

Big Little Lies Study Guide

Big Little Lies by Liane Moriarty

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Plot Summary

Big Little Lies by Liane Moriarty begins with Mrs. Patty Ponder observing a riot happening across the street at Pirriwee Public. The school has just held the annual costume party/trivia night, and several of the fathers of the students are shouting and shoving one another. The chapter cuts away to a group of interviewees giving statements to a police detective. The parents are discussing how the school was divided over something that was being called "The Mummy Wars." The last statement is from a police detective, talking about how they are investigating a murder.

The book then cuts away to several months before the trivia night where the readers are introduced to the cast of characters. The three main protagonists are Madeline, Jane, and Celeste, all mothers that have children attending kindergarten at Pirriwee Public. Madeline is a very outspoken mother who's just turned 40. She has two younger children and a teenage daughter, Abigail. Abigail and Madeline have a strained relationship because she wants to move in with her father and Madeline's divorced husband, Nathan, and his new wife, Bonnie.

Jane is the youngest and newest to town. She's running away from a mysterious past with her son, Ziggy. Jane is very secretive over who Ziggy's father is, simply saying that he was someone that she had a one night stand with several years ago. The group is rounded out by the beautiful and rich Celeste, who is the mother to twins, Max and Josh. Everyone in town looks up to Celeste because of her looks and success. Celeste is married to Perry, who is the breadwinner of the family.

The three mothers become friends at orientation. Things get awkward when one of the mothers, Renata, accuses Ziggy of bullying her child, Amabella. Ziggy denies it, and Jane and her new friends stick up for him. Things get worse for Ziggy and Jane as Renata starts pushing a petition around the school trying to get Ziggy suspended for bullying. The school ignores it because there's no actual proof of Ziggy bullying anyone, but the rest of the parents are forced to pick sides.

While this is going on, Celeste is dealing with a dark secret at home, that her husband Perry hits her. Celeste is too ashamed to tell anyone about the abuse and feels like she deserves it. As the group grows closer, Jane reveals that she knows the name of Ziggy's father. He was a man named Saxon Banks, who was abusive and humiliated Jane during their one night stand. Celeste is surprised to learn that Saxon Banks is related to her husband, Perry.

To make matters worse, Celeste discovers that it was her son Max who was responsible for bullying Renata's child. That isn't the only child that Max has bullied either. Celeste realizes that Max has seen her being abused and has started to pick up the aggressive behavior. Madeline tries to help her friends, but she has her own problems trying to keep her family together. Her daughter Abigail has decided to leave and live with Nathan and Bonnie. While she's there, she starts getting interested in charity. In an



attempt to raise awareness about child trafficking, she's started a website where she's trying to auction off her virginity.

Everything comes to a head as trivia night draws closer. Jane and Perry meet for the first time, and she realizes that he and Saxon Banks are one and the same. When confronted with the truth, Perry snaps and hits Celeste. In response, Bonnie pushes him over the edge of the balcony. She reveals that her mother was abused by her father when she was a child and she snapped when she saw the way Perry was acting. Everyone wants to protect her and keep the murder a secret, but Bonnie comes forward and confesses because she doesn't want to see the families torn apart any further.

At the conclusion of the novel, Celeste has decided that her sons will not grow up to be the same kind of man as their father. She is in therapy to overcome her feelings of responsibility for Perry's death. Celeste uses her experience to help others by giving a speech on domestic violence. Her primary message is that domestic abuse can happen to anyone.



Chapters 1-3

Summary

Chapter 1

Big Little Lies opens with Mrs. Patty Ponder watching television and talking to her cat. She lives right across the street from a school, Pirriwee Public. The school is having some sort of trivia night, and she can hear the sounds of arguing and excessive cursing. She goes to investigate. When she looks out the window, she sees two men getting into a fight. They are quickly separated by some of the other parents. The rest of the chapter consists of different parents giving testimony. Some of them talk about how the fight was sparked because of gender issues. Some even cite an event at kindergarten orientation referred to as "The Mummy Wars." The chapter ends with a police detective saying they are investigating a murder.

Chapter 2

Chapter 2 is set six months before the event at the trivia night. Madeline Martha Mackenzie is driving her five year old daughter, Chloe, to her orientation at Pirriwee Public. Madeline had turned 40 that day which she was fixated on. She felt like she was getting older and had officially entered into her frumpy years. She gets angry at the car in front of them because the young driver is constantly texting on her phone. At the light, she pulls over and goes up to the car, shouting at the driver and taking her phone away. The chapter ends with Madeline twisting her ankle as she returns to her car, which the narrator notes started everything.

Chapter 3

In Chapter 3, Jane is on her way to orientation with her son, Ziggy, when she sees Madeline fall in the road right after confronting the teenagers. At first Jane thinks about leaving, but Ziggy points out that helping Madeline is the right thing to do. Jane chastises herself for even thinking about leaving and goes out to help. Jane is taken with Madeline's looks. She assesses the damage and determines that Madeline rolled her ankle. They introduce each other and find out that they are both going to the same orientation.

In the present, the interviewees are still giving statements. One of them comments that the school was divided into two sides. Another one says that everything started when a strange named child, Ziggy, did something at orientation.

Analysis

Chapter 1



The first chapter sets up the main conflict of the book, someone being murdered. The interviewees make it sound like it is a result of “The Mummy Wars” referring to one of the central conflicts between Jane and Renata. As readers eventually find out much later in the book, the conflict was actually about Perry cheating on Celeste and abusing Jane several years ago while pretending to be his cousin.

The storytelling element of using the interviewees to convey and expand on details is established in this chapter.

The majority of the chapters end with someone giving a statement to the police about what happened on the night of the murder. Many of these quotes serve to either expand on something that was established in the chapter, or to foreshadow specific events. In this chapter, the interviewees do both. They clarify details about the fight that Mrs. Ponder witnessed, expressing that someone was murdered. They also foreshadow the conflict between Jane and Renata by mentioning “The Mummy Wars.”

Chapter 2

Madeline is introduced and brings up one of the major reoccurring themes in the book, image. Madeline is obsessing over the fact that she’s just turned 40 and feels like she’s getting older. She also mentions the new outfit that she got for orientation, clearly wanting to show off. Madeline’s intense personality is shown off very well in her introduction when she gets out of the car and goes to confront the younger kids in the car ahead of her. This showcases her passion, but also her confrontational nature as well.

Madeline has a very hard time letting things go. This repeatedly causes her to clash with the other parents, especially Renata. Renata’s main conflict is with Jane, but Madeline constantly interferes in the fight which escalates things further. Without Madeline there likely wouldn’t be any conflict since Jane is still incredibly passive in the beginning of the book and wouldn’t try to directly engage Renata in the same way Madeline would.

Chapter 3

Jane and Ziggy meet Madeline on the side of the road. Jane helping Madeline with her ankle marks the very start of their friendship, which continues to blossom throughout the next couple of chapters. Jane and Madeline’s friendship is an important part of the book since Madeline’s defense of Jane drives many of the early conflicts. Madeline also introduces Jane to many of the other characters, most notably Celeste. Celeste and Jane’s friendship ends up being very important to the story because that’s how Celeste is able to find out about Perry cheating on her. This sets up a string of events where his abusive nature is revealed leading to his murder at the hands of the formerly abused Bonnie. Because they get so close, Jane is later able to tell Madeline all about the abuse she suffered at Perry’s hands.

As noted by the interviewees in the present, their friendship is largely what started the feud that was earlier foreshadowed at the start of the book. If Jane had never met



Madeline she likely would have just left the school after the bullying accusations. The interviewees make it clear that Jane's son is the one that sparked everything, although the readers will learn throughout the course of the book that the bullying situation was far more complicated and didn't actually involve Ziggy at all. Ziggy was simply blamed because the actual bully, Max, threatened Amabella if she told the truth. She just happened to pick Ziggy as the one to accuse during the orientation.

Discussion Question 1

What is the inciting incident in the story?

Discussion Question 2

Who is Madeline and what does the reader learn about her in Chapters 1-3?

Discussion Question 3

Discuss the theme of Image as it appears in Chapter 2.

Vocabulary

trivial, hollers, intervals, abhorred, rendition, trilled, vacantly, gesticulating, calamity, metamorphosed, writhing, aesthetically, ruefully, defamatory



Chapters 4-6

Summary

Chapter 4

In Chapter 4, Jane takes Madeline to a café so she can rest her leg after dropping their children off at orientation. Chloe is happy to go with Ziggy, explaining all the school rules to him. Madeline talks to Jane while she waits for her friend, Celeste, to show up. Madeline tells her that she has an ex-husband, Nathan, who has remarried to someone named Bonnie. Bonnie will be at the orientation as well since they have a child attending the school. She tells Jane that she hates her ex-husband and his new wife, although it's hard to hate her because of how likeable she is. Jane tells Madeline that she moved to the beach on a whim. She doesn't know who Ziggy's father is, but Madeline doesn't seem bothered by this. Jane tells Madeline she's only 24, and Madeline remarks she's likely the youngest mom at the school.

Chapter 5

Celeste arrives and momentarily panics when she sees that Madeline is with someone else. She's been having a hard time in small groups because she always felt like she was acting socially inappropriate. Celeste joins them and gives Madeline her gift, a very expensive bottle of champagne along with expensive champagne glasses. Madeline explains that Celeste's child is attending the orientation too, and since they're new to the school she wants to explain everything. She talks about some of the moms and explains the social hierarchies to the two. She mostly focuses on the gifted children as well as the mothers that run the PTA. Madeline tries very hard to impress Jane while she explains everything. The three celebrate Madeline's birthday with a glass of champagne, something that the interviewees comment on in the present.

Chapter 6

Jane is very happy with the fact that she made new friends. She felt like she never fit in with the other mother's before because their problems seemed so fake. They would complain about minor slights from their husband, something that Jane obviously couldn't relate to. Even though Celeste and Madeline were older, she felt like she related to them better and they were talking like old friends. Jane meets a few of the other mothers, including Renata and her nanny, Juliette. She also meets Harper, who seems to be a supportive follower of Renata. Renata's child is Amabella. She's very protective of her. The children all come out and the teacher calls the parents forward to address them. Amabella had been physically bullied by one of the boys. The teacher lines the boys out, and Amabella indicates that Ziggy was the one who hurt her, but he denied it.



Analysis

Chapter 4

Madeline and Jane quickly become friends while they wait together in the café. Madeline reveals a lot of information about her past, establishing several characters and her relationship with them, most notably Celeste and Bonnie. Her animosity with Bonnie is a reoccurring conflict throughout the book as Madeline feels like Bonnie is stealing Abigail away. She also explains about some of the parents, foreshadowing Jane's eventual meeting with Renata and Harper. Both Renata and Harper actively work against Jane after orientation because they want her child banned from the school after he's mistakenly accused of bullying.

Jane reveals a lot about herself as well. She wants to impress Madeline by telling a whimsical story. She's clearly trying to fit in with everyone else in the area. Jane reinforces this several times throughout the book, stating that she was never looking to cause any conflict and just wanted to blend in with all of the other mothers. Her inner thoughts also make it clear that she has been searching for a place that feels like home.

Both Jane and Madeline admit to having problems when it comes to forgiving people. This foreshadows Jane's difficult past with Perry. Towards the end of the book she admits that one of the reasons she decided to move was because she knew that Perry lived here several years ago. She was never able to forgive him for the abuse she suffered at his hands. She also wanted to show off the beautiful child that she had because she believed Perry would be hurt if he knew that he missed out on getting to be a father to Ziggy.

The subject of age is brought up once again, this time with Jane remarking how older people frequently treat youth like some miraculous concept. They believe younger people are naturally more beautiful, happy, and energetic simply because of their age.

The café, Blue Blues is introduced for the first time. The café becomes a reoccurring setting much later in the book. It proves to be very important for Jane because the café is what makes her feel like she's finally found a home. The café is also where she meets Tom. Along with Madeline and Celeste, Tom is one of the characters that helps Jane confront her past abuse from Perry and break out of the passive shell she's defensively put up as a result of Perry's actions.

Chapter 5

Many of Celeste's insecurities are explored in her initial introduction. She struggles in social situations because she feels like she doesn't know how to act. Madeline expands on this in her own thoughts. Celeste gets uncomfortable anytime someone brings up her wealth or her looks. She wants to hide it because she doesn't want people to think she's extraordinary. Madeline works very hard to impress Jane, going out of her way to make jokes to try and get Jane to laugh again. Celeste remarks that Madeline is very extreme



with her social contacts, either making loving friends or hated enemies. She does note that Madeline tends to make more enemies than friends.

Celeste mentions how Madeline had feuded before with another mother, Renata. Renata was a mother of a gifted child and had tried to make a special field trip just for them, but Madeline felt that was unfair. By the end of the chapter all three are friends, something that the rest of the parents don't seem to be too pleased about. As Madeline notes at the end of the chapter, nobody likes feeling like they were left out. Jane makes a remark about not wanting to get involved in school politics, but a cut to the present foreshadows how mistaken Jane was about that decision.

Chapter 6

The conflict is finally set up for the characters when Amabella accuses Ziggy of bullying. While the readers have already been aware of it since it was discussed in the present, this is the first time it has been brought up for the characters. Throughout the rest of the story Ziggy's bullying is a conflict, especially between Madeline and Renata. Renata and Harper are introduced for the first time, both serving as antagonists for the majority of the book. Harper's loyalty to Renata is made clear right from her introduction. Her status as Renata's minion sets up several future conflicts, since Harper is the one that actually creates the petition to get Ziggy banned from the school.

Discussion Question 1

Discuss Celeste's insecurities.

Discussion Question 2

What message is made about 'Age' as referenced by Jane and Madeline in Chapter 4?

Discussion Question 3

Discuss Renata and her motives for being a very vocal parent.

Vocabulary

articulate, indictment, mundane, effervescent, charismatic, accosted, tonic, furtive, chortled, contraband, rhetorical, excursion, euphoric, benign, sauntered, vigorously



Chapters 7-9

Summary

Chapter 7

In Chapter 7, Jane is quick to support Ziggy. She believes that he didn't hurt Amabella. Renata gets defensive as well and demands that he apologizes. Madeline tries to intervene and calm the situation down, but Renata just snaps at her. Madeline thinks that the two of them had always been rivals, even though she liked Renata. She was starting to believe that Ziggy didn't do it because of how calm he was, and he was able to look Renata in the eye when he said he didn't do it. The teacher eventually dismisses the parents, unsure of how she should proceed.

Chapter 8

The chapter starts five months before the trivia night. It is Christmas and Madeline is disappointed that her eldest daughter, Abigail, is spending Christmas with her ex-husband, Nathan, and Bonnie. Abigail seems to prefer her ex-husband's side of the family. They're spending their morning volunteering at a homeless shelter, something that Madeline notes Abigail would never do without Bonnie's intervention. Back in the present, one of the interviewees is commenting how hard it must have been for Bonnie and Madeline to have a child in the same class together and how Bonnie had thrown a drink at Madeline.

Chapter 9

Celeste is spending Christmas in Canada with her twins and her husband, Perry. She talks about how Perry always picks out the best gifts and how he's good with the children. She decides that she's going to stay with him until the twins are finished with high school. In the present, one of the interviewees is commenting about how they didn't think Celeste and Perry had a perfect marriage, and they had seen the two of them in their car before the trivia night, not speaking to one another.

Analysis

Chapter 7

Madeline's rivalry with Renata is officially established, something that persists throughout most of the story. Readers quickly become aware that Madeline is the driving force in the war against Renata, not Jane. While they might oppose one another, Madeline makes it clear that they don't hate each other. This foreshadows the eventual support that Madeline shows towards Renata much later in the book. Even with them being at odds, she still cares about and respects Renata and doesn't want to see any harm befall her. She's just also very protective of Jane.



Chapter 8

Madeline and Ed both show a sense of hostility towards Bonnie and Nathan. Madeline is clearly bothered by the fact that Nathan responds so well to Bonnie, and that Abigail prefers that side of the family. She notes that she feels like she lost something precious whenever she sees the child that Bonnie and Nathan had because it reminds her so much of Abigail. At the start of the book this conflict just seems like a side plot. As time goes on Bonnie's rivalry with Madeline becomes one of the driving conflicts of the book, with Abigail eventually leaving Madeline to live with Nathan and Bonnie. Madeline's hatred towards Nathan is explored later on as well when she reveals he left because he didn't want to raise Abigail.

In the present, more of the incident is explained, making it clear that Bonnie and Madeline's rivalry had something to do with the murder. Readers eventually find out that this detail was just a misdirect. Bonnie never threw her drink at Madeline, she was accidentally pushed and her drink spilled on Madeline. While Madeline was momentarily upset it had absolutely nothing to do with the murder.

