, she comes back to find a nursing home for her ailing mother, Bunty. On her first night in the home, Bunty suffers a stroke and later dies with Ruby and her only remaining sister, Patricia at her bedside.

Although all these deaths affect Ruby in different ways, the one that has the biggest impact on Ruby is the one she does not even remember until she is a teenager. Her own twin, Pearl dies when they are four years old. Pearl and Gillian are out on the partially frozen pond at their Auntie Mabel and Uncle Tom's house, when the piece of ice Pearl is on tips her into the water. All Ruby can do is scream as her twin looks at her and yells "Ruby help me!" When their parents get there Gillian tells them that Ruby pushed Pearl into the pond, Gillian is afraid she will be in trouble for getting her out on the ice to start with. Ruby pushes all her memories of that day and of her sister out of her mind. It is not until Ruby is a teenager that she remembers the truth about that awful day, and it is not until she faces that day that she can finally feel good about being Ruby Lennox.

## Regret

Most of the characters in "Behind the Scenes at the Museum" have one thing in common, regret—regret for what they have done or have not done or what they cannot find it in themselves to do now. Alice Barker, the great-grandmother of Ruby Lennox, starts this theme when she leaves her family and her offspring carries it on for many years to come.

Alice Barker finds herself in a life she does not expect and a husband she does not like. The mundane chores of country living are more than she thinks she can handle, and



instead of looking for help she seeks a way out. When suicide does not seem to be the answer, she runs off with a traveling photographer. She leaves behind seven children, including a brand new baby girl, Nell, Ruby's grandmother, with their father. She soon realizes that she has made the wrong decision, but it is too late. No matter how hard Alice tries she never is able to reconnect with any of her children, and her regrets only increase. In the end she dies old and alone, never seeing any of her children again, and all any of them ever wish is to some how find her.

All of Alice's seven children live their whole lives with the regret of not having their own mother. They are told that she dies giving birth to Nell. Soon their father brings in a new Mrs. Barker to help take care of his children. None of the Barker children ever like Rachel and she never likes any of them. Rachel resents having to "clean up Alice's mess she left behind," and she takes it out on the children.

Bunty, Ruby's mother, is resentful of her childhood and after not one, but two failed engagements she marries George Lennox. Bunty regrets this decision most, if not all, her life with George. If only she could have married Buck, the American she was in love with during the war, her life would have been better. However, when Buck gets his foot blown off he is shipped home, he promises to call for Bunty but he never does and so Bunty marries George. Then when she loses her daughter Pearl, and then a second, Gillian, her list of regrets just continues to grow. Like her grandmother, Alice, Bunty does not know how else to handle her life, so she leaves her husband and children. However, unlike Alice, Bunty is only gone a week.

It seems that Ruby is destined to the same footsteps of the women before her when she finds herself in marriage she does not want to be in with two small girls of her own. Ruby instead takes her daughters and leaves her husband. Later Ruby has to come home to make arrangements for her ailing mother. While she is getting her settled into a nursing home, Bunty has a stroke and later dies. Ruby is with her mother and her only remaining sister Patricia when their mother dies. The two girls realize that their mother, in fact, loved them and, even more shocking, they loved her too. They are finally able to let go of the regret they have held onto for so long.

## Luck

The rabbit's foot is suppose to bring good luck, and you could say that it does the job for the members of the Barker family, but if you look closely, perhaps it does just the opposite.

When Rachel first comes to care for the Barkers after Alice leaves, Mr. Barker brings in two rabbits he has killed for diner, and Rachel cuts the paw off of one and puts it away for luck. When Nell's second boyfriend, Jack Keech, leaves for the war, Rachel gives Nell the rabbit's foot to give to Jack. For the entire time Jack has the foot he is safe. When he comes home on leave he realizes that it is not Nell he loves but her sister Lillian. However, he is sent back before he can tell anyone but Lillian the truth. Once back he gives the rabbit's foot to his friend Frank Cook who is sure he is going to die.



Soon after Jack is killed, and has unknowingly left behind a pregnant Lillian, who refuses to tell anyone the name of her baby's father, Frank comes home from the war and marries Nell. Frank gives the rabbit's foot to his son Clifford. Not long after this, Frank is killed when a bomber plane missed its target and hits Frank instead. Sometime later Clifford gives the foot to his sister Bunty. The author mentions Bunty holding this same rabbit's foot when she is giving birth to the twins, Ruby and Pearl. Pearl later dies in a pond and Ruby is blamed for pushing her into the pond by Gillian. Gillian is later killed by a bus on Christmas Eve.

In the end, when Bunty has died and the two remaining sisters are going through their mother's things, Patricia finds the rabbit's foot. It somehow made it through the fire at Above the Shop. Patricia decides to bury the rabbit's foot. Maybe this action will put an end to all the good luck it has brought their family over the years.



# Style

## Point of View

This novel is told from the third person point of view. The point of view is omniscient and this is especially important to the subplot of this novel. If not for the omniscient point of view the reader would not be able to tie all the characters together. This allows the author to convey not only what the characters are doing but also what they are thinking and feeling, and in this case gives the reader crucial background information as well.

In this novel the character Doreen O'Doherty is George Lennox's girlfriend who takes the three Lennox girls and their cousin on their beach vacation when Bunty disappears. Doreen is also the nurse that Edmund Donner is dating years earlier and Doreen becomes pregnant with Edmund's child before he is killed during the war. Doreen gives the child up for adoption and this child is Sister Blake, the nurse who is with Ruby and Patricia when Bunty dies. If not for the omniscient point of view, the reader would not know of this family relationship between the Lennox girls and Sister Blake.

