

Charmed Thirds: A Novel Study Guide

Charmed Thirds: A Novel by Megan McCafferty

(c)2015 BookRags, Inc. All rights reserved.



Contents

Charmed Thirds: A Novel Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	3
June 1, 2003.....	4
June 30, 2003.....	7
July 31, 2003.....	9
December 15, 2003.....	11
June 1, 2004.....	13
July 4, 2004.....	14
July 31, 2004.....	16
December 15, 2004.....	18
December 31, 2004.....	19
June 1, 2005.....	21
June 30, 2005.....	23
July 31, 2005.....	25
December 15, 2005.....	27
Characters.....	29
Objects/Places.....	33
Themes.....	35
Style.....	37
Quotes.....	39
Topics for Discussion.....	41

Plot Summary

"Charmed Thirds" is the third series of novels by author Megan McCafferty. The story follows the main character, Jessica Darling, as a college student at Columbia University. Jessica is studying to be a psychologist, but she is also an avid writer. The book chronicles her three and half years attending Columbia through letters to her best friend, Hope, her off again-on again boyfriend, Marcus Flutie, and Jessica's journal entries.

When the novel first opens, Jessica is heading home to Pineville, New Jersey on a break from school. When she arrives in her hometown, it's just as she has left it. She finds it strange to back home without her boyfriend, Marcus Flutie there at the same time. Eventually, Marcus does arrive, and he and Jessica pick up right where they left off before she headed off to Columbia and he headed off to his Gakkai college program in California. During the novel, Marcus and Jessica have their ups and down, including Jessica cheating on Marcus with a guy that lives in her dorm at Columbia.

This coming of age novel shows that even when acquiring higher education, life stills throw curve balls. Jessica deals with her breakup with Marcus, the death of the guy she cheated on Marcus with and three and half years of studying at an ivy league university, to wind up unsure of exactly what it is she wants to do with her life.



June 1, 2003

June 1, 2003 Summary

The narrator is writing a letter to someone, but the recipient is unknown. The writer is Jessica Darling and she is a student at Columbia University. She is writing the letter to a friend of hers that she hasn't been in touch with for a while. She's describing her trip home to NJ as she sits in the NYC Port Authority waiting to catch her bus.

In the letter, she also reveals that she is taking the drug Accutane. She also reveals that her boyfriend's name is Marcus. One of Marcus's talents is to turn his spam email into haikus that he emails to her at her school email address. Jessica's parents do not help her out financially because she chose to go to Columbia instead of using her full scholarship to Piedmont. She is living on her grandmother's inheritance, but is about to run out. For one month, she'll be spending July with her sister, brother-in-law and niece, while she interns at a magazine—unpaid.

She says she left some things behind when she packed up for college. She wanted her room at home to still feel like her room. When she visits home in Pineville, NJ, however, she feels as if she is looking at artifacts that belong to Jessica Darling.

Jessica also writes about her sister, who is married to "G-Money," a nickname for his work on Wall Street and investments in a doughnut and ice cream shop. Their daughter, Marin, has two birthday parties when she turns one. The first is in the city, where they live. The second is at Jessica's parents' house, where Jessica is forced to dress up as Pinky, a giant pink poodle that is a cartoon character and the theme for the party.

Jessica's sister, Bethany, asks her if she won the pool. The pool is a bet of the freshman in Jessica's dorm about which high school relationships will last the longest while they are away at college. Jessica tells Marin that she and Marcus were one of the two couples that lasted the longest, which won them \$375, with the other \$375 going to an Indian couple that are in an arranged marriage.

Jessica's mom comes into the kitchen. When she finds out Jessica and Marcus won the pool, her mom changes the subject. She updates Jessica on all of her classmates that are home or coming home for summer break. After their mom leaves, Bethany asks why Marcus isn't home from his college in California. Marcus is attending a seminar instead.

Marcus shows up surprising Jessie for the one-year anniversary of their first time having sex together, which was Jessie's first time ever, but not Marcus's first time ever. Jessie acts as if a dog would act when happy from seeing someone since she still has on the bottom half of the Pinky the Poodle costume when Marcus arrives. Jessie's mom summons her to return as Pinky to carry out Marin's birthday cake. Jessie's mom dislikes Marcus and her father just tolerates him.



Marcus is home a week, and he and Jessie still haven't had sex. Jessie thinks it's because he doesn't like her hair. With Marcus's dad laid up on the couch with a broken leg, and the fact that Jessie won't have sex in his Cadillac or a hotel room, it's more likely that it's having a location to do it than the hair that is prohibiting the act. Jessie and Marcus do partake in a lot of other activities. One day while at an event, they run into one of the girls that Marcus previously had sex. This is when Jessie realizes the numerous girls that Marcus had sex with before her, even though she's known all along how many sexual partners he's had.

A few days later, Marcus's father gets off the couch to leave the house, so Jessie and Marcus can have sex for the first time since they came home for the summer. When Jessie talks about the cyst she has on the tip of her nose, and how during the black plague, when the cysts turned black, people wouldn't go near the person even to bury them, Marcus kisses her cyst post-coital and says he'd bury her.