Chapter 9

Earlier in the book, Madeline had made it sound like Celeste and her husband had a great marriage, in no small part because of the wealth that Perry had. Celeste reveals that this wasn't the truth and she was unhappy in the marriage, but willing to stay with him for the sake of their children. Celeste's unhappiness is gradually explored over the rest of the book where she reveals that she's unhappy because Perry is abusive for her. Celeste coming to terms with her abuse is another one of the major conflicts throughout the book. Perry's abuse ties directly into the murder because he's the one that's killed at the trivia night when he lashes out against Celeste.

Although she isn't actively doing it in this chapter, this is the first example of one of the themes, don't defend your abuser. Celeste frequently defends Perry's actions by stating that he's a good father and his abuse doesn't affect the children in any way. This ends up being untrue when Celeste finds out that Max is bullying other children at school because he's seen the way Perry treats her.

Discussion Question 1

Discuss the foreshadowing that occurs in Chapter 7.

Discussion Question 2

Why did Celeste feel that she needed to remain married to Perry?



Discussion Question 3

Describe the relationship between Madeline and Bonnie.

Vocabulary

fretted, exertions, incentive, perplexed, intertwined, elusive, comical, bombastic



Chapters 10-12

Summary

Chapter 10

Every night, Jane had wakened with Ziggy in her bed. She was worried that he wasn't going to drop this behavior anytime soon. Jane had been having a nightmare about Ziggy choking her. She was having a hard time figuring out whether or not Ziggy had actually hurt Amabella. She was worried that she had done something wrong as a mother. Ziggy wakes up excited for Christmas, accidentally knocking the side of his head against Jane. In the present, an interviewee comments how hard it can be for a child growing up without a male role model in their life.

Chapter 11

Celeste and her family are flying home. Perry continues to be good with both of the children. He makes a remark that he'll try to spend more time at home this year, an apology that was clearly meant for Celeste. Celeste entertains the idea of staying with Perry, which makes her momentarily feel better, but it's clear that she has trouble believing it.

Chapter 12

It is now four months since the trivia night. Chloe tells Madeline that she wants to have a play date with Ziggy. Madeline agrees, but her husband, Ed is hesitant. He reminds Madeline about what Ziggy supposedly did to Amabella at orientation. Abigail points out that Chloe could have a play date with Skye, the daughter that Bonnie and Nathan had together. Madeline is unhappy with that suggestion, but Chloe seems intrigued. Madeline insists that she'll set up a play date with Ziggy, since she had been meaning to call Jane anyway. In the present, an interviewee comments how Madeline and Bonnie had been arguing that night, apparently about something involving Abigail.

Analysis

Chapter 10

Jane's fears of being a bad mother were hinted at before, but outright stated in this chapter. She's starting to have fears about Ziggy becoming physically aggressive, showing that she's starting to doubt whether or not he had been innocent or not. This fear is made all the more real when Ziggy knocks his head into Jane. These events foreshadow Jane's later fears concerning the true nature of Ziggy's father, who turns out to be the abusive Perry. Jane was having nightmares about Ziggy abusing her because she's terrified that Ziggy has inherited the traits of his father. This introduces another theme, that genetics don't make who you are. Towards the end of the book Jane



realizes that it doesn't matter who Ziggy's father was because it doesn't change the person that he is today. She recognizes that he's a kind child who has no intention of hurting anyone else.

Chapter 11

Celeste once again makes it clear that she isn't happy in her marriage, something that Perry also seems to be aware of. He's trying to make efforts to fix their marriage, remarking that he'll try and travel less. Celeste shows that she does have mixed feelings, and makes it clear that at one point in their relationship she was genuinely happy with Perry. Perry continues to show the theme of presenting his own image. He wants the world to think that he and Celeste have the perfect family. Although it isn't clear to readers now, Celeste is once again defending Perry. She frequently likes to point out that he isn't always bad and he used to be very kind to her, as if that justified the fact that he also abuses her.

Chapter 12

The hostility between Madeline and Bonnie is once again brought up. Abigail shows hints of wanting to leave Madeline's house when she mentions how well behaved Skye is, indicating that Abigail has been getting much closer with that side of the family. Ziggy's reputation with the rest of the parents is shown as well, letting the reader know that the parents haven't forgotten what happened at orientation. Ed even makes mention of how he and Madeline should choose sides, once again foreshadowing the future conflict. Madeline continues to show loyalty towards Jane and Ziggy, arguing that there was no proof that Ziggy actually choked Amabella.

Discussion Question 1

Discuss the character, Ziggy, and what role he plays in the story.

Discussion Question 2

What evidence is there that Ziggy actually choked Amabella?

Discussion Question 3

What would make Jane think that Ziggy is capable of harming another child?

Vocabulary

benign, adamantly, fraudulent, besotted, mosaic



Chapters 13-15

Summary

Chapter 13

Celeste is out with her husband and twin boys, going to pick them up uniforms for school. Celeste is tense and feeling overly sensitive to everything around her. The night before it had just been her and Perry. She had a problem with the computer and he couldn't fix it, which led to the two of them fighting. Celeste felt guilty because she wasn't sure if she enjoyed the love/hate relationship she had with Perry. She knew that it added an extra level of passion to their relationship. They had tried counseling in the past, but they weren't comfortable enough to talk about the issues. They run into Renata who once again mentions what Ziggy did. Celeste is torn because she likes Jane, but she was worried about the way Ziggy acted. At the end of the chapter she reveals to the reader that her husband hits her, but never in a place where it would be visible.

Chapter 14

Madeline calls up Celeste to ask if she wants to join her and Jane for a play date. Celeste is initially hesitant because of what Renata said, but she eventually agrees. Madeline notices that Celeste has a habit of trailing off sometimes when they talk. That was actually how they met in the first place. Their children attended swim classes together and one of Celeste's sons nearly drowned when the swim teacher wasn't around. Celeste was zoning off so she didn't notice. Madeline dived into the pool and pulled him out. While they talk, Madeline notices how much older she's getting. She's sad that it makes her depressed because she feels it's a very superficial thing to get upset about. She also mentions how eager Abigail was to run off with Bonnie when she came to pick her up.

Chapter 15

Jane brings Ziggy to Madeline's house. Ziggy remarks how much he wants to live in a house like that. Jane feels bad because she feels like if she made different choices in life she might have had a husband and a better life. She then realizes she might not have had Ziggy at all because the doctor said it was unlikely she'd ever be able to conceive a child. Jane gets to meet Madeline's family, but Abigail has arranged for her father to pick her up, much to Madeline's chagrin. Jane brings up how some of the parents have been ignoring her because of what happened at orientation. Madeline chastises those parents and assures Jane she doesn't believe Ziggy did it. Jane hesitates, thinking about telling Madeline a story that might change her mind, but she doesn't bring it up. Ed tells Jane about how he and Madeline met, and Jane once again feels bad for not having a husband.



Analysis

Chapter 13

The theme of Domestic Violence is introduced largely in this chapter as the reader sees that Celeste's marriage problems are fully revealed at the end of the chapter when she talks about how Perry hits her. She makes it clear that she doesn't fight back, but she seems to think about it. Both she and Perry have to hide their problems because they care so much about their image, which touches upon one of the major themes of the book. They want everyone to think they are just a perfect family, which is why they work so hard to hide their fighting from their children and neighbors. When they meet Renata, Celeste reveals that Perry used to be bullied as a child. This detail is only briefly touched upon, but it gives some motivation for Perry's abusive nature. He was clearly affected by what happened to him as a child, which is why he lashes out against women as an adult. He was also saved by his cousin, Saxon, when he was bullied. This is why he adopted Saxon's name as an alias when he was cheating on Celeste during his business trips.

Chapter 14

Madeline is once again focused on her image, demonstrating and continuing the theme of Image. Just like Celeste, she cares greatly about how she looks to everyone around her. Madeline's issues with Bonnie are brought up again when she tells Celeste how much she hates feeling like Abigail prefers Bonnie over her. She wants to point out that Nathan left not only her, but also Abigail. She doesn't bring that up because she feels it would make her a bad mother. Madeline shows a great deal of solidarity towards Jane. Unlike Celeste, she doesn't concern herself with what the other parents might think. She likes Jane and she wants to be there to support her, expecting the year is going to be difficult for her because of what happened with Ziggy.

Chapter 15

The theme of image is brought up once again. Jane worries about how everyone looks at her because of what happened with Ziggy, and she wishes that she had a classic suburban life just like Madeline. Madeline is still having issues with Abigail, who makes it clear that she doesn't respect Madeline and is perfectly okay going behind her back if it means getting to spend more time with Nathan and Bonnie. Jane hints at something that happened with Ziggy in the past, but she doesn't go into detail about it. Readers later discover this doesn't have to do with Ziggy, but his father. Jane is still afraid that Ziggy might have inherited the traits from the abusive Perry. Madeline once again shows her loyalty when she jumps to defend Jane and Ziggy.

Discussion Question 1

What is Celeste suggesting contributed to Perry being an abuser as an adult in Chapter 13?



Discussion Question 2

How is the theme of Image demonstrated in Chapters 13-15?

Discussion Question 3

Describe Jane and what seems to be her underlying motive for being friends with everyone.

Vocabulary

delineated, tremulous, aberration, obsequiously, superficial



Chapters 16-18

Summary

Chapter 16

Madeline talks to Ed after the play date. She thinks that Celeste and Jane are very similar, but she can't figure out why. Ed thinks it's because they're both damaged. Madeline is surprised by this and wonders if she is damaged too. Ed assures her that she isn't. Madeline starts talking about how she's hurt that Abigail left with Nathan. She thought after the divorce Abigail would hate Nathan and love Madeline the most. Ed makes a joke about killing Nathan for her. In the present, one of the interviewees comments how it seems like the police have no idea what happened.

Chapter 17

Jane is getting ready for Ziggy's first day of school. While she's taking pictures with Ziggy and her parents, she runs into Bonnie and Nathan for the first time. Amabella shows up with a stack full of pink envelopes. She gives one to Bonnie's daughter, Skye, inviting her over to her fifth birthday party. When she sees Ziggy she panics and runs away. Jane notices that all the other children get one except for Ziggy. In the present, Harper comments that Renata wasn't trying to send a message, but the next person argues that she most definitely was.

Chapter 18

Madeline is having a rough morning when she takes Chloe to school. She runs into Bonnie and Nathan, which makes it that much harder for her. She thinks back to when she and Nathan were married. Shortly after having Abigail, Nathan said he couldn't handle being a parent. Madeline thought he was exaggerating, but he packed his bags that night and left. That's why it was so painful to Madeline that Abigail seemed to prefer Nathan and Bonnie over her and Ed. Celeste arrives late to school, wishing Perry was home to help with the children. She briefly thinks about what it would be like to have an affair, but decides that it wouldn't fulfill her. Renata gives the twins invitations to Amabella's party. Madeline is annoyed that everyone but Ziggy was invited and informs Renata that Chloe won't make it. After Renata lives, Madeline tells Celeste that it's the start of a war.

Analysis

Chapter 16

At the start of the chapter, Madeline is fixated on her image, wishing that she could appear younger. Ed points out that Celeste and Jane both seem to be damaged, something that so far no other character has noticed. This foreshadows the fact that



both Celeste and Jane were abused by the same man. Madeline is still upset about what happened with Abigail.

Ed's remark at the end of the chapter is clearly meant to the reader to be foreshadowing, especially since it jumps to the present where the interviewee is talking about the murder that took place. This line is actually another misdirect to make readers think that Ed might somehow be involved in Perry's murder at the end of the book. It ends up being a very ironic misdirect because Ed is the one most opposed to keeping the murder a secret and he almost confesses everything to the police because he could never approve of someone murdering someone else, even though he admits Perry certainly deserved it.

Chapter 17

Things are still very tense with Ziggy and the other children. Bonnie seems unaware of what happened, or at least unaware of who Ziggy is. Skye is introduced for the first time, and shown to be a very shy child. Skye is only a very minor character, but she later admits to being bullied by Max which helps to clear up Ziggy's name. It also makes Celeste aware of how much Max has been affected by the abuse he's witnessed from Perry.

Renata choosing to invite everyone but Ziggy is obviously intentional and shows that she still hasn't forgiven Jane and Ziggy for what happened, even though Ziggy still insists he didn't do anything. Back in the present, Harper uses the past tense when she talks about Renata, implying that she might have been the one that was murdered, although this ends up being another misdirect. She most likely just used the past tense because Renata moved away.

Chapter 18

Madeline reveals the exact reason why Nathan left her, something that had only been vaguely hinted at before in the book. It explains why she has such a strong hatred for Nathan as well as Bonnie, because she was stranded as a single parent. Nathan was such a bad father he didn't even realize when Abigail had started to attend school. Madeline officially declares her feud with Renata, inadvertently dragging Celeste in even though she doesn't want to take sides. Celeste once again reveals how unhappy she is with her marriage, looking for anything that might excite her or push her marriage over the edge. She also openly acknowledges that someone was checking her out, something that Madeline had earlier said she was unaware of, showing that Celeste isn't as in the clouds as everyone believes.

Discussion Question 1

What does Ed say that makes him a suspect, and how is it used as foreshadowing?



Discussion Question 2

Why did Nathan leave Madeline?

Discussion Question 3

How has Celeste become embroiled in the feud between Renata and Madeline?

Vocabulary

gesticulating, etiquette, waif, blanched, ostentatious, inexorably, listless



Chapters 19-21

Summary

Chapter 19

Jane's parents invite Madeline and Ed out to the café for lunch. Jane's mother, Di, goes for a private walk with Madeline on the beach. She reveals that Jane has been very unhappy for the last few years and she feels like Jane is drifting away from her. She's happy that it seems like Jane at least has a friend in Madeline, but she's unhappy with the fact that Renata didn't invite Ziggy to Amabella's party. Madeline promises Di that she'll take care of Jane. In the present, one of the interviewees is commenting about how it felt like Madeline had adopted Jane and was overly protective of her.

Chapter 20

Jane is having a hard time at home because she's worried about Ziggy. She's glad that he's too young to feel sad about the invitations, but she was bothered that he wasn't invited. She was hoping that the twins or Chloe would sit with him during school. She's a little worried about the trouble that Madeline might be stirring up. Jane just wants to get through the year without any problems. She wants everyone to think that she and Ziggy have a perfectly normal life. One of Jane's friends asks if she wants to go out with her cousin. Jane agrees, but then feels nauseous and collapses on her desk. She hints that this has happened before, but doesn't go into more detail. In the present, the interviewees talk about Jane dating a stay at home dad, but nobody seems to be able to confirm if it was the truth or not.

Chapter 21

Celeste is eager for her children to come home from school. She goes early to pick them up and runs into Jane. Celeste almost missed her because she was in one of her dreamy states. Celeste and Jane talk about going on walks together to stay in shape. Celeste talks about how she used to be a lawyer but gave it up for the twins. Jane comments that she was supposed to be a lawyer, but also had to give up that dream when she had Ziggy. In the present, Harper comments that Celeste and Jane must not have been that good of friends because that night Celeste was apologizing to Jane over and over. Back in the past, Madeline got tickets for Disney on Ice from her work. The tickets were for the same day as Amabella's party. In the present, the parents talked about how Madeline was handing out tickets left and right and it divided the families between choosing that or the birthday party.

Analysis

Chapter 19



Madeline was already protective about Jane, but after speaking with Di she starts to form an almost sisterly relationship with Jane, as noted by the interviewee in the present. This along with Madeline's early statements about going to war help foreshadow the future conflict throughout the book. Di reveals that Jane had been constantly moving over the last few years and seemed to always be unhappy, something that Jane herself had previously alluded to. This is later explored in much greater detail when Jane opens up to Madeline about the abuse she suffered from Perry.

Chapter 20

Jane has a nauseous fit, something that she implies has happened before in the past. She also hints at trouble she's had with Ziggy. Jane is once again focused on presenting an image in front of everyone. She wants everyone to think that she and Ziggy are living a perfectly normal life. She even considers getting a boyfriend both to reinforce this image and to please her mother. Jane forcing herself to get a boyfriend shows that she isn't comfortable with the idea, foreshadowing her previous relationship with Perry.

In the present the interviewees hint at some sort of sordid affair that Jane might have had with one of the father's, implying this was part of the murder. This actually foreshadows Jane's relationship with Tom, who is not a father. This is also a misdirect because Jane's relationship with Tom has nothing to do with Perry's murder.

Chapter 21

Celeste initially seems jealous of the lifestyle that Jane has. She believes that Jane lives a simple carefree lifestyle, just like everyone thinks that Celeste has a perfect lifestyle. This is so important to Celeste because she thinks Jane has the life that she wants. Despite how much she defends Perry, all Celeste wants to do is move away from him. This could even be seen as foreshadowing Celeste buying the small apartment where she eventually raises her children after Perry's death.