## Setting

The setting of this novel is mainly England, a town called York, which is where the main character Ruby Lennox and her family live. The author does not give much detail about the town itself except that the street that the Lennox family lives on has many other stores much like the one the Lennox family owns. The Lennox family lives in the pet store they own in what they call Above the Shop.

George Lennox promises his daughters that he will take them on a beach vacation, but when Bunty disappears the girls fear the vacation will be cancelled. George arranges for his girlfriend, Doreen, to take the girls and their cousin on the vacation. The author focuses more on the activities the girls are involved in while at the beach than the scenery. The girls play games, build sand castles, and eat store bought cakes, all things they would not be doing if their own mother were there.

The Lennox family and their neighbors the Ropers take a vacation to Scotland sometime after Gillian dies. The farmhouse the two families stay at while on holiday has "rolling hills of brown-green grass and bracken" with milk cows and chickens. It rains a lot while the families are in Scotland. While on this holiday George finds out that Bunty has been having an affair with Mr. Roper and everyone finds out that Patricia is pregnant.

Although Ruby moves to Scotland and marries after she graduates from high school, the final setting for this novel is back in York. Ruby comes home to find a nursing home for Bunty who has become unable to live alone and on Bunty's first night in the home, Bunty suffers a stroke. Patricia comes back to York as well and the two Lennox girls are at their mother's side when she dies.





## Language and Meaning

The language of this novel is simple and in keeping with the way in which we speak today. However in the subplots the language tends to be more indicative of an older time period and a poorer culture. This change in language is sometimes hard to follow and may slow down the usual fast pace the reader has become accustomed to in the main plot. This change of language does lend to the authenticity of the novel and makes the story more visual to the reader.

The language of this novel allows the reader to more easily recognize the change of characters. With the fast pace of the main story-line, the language of the subplot helps to remind the reader which family member the subplot is focusing on, as each subplot deals with a different memory and different family member each time. If not for the change in language the reader would be forced to reread the passages and take notes to be able to keep up with the many family members this novel deals with.

## Structure

This novel is comprised of thirteen chapters. Most of the chapters have footnotes at the end of the chapters. Each chapter is about twenty pages long and some of the footnotes are the same. The chapters are numbered and not only tell about something that is going to happen in the chapter but also tell the reader what year of Ruby's life we are in. The footnotes go back in time to Ruby's grandmother, great-grand mother, and mother. They give us insights into why Ruby's family is the way it is.

The plot of this novel follows the main character Ruby Lennox from conception all the way until Ruby is a grown woman with children of her own as she deals with death of her sister Gillian and a mother who is distant and cold. She later learns that she had a twin sister who died and that everyone thought she was the cause of her death. As Ruby deals with the news of her sister Pearl and the new memories of what really happened, Ruby finally feels good about being "just Ruby."

The footnotes at the end of the chapters lead you through the lives of Ruby's mother, grandmother and her great-grandmother. We learn of lost loves and of lives that do not turn out as planned. These footnotes give the reader some insight as to why each of the woman in Ruby's life parent the way they do, and why Ruby never feels like her own mother loves her.

This novel is a very easy read as there is not a lot of skipping back and forth in time. The footnotes may be a bit confusing at times but are quickly made clear. They also add an element of interest to understand how things tie together.



## Quotes

"Lillian had a bit more life about her—with her lovely slanting eyes, like a cat, and the feeling you got that secretly she was laughing at everything as if she knew what a piece of nonsense the world was." Chapter Two, p. 67, n. ii.

"If you blinked you'd almost think there was two of me." Chapter Three, p. 73.

"Business as Usual. Bombed but not Beaten." Chapter Three, p. 93. n. iii.

"Our childhood is over, yet we're still waiting for it to begin." Chapter Six, p. 166.

"Just get her, Ruby, don't be clever." They really don't want me to be clever, do they?" Chapter Seven, p. 187.

"I'm waiting for Bunty to say something like 'I told you to be more careful!' but to my surprise she says nothing at all and pulls me towards her, wrapping me in the shelter of her dressing-gowned arms and, for once, the invisible cord between us shrivels and shirrs to nothing as bridge the three-foot chasm." Chapter Seven, p. 191.

"As we're leaving, Bunty turns to look back and after a slight pause says, "That was my mother," and the hairs stand up on the back of my neck, just like June Allyson's in *The Glenn Miller Story* on television the previous Sunday afternoon, because I knew with the certainty of premonition, that one day I would say exactly the same thing." Chapter Eight, p. 210.

"I think I'd just like to be happy." Chapter Eight, p. 215.

"It's not the destination that's important, Patricia says in a dreamy way, it's the journey." Chapter Nine, p. 225.

"Perhaps my concept of love—as wide as the sky—isn't big enough to encompass Bunty's autistic mothering." Chapter Thirteen, p. 326.

"'The past is what you leave behind in life,' she says with the smile of a reincarnated lama. 'Nonsense, Patricia,' I tell her as I climb on board my train. 'The past's what you take with you.'" Chapter Thirteen, p. 331.

"I am a precious jewel. I am a drop of blood. I am Ruby Lennox." Chapter Thirteen, final page, no number.



## Topics for Discussion

How does Alice's leaving affect her children?

Where does Lawrence go when he runs away from home?

Why does Lillian refuse to tell her family who the father of baby Edmund is?

Who sees the ghost of Albert Barker on the day he dies?

What theme is paralleled in the lives of Alice, Bunty, and Patricia?

What are the two things that Ruby carries with her out of her burning home?

Who is Tessa Blake, and what is her relationship to the family in this novel?

What two events finally lead Ruby to remembering her twin sister Pearl?

Why has Ruby blocked out all memories of Pearl?