A few days later, Jessie's friend, Bridget, comes home from California. Bridget is there to pick Jessie up to go to high school graduation. As soon as they arrive on campus, they run into Jessie's brother-in-law's business partner's daughter, Sara D'Abruzzi. Sara is Manda's best friend, which is Jessie's ex-boyfriend, Len's, new girlfriend. Sara asks if they are both with their respective boyfriends. Then, she catches them up on the gossip she knows about everyone else.

It's the last night Jessie and Marcus have together before she takes the train to New York. They spend it having sex rather than going out and doing something. When Jessie says maybe she shouldn't go, Marcus accuses her of being one of those girls that doesn't do things because of her boyfriend. Jessie admits that she doesn't want to be that girl. When Marcus asks why she wants to do the internship, she says it's because True magazine covers topics and angles that are similar to the letters she writes to Hope and Marcus. Marcus insists she should go and Jessie decides she will.

June 1, 2003 Analysis

Jessie is a very accomplished freshman attending Columbia. She feels self-conscious and as if her life is sub-par to those of her classmates. This isn't exactly true because when she compares her high school experience with the other kids from college, they seem to have far bigger problems than Jessie has ever had.

Ironically, Jessie says she is very in love with Marcus, but they are hardly ever in the same place. They were only together two weeks before he left to attend college in California and Jessie went to Columbia. They are only together for a few more weeks before Jessie gets ready to leave for New York City again for her internship at True magazine.

Jessie seems most affected by her best friend, Hope, moving to Tennessee with her parents after her brother died from a heroin overdose. The information Jessie is sharing



in each chapter of the book is her actual letters to Hope to keep in her the loop on everything that is going on in her life.



June 30, 2003

June 30, 2003 Summary

Jessie starts another letter to Hope. Jessie is waiting on Marcus to pick her so he can drive her to her sister's house and spend one more night with her before they are separated again. Jessie tells Hope it doesn't compare to the four months since Jessie and Hope last saw each other. She advises Hope to pick someone to lose her virginity with that she doesn't have to say goodbye to with her body and her soul. Marcus arrives, so Jessie ends the letter.

Jessie picks up the letter again the next day. In her sisters mansion, Bethany escorts Jessie and Marcus to the guest room and warns them not to get pregnant. Jessie thinks she's on her period, so there won't be any impregnating going on. Jessie finally falls asleep and is awoken by the alarm clock at 8 am, but Marcus sleeps through it. She gets ready for her first day at True and kisses Marcus goodbye while he's still sleeping.

Jessie arrives at the True office at 10:02 am, but nobody else on staff arrives until almost 11:30 am. This is when Tyra Braun, the editor, and a group of twenty-somethings walk into the office.

Tyra apologizes for being late. She explains they were all out late last night celebrating her 30th birthday. Jessie says Tyra introduces her to all the other staff, but she can't remember anyone except for Hannah who interviewed Jesse over the phone. They all seem excited about Jessie's experience working at her brothers sweet shop on the Boardwalk the summer before her junior year.

Tyra explains that it's because the topic of the issue they'll be working on during her internship is about New Jersey. They think Jessie will be able to help them put a true spin on the issue because of her experience with New Jersey. Tyra tells Jessie to go to her cube and brainstorm ideas. A few hours later, Tyra yells through a bullhorn that they should all go home. she tells Jessie they'll talk about her ideas tomorrow.

Jessie gets home to find Marcus playing in the living room with Marin. Bethany says he's great with kids and can stay as long as he wants. When Jessie presents her ideas to Tyra, Tyra thanks her but doesn't seem as blown away as Jessie would have liked. The night of the fourth of July, Jessie expects to have a night and weekend alone with Marcus, because her sister, brother-in-law and niece are heading to the Hamptons. Instead, she spends it with her sister, niece and Marcus because Grant, G-Money, has to open a new store over the weekend.

On the sixth, Marcus goes home to help his father. At the office, Tyra implements an Educational Salon. They have a semi-celebrity come on who gives them a talk on how important what women wear under their clothes is. Someone shoots a picture of the quasi celebrity bending over with a huge wedgie. Tyra asks Jessie to write on it for their



Hit or Miss column. She also has the only male staff member make Jessie a fake ID. Jessie uses the fake ID to get into a NJ-themed club in Manhattan to do a story on it.

Bethany goes with Jessie and they witness a handmade bikini contest, where the materials range from whipped cream to safety pin curtain tops. When Jessie goes into the office, Tyra is raving about a book written by a NJ native about a NJ high school. Jessie doesn't want to admit that she knows and went to high school with the author. She also doesn't want to admit that she is the basis for one of the "fictional" characters in the book. Then, Tyra announces that Hy, the author of the book is going to be writing a piece on the topic that Jessie had pitched and Tyra turned down. Tyra, however, is acting as if it is her own idea instead one that was pitched to her by Jessie.

Marcus is supposed to come to the city for his birthday, but calls Jessie on his birthday and tells her to come to him instead. Jessie starts to act a little hysterical, but realizes that she doesn't want to be that kind of girlfriend. Marcus tells her he loves her and that they will celebrate his birthday when they see each other again. A half an hour later, Marcus sends Jessica one of his haiku spam emails.