The two form a friendship, although Celeste still believes that Ziggy had hurt Amabella. Comments from the present suggest that they might not have been that close of friends. This is again another misdirect. Celeste and Jane were very close during the night of the murder. The interviewees saw Celeste apologizing because she just discovered that Max was the one bullying Amabella and the other children. Jane is very forgiving of Celeste and is actually very happy that evening because she's spending time with Tom and Ziggy has just been proven innocent.

Madeline continues her war against Renata, using the Disney on Ice tickets to pull families away from the birthday party. This ends up being a very decisive action in "The Mummy Wars", with some of the comments in the present later suggesting this event along with the petition is what split the parents apart.



Discussion Question 1

What does the reader learn about Jane and the double life that she is leading?

Discussion Question 2

What might the nauseous fits that Jane is experiencing, be coming from?

Discussion Question 3

What are the false assumptions that Celeste has about Jane and her lifestyle?

Vocabulary

voluptuous, excursion, fraudulent, propensities, audacious, unadorned



Chapters 22-24

Summary

Chapter 22

The chapter opens three months before the trivia night. Celeste is watching television with Perry, who had just gotten back from a trip. Perry asks about the birthday party, but Celeste says she's going to Disney on Ice with Madeline and Jane and some other parents. Perry is annoyed that he wasn't included in the decision making. Celeste senses a fight is starting and tries to smooth it over. Perry grabs her arm and squeezes hard enough to leave marks. Celeste thinks back to the first time it happened. She said that she was going to leave him. She intended to the next time it happened, but one of their children got sick and they were both too worried to talk about it. Now Celeste just made excuses for him. She decides that it was just the glitch they had in their relationships. All couples had problems, and she was lucky that he wasn't rougher, and afterwards he was always kind and gentle with her.

Chapter 23

Madeline, Jane, Celeste, and a few other parents go to see Disney on Ice. That weekend, Ziggy is in charge of watching over Harry the Hippo. Each week, the students take a turn with the stuffed animal. While she's watching the performance, Celeste decides that she needs to leave her husband. She was being ridiculous defending him. She decides to pack her bags when she gets home, but hesitates when she considers how it will make her children feel. Later that night, Jane realizes that they left Harry the Hippo at the ice rink. Jane calls Madeline in a panic who tells her not to worry. Jane says she cares what the other parents think and this will just make them hate her even more.

Chapter 24

It is now two months before the trivia night. Madeline is getting ready for an athletic event at the school. While she's getting ready, Abigail reveals she wants to live full time with Nathan. Madeline is beyond hurt, but she lets Abigail do what she wants. She thinks back to when it was just the two of them and she had to take care of Abigail. Nathan never even paid child support. Madeline runs into Nathan at the athletic event which angers her further since he was never there for Abigail, yet Abigail still wants to live with him. He brings up the child support, and Madeline subtly shames him which causes him to be quiet.

Analysis

Chapter 22



The theme of Domestic Violence is demonstrated in this chapter when Celeste begins to make excuses for Perry's abusive behavior. Part of why she stays with him is because of the kids, but another part is because she doesn't want to give the image of being a dysfunctional family. She tries to convince herself that no relationship is perfect. Every couple has their problems, and this was theirs. She then tries to convince herself that he isn't even that abusive because he rarely hits her in the face. It's clear that she's talking herself in circles trying to justify what happened. This all touches on one of the themes of the book, that you shouldn't defend your abusers.

Based on comments in the present from the interviewees, Celeste and Perry became less subtle about their problems during the trivia night. This is a very key detail since it foreshadows Perry's growing anger during the trivia night. His anger is what causes him to lash out against Celeste in front of everyone else. When Bonnie sees this, she snaps and murders him by pushing him over the ledge.

Chapter 23

Madeline feels a little guilty because she knows that she's creating a rift between the parents that came with her and Renata. Celeste starts to take steps to break up with her husband, realizing that she was just making excuses. She can't follow through with it because of her children. Jane once again has to look like a bad parent for losing Harry the Hippo. This very briefly touches upon the theme of presenting an image in the book. Jane is so upset because she wants the other parents to think of her as a normal mother, but losing Harry once again makes her look like some sort of delinquent mother.

In the present, the interviewees make it clear that it was a big deal to them because the Hippo had been with the school for years. They just see it as another reason to look down upon Jane as a mother. This further fuels the conflict between Jane and the other moms.

Chapter 24

The image of Theme is demonstrated once again, this time through Nathan. Nathan is trying to put on the appearance of a good father. Madeline notes that he was never there for any of Abigail's events, but now he was taking time off so he could volunteer for Skye. Abigail acts like he's a good father because he's putting on a good image and Madeline is shielding her from what he was actually like when it was just the two of them. Madeline notes that Abigail is even starting to walk like Bonnie, and it's clear that she feels like she's being phased out as a mother. This once again foreshadows Abigail leaving Madeline's house to spend more time living with Nathan and Bonnie.

Discussion Question 1

In Chapter 22, discuss the theme of Domestic Violence and how it is affecting Celeste.



Discussion Question 2

In Chapter 23, why does Madeline feel guilty?

Discussion Question 3

How is the theme of Image portrayed through Nathan in Chapter 24?

Vocabulary

feral, tacit, recriminations, enthralled, copiously, quintessential



Chapters 25-27

Summary

Chapter 25

The mothers are getting ready to race one another at the athletic event. Jane has been spending the last few weeks doing everything that she could to get on the good side of the parents. She constantly volunteers and invites children over for play dates. She still feels like everyone treats her differently, no matter how kindly they seem on the outside. She once again makes a vague mention to a difficult event that happened in the past, but doesn't explore it.

Chapter 26

Celeste once again finds herself distracted. She's thinking back to the previous night. Perry was angry because the twins left their Legos around the house. Celeste told him if he was annoyed he could pick them up. She was surprised that he had. Once he gathered them all, he dumped the box over Celeste and yelled at her. He slapped her across the face which caused her to jump on him. The two momentarily fought before Perry shoved her away in disgust. She injured her leg in the fight, which is why she wasn't racing. Perry acted like nothing had happened the next day and just wrote it off as something they did because they were an intense and passionate couple. Renata declares Bonnie the winner of the race even though everyone says Madeline won. Madeline denies it and declares Bonnie the winner.

Chapter 27

Celeste is back at home, wondering if her life would have been different if she hadn't grown up with a big brother. When she was younger, her brother used to hit her. She would hit him right back because that's how she was raised. She wonders if she just let Perry hit her if things would get better. She starts to feel guilty and begins to donate her money to charity. That just makes her feel guiltier because she isn't sure if she's doing it out of genuine concern or just because she wanted to spite Perry and spend some of his money. Sometimes she found herself purposefully doing things to upset him if he hadn't hit her recently, just because she wanted to get it out of the way. She knew it was inevitable.

She thinks back to when she was in college. One of her friends was having a bad day and had waved Celeste away because she couldn't deal with the fact Celeste always looked so good. Ever since then, Celeste had gone out of her way not to ever appear too happy because she was worried that her happiness aggravated everyone around her. She felt like both her looks and her good finances were just a result of luck. Both she and Perry would donate at charity events, but Perry did it just because he felt like he had to win at auctions. Celeste realizes that she's become so much softer and



weaker since she was younger. She decides to look up counseling for domestic abuse at the end of the chapter.

Analysis

Chapter 25

Jane once again frets about her social standing with the rest of the parents and the way that they perceive her. She's been going out of her way to make sure that presents a positive image to them. Madeline is still upset at Bonnie, as Jane notes she seems to be taking the race far more seriously than any of the other moms there. Jane makes another reference to some sort of painful event that happened in her past before she moves, but she once again remains very vague on the details of what actually happened. Readers learn in later chapters that Jane is referring to her abuse at Perry's hands.

Chapter 26

Celeste has one of her worst fights yet with Perry. She tries to defend herself and then later feels ashamed for that, as if she has no right to defend herself. Perry shows how little he cares about their fights, acting amused by it and believing it to be perfectly normal. This could be seen as him caring about his own personal image that he portrays to his wife, since he obviously doesn't want to think of himself as a bad husband. Madeline hands Bonnie the first place medal. Bonnie tries to deny it, but Madeline makes it clear that she's the winner, not referring to the race, but to the fact that Abigail prefers Bonnie and Nathan over her and Ed. Renata declaring Bonnie the winner also shows that she's still mad at Madeline for the Disney on Ice incident, which both Celeste and Madeline take note of.

Chapter 27

Celeste has a breakthrough when she realizes the life that she's living. She's no longer a strong and happy law student, but instead a meek wife who gets thrown around by her husband. Celeste keeps trying to convince herself that she deserves the beatings that Perry gives her. She feels guilty over the fact that people would get aggravated at how happy she was or how attractive she looked. She tries to do good things with her life, but even then she doesn't let herself feel happy about that. Instead she tries to justify it as her being selfish, just so she has another reason to feel like she should be hit. Celeste briefly mentions that she wishes she could be like the cleaning ladies. She enjoys the way they happily clean, clearly wishing that she was allowed to show her happiness like that.

The theme of false assumptions is demonstrated in this chapter, as well as the theme of image. This is particularly noticeable when Perry shows that he cares about his own image above all others. As Celeste notes, he donates at charity auctions not because he wants to do something good, but because he cares about winning. He always encourages Celeste to spend money because he knows he can afford it and he likes



the image that comes with her spending. He's constantly sending her gifts and flowers to apologize for hitting her. Celeste hates these gifts and never wears the jewelry, but Perry doesn't notice. He believes just the act of spending money is enough to make Celeste happy, but she doesn't care about that at all.

Discussion Question 1

Discuss the dynamic between Perry and Celeste as evidenced in Chapter 26.

Discussion Question 2

What assumption does Perry make about Celeste and their money?

Discussion Question 3

How is the theme of false assumptions demonstrated in Chapter 27?

Vocabulary

languidly, resilience, torrent, uncouth, vendetta, raucous, subversive, transgression



Chapters 28-30

Summary

Chapter 28

Madeline is packing up Abigail's clothing. She's still hurt that Abigail is leaving, but trying not to show it. Ed wonders if it was his fault because he was very authoritative with Abigail. Madeline thinks it might have been a little bit his fault, but she doesn't say that aloud and reassures him he didn't do anything wrong. She tells him that she thinks it's more the appeal of living with Bonnie. They pack up the expensive bed that they bought for Abigail's birthday. Madeline was hoping that Abigail was hurt with how casually she was acting about her leaving, but Abigail just seemed happy to leave. At the end of the chapter, Ed mentions he is going to a book club. Madeline decides that she should start a book club, something that had been alluded to before by the interviewees at the present.

Chapter 29

It is now one month before the trivia night. Jane is giving Ziggy a bath while reading a book for Madeline's book club. She really she's getting excited from reading a lovemaking scene, which makes her feel foolish. He's talking about a family tree project that's due tomorrow. Jane insists that it was due the next week. She checks the paper and realizes that she was mistaken. Not only that, but she was late on several assignments for work. Jane begins to panic and starts to yell at Ziggy to get out of the bath while she texts Madeline asking for supplies. She turns the bath off which upsets Ziggy. He nearly falls in the tub, but Jane manages to catch him. Ziggy says he was hurt and starts to flail, kicking Jane in the stomach. She brings him into the bed and starts shouting, which makes Ziggy panic. Jane calms down and just hugs Ziggy, who is still crying but has also calmed. Jane hears someone at the door and goes to answer it. She was expecting an angry neighbor from all the noise, but it turned out to be Madeline with the supplies. Jane burst into tears when she realized who it was.

Chapter 30

Madeline helps Ziggy and Jane with the project. Ziggy is worried because he has to put a name down for his father. Jane tries to explain he doesn't have a father, but he doesn't accept that. Madeline is able to calm him down and they simply put "Ziggy's father" in place. Madeline takes Ziggy to bed and reads him a story. Madeline is actually happy to be needed because she was struggling at home without Abigail. It had been two weeks since she left. Whenever she came over now she just wanted to sit and watch TV, because Bonnie's house didn't have a television. Once she comes back, Jane tells Madeline that she knows the name of Ziggy's father, its Saxon Banks. Madeline asks why she didn't try to get in touch with him and Jane just says that he was a bad man.



Analysis

Chapter 28

Madeline talks about how good of a step-father Ed was towards Abigail, something which had been implied but never outright stated before. It's clear that Ed cares about her which is why he blames himself. He even offers to help put Abigail's bed together because he does genuinely want her to be happy. Ed is acting like the complete opposite of Nathan. Nathan ran away when he had a child, but Ed has chosen to embrace Madeline already having a child, even though Abigail wasn't his own. Unlike the majority of the other characters, Ed isn't trying to put on an appearance. He's genuinely trying to be a good father because he cares about all of his children, as well as loving Madeline.

Madeline decides to start her book club. Some of the interviewees had made vague mention of a book club before, with some referring to it as an erotic book club. In the present, this title is explained. One of the books had a raunchy scene in it, and Madeline jokingly asked if they realized they had joined an erotic book club. It wasn't actually, but the name had stuck and that's what everyone else had decided to call it.

The book club had previously been brought up before and gets mentioned a few more times throughout the book. This acts as another misdirect since the book club had absolutely nothing to do with the murder that occurred at the trivia night.

Chapter 29

Jane is still doing her best to balance her career life and her school life. She can't bear the thought of sending Ziggy to school without his assignment because it will draw more attention to him. She knows all Ziggy wants is to blend in with the crowd and be like everyone else, just like she's trying to do. Jane snaps at Ziggy for the first time, which surprises him. He does react violently, but it's not clear whether it was because he was just flailing or if he was going out of his way to hurt Jane. This is an important distinction because it could put the previous accusation of hurting Amabella in a different light. Jane is clearly overwhelmed, which shows when Madeline arrives. The fact that Madeline showed up at all is very telling of the friendship that they have built.

Jane is also struggling with the fact that she doesn't have a man in her life. When she's reading the book she gets frustrated with her excitement. She convinces herself that she could find a boyfriend if she wanted, but then the idea makes her uncomfortable, foreshadowing the abuse she suffered from Perry which turned her off to relationships.

Chapter 30

Ziggy starts to show interest in who his father is, something that Jane hoped wouldn't happen for years. She reveals that she knows who the man was, a fact that clearly makes her uncomfortable by the way she suddenly gets formal with Madeline. When asked why, Jane reveals that he was a bad person, but doesn't press it any further than



that. Jane will eventually tell Madeline the truth about how she was abused, which is why she's afraid Ziggy might actually be a bully.

Madeline is struggling with Abigail being gone. She's grateful to have a problem that she can actually solve. Even being in Jane's apartment makes her think about Abigail because it reminds her of the apartment she had when she was a single mother. Madeline gets very defensive and protective over Jane. This is likely because Madeline sees a lot of herself in Jane from the time she was raising Abigail as a single mother. She promises Jane that she'll talk to the teacher the next day about how insensitive the family tree project is.

Discussion Question 1

Compare the character of Nathan to Ed.

Discussion Question 2

What happens in Chapter 29 that indicates that Ziggy could have hurt Amabella?

Discussion Question 3

Why does the family tree project cause Jane to be upset and worried for Ziggy?

Vocabulary

empathy, exorbitant, prodigal, derivative, surmountable, condescending



Chapters 31-33

Summary

Chapter 31

Jane tells Madeline about how she meant Saxon when she was 19. She had just broken up with her boyfriend and felt heartbroken. Saxon was a successful businessman who was flirting with Jane. She decided that having a one night stand would be part of her break up recovery. When they got to his room, he started to choke her and get very rough. He said cruel things to her and made her feel miserable, insulting all of her choices, her intelligence, her dress, and even her breath. She quickly left and felt like Saxon saw her as nothing more than a joke.

Chapter 32

Jane continues to talk to Madeline about what happened. She explains how she used to be overweight and ever since that incident she's worried about her appearance. Madeline insists that she's beautiful, but that just upsets Jane even more because she doesn't like the fact that Saxon's words were able to affect her at all. She laments how hard it is for women. Men can get away with being unattractive, but women are always judged for it. Jane keeps trying to defend Saxon whenever Madeline points out how wrong he was. Madeline realizes how damaged Jane is from the incident and does everything she can to comfort her. Jane goes on to say how she's worried that part of Saxon might be in Ziggy. She was especially concerned about what happened to Amabella because it involved choking, which is exactly what Saxon had done to her.

Chapter 33

Celeste follows through with seeing a therapist. She dresses in an incredibly expensive dress from Paris and makes a point of wearing her makeup and driving her expensive car. She judges another one of the patients as well as her therapist, Susi, thinking to herself she looks too young to be a therapist and doesn't know how to do her makeup. When they start to talk, she insists that the therapist doesn't understand and that Perry really isn't that bad. She tries to explain how it's a shift of power. After he hits her, she's the one that has the power because he feels bad. It starts to shift as her bruises wear off and she knows she'll be hit again. She's quick to point out that Perry is a good father and she couldn't leave because she was afraid of the impact it would have on the children. As she keeps talking she eventually realizes how wrong everything is and stops trying to judge the therapist. She knows she is going to be hit again, and the therapist says they'll work on a plan together.

Analysis

Chapter 31



Jane pours her heart out to Madeline, explaining all of the horrible things she went through with Saxon, who readers later find out is in fact Perry using an alias so he can cheat on Celeste. It becomes clear why she was avoiding getting into a relationship again, as well as the darker moments that she had hinted at earlier in the book. Throughout the book, Jane was repeatedly seen chewing gum. One of the first things that Saxon had commented on was how her breath was disgusting, which is why she consistently has gum on her at all times.

Chapter 32

Jane reveals just how damaged she is from her encounter with Saxon. She's developed serious body issues and just like Celeste she jumps to defend her attacker. Madeline is shocked by this behavior and keeps trying to argue against what Saxon said, but Jane just doesn't believe it. Madeline is a little hurt when Jane points out how important appearances are for women, since Madeline has always valued the way that she looks. Madeline shows how defensive she is with Jane, instinctively wanting to comfort her and go after Saxon for saying those horrible things to her. Jane's fears about Ziggy are finally made clear to the reader. Ziggy had supposedly acted just like Saxon did during the orientation. She's afraid that some of Saxon has rubbed off on Ziggy and he might have a violent side.

Chapter 33

Celeste is obsessing over her image during the chapter. She makes sure to go to a therapist far away from where she lives. She judges everyone she meets along the way. She gets offended at the thought of anyone looking down on her. She wants to separate herself from everyone there with her wealth and her beauty. She starts to gradually let her guard down around her therapist. Finally telling everyone what she had been enduring for the last five years is incredibly therapeutic for Celeste, although she still doesn't want to leave Perry. She keeps insisting that she doesn't need to go to a shelter and she isn't afraid for her life.

She also tries to defend Perry, pointing out that sometimes it is her fault. Her therapist is mostly silent during this part, only asking very basic questions, letting Celeste do the majority of the talking. Celeste feels shame for being a victim, trying to do everything she can to make it sound like she was fighting back and it was a mutual, toxic relationship. She shudders whenever the therapist uses the term abuse. By the end of the session, Celeste seems pleased with herself, especially since the therapist wants to work out a plan and not just tell her to pack her bags or go to a shelter.

Discussion Question 1

Why has Jane been avoiding becoming involved with anyone again?



Discussion Question 2

Discuss how the theme of image is demonstrated in Chapter 33.

Discussion Question 3

Why does Celeste feel compelled to defend Perry?

Vocabulary

slovenly, tirade, flippant, inflection, debasement, philanthropic, placate



Chapters 34-36

Summary

Chapter 34

Madeline tells Ed what happened to Jane. She ends up getting in a fight with him because she feels like he's victim shaming Jane. She goes downstairs and realizes that Ed wasn't doing anything like that. She's still upset over Abigail leaving and feels like she's starting to blame Ed. For a moment she thinks that Ed and the rest of the family invaded the family life that Abigail and Madeline used to have, which could be why she left. Even though she promised Jane she wouldn't, she decides to look up Saxon Banks. This once again fills her with anger. She finds out that he is married with three other kids. She feels guilty because now she knows something about Jane's family that Jane didn't. She worries that she's being too judgmental and not supportive enough towards Jane. Chloe has a nightmare which pulls Madeline away. She's happy to have a problem that she can once again solve.

Chapter 35

The chapter opens in the present with Miss Barnes commenting that the year started well, even with the orientation incident. Around the middle of the year, things changed. The chapter then goes back to two weeks before the trivia night. Jane has been going out to the café to do her work, which has improved her mood. She was enjoying the sunlight and the vivid colors and even made friends with the Barista, Tom. Ever since she spoke with Madeline she was starting to feel better. She realizes that keeping it inside was giving it power. Since telling Madeline, she felt like talking about it more. She told Celeste on one of their walks.

The next day Celeste gives her a necklace that is supposed to help heal emotional wounds. Jane notices that she's been appreciating people's bodies more. Not even just the attractive people, but little things on ordinary people as well. She gets a call from the principal, who insists everything is fine, but needs to have a meeting as soon as possible. Jane sets up a meeting for later in the afternoon. In the present, the interviewees are talking about bullying and how Renata's nanny, Juliette, had been too busy to notice it.

Chapter 36

Jane goes to her meeting with the principal. The principal tells her that Amabella has been physically bullied. She has bruises and other marks to indicate someone was hurting her. Because of what happened with Ziggy, they wanted to bring Jane in. She quickly adds that the teacher has been keeping an eye on Ziggy and thinks he's a wonderful child and there hasn't been any actual proof of bullying from him. Renata just suspects it must be Ziggy. Jane notes that Renata has donated a lot of money to the



school, so they must take her claims very seriously. Renata and her husband show up much to the chagrin of the principal, who had been expecting them in an hour. Jane feels guilty because she believes it was her fault that Ziggy was having problems because she let herself get pregnant from Saxon. Renata accuses Ziggy and demands that he stay away from Amabella.

Analysis

Chapter 34

Madeline reveals that she's still having problems with Abigail being gone. She's starting to project her problems onto the rest of the family, blaming them for something that isn't their fault. She quickly recognizes what she is doing and decides she'll apologize later. She tries to distract herself by looking up information about Saxon Banks. Madeline worries that she's shaming Jane as well by acting superior. She thinks that nothing like that could have ever happened to her when she was 19. Once again, she catches herself and realizes that if she were in such a vulnerable position like Jane was she certainly would have reacted the same way. She's just frustrated because there isn't anything that she can do to help Jane or to bring Abigail back. This is why she got so excited when Jane needed her help with the project and Chloe had her nightmare, because they were problems that she could directly solve.

Chapter 35

Jane is starting to heal from the damage that Saxon inflicted. She's trying to get away from the drab colorless life that she was living. She's once again starting to notice people and even finds herself appreciating all of their little qualities. She still has some issues with food, so she hasn't completely recovered. Jane has been reaching out to some of the adults and made a friend with the Barista, Tom. When she gets a call from the school, Tom even comments on how good of a kid Ziggy is. This closeness foreshadows the eventual relationship that develops between Tom and Jane.

Back in the present, the interviewees start talking about bullying that was going on, something that will continue to be brought up in the later chapters. The interviewees also make it sound like Renata's child, Amabella is somehow involved and that it had been an ongoing problem that the nanny wasn't reporting on because she was distracted. This is eventually revealed to be an affair between the nanny and Renata's husband. Both of these events have nothing to do with Perry being murdered and just act as additional misdirects.

Chapter 36

Jane feels guilty about what's happening with Ziggy, which suggests she actually believes the claims. She again blames herself instead of properly blaming Saxon. This touches upon the theme of not defending your abusers. She seems relieved at first when the principle mentions how good of a child Ziggy was, but she seems to forget this once Renata shows up.



Renata reinforces the theme about image. She goes out of her way to present a very official image to the rest of the school. At the last trivia night, the principle had to specifically mention that the school could afford air conditioned because of the generous donation from Renata, something she clearly wanted all the other parents to be aware of.

Discussion Question 1

Discuss Jane's feelings and belief system in regards to Saxon.

Discussion Question 2

Discuss the character of Renata and how she impacts the situation.

Discussion Question 3

Discuss the bullying that was going on and how it started.

Vocabulary

fathom, alliteration, malicious, aesthetic, preamble, convulsively, corroboration, ostentatious, fortuitous, remonstrated



Chapters 37-39

Summary

Chapter 37

Madeline is spending the afternoon with Abigail, who is researching something on her computer. Ever since she lived with Bonnie, Madeline felt like they didn't have the same sort of relationship. She was paying attention to all of her flaws, trying to imagine how Abigail must view her. Abigail tells Madeline that she's researching an article on child slavery. Madeline is a little annoyed that Nathan and Bonnie are letting her get involved in such atrocious social issues at her young age. Abigail says she wants to do something, but Madeline never gets to hear what as Nathan arrives to pick her up. Madeline does later note if she knew what Abigail was going to do she would have tried to stop her.

Chapter 38

Celeste rents a small apartment that she can run away to. She tells herself that she is only doing it because she wants to impress Susi. She starts to decorate the apartment and decides she wants to buy all of the things that Perry didn't like. She had a tacky sense of fashion, but Perry always insisted on buying high quality, expensive things. Celeste always felt guilty when people saw their house because it was so large and gave the impression that they were bragging about how much money they had compared to everyone else. Celeste starts to think about all of the good things that Perry does. She enjoys how good of a father she is, and how accepting his family was. She doesn't want to give up that family. She starts to feel guilty because she does have a good life outside of the abuse she suffers at Perry's hands. She wonders if the abuse is just the price that she has to pay for all of those good moments. The therapist had told her to keep a record of all the times she was hit, but Celeste doesn't want to do that because she finds it humiliating.

Chapter 39

Jane goes to the beach with Ziggy. She starts to talk to him about the meeting that she had with the principal. Ziggy doesn't seem to react at first, but he does stop when Jane asks if Ziggy was responsible for the bullying. She asks again and Ziggy just says that he doesn't want to talk about it.

Analysis

Chapter 37

The theme of image is demonstrated gain as Madeline obsesses over how Abigail sees her. She also compares herself to Bonnie, feeling like Bonnie presents a better image



which is why Abigail wants to live with her. She's still angry because she was the one who raised Abigail and Nathan was the one who abandoned them, so why should he get to be rewarded with her? Madeline foreshadows that Abigail is up to something at the end of the chapter when she remarks that if she knew what Abigail was getting up to, she would have stopped her.

Chapter 38

Celeste continues to struggle with her role as a victim, which ties into the theme of image. Celeste doesn't want to present herself as a victim, that's why she refuses to keep a record of her injuries. She comments that it would be humiliating to have to admit to having those. Celeste isn't happy with presenting an extravagant or wealthy image either, not like her husband. She just wants to be seen as normal and not have to admit to having any problems. She keeps trying to justify Perry in that way because admitting something is wrong with him means admitting something is wrong with their relationship. This is part of her image problem, since she wouldn't be normal if she was in an abusive relationship.

Celeste does show signs of longing for a life without Perry when she thinks about how she wants to decorate the apartment. She considers where the children will sleep, and imagines inviting Madeline and Jane over. She's happy when she thinks about how she'll have her own property. She's still struggling with her image and the way everyone sees her, but she is making efforts to become independent and get away from Perry, even if she does keep second guessing herself and trying to defend him.

Some of Perry's issues with image are brought up again as well. Perry clearly wants to be perceived as wealthy, which is why he always encourages Celeste to buy more expensive products. He doesn't care about what she wants, but simply how expensive it is and how it will look to everyone else. Celeste compares this to the way he always shares their family pictures online, clearly wanting everyone else to think that they are a happy and perfect family.

Chapter 39

Jane is trying to get to the truth of Amabella's bullying. Her previous faith in Ziggy seems to be wavering and the reader can see that she believes he might have been responsible for it. Ziggy's denial certainly doesn't help her suspicion, but he also doesn't admit to it, implying that there's more going on. This is all later made clear to the reader. Ziggy knows that Max was the one doing the bullying. He couldn't say anything though because Max threatened to hurt Amabella if anyone found out the truth. Because Ziggy was friends with Amabella he didn't want to do anything that would break his promise to her, or result in her getting hurt.

Discussion Question 1

Discuss the theme of Image in Chapter 37.



Discussion Question 2

How is Celeste conflicted in Chapter 38?

Discussion Question 3

What makes Jane start doubting Ziggy?

Vocabulary

brusquely, atrocities, visceral, quintessential, tentatively, conclusive



Chapters 40-42

Summary

Chapter 40

In the present, the interviewees are talking about a petition that Harper started on Renata's behalf. It clearly had something to do with the bullying problem. The chapter then jumps to one week before the trivia night. Madeline is hosting her first book club. She feels a little guilty because she's only hosting it to distract herself from her grief over Abigail. One of the parents, Samantha, arrives early. She talks about a petition going around the school to get Ziggy suspended. The school seems divided on whether or not they want to sign it. Chloe comes in and asks if they're talking about the petition. She says that one of the kids told Ziggy they couldn't play together anymore because he was a bully. Chloe then says that she punched him because of that, much to the surprise of Madeline.

Chapter 41

Jane is getting ready to go to the book club when she finds out about the petition from Ziggy's teacher calling her. Miss Barnes assures Jane that she doesn't believe Ziggy is bullying Amabella. She keeps such a close eye on Ziggy. Jane knows that Ziggy follows every single rule in school, which makes it so strange that he would be bullying someone. Miss Barnes even points out that Ziggy and Amabella appear to be friends, which is why she doesn't believe he's bullying her. When she gets off the phone Ziggy is crying and asks if none of the kids are allowed to play with him now. In the present, the interviewees comment on how everyone had been drinking at the trivia night.

Chapter 42

Celeste is getting ready to leave for the book club. She has a babysitter for them, Gwen. Gwen notices a bruise on Celeste's arm. She makes up an excuse, saying she and her tennis partner both dove for the same ball. Gwen remarks that it might be time for her to find a new partner. When Celeste says it was just as much her fault, Gwen says that probably isn't the case. As Celeste leaves, she notes that Gwen never married and still seems to be perfectly happy.

Analysis

Chapter 40

Renata continues her feud with Jane and Ziggy. In the present, the Principal reminds everyone that there was no proof Ziggy has been doing the bullying. The school seems torn about who to support. Madeline is upset and still defends Jane and Ziggy. Chloe mimics this behavior as well. Chloe surprises everyone by admitting to hitting other



children in Ziggy's defense. This revelation is meant to signal to readers that Chloe might be the one who is hurting Amabella and Ziggy was refusing to talk about the matter because he didn't want to get his friend in trouble, not because he was actually doing any bullying. Readers later discover that this is just a red herring, but it does get hinted at a few other times throughout the story.

Chapter 41

More evidence is presented that Ziggy isn't the one bullying Amabella. As Miss Barnes points out, Ziggy and she seem to be friends. Ziggy also seems unable to break any of the rules from his teacher. When he hears her mention that he's supposed to be in bed, he immediately goes to his room. Jane still clearly has her doubts, but hearing what Miss Barnes says makes her reconsider whether or not Ziggy is a bully. Miss Barnes's evidence ends up being correct as readers discover later on in the book. Ziggy and Amabella were friends and the only reason he didn't tell the teachers that Max was bullying is because Amabella made him promise not to since Max threatened to hurt her even more if anyone told.

Chapter 42

Gwen speaks in a very matter of fact way when she brings up Celeste getting a new partner. She clearly doesn't believe the story that Celeste gives. Celeste mentions she had been their babysitter for years, so it's possible that she has noticed the signs before. Gwen is quick to say that Celeste isn't at fault and even encourages her to find a different partner. Celeste notes that Gwen is perfectly happy in her life without a husband, implying that she's once again considering what life might be like without Perry around.

Discussion Question 1

What plausible motive is given for Ziggy acting as he has in regards to sharing information about Amabella's bullying in Chapter 40?

Discussion Question 2

What seems to be the real story concerning Ziggy and the bullying?

Discussion Question 3

What leads the reader to believe that Celeste is considering leaving Perry?

Vocabulary

inaugural, berated, superfluous, introspective, reflexive



Chapters 43-45

Summary

Chapter 43

Jane decides not to attend book club because Ziggy is still crying. He tells her how several of the kids say they aren't allowed to play with Ziggy. This hurts and angers Jane. Jane pays the babysitter anyway and sends her off. The babysitter's mother, Irene, shows up to return the money, saying it was no inconvenience. Jane talks to her about the bullying accusations. Irene assures her that Ziggy is a good child. She was a teacher and said she could spot bullies, and Ziggy wasn't a bully.

Chapter 44

At the book club, the parents are debating about the petition. Celeste is trying to listen, but she has a hard time focusing. It sounds like the majority of the parents believe that the petition is outrageous, with some even defending Ziggy. Celeste feels so out of place and wonders how everyone would react if they knew what Perry did to her. Someone asks about Perry and Celeste gets very uncomfortable, changing the topic to the trivia night. She knew Perry was excited about the trivia night because it was a costume party. He intended to buy authentic pearls for Celeste's costume, something she was uncomfortable with.

Chapter 45

Celeste stays after the rest of the book club leaves. Madeline starts to talk to her about the petition, glad the rest of the parents weren't going to sign it. Celeste seems worried about staying because she doesn't want to upset Ed, but Madeline insists he wouldn't mind. They talk about what happened with Jane. When Madeline mentions Saxon Banks, Celeste recognizes the name and says that's Perry's cousin. They are unsure of how to proceed. Celeste is too afraid to tell Perry because she thinks he would be upset. Madeline is surprised because she would tell Ed right away. They both decide that for the time being it would be best not to tell Jane. Madeline says she has a hard time with secrets, but Celeste insists she's good at keeping them.

Analysis

Chapter 43

Jane is devastated when she hears that some of the other kids aren't allowed to play with Ziggy anymore. Irene offers more evidence that Ziggy wasn't the bully and that it's just Renata drawing conclusions. When Jane cancels, Madeline mentions that she's going to call her, once again reinforcing their strong friendship. At the end of the chapter, Jane decides she doesn't care who Ziggy's father was, all she wants to do is protect



him and stop Renata. This touches upon the theme of genetics not mattering who you are. Even though Ziggy had a violent father, Jane knows that it doesn't change the kind natured person that Ziggy has become.

Chapter 44

Perry's focus on image is brought up once again. Even though costume parties are supposed to be cheap affairs he wants to buy something that costs more than what the actual fund raising event was for. This upsets Celeste because she doesn't like the wealthy appearance Perry insists on putting on. Celeste is still trying to defend her own image by keeping everything about Perry bottled up from the rest of the book club, who she considers to be normal. This again emphasizes the theme of not defending your abuser, as well as Celeste's own focus on image. Part of why she doesn't want to bring up the abuse is because she thinks she'll be humiliated because all of the other parents will judge her and the rest of her family.

Chapter 45

Celeste initially shows concern for Madeline, not wanting Ed to get angry at her. Madeline insists that Ed wouldn't mind and that they share the house, something that Celeste clearly isn't used to. Perry always makes her feel inferior. She doesn't want to tell Perry because she's afraid of how he will react. Madeline doesn't seem to notice this fear, but the reader understands that she's afraid Perry will get angry and hit her. Both Madeline and Celeste wish there was something they could do about Saxon, but they know he didn't technically break any laws. They decide with obvious reservations to withhold the truth from Jane. Madeline is actually a little happy to discover the truth about Saxon because it serves as another distraction from everything that's going on with Abigail.

Discussion Question 1

Why does the revelation of who Saxon Banks is in Chapter 45 cause everyone to decide to keep it a secret?

Discussion Question 2

What action by Perry indicates that Image is everything to him?

Discussion Question 3

How does the author suggest that Ziggy is innocent?

Vocabulary

incandescent, stodgy, austere, pithy, burdensome, worrisome, noisily, ravenously, furtive



Chapters 46-48

Summary

Chapter 46

Celeste returns home and thinks about everything she learned regarding Saxon. When she first met him he seemed like such a kind and loving husband. She realizes that people would say the same thing about Perry. She feels conflicted about whether or not she should try and tell his wife. She decides against it and instead looks at the bruise on her arm to remind herself why she's thinking about leaving Perry, thinking that he at least isn't as bad as Saxon.

Chapter 47

Jane takes Ziggy to spend the night with her parents. She decides not to send him to school the next day. She briefly thinks about moving away, but she realizes that some of the best moments of her life were at her new home. She had made new friends and up until recently Ziggy had been enjoying school, plus she was getting more work from clients Madeline had introduced her to. Jane nearly admits who Ziggy's father was to her parents, but she catches herself before she says he was an abusive man. Jane's brother, Dane, doesn't believe her, but goes along with the lie.

Chapter 48

Madeline is awake and thinking about everything that has happened to her and her friends in the last few days. She's upset because she realizes she doesn't have to wake up early to get Abigail to her math tutor in the morning. She goes online to check social media sites for Abigail's activities, something she had been doing a lot lately. She notices that one of the comments on Abigail's pictures mentions something about her trying to look provocative for a secret project. Seeing that Abigail responded a few minutes ago she sends a message to her, telling her to go to sleep to get some rest for her tutor. Abigail responds that she's getting tutored by her dad now so he cancelled the tutor. Madeline is furious about this and calls up Nathan, demanding to know why he cancelled the tutor. She feels he has no right given he wasn't there for her before. Nathan is annoyed by the call, but he apologizes and admits he should have brought it up to her before. When he hangs up, Madeline angrily throws her phone.

Analysis

Chapter 46

The theme of Inheritance is demonstrated when Celeste compares Perry and Saxon and wonders if their bad behavior is something that runs in the family, just like the comparison that Jane had been doing between Ziggy and Saxon. Celeste is actually the



third character who wonders this, since Madeline had earlier wondered about how Ziggy's half-sisters acted. Celeste compares her situation to what Jane went through. She once again uses it as an excuse to defend Perry's behavior, arguing to herself that Perry was never maliciously aggressive towards her, he just sometimes got angry. She tries to rationalize it even further by placing the blame on how stressful his job is. Looking at her bruise snaps her back into reality and reminds her why she got the apartment to run away to.

Chapter 47

Jane struggles with whether or not she should run away again. Her first instinct is to run, just like she was doing at the start of the book. Having friends like Madeline and Celeste improved her life, and Ziggy had been enjoying himself up until the petition started. Jane nearly lets slip the true nature of Ziggy's father to her parents. She withholds the truth because she doesn't want to make them worry. Her brother clearly doesn't believe the lie, but he seems to understand why she's doing it and doesn't speak up.

Chapter 48

Madeline reveals that she has been keeping an eye on Abigail. Her social media pages make it clear that Abigail is up to something, which the reader can piece together relates to the articles that she was reading earlier. This is eventually explicitly spelled out when Madeline finds out Abigail was auctioning her virginity to raise awareness about human trafficking. Madeline doesn't seem to grasp the significance of it though.

Madeline is also upset that Nathan is trying to actively get involved in Abigail's life after not being involved for so long. She's even more upset that he doesn't realize Abigail is still awake even though it's nearly midnight.

Discussion Question 1

Why is Celeste conflicted in Chapter 46?

Discussion Question 2

What convinces Jane that she shouldn't move once again?

Discussion Question 3

What worries Madeline about Abigail?

Vocabulary

volatile, panoramic, unilateral, conciliatory, retaliation



Chapters 49-51

Summary

Chapter 49

The chapter opens five nights before the trivia night. Jane is volunteering at school when she overhears two parents talking about her. One of them is holding the petition. Jane decides to confront the parents, telling them that Ziggy would never hurt anyone. In that moment, she decides that Ziggy is his own man and wasn't tainted by hers or anyone else's genes. She goes outside and talks to Miss Barnes, who is still supportive of Ziggy. She's upset when she hears the petition is still going around and children aren't being allowed to play with Ziggy. She tells Jane that she has a teacher's aide specifically for keeping an eye on the children. In the present, Harper mentions how aggressive Jane was the night of the assault, but one of the other parents is quick to point out that what happened was hardly assault.

Chapter 50

Jane is doing her reading with the children. She gets done with one of Celeste's twins and calls over the next child, Amabella. Jane actually liked reading with her despite everything that had been happening. The view switches back to the present. One of the parents comments how hard Miss Barnes has it, and how she made a mistake letting Jane read with Amabella that day. Miss Barnes responds that it was a mistake, but Jane was also to blame. Back in the past, Jane asks Amabella about the bullying. She starts to say that Ziggy didn't do it, but starts to cry. She's interrupted by Harper showing up. Harper and Jane get in a shouting match that's interrupted when the other parents show up.

Chapter 51

In the present, the parents are discussing how Harper was trying to make things worse by claiming assault. Miss Barnes and the principle say that it would be impossible to suspend Ziggy because nobody could prove he did anything wrong, and they both thought it was unlikely he was a bully. After Jane and Harper fought thought, the board of education was called up. The chapter shifts to one night before the trivia night after that. The parents are all going to an assembly. Jane is out with Ziggy, seeing a therapist. Celeste and Madeline were told to keep that a secret. When Madeline sees Perry she's momentarily jealous of Celeste. She was impressed by the way that he dressed, but when she looks back at Ed she feels a strong surge of affection and realizes she's lucky to be with him. Ed is talking about how his work wants him to write a piece on the bullying going on. When he tells this to Perry he remembers that he knows Renata vaguely through work. He asks if he should sign the petition, but Celeste very seriously says that if he does she will leave him.



Analysis

Chapter 49

Jane decides she wants to be more like Madeline and confronts the parents when they're talking about her behind her back. This shows how much of a positive influence Madeline has been to Jane. She's also determined that Ziggy was innocent and that it didn't matter who his parents were. He was just Ziggy and nothing could change that. Miss Barnes continues to be supportive of Jane, and the school has hired an aide to keep an eye on Ziggy and Amabella.

In the present, the parents are foreshadowing an assault that happened the same day that Jane confronted the parents. Readers later find out the assault ends up being nothing more than a verbal confrontation between Harper and Jane. Harper greatly over exaggerated the conflict because she wanted to make Jane look bad.

Chapter 50

The assault turns out to be nothing more than a verbal argument between Harper and Jane. Harper was trying to over exaggerate it because she wanted to make Jane look bad. Jane realizes how strange it is that such a good kid like Amabella wouldn't just admit to Ziggy bullying her if that was the truth. She tries to get the truth out of her, but she gets interrupted. Amabella hints that it wasn't Ziggy who was bullying her, but Jane doesn't get the chance to try and learn more. This foreshadows the eventual discovery that Ziggy was only keeping quiet about Max being the bully because Max threatened to hurt Amabella even worse if anyone ever found out.

Chapter 51

Perry is once again fixated on his appearance. As Madeline notes, he was wearing a very expensive outfit. She initially finds this very breathtaking and remarks that he's always wearing such lavish clothing. She makes it very clear that she's still happy with Ed and prefers to be with him. He had been very supportive and patient with everything that Madeline was going through with Abigail. Jane is fretting about her appearance as well, even though she wasn't physically in the chapter. She told her friends to keep the therapist appointment hidden because she didn't want the other parents to know. She was worried it would have a negative impact on her and Ziggy and might make the parents more suspicious. Celeste surprisingly stands up to Perry, threatening to leave him if he signed the petition about Ziggy. Perry takes this in stride, but the reader knows this is going to push him over the edge later when Perry and Celeste are alone.

Discussion Question 1

Why would Harper make the argument out to be more than it was when she spoke with the interviewer?



Discussion Question 2

Discuss the relationship between Ed and Madeline at this point in the novel.

Discussion Question 3

What does Celeste do that will most likely have dire consequences when she returns home with Perry?

Vocabulary

hierarchy, disdainful, intrinsically, sedate, predate, predilection



Chapters 52-54

Summary

Chapter 52

In the present, one of the parents note that the day of the assembly the school was divided into sides, either Renata's or Madeline's. At the assembly, Madeline has to sit near Bonnie. Bonnie tries to be civil, but Madeline feels like she's speaking to an outsider. Bonnie remarks how Abigail wants to become a social worker, but Madeline argues against that because she's not tough enough. Bonnie invites Madeline and her family to their house next week for Abigail's 15th birthday party, which hurts Madeline.

Chapter 53

Ziggy has just gotten done with his first session with his therapist. The therapist assures Jane that Ziggy doesn't seem like a bully. He was very empathetic and didn't seem like a liar, so she believed that he never attacked Amabella at orientation. She thinks that Ziggy might actually be the one being bullied since he seems anxious. She suspects one of the gifted kids might have found something that verbally affects him. She also adds that he's very anxious and curious about his father.

Chapter 54

Celeste and Perry are driving home together. Perry is acting perfectly normal, and Celeste feels guilty about the fact she had furnished a second home to run away to. It made her feel like a bad wife. As she got out of the car, she sensed something changed in him. When they got inside, he smashed her head against the wall and told her to never embarrass him again or he'd kill her. He returned a few moments later with an icepack and the two cried together.

Analysis

Chapter 52

Madeline is hurt that Abigail is having her birthday at Bonnie's. It feels foreign to her because she has to be a guest at her own daughter's birthday party. Not only that, but Madeline will be leaving while Abigail stays at her home, away from her. Things are made worse by Bonnie mentioning that Abigail wants to become a social worker, a profession she's clearly only considering because of how charitable Bonnie is. Madeline knows that Abigail might feel inspired, but it isn't a job that's suited for her because she's not emotionally strong enough and would get too involved in her patient's issues.

Chapter 53



Jane once again gets confirmation that Ziggy is perfectly innocent. Not only that, but the therapist hints that Ziggy might be getting bullied himself. This ends up being partially correct. Ziggy isn't being directly bullied, but he isn't able to talk about what happened because he's trying to protect Amabella from being bullied further. Ziggy is curious about his father, but he knows that it upsets his mother to talk about. The fact that he points this out to the therapist is just another reason why she thinks he isn't a bully because it's a strong indicator of his empathy.

Chapter 54

Celeste experiences some of the worst abuse from Perry to date. She comments that it feels like the first time that he ever hit her. Celeste had only threatened him before because she felt like he owed Jane because of his relation to Saxon Banks. She tries to convince herself that Madeline might have gotten the name wrong, but the reader can tell she clearly doesn't believe that excuse. In an ironic twist, this ends up being partially true. Jane didn't get the name wrong, but she was using the wrong name because Saxon Banks was actually just an alias that Perry was using to try and mask the affairs he had on his business trips.

Discussion Question 1

What does the reader learn about Ziggy after his visit to the therapist?

Discussion Question 2

What conclusions does Celeste come to as a result of her beating from Perry?

Discussion Question 3

Why is Madeline upset about attending Abigail's birthday party?

Vocabulary

caricature, misanthropic, articulate, pathologically, narcissistic, grotesque



Chapters 55-57

Summary

Chapter 55

Madeline is at work, about to make a business call to Lorraine. She was dreading it because she knew it would turn into a social call. Lorraine tells her she had a new bit of juicy gossip, that Renata's husband was cheating on Renata with the maid Juliette. Madeline feels guilty because even though she dislikes Renata she doesn't feel she deserves to have her husband cheat. Lorraine also mentions the secret project that Abigail is involved in. She doesn't know what it is, but her motherly instincts kicked in. Madeline texts Abigail to call her. She gets a call a few moments later from Nathan, pleading with her not to be mad.

Chapter 56

Celeste is still recovering from the damage that Perry did. Her therapist had always said that the end of an abusive relationship was the hardest part, but Celeste didn't believe that. She thought it would be simple to leave. As she thinks about it, she wonders how angry Perry will be. She realizes that he would kill her if she left, but she also realizes that if she stays he'll eventually get mad enough where he finally snaps and kills her.

Chapter 57

Nathan explains what Abigail had done. She set up a website where she was selling her virginity to help raise awareness about child slavery. She was going to donate all of the proceeds to a charity group to stop child trafficking. Madeline is furious, and realizes how weird it is to be talking with Nathan about it and not Ed. It was unusual for them to discuss any parenting issue. Madeline immediately blames Nathan and Bonnie since they should have been doing a better job of supervising Abigail.

Analysis

Chapter 55

Madeline finds out about Juliette, something that had been foreshadowed many chapters previously by the interviewees. She shows a surprising amount of sympathy towards Renata. Even with her dislike towards Renata she doesn't want to see her personally devastated, especially since she knows how hard it can be to have a family split up. Lorraine brings up the secret charity project that Abigail was working on. Madeline had forgotten about it because she was stressed about what was going on with Abigail's tutor. This, along with Nathan's immediate call foreshadows the trouble that Abigail has gotten into.



Chapter 56

Celeste is having trouble leaving, just like her therapist had warned her about. She realizes that she has to do something because if she stays around Perry any longer he'll continue to get progressively worse and worse until he eventually kills her. She knows that if she had been smashed against the wall one more time she likely wouldn't have survived.

Chapter 57

Abigail's plan is made clear when Nathan explains about the website. Madeline is upset with Nathan because she doesn't feel like he has any right to discuss parental issues with her. She also clearly blames him and Bonnie for letting things with Abigail get out of hand. Bonnie was the one that got her interested in charity in the first place, plus it was clear that Abigail had been trying to do things to impress Bonnie. Nathan was also the one responsible for teaching her how to make websites. If Abigail had still been living with Madeline she never would have been able to get her website up and running.

Discussion Question 1

What has Abigail done that astounds and upsets Madeline?

Discussion Question 2

Why is it ironic that Abigail has set up this website for a charity against the child sex trade?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Madeline believe Abigail never would have done this sort of thing if she'd been living with her?

Vocabulary

prestige, philandering, unperturbed, raucous, contemporary



Chapters 58-60

Summary

Chapter 58

Jane is talking with Ziggy in the café. She's thinking about moving again since her lease is almost up. When she asks Ziggy about it, he says he wants to stay because he likes the friends he made. He names some of his friends, and Amabella is included in that list. Jane asks if he knows who was hurting her. Ziggy says he can't say, but Jane convinces him he can write the name down. While he's writing, Harper and her husband come in. He goes over to threaten Jane, since Harper claimed Jane assaulted her. The barista, Tom, jumps to Jane's defense and kicks Harper and her husband out. Jane realizes that she's made so many wonderful friends and doesn't want to move. She looks at the note that Ziggy wrote and discovers that Celeste's child, Max, is the one that has been bullying Amabella.

Chapter 59

Celeste takes a painkiller to help soothe her head. She finds it funny how caring Perry suddenly is after being so abusive. She asks Perry about when he was being bullied as a child. It had been a rough year, but Saxon came to his rescue and beat up the ringleader of the bullies. Celeste feels responsible for what Saxon did to Jane. She thinks if she were there, she could have protected Jane and kept her away from Saxon.

Chapter 60

Madeline tries to help Nathan take down the website, but Nathan had recently advised Abigail not to use the same password for everything. So, Madeline's suggestions don't work. Madeline says she's going to go over to the school and make her take it down. Nathan advises against that and says that they need to handle it together. He talks about grounding her, which Madeline finds comical. She knows Nathan is far out of his league as a parent and can't handle the situation. He pleads with her not to yell, but Madeline ignores him because she knows how extreme the situation is.

Analysis

Chapter 58

When Jane is thinking about leaving she hints there was some other reason for her moving in the first place. She realizes that living in Pirriwee has been good for her. She's finally been able to confront what happened in the past with Saxon. He's no longer a monster to her, but just a man. Despite all the bullying drama, Ziggy seems to be doing well and he doesn't want to move either. He likes the friends that he made. Harper's husband makes Jane doubt her decision, but when she sees how loyal Tom is



she's reminded that she's made wonderful friends in Pirriwee as well. Jane discovers at the end of the chapter who the true bully was, Celeste's son Max.

The theme of image is brought up through Harper's husband. Jane notes that he goes out of his way to present himself in an intimidating fashion. He tries to make himself look big and imposing, and he leans over Jane in an attempt to make her feel small. Jane recognizes what he's trying to do and isn't intimidated.

Chapter 59

Celeste recognizes what Saxon did is wrong, but still has a hard time admitting to herself that Perry is at fault as well. She keeps arguing to herself that Perry isn't as bad as Saxon because he isn't as cruel. Perry continues to act like everything is normal at home, taking care of Celeste as though she were sick and not as though she was beaten by him. Celeste has been obsessing over Saxon so much because she has formed a strong friendship with Jane and just wants to help and protect her friend. This could also be seen as Celeste not wanting anyone to go through the same situation that she goes through with Perry.

Chapter 60

Nathan's inexperience as a parent shines through once again. Not only has he done a bad job at keeping an eye on Abigail, but he doesn't know how to get her to stop either. He just wants to talk to her, but Madeline knows how dedicated Abigail gets to a cause. Threatening to punish her won't do anything either. Nathan is trying to present his own image as a competent father, but it's starting to fall apart because he was never truly there for Abigail. Even when he was back in her life, Madeline was the one that did most of the parenting. Now that Abigail is living with Nathan, he's the one that has to handle the serious issues and he's very clearly out of his element.

Discussion Question 1

What makes Jane decide to remain in Pirriwee?

Discussion Question 2

Compare Madeline and Nathan's parenting techniques.

Discussion Question 3

How is Celeste rationalizing the information that she's found out about Saxon?

Vocabulary

embroiled, colluded, somnolent, languid, peripheral, inexperience



Chapters 61-63

Summary

Chapter 61

Jane is eager to get to school so she can tell the principle about everything Ziggy said. She was wondering what Max had said to keep Amabella quiet in the first place. She was still surprised Max was the bully because he always seemed like a good child. She was unsure if she should tell Celeste first or not, and hoped it wouldn't ruin their friendship. Before she gets to school, Mrs. Ponder pulls Jane and Ziggy over because she's worried about lice. She had noticed before that Ziggy displayed symptoms. She happily declares that Ziggy does in fact have them.

Chapter 62

Madeline has picked up Abigail from school. She confronts her about the website and Abigail instantly gets defensive. Madeline says they can raise awareness in some other way, but Abigail selling herself isn't going to do any good. Nobody cares about the cause; they're just focused on how sensational Abigail's story is. Abigail is dismissive, but Madeline can tell she's starting to get through. Madeline isn't paying attention and ends up hitting Renata's car.

Chapter 63

Jane and Ziggy visit the hair dresser where Mrs. Ponders's daughter, Lucy works. Lucy helps Ziggy with the lice treatment. She offers to give Jane a makeover as well. Jane initially declines, but Lucy talks her into it. In the present, one of the parents comments on how different Jane looked that night.

Analysis

Chapter 61

Jane is surprised at Max's actions because she doesn't know about the difficulty Celeste is going through at home, or that he shares a relation with Saxon Banks, who is actually Perry. Celeste and Perry have worked so hard to put on a perfect family image. Jane notes that she has never even seen Celeste or Perry raise their voices at the twins. This is exactly what Celeste and Perry want everyone to think, just like Jane had been working so hard to have her and Ziggy look like a normal family. She doesn't want to impact her friendship with Celeste, but at the same time she's more than eager to clear Ziggy's name.

Chapter 62



Madeline is able to get through to Abigail because she understands how she thinks. She knows that Abigail was getting so passionate because she could vividly imagine the children in her mind and what they were going through. Madeline promises to help, but Abigail doesn't believe her because Abigail has consistently misjudged how much Madeline cared. Madeline didn't mean to hit Renata's car, but Renata clearly doesn't know that and she just sees it as another attack in their social war.

Chapter 63

Before her makeover, Jane had never shown much interest in her appearance. The only time she was shown to dress up was years ago, but once she met Saxon she had stopped. Saxon had ruined her confidence and made her want to hide herself with simple styles and drab colors. Now that she has begun to confront her past and deconstruct Saxon as a monster she's able to once again dress up and wear more fashionable styles. She's no longer afraid to show off which is a huge turning point for her character. This change is also what helps her eventually get into a relationship with Tom.

Discussion Question 1

What is clearly Jane's overall motivation for the decisions she makes?

Discussion Question 2

Why is Madeline better able to address the situation with Abigail than Nathan?

Discussion Question 3

What change in Jane indicates that she's finally beginning to heal from her abusive relationship with Saxon?

Vocabulary

aspersions, delouse, deluge, quantify, meaningless, atypical, fortitude



Chapters 64-66

Summary

Chapter 64

Madeline drops Celeste's twins off at her house, since Celeste was too hurt to pick them up. Madeline told her about what Abigail had done. Celeste was shocked, but then added she was also proud of Abigail for trying to do something and take a stand.

Chapter 65

The chapter starts eight hours before the trivia night. Jane has just dropped Ziggy off at her parents so she could go to the trivia night. She was incredibly happy with her new haircut and wasn't thinking about all of the terrible things Saxon had told to her. She was also happy that Ziggy was innocent. She tried earlier to get in touch with Celeste, but Celeste said she was sick. Jane didn't think their friendship would be affected. She knew the other parents wouldn't care as much about Max being the bully because he came from a rich and beautiful family.

Chapter 66

Celeste is in bed, listening to Perry and the twins cooking downstairs. She notes how every time Perry hits her, he tries to do something positive for her and the family the next day. He was excited for the trivia contest because he had ordered an expensive costume to fit the theme. After that, he's going on a trip to Hawaii. Celeste decides she will move her family away while he's on his trip.

Analysis

Chapter 64

Celeste continues to hide the abuse from Madeline. She's content to play her disheveled state off as a virus. When Celeste hears about what Abigail is doing she's actually proud. She can admire the fact that Abigail is trying to do something because for so long Celeste has just been passively sitting back. Even now, she has her doubts about trying to run away to the home she's prepared away from Perry.

Chapter 65

The theme of image is brought up again. Jane knows that the other families aren't going to create a petition because of the image that Perry and Celeste have throughout the community. They're the perfect family, so it will be more of a tragedy that Max has bullying problems. They'll want to see him get help and won't be as judgmental as they were of Jane and Ziggy, who were outsiders when the incident first happened. Jane



continues to embrace her new hair style. She's eager to show it off to everyone because for the first time since meeting Saxon she feels proud and confident of the way she looks.

Chapter 66

Celeste commits to her previous plan about leaving with the twins. She knows that Perry would never kill her, and that she can't stay in the house anymore. He can still be a good father to the children, but he can't be a good husband to her. Perry's obsession with his image is briefly shown again when Celeste comments on how expensive his outfit is. She notes all the other families will have simple costumes from the dollar store, but Perry had to order something from a specialty shop in London to show off his wealth.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Jane feel that Max won't get the same bad treatment that she and Ziggy did in regards to the bullying issues?

Discussion Question 2

What action on Perry's part indicates that his priority is maintaining a certain image?

Discussion Question 3

How has Jane's character changed since the beginning of the novel?

Vocabulary

exuberantly, reproachfully, existentialism, metaphorically, logistics



Chapters 67-69

Summary

Chapter 67

Madeline and Nathan had no success getting Abigail to shut the website down. Ed was considering calling the police, but Abigail suddenly came out of her room and announced the website was closed. She had gotten an email from someone saying they didn't want her virginity, but they were moved by her cause and would donate \$100,000 to Amnesty International. Madeline saw that Abigail was visibly relieved. Madeline finds the whole thing strange, wondering who really sent the email. Abigail broke her vegan diet, claiming she couldn't stay vegan while at Madeline's.

Chapter 68

Jane runs through the rain to get to Tom's. His shop was closed, but he opens it up when he sees Jane. Tom takes Jane into his apartment into the back to dry off. He compliments her hair and Jane says she thought he would have noticed right away because he was gay. Tom is surprised and embarrassed and says she's thinking of the wrong Tom. Jane is equally surprised and embarrassed. She had allowed herself to get a crush on Tom because she thought he was unavailable. She stays anyway and the two do a jigsaw together, just like Jane normally did with her family.

Chapter 69

The chapter opens half an hour before the trivia night. Celeste is getting ready to leave in the expensive outfit that Perry had prepared for her. Josh runs into the room and says he has to talk to her. He says that Max has stopped bullying Amabella, but he pushed Skye down the stairs again. Celeste is horrified and it takes her awhile to even register that Max has been bullying Amabella. She doesn't get the chance to do anything as Perry comes in. He says her apartment manager just called to ask about installing new smoke detectors.

Analysis

Chapter 67

Abigail breaks her vegan code, using Madeline's house as an excuse. Just like with television, it's something that she still enjoys and want to do, but just can't whenever she's with Bonnie and Nathan. Madeline has a feeling that the email is far too good to be true and wants to find out the truth behind it. Even Abigail seems relieved, since she knew that she hadn't thought her plan through all the way, so the email was letting her off the hook while still feeling like she accomplished her goal, adding to the implausibility of it all.



Chapter 68

Jane hadn't allowed herself to consider a relationship since she was humiliated by Saxon. She always crushed on Tom a little bit, but she never actually thought she would have a chance with him. Once she finds out that he's straight, she's embarrassed, but doesn't leave. Tom seems happy that she stayed, and the reader can tell that they each have feelings for one another. Jane's recover has finally made it where she's letting herself think about relationships again. Just feeling an attraction towards Tom is a huge step for her since she's been avoiding even thinking about relationships ever since she was with Saxon as a teenager.

Chapter 69

Celeste finds out the truth about Max. Not only has he been bullying Amabella, but he's started to bully Skye as well. Celeste is shocked because Max always seemed like the more sensitive of the twins. She thinks back to her therapy session, where she insisted the violence at home had never impacted her children in any way. Perry finds out about her apartment, which Celeste and the reader know will have dangerous implications once they are alone in private. Perry's obsession with their image is shown once more through the ridiculously expensive outfit he bought for Celeste.

Discussion Question 1

When the final revelation about who has been doing the bullying comes out, what is Celeste's reaction?

Discussion Question 2

Why hadn't Jane considered another relationship since Saxon?

Discussion Question 3

Discuss Tom's character and what role he plays in the novel.

Vocabulary

egocentricity, vegan, bereft, astonished, resolute



Chapters 70-72

Summary

Chapter 70

The chapter opens with the interviewees commenting on how someone got the drink recipe wrong, so the cocktails contained far more alcohol than intended. The chapter then jumps right to the trivia night. Jane and Madeline meet up and Madeline is ecstatic to see that Jane has dressed up. Jane tells her that Ziggy isn't the bully, but then she gets distracted by Tom. Madeline is equally happy about this and surprised that she never noticed their attraction before.

Chapter 71

Perry makes Celeste pose with him before they leave, so he can post the pictures to Facebook. In the car, Celeste tells Perry all about the bullying and how she knows Max has seen him hit her before. Perry assures her that he'll talk about it. Celeste says that's no way to treat a woman, and it's clear she's referring to Perry's abuse. He apologizes and says that he'll get help and he'll do nothing but work on their family. Celeste says that she's going to be leaving next week. She realizes that it's because of Max's behavior that she has the courage to leave. She knows the abuse isn't just affecting her now, but also her sons. Perry pleads with her, but they are interrupted by Renata and her husband going up to the car, asking if they need an umbrella.

Chapter 72

Perry and Celeste arrive, looking extravagant in their expensive costumes. Madeline talks to Bonnie and starts to get aggressive thanks to the drink she has. She makes jokes about how Abigail was back at home teaching Chloe about making websites. She then talks about how Nathan abandoned her with a child, but Bonnie was lucky because he hadn't done that with Skye. Bonnie insists that Madeline needs to forgive Nathan, but she ignores her. A guest bumps into Bonnie, who ends up spilling her drink over Madeline.

Analysis

Chapter 70

Tom and Jane continue to make their feelings known, becoming so obvious that Madeline can see their attraction. Both Madeline and Jane are in great spirits, partly because of their drinks but also because they've both gotten over big problems in their life. Madeline is happy that the website is finally down, and Jane is happy because she knows that Ziggy isn't the bully.



Chapter 71

While everything is going well for the other characters, Celeste is still working out her problems. She finally confronts Perry about the abuse. Perry promises to get help, but Celeste knows that he won't. He's acting like it's a new problem and not something that has been going on for years. Celeste has finally opened her eyes up because she's seen the effect that he's having on their kids. Max has seen them fight before, which is what Celeste thinks has triggered the bullying. At the start of the chapter, Perry shows his obsession with image, once again sharing their family pictures so everyone thinks that they have the perfect home life.

Chapter 72

Many of the events that the interviewees had discussed in the earlier chapters have come to pass. Madeline is becoming more aggressive towards Bonnie thanks to the drink. Madeline immediately notices the outfits that Celeste and Perry are wearing, which is what Perry wanted. Madeline notices that everyone in the crowd seems to react the same way when they arrive, instantly feeling like their costumes are inferior.

Discussion Question 1

Why do both Jane and Madeline have cause to celebrate in Chapter 70?

Discussion Question 2

What leads Celeste to believe that Perry will not be able to change?

Discussion Question 3

What does Madeline notice about everyone at trivia night when Celeste and Perry walk into the room with their expensive costumes?

Vocabulary

inferior, turpitude, interloper, assiduously, banal, pedestrian



Chapters 73-75

Summary

Chapter 73

Jane and Tom continue to spend time with one another, something that makes Madeline happy. Tom is pulled away to discuss drinks, leaving Miss Barnes to talk with Jane. Miss Barnes tells her how the parents have been harassing her about the bullying and showing up at random times to watch her class. She mentions how hard it can be as a teacher because she feels like she always has to be on guard because she's expected to act a certain way, whether or not she's on the job. Jane assures her that she's doing fine, and ends up getting pulled away by Celeste, saying that they need to talk.

Chapter 74

Celeste and Jane go onto the balcony to talk. Celeste sees that Perry is socializing with the other parents. She knows that by the time they get back home he's going to forget all about what he said in the car and take his anger out on her. Celeste explains everything to Jane, who is quick to forgive her. She says that it wasn't Celeste's fault and they'd clear everything up with the school on Monday. Nathan and Bonnie come out, and Celeste apologizes to them too. They say they recently found out from Skye and had emailed the teacher. Like Jane, they are very forgiving. In the present, the detective remarks that the victim was one of the eight people on the balcony that evening.

Chapter 75

Madeline snaps at a group of parents that are discussing the bullying situation as well as Juliette's affair. She didn't like Renata, but it wasn't fair to her to have people discussing her marriage like that. She joins the others on the balcony. Madeline finds out that Celeste was the one who donated the \$100,000 for Abigail. Celeste says she owed Madeline. She then tells Renata it was Max who was doing the bullying. Renata is surprised, but quickly apologizes to Jane for all the terrible things she did. Jane forgives her. Perry joins them on the balcony, and Jane realizes that she's seen him before, but back then he was using the name Saxon Banks.

Analysis

Chapter 73

Jane and Tom continue to flirt with one another before they are interrupted. Miss Barnes once again brings up the theme of image. She tells Jane how she has to constantly have her teacher persona up. She feels like she's never allowed to swear or just be herself because the parents will report her, even if she isn't at school. She wants all of the parents to think of her as the perfect teacher, which has been hard with the bullying.



Celeste pulls Jane away so the two can finally discuss the true source of Amabella's bullying.

Chapter 74

Jane knows that Perry's promises in the car meant nothing, and he would return to his abusive self once they were alone together. She feels guilty not only because of Max being the bully, but also because of Perry's relation with Saxon, something that Jane still doesn't know about. Nathan and Bonnie point out that the bullying isn't nearly as big of an incident as everyone is making it out to be. They feel like the kids are just behaving like kids are supposed to, and they were already working on strategies with Skye to make sure that the bullying stopped. Celeste actually starts to feel comfortable around the group and it seems like some of her guilt has faded. In the present, the detective foreshadows that someone who was on the balcony was murdered, but it isn't made clear who since he says there were eight people and the readers only know of five that have been on the balcony so far.

Chapter 75

Despite their feud, Madeline doesn't want anyone speaking ill of Renata's marriage. She can sympathize because her marriage had fallen apart. The circumstances might have been different, but both she and Renata were still the victims. Madeline discovers that Celeste made the generous donation. Unlike with Perry, Celeste didn't donate her money because of her image, which is why she tried to do it anonymously. Celeste brings up the time that Madeline saved Max when they first met, pointing out that she could never put a price on his life, so Madeline didn't have to repay her. Perry makes a point of sitting in the middle of everyone, making himself the center of attention. At the very end of the chapter, Jane comes to the realization that "Saxon Banks" was in fact an alias that Perry was using years ago.

Discussion Question 1

What is the startling revelation in regards to Saxon Banks and his real identity?

Discussion Question 2

What indicates that Nathan and Bonnie aren't taking the bullying incident seriously?

Discussion Question 3

How is the theme of image discussed in Chapter 73?

Vocabulary

undulating, placid, poised, remonstrating, hysterical, alias



Chapters 76-78

Summary

Chapter 76

Perry is quick to dismiss Jane, telling Celeste his affair meant nothing. Jane admits to herself that the reason she moved was because she knew that “Saxon Banks” lived in the area. That night he was sad about the fact that he had no kids. Jane wanted to show him Ziggy, to see everything that he had lost out on. Celeste remembers a story where Perry had gotten in trouble as a child and used Saxon’s name as an alias. Celeste is beyond upset, throwing her drink in Perry’s face. Perry instinctively slaps her. Ed gets between the two of them and Renata threatens to call the police. Madeline is surprised to see Bonnie act the most enraged. She screams at Perry that his children saw and that’s why they bullied. While she’s screaming at him, she pushes him down.

Chapter 77

Perry falls over the balcony after Bonnie pushes him. Renata is about to call an ambulance, but she makes a point of saying she didn’t see what happened. Ed protests this, but everyone else agrees that they didn’t see what happened either. Ed struggles with what they’re doing, but eventually goes along with it. Back inside, a group of parents were fighting over an argument that got out of hand regarding standardized testing. Two of the parents collide onto the balcony, pushing into Madeline and Jane. Jane lands hard on the balcony and can feel her mouth filling up with blood.

Chapter 78

The chapter opens the day after the trivia night. Madeline is in the hospital with a broken ankle. She and Ed are arguing about telling the truth. Ed believes that Bonnie didn’t mean to kill Perry and that’s what he wants to tell the police. Nathan comes in and explains how Bonnie had an abusive childhood. She witnessed her mother getting hit, so when she saw Perry hit Celeste she just snapped. He also adds that Abigail wants to move back in to help Madeline. Madeline understands, even though she’s never been through anything like that. She says they aren’t going to say anything, which causes Ed to leave the room. In the present, the detective comments that someone wasn’t telling the truth about what happened on the balcony.

Analysis

Chapter 76

Even as a youth, Perry was obsessed with his image. He used a fake name because he didn’t want anyone associating him with any negative deeds. Perry shows his superiority by simply brushing off Jane. As Celeste notes, he doesn’t even bother to



look at Jane and just seems to wave her off. He barely even registers that what he did was wrong. Jane reveals the real reason she moved to the area, something she had been hinting at throughout the book. She knew that Saxon lived there and she wanted to get revenge by showing him the beautiful child that he lost the chance of raising. Bonnie shows a surprisingly aggressive side, associating herself with the children when she says that they saw his violence. That, along with her physical response, suggests that she grew up with some sort of abuse in her childhood.

Chapter 77

The victim of the murder is finally revealed to be Perry, and the murderer, Bonnie. In a surprising act of solidarity, Renata is the one who suggests they hide the truth. This could be because she just had to deal with marital problems as well, making her sympathetic towards Celeste and Jane's abuse. All of her friends naturally agree, but Ed has a hard time with it. It isn't that he doesn't care about the women, but throughout the book he's just always been portrayed as an honest character. Jane getting injured is once again meant to create tension as it was never made clear if she was alive or not in the present, but as the next chapter reveals she is still alive, just injured.

Chapter 78

Abigail is trying to protect her image because she doesn't want Madeline to know how much she misses living with her. Nathan even says that Abigail had been looking for any excuse to go back home. Nathan explains everything that Bonnie went through, letting the reader understand exactly why she was the one that lashed out and murdered Perry. Ed is clearly having a hard time lying. Madeline admits that what he wants to do is right, but she also knows that sometimes doing the wrong thing is also right. Madeline is feeling particularly guilty because she never had any idea that Celeste was being abused. She was worried that she never gave Celeste the chance to speak up, or that she was missing the obvious signs.

Discussion Question 1

What does the reader learn about Perry and his childhood?

Discussion Question 2

Why does the group decide to hide the truth from the authorities?

Discussion Question 3

What is the moral and ethical dilemma that the characters find themselves in, in Chapter 78?

Vocabulary

dredging, guttural, catatonic, dilemma, conscience, withering



Chapters 79-81

Summary

Chapter 79

Jane is interviewed by a detective. She explains that everyone was drunk and she couldn't remember what she saw. She says she was distracted by the fight inside and didn't see Perry fall. When asked if she knew Perry, she said she met him that night for the first time. The detective says he thinks she's lying.

Chapter 80

Celeste is sitting with her children, who seem sad. Celeste doesn't believe they understand what really happened. Bonnie shows up to talk to Celeste. She tells Celeste more about how her mother was abused. She used to be terrified, but one day she finally got the courage to call the cops. She tells Celeste that she can tell the truth to the police. She doesn't want them to cover, and she knows Ed, Jane, and Nathan are going to have trouble with it anyway. Celeste insists she can lie, but Bonnie tells her she doesn't have to lie anymore.

Chapter 81

Celeste texts Madeline that Bonnie is going to tell the truth. Madeline calls Ed and tells him he doesn't need to confess. Ed is crying, which surprises Madeline. He insists he was going to confess, but Madeline knows that he would have lied for her. Renata sends a note to Ziggy, apologizing for everything and asking him to a Star Wars themed going away party for Amabella.

Analysis

Chapter 79

Jane continues to question what she was expecting from moving to Pirriwee. She wonders if she was expecting to see remorse from Perry. She doesn't have much time to think about it since she's being interviewed by the detective. The detective makes it clear that he doesn't believe Jane and thinks there's more going on with Perry's death.

Chapter 80

Bonnie understands how good of a liar Celeste is because they were both in similar positions. Even though Bonnie wasn't being abused, she still had to pretend that everything was fine, just like Celeste. Bonnie doesn't want anyone else to lie because she knows how difficult it is, and she knows that she's responsible for what happened



with Perry. Celeste shares Bonnie's protective feelings. She wants to protect Bonnie, just as much as Bonnie wants to protect her.

Chapter 81

Even with Ed insisting that he was going to tell the truth, Madeline knows that he wasn't going to. Ed might be an honest man, but he loved Madeline enough to lie, even if he was morally uncomfortable. Renata realizes the error of her ways and apologizes to Ziggy. She sets up the Star Wars themed party because she knows how much Ziggy loves Star Wars since he always talked about it with Amabella.

Discussion Question 1

What do both Bonnie and Celeste want to do for each other?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Renata offer to throw a Star Wars themed party for Ziggy?

Discussion Question 3

Why isn't the detective buying any of their stories at this point?

Vocabulary

obtuse, atavistic, haggard, affidavit, preamble



Chapters 82-84

Summary

Chapter 82

The chapter opens four weeks after the trivia night. Jane has been avoiding the reporter who was interviewing everyone about the deaths. Jane hadn't spoken with Celeste since the funeral. Celeste was moving out to the apartment that she had prepared when she was getting ready to run away from Perry. Jane and Tom finally confess their feelings for one another and share their first kiss.

Chapter 83

The interviewees are giving their final statements. Renata has decided to move to London since she's leaving her husband. Everyone seems surprised to learn that Bonnie was the killer. Miss Barnes is hopeful that both the school and parents will learn from what happened.

Chapter 84

The chapter takes place one year after the trivia night. Madeline has been helping Celeste the last year because she still feels guilty that she wasn't able to do more to help. Bonnie didn't have to serve any prison time, since the judge understood the extenuating circumstances behind what she did. She instead had 200 hours of community service, which Abigail helped her serve. The twins were having trouble adjusting to the death of their father, and they were reacting violently. Celeste was determined not to let her boys grow up like Perry. She still feels guilty about Perry, like she was responsible. Her therapist said this was perfectly normal. Celeste set up a trust fund for Ziggy, even though Jane protested. The chapter ends with Celeste giving a speech on domestic abuse, stating that it can happen to anyone.

Analysis

Chapter 82

Jane and Tom are able to start a relationship, showing that Jane has fully recovered from all of the damage that was previously inflicted by Perry. The reader finds out that Jane and Celeste haven't been talking, and that Celeste has moved away from the city.

Chapter 83

Like Celeste, Renata has decided to move away from the city to start over, away from memories of her husband. The parents and the school are going to work harder to make sure they don't jump to conclusions and gossip amongst each other.



Chapter 84

Celeste doesn't want anyone else to have to go through what she did. She is trying to do good with her future. She's determined to make her children work and not just grow up as trust fund kids. She's giving some of her wealth to Ziggy, because she feels he deserves it since he was technically Perry's son. Celeste giving a speech at the end is huge for her because she was always trying to hide her abuse and her true self. Near the end of the chapter she decides that her dignity doesn't matter, and it's important that everyone realizes that domestic abuse can happen to anyone.

Discussion Question 1

Discuss all of the characters who have left the town and what their motivations were for leaving.

Discussion Question 2

What important lesson about image does Celeste reveal at the end with her speech?

Discussion Question 3

What is the overall message that the author wishes to convey about domestic violence?

Vocabulary

transcribed, irrefutable, scrupulously, sartorial, solidarity, solemn



Characters

Madeline

At the start of the story, Madeline has just turned 40, something that upsets her because she feels like she is getting old. Madeline is someone who cares a lot about her appearance. This applies to the way she physically looks as well as the way that other people view her. Madeline has a very extreme personality. She notes later on in the book that she purposefully plays this up because she knows that her friends and family enjoy her intense behavior. Madeline is very protective of her friends and family, which is how she starts the feud with Renata. Despite being very open and chatty about her life, she tries to hide her negative emotions from people who have heard her. This is especially true with Nathan, Abigail, and Bonnie.

Ed

Ed is Madeline's second husband and father of her two youngest children. Although he's only a side character, Ed seems to have the most insight on all of the other characters. He's the first one to notice that both Celeste and Jane seem damaged, although he doesn't know the full extent of what happened. Ed is a very straightforward person and not afraid to say what's on his mind. Like Madeline, he's extremely loyal to his family. Ed is the one that has the biggest problem with hiding the truth from the police, and at the end of the book he says he's going to confess. Madeline knows that he actually wouldn't because even with his honesty, he's still willing to do whatever he has to in order to protect his family.

Abigail

Abigail is Madeline's first daughter that she had with Nathan. Abigail is easily influenced by Nathan and Bonnie. She's almost obsessed with emulating and impressing Bonnie. When she's back home with Madeline she acts like her old self, watching television and eating meat. Like Madeline, she has a very passionate personality and active imagination. This is why she reacts so strongly when she hears about the child trafficking and becomes determined to do something to fix the situation, even though she clearly gets in over her head.

Nathan

Nathan is Madeline's ex-husband and Bonnie's current husband. He ran out on their marriage shortly after they had Abigail because he couldn't handle the stress of being a father. He was absent for the majority of her childhood and didn't even pay child support. This angers Madeline when he comes back into their lives and Abigail seems



to prefer his company. Despite trying hard to make up for his mistakes as a father, Nathan frequently doesn't know what to do when any serious parenting issues come up.

Bonnie

Bonnie is Nathan's new wife. Bonnie is a yoga enthusiast and likes to live a very naturalistic life style. She's incredibly kind to everyone around her, and even Madeline finds herself liking Bonnie despite how much she wants to hate her. Like Nathan, Bonnie struggles with being a parent when it comes to making hard decisions. When she was younger, Bonnie witnessed her mother constantly being abused by her father. When she sees the way Perry treats Celeste, she snaps and pushes him over the balcony.

Renata

Renata is Amabella's mother. She's very proud of her daughter because she's one of the gifted children. Despite working a very busy job, Renata tries to be involved with her child. Renata acts as one of the antagonists for the majority of the book, since it's her child that initially accuses Ziggy of bullying. Despite that, she supports the rest of the characters at the end of the book. She's actually the one who first says that she didn't see what Bonnie did after she pushes Perry over the balcony.

Amabella

Amabella is Renata's gifted child. Early on in the book she is being bullied by Max, but she tells everyone that it was Ziggy because he threatens to hurt her more if she tells the truth. Amabella is actually good friends with Ziggy. This helps Jane determine that Ziggy wasn't actually bullying her.

Harper

Harper is extremely loyal to Renata. She's actually the one that first starts the petition to get Ziggy kicked out of school. Harper is prone to exaggeration, as many of the interviewees note in the present.

Celeste

Celeste is most well known for her beautiful looks and the fact that, thanks to Perry, she is incredibly wealthy. Celeste often appears aloof because she's lost in her thoughts. Many people mistake her as just being ditzy, but she's always in her head because she's being abused by Perry. Celeste obsesses over what other people think and feel. She tries not to ever bring up her looks or money because she knows it makes people jealous and she doesn't want them to be uncomfortable. Celeste takes this to an



extreme, trying to hide her happiness just because she doesn't want anyone to be bothered by her emotions.

Celeste wants everyone to think of her as normal, which is why she has a hard time seeking help with Perry. She worries that if anyone knew she was in therapy they would judge her, especially since it was for domestic abuse. She constantly defends Perry because she can't face the truth of their relationship. She feels like she deserves the abuse because everything is so good in her life. Celeste frequently donates to charity because of the guilt that she feels.

Perry

Perry is Celeste's husband and also the father to Ziggy, although he never learns this during the book. Perry was bullied as a child which is part of what contributed to his future abuse. He was protected and inspired by his cousin, Saxon Banks. Whenever he's on a business trip looking to meet women, he uses Saxon's name. Perry obsesses over his image. He's constantly posting pictures of his family on Facebook and he always encourages his wife to flaunt their wealth. Whenever he feels slighted by Celeste he gets aggressive, even he has to wait until they're back at home to abuse her.

Jane

Jane is the youngest mother in the school at the age of 24. She's described as dressing very plainly. This is because she doesn't want to draw attention to herself and because she was scarred by what Perry said about her appearance. She also frequently chews gum because of the comments that he made about her breath. Jane desperately wants to blend in and be seen as a normal parent, but she's quickly dragged into drama after Ziggy is accused of bullying at orientation. Like Celeste, Jane is in denial about how serious her abuse was. By the end of the book she's come to terms with it though and feels more comfortable expressing herself and even in pursuing relationships.

Ziggy

Ziggy is Jane's child. He's a generally well behaved child and Miss Barnes notes that he never breaks any rules in class. This is why it seems so strange that he would be a bully. Jane is afraid that he takes after his father, Perry, but by the end of the book she's determined that isn't the case. Ziggy is a huge fan of Star Wars and frequently talks about it around other children. One of the reasons he's friends with Amabella is because she always lets him talk about it.

Tom

Tom is the barista at Blue Blues, the local café. Everyone in town loves his coffee, so they work hard to stay on his good side. Many of the residents also believe he is gay

because they got a rumor mixed up about another Tom in the town. Tom is very friendly and protective of his valued patrons. Towards the end of the book he and Jane develop a relationship.



Symbols and Symbolism

Perry's Facebook photos

Celeste talks about how Perry is always taking pictures of their family to post on Facebook. He likes presenting them as the perfect family. For Perry, this represents his pride because everyone always comments positively about the pictures and how good of a family he has.

Abigail's Veganism

Abigail decides to become a vegan early on in the book. This is because Bonnie is a vegan and Abigail wants to be closer to her. Her choosing to become a vegan represents that closeness and how much she idealizes Bonnie.

Celeste's Jewelry

Whenever Perry hits Celeste he always goes out and gets her jewelry. In his mind, this justifies and absolves him from the abuse. Celeste never wears the jewelry that he buys because she subconsciously doesn't want him to be absolved, even though she frequently defends his actions.

Jane's Gum

Jane is constantly chewing gum throughout the book. Jane eventually reveals that the reason he does this is because of the abusive comments that Perry made during their one night stand. One of the first things he said was she had terrible breath. The comment stuck so she's constantly chewing gum because she doesn't want to have bad breath. This habit represents how much she's suffering from everything that Perry did to her.

Charity Donations

Both Celeste and Perry frequently donate to charities, but for very different reasons. For Perry, charity is a competition. He sees it as a way to show off his wealth and success. For Celeste, it represents her guilt. Whenever she feels like she's complaining too much given how privileged she is, she goes and donates to charity.



Lapis Necklace

After Celeste hears about what Jane went through, she gets her a lapis necklace because that's supposed to help heal emotional wounds. The necklace is symbolic of Celeste's empathy towards Jane as a fellow victim of abuse. It's also symbolic of how strong their friendship is. This is especially important since the reader frequently only gets to see Jane and Madeline's friendship.

“Tennis Partner”

When Celeste is explaining away her injuries to her babysitter, she makes up a story about getting hurt during tennis. Her babysitter doesn't believe it and remarks that she should get a new partner. She insists it was her fault, but her babysitter says she doubts that was the case. To the reader, it's clear that the “tennis partner” represents Perry and his abusive behavior, and the babysitter is telling her to get out of the abusive relationship.

Jane's Hairstyle

Towards the end of the book, Jane decides to get a fashionable haircut for the trivia night. Up until that point, Jane had always worn her hair in a simple ponytail. She always wore drab clothing, which Madeline discovers is because of the abuse she suffered at Perry's hands. Towards the end of the book she begins to recover. Her haircut represents that she's getting over what Perry did to her, and she's not going to let his words influence her life anymore.

“Oh Calamity”

At the very start of the book, Madeline remarks how everyone has been saying “oh calamity” recently because her daughter, Chloe, says it so much. Throughout the rest of the book characters that are close to Madeline say it at least once. The phrase is a representation of each character's friendship to Madeline, as well as the influence that Madeline has had on their life. It's most notable with Jane, since she's the newest one to meet Madeline. Her use of the phrase shows that she's been accepted into Madeline's social circle.

Amabella's Star Wars themed party

At the end of the book, Amabella hosts a going away party. All of her parties are always themed. Amabella chooses a Star Wars theme because of how much Ziggy likes it. Making it Star Wars themed is Renata and Amabella's way of apologizing to all of the stress that Ziggy has gone through.



Settings

Pirriwee Public School

Pirriwee Public is the school that all of the young children attend. Major events such as the kindergarten orientation and the trivia night occur at the school.

Blue Blues

Blue Blues is the local café in town where Tom works. All the parents love the café because of the high quality coffee Tom brews. Once Jane gets comfortable in town, she starts doing all of her work from the café.

Madeline's Home

Most of the conflict with Abigail happens at Madeline's home. This is also where Madeline hosts her book club. After the first book club, Madeline tells Celeste everything she knows about Jane's abuse.

Perry's Home

Perry and Celeste live in a very extravagant and expensive home. Perry likes the statement this makes, but Celeste is uncomfortable with it. Their home is where the majority of Celeste's abuse occurs.

Celeste's Apartment

When Celeste decides she's going to leave Perry, she gets an apartment outside of the city. She styles the apartment in all the ways that Perry would have normally objected to.

Therapists' Offices

There are two therapist offices in the book. One is outside of town where Celeste goes to get help about the abuse. The other is where Jane goes when she's trying to figure out whether or not Ziggy has actually been bullying other kids.



Themes and Motifs

Image

Image as a theme is very clearly demonstrated as early as the start of the book. Madeline is obsessing over her image because she feels like she's getting older now that she's turned 40. Throughout the book Madeline tries to counter her aging using different beauty products and wearing fashionable outfits. She wants to give off a youthful appearance. Her behavior also shows a certain type of image. She likes everyone to think of her as an intense person, hence why she plays up whatever emotion she's feeling at the time.

The theme is also consistently shown through Perry and Celeste. Perry wants everyone to see how successful and wealthy he is. He's always posting family images on Facebook to show off. He insists that Celeste wear elaborate and expensive outfits and gets upset if she ever gets anything that he considers tacky. Celeste on the other hand always tries to hide her wealth and her beauty. She knows that it makes people jealous which can lead to them being unhappy. Celeste is very mindful of everyone's feelings so she tries to hide herself and not draw attention.

Jane, like Celeste, also wants to put on a normal appearance. She dresses in very plain and drab clothing because when she last wore colorful clothing she was assaulted by Perry. He insulted her clothing choice and her appearance, something that left lasting damage for several years until Jane could start to talk about it. Once she comes to terms with what happened, Jane began to dress in a very colorful fashion and wasn't afraid to be noticed by people.

Domestic Abuse

The theme of domestic abuse is demonstrated by Celeste and Jane throughout the book. Celeste is the first character who shows it. She reveals to the reader very early on that she's being abused by Perry, but she never does anything about it. She constantly tries to justify Perry's actions. At first she argues that every relationship has something negative about it. Their negative quirk is Perry's abuse. She later argues that Perry only does it because she keeps messing up and she brings it upon themselves. She also tries to justify it by saying they are just a very passionate couple.

The reason that Celeste wants to defend his abuse is because she can't face up to the truth of it. She finds it humiliating to be a victim. This is shown to be very dangerous because Perry's abuse keeps escalating. The more she's abused, the worse she feels about herself. Even when she isn't blaming herself, she feels bad that she's complaining because everything else in her life is so good.

Jane defends Perry's abuse as well. Like Celeste, she convinces herself that she deserved it for making bad choices as a teenager.



She also tries to justify it by agreeing with what Perry said. As Madeline points out, nothing he said was true and he was just being a horrible person. Both characters show the dangers of defending your abuser because each time they come up with a defense they suffer. Jane was miserable for years and afraid to live her life while she lived in the shadow of Perry's abuse. Celeste was miserable and as a result of the abuse at home, Max became a bully and started to hurt girls at school. By defending Perry they allowed all these bad things to happen, and things only began to get better once they admitted to themselves that Perry was in the wrong.

Inheritance

Inheritance is a theme that is demonstrated mostly through Ziggy, but also with Max and Bonnie toward the end of the book. At the very beginning, Jane wonders if Ziggy was a bully because of who his father was. Whenever bullying is brought up, she keeps wondering if there's a darkness in Ziggy that he inherited from his father. This darkness is revealed to the reader when Jane opens up to Madeline about the nature of her one night stand and how abusive it had been. She worries so much about this that she frequently has nightmares about Ziggy hurting her. It's made even worse by the fact that Ziggy was accused of strangling Amabella, just like Perry did to her.

Jane later learns that Ziggy isn't responsible for bullying. She comes to the conclusion that it doesn't matter who Ziggy's father was. It doesn't even matter that she was his mother. Ziggy is his own person, and there's no way that his genes could change who he was. With Max things are a little different. Like Ziggy, Max is also Perry's son. While Max shows the same type of abusive behavior, it isn't because he inherited it genetically. Max is abusive because he specifically witnessed Perry abusing Celeste. It's clear that it isn't genetics in this instance because Josh doesn't display any of this abusive behavior.

The theme is also shown with Bonnie very briefly at the end of the book. Bonnie is the one that murders Perry when she finds out about his abusive behavior. This is because Bonnie came from a broken household herself. Bonnie didn't inherit any abusive traits from her father. She's one of the kindest characters throughout the book. This one act of aggression is just very clearly her reacting to the situation and not something that she genetically inherited.

Responsibility

Responsibility as a theme is shown in two very different ways. It is first demonstrated with Madeline. When Madeline finds out about what happens to Celeste she immediately feels guilty and blames herself for not realizing that her friend was being abused. Celeste notes that after the funeral Madeline was constantly trying to help her because she felt so bad about not doing more for Celeste. As Celeste points out Madeline was in no way at fault. Madeline is just causing herself stress for something that she was in no way responsible for.



This theme is shown in the more traditional sense through Bonnie. After Bonnie pushes Perry over the ledge, everyone wants to defend her. They all know that Perry deserved to be pushed over the balcony because of the way that he treated both Celeste and Jane. All of the characters are willing to lie about what happened to protect Bonnie. Bonnie knows what she did is wrong and she turns herself in, accepting responsibility for what she did.

The theme is very clearly demonstrated with Perry as well. Perry acts like he's the perfect father and husband. He hits Celeste, but he justifies his behavior by buying her jewelry and doing nice things for her. He refuses to accept that what he does is wrong because he doesn't want to tarnish the perfect image that he presents to everyone else. As a result, he turns his child into a bully and gets himself killed.

False Assumptions

When Jane first arrives at the school, many of the parents mistake her for a nanny or some other caretaker because of her young age. This along with her outsider status leads to many of the parents judging her harshly when Ziggy is accused of bullying. In their eyes, she's just a young, irresponsible mother, and they naturally assume that Ziggy is a bully. These parents also make similar assumptions about Ziggy's teacher, Miss Barnes. Miss Barnes is the same age as Jane, so the parents like to argue she's too young and inexperienced to handle the class. She later reveals to Jane that the parents are constantly stopping by unexpectedly just to check on her behavior.

This theme is also clearly shown with the way that people treat Celeste. Whenever anyone sees Celeste they believe that she has a perfect life because she is beautiful and so wealthy. Nobody ever suspects that Celeste might be having her own problems. This even extends to Madeline, who is Celeste's best friend. By making this assumption about Celeste, they ignored all the signs that she was being abused at home by Perry.

Jane herself also shows this theme with the way that she treats Ziggy. While she's normally very supportive of Ziggy, she does occasionally have her doubts about whether or not he was actually the bully. This is because Jane assumes that he might have inherited some of the negative traits from his father, which is disproven by the end of the book.

Styles

Point of View

Big Little Lies is told from a third person omniscient point of view. Each chapter focuses on one of the three main characters, Madeline, Jane, or Celeste. For the most part, each chapter switches to the view of a different character. Sometimes it can be a direct continuation from where the last chapter left off, while other times it will be in a different point of time or a new location. Most of the chapters are told from the point of view of just one character. Sometimes certain sections will shift to the viewpoint of a different character. Many of the chapters end in the present with different parents and members of the school giving an interview based on different plots in the book.

Language and Meaning

Big Little Lies is set in the modern day. It makes references to television shows such as The Walking Dead and America's Next Top Model. The book is set in Australia, but this doesn't have any real impact on the story. Occasionally they will use different types of spelling, with the most frequent example being "Mum" instead of "Mom". The language used by each of the characters differs a little bit to reflect their different personalities. For example, Celeste's sections are structured in a more organized fashion compared to Madeline.

Structure

Chapter 1 ends with a police detective declaring that there was a murder. The book then switches over to six months before the trivia night. From there, time slowly progresses upwards until the events of the trivia night. At the end of the most of the chapters there are statements from the present which give clues to what happened at the trivia night, or just expand more on certain plot points. The final few chapters are set in the aftermath of the trivia night and deal with the fallout from the murder.



Quotes

Let me be clear: This is not a circus. This is a murder investigation.

-- Detective-Sergeant Adrian Quinlan (Chapter 1 paragraph 43)

Importance: The quote from the detective is the first sign to the readers that someone has been killed, and nearly the rest of the book is about discovering who was killed and why.

She didn't tell Madeline that she'd been taking six-month leases in different rental apartments across Sydney ever since Ziggy was a baby, trying to find a life that worked. She didn't tell her that, maybe the whole time, she'd been circling closer and closer to Pirriwee Beach.

-- Jane (Chapter 4 paragraph 31)

Importance: This is the first time that Jane hints there was something in her past that was causing her to constantly travel, each time pushing her closer to Pirriwee.

All around her was color: rich, vibrant color. She was the only colorless thing in this whole house

-- Jane (Chapter 15 paragraph 112)

Importance: This is one of the first signs that there is something wrong with Jane, as is later explained when she tells Madeline the details about her one night stand.

Harper: Look, nobody in that school knew Renata better than me. We were very close. I can tell you for a fact, she was not trying to make a point that day. Samantha: Oh my God, of course she was making a point.

-- Harper and Samantha (Chapter 17 paragraph 27)

Importance: This quote sets up the growing war between Renata and Jane, making it very clear that there was a feud brewing between them.

I'm so sorry, Maddie, but I'm just not cut out for this." That's what Nathan had said when Abigail was three weeks old, a fretful baby, who, since she'd been home from the hospital, had never slept longer than thirty-two minutes. Madeline had yawned, "Me either." She didn't think he meant it literally. An hour later, she'd watched in stunned amazement as he'd packed his clothes into his long red cricket bag and his eyes had rested briefly on the baby, as if she belonged to someone else, and he'd left. She would never ever forgive or forget that cursory glance he gave his beautiful baby daughter. And now that daughter was a teenager, who made her own lunch and caught the bus to high school all on her own and called out over her shoulder as she left, "Don't forget I'm staying at Dad's place tonight!

-- Madeline (Chapter 18 paragraph 34)

Importance: The reader finally discovers why Nathan left and why Madeline is so upset



with him. She's no longer just a vindictive ex, but someone who was put in a horrible situation. Her anguish over Abigail is made much clearer when readers understand why she feels Nathan has no right to be in her life, let alone be the favorite parent.

You beat me, Bonnie." She met Bonnie's pale blue eyes and saw understanding register. "You beat me fair and square."
-- Madeline (Chapter 26 paragraph 47)

Importance: Madeline isn't talking about the race, but the fact that Abigail wants to live with her and Nathan and have Bonnie as a mother.

So that's why, if you're in bed with a man, and you're naked and vulnerable, and you're assuming that he finds you at least mildly attractive, and then he says something like that, well it's . . ." She gave Madeline a wry look. "It's kind of devastating." She paused. "And, Madeline, it infuriates me that I found it so devastating. It infuriates me that he had that power over me. I look in the mirror each day, and I think, 'I'm not overweight anymore,' but he's right, I'm still ugly. Intellectually I know I'm not ugly, I'm perfectly acceptable. But I feel ugly, because one man said it was so, and that made it so. It's pathetic."
-- Jane (Chapter 32 paragraph 35)

Importance: Jane finally reveals the truth of what happened to her. Finding this out explains who Jane used to be and how she came to be the damaged person that she is today.

She thought of the photo Jane had showed her. The open, carefree expression on her face. The red dress. Jane once wore bright colors! Jane once had cleavage! Now Jane dressed her bony body apologetically, humbly, like she wanted to disappear, like she was trying to be invisible, to make herself nothing. That man had done that to her."
-- Madeline (Chapter 34 paragraph 35)

Importance: Madeline again emphasizes the ordeal that Jane went through and how much she changed from all the terrible things that Perry did to her.

Those beautiful rooms were just like Perry's constant Facebook posts: stylized representations of their life. Yes, they did sometimes sit on that gloriously comfortable-looking couch and put glasses of champagne on that coffee table and watch the sun set over the ocean. Yes, they did. And sometimes, often, it was glorious. But that was also the couch where Perry had once held her face squashed into the corner and she'd thought she might die. And that Facebook photo captioned Fun day out with the kids wasn't a lie because it was a fun day out with the kids, and anyway, they didn't have a photo of what happened after the kids were in bed that night. Celeste's nose bled too easily. It always had."
-- Celeste (Chapter 38 paragraph 23)

Importance: Perry's abuse towards Celeste is one of the main plots throughout the



book. This passage not only shows how bad he treats her, but also how much he cares about keeping up the perfect family appearance.

For the first time since before that night in the hotel, when those words had wormed their malevolent way into her head, she looked at herself in the mirror and felt uncomplicated pleasure. In fact she couldn't stop looking at herself, sheepishly grinning and turning her head from side to side.

-- Jane (Chapter 65 paragraph 23)

Importance: With the help of Madeline and all her other friends, Jane has finally started to recover. She's proud of her appearance and not afraid to show off anymore.

She watched his hands on the steering wheel. Capable hands. Tender hands. Vicious hands. He was just a man in an Elvis costume driving her to a school event. He was a man who had just discovered that his wife was planning to leave him. A hurt man. A betrayed man. An angry man. But just a man.

-- Celeste (Chapter 71 paragraph 4)

Importance: Celeste finally stands up to Perry and makes it clear that she wants to leave. It also sets up for the events at the trivia night where he finally snaps and hits her in public.

So when that child with the ridiculous name, that Ziggy, did what he did, and it was only the orientation morning! Well, she was understandably very distressed. That's what started it all.

-- Renata (Chapter 3 paragraph 37)

Importance: This quote sets up the bullying plot with Ziggy, which is one of the driving forces for the conflict with Renata.