At the next Educational Salon is a sexpert that has all of the staff members pick out a dildo. They suction cup it to a dinner plate and the sexpert walks them through the process of yanking and pulling on the dildo. Jessie thinks that it is degrading to give her dildo a handjob in front of her boss and fellow staffers. Then, she starts to worry if they think the way she is half-heartedly doing in public is how she does it behind closed doors. As the sexpert tells them it is time to practice their oral skills on the dildo, Jessie gets up, grabs her things and leaves. She intends to get on the bus home.

June 30, 2003 Analysis

Jessie feels very insecure about her relationship with Marcus. She is always thinking about the forty-something girls he slept with before her. She's always worrying about the future instead of living for today and enjoying what she has now. Jessie always thinks that everyone else's life sounds more interesting than her own. She doesn't see her own comings, goings and experiences as adventures or interesting.

Ironically, Marcus and Jessie's relationship is similar to that of Bethany and G-Money's relationship. Even though Jessie and her sister are 11 years apart and lead very different lives, neither of them spend a lot of time with their significant others. Jessie has seen G-Money three times in the almost month she's been living with them. Jessie and Marcus barely see each other either.

One of Jessie's problems is that she worries too much about what other people think of her. She gets so preoccupied with what other people might think that she forgets sometimes to just be herself and do what she wants rather than worry about what everyone else thinks. Finally, Jessie realizes that she doesn't have it in her to do the things the True staffers are doing. She starts to question why she is working at True in the first place. When she realizes her intentions aren't there, she leaves.



July 31, 2003

July 31, 2003 Summary

Jessie is writing back to Hope. She thanks her for saying that her journalism experience and every experience is a learning one. Jessie says that she was too poor to experience anything interesting during her visit. She also says that she didn't even get to bond with her sister and niece because their family dynamic was so messed up.

When Jessie picks up her letter writing again, she apologizes for the delay but says that she and Marcus have been having a lot of sex since she got back to New Jersey. Today is the first day that has been sunny, so they venture out of the house to the beach. While sitting on the beach, Marcus talks about a seminar he attended. It talked about how we chase things that we think will make us happy. While achieving them do make us happy for a while, it usually isn't as euphoric as we think, so we move on to the next thing, and then it becomes a cycle. The opposite holds true for negative event, so while we think things might kill us, we usually learn to cope and go on.

Jessie writes to let Hope know that her friend Jane from Columbia is visiting. Jane and Jessie look a lot alike and share a lot of things in common. This has earned them the nickname by some of their dorm mates, the 2 Skinny J's. Jane is shocked to find out that Jessie walked out on the job with the magazine she loves. Tonight, Jane and Jessie are having girl night, but tomorrow Jessie introduces Jane to Marcus.

Jessie is excited to introduce Jane to Marcus because she thinks Jane's boyfriend is so wrong for Jane. The next morning, Jane find a rock metal band glam slam from the 80s that she wants to attend. The girls consult Bethany's yearbook on putting together outfits for the event, and Jessie's mother pulls out a white leather fringe jacket that Bethany "just had to have." Marcus comes in and they tell him where they're going tonight with him. Bridget calls, so Jane tells Jessie to tell Bridget she has to go too.

Jane makes a statement about how interesting it is that Percy, Bridget's boyfriend goes to school in New York like Jessie, and that Bridget goes to college in California, like Marcus. Marcus backs out of going to the hairbandapalooza because he says it is similar to what Jessie did at true. He says Jessie hates hair bands, yet she is going because she wants to show Jane that she is "game."

Jane and Jessie head to the consignment shop to get outfits. They rush home to tease their hair and do their makeup. Bridget and Percy show up dressed the parts as well. When they get to the concert, they are the only ones in costume. They drink some beers from the cooler they packed and end up having a great time. on the way home, Bridget asks why Marcus didn't come. Jessie says it's because he didn't want to dress up. Bridget launches into a description of Marcus's outfits over the years and Jane says it's his shtick for getting attention. Jessie gets mad at Jane for judging her boyfriend



when Jane's boyfriend has his own set of issues. While Jane is helping Jessie get off their '80s makeup, Jessie decides to forgive Jane.

When Jane is leaving, she declares that Jessie is her best friend in the world. Jessie feels conflicted by this because she and Hope have always been best friends and declared so. After Jane leaves, Marcus comes over and Jessie tells him about the fight she had with Jane. When Jessie asks Marcus why he always wears white t-shirts now, Marcus says sometimes a t-shirt is just a t-shirt.

Jessie comes down to the kitchen to find her mother disheveled, which she never is. Jessie realizes it is the anniversary of her mother that died of SIDS before Jessie was born. When Marcus picks Jessie up later, he says she needs a road trip. He suggests they drive cross country with Percy and Bridget to California and that Percy and Jessica fly back. Jessie says she can't because she doesn't have the money.

Instead, Marcus and Bridget decide to drive back to California together. While Bridget is packing, Jessica interrogates Bridget about her and Marcus's sleeping arrangements in the hotel. Bridget tells Jessie not to worry and that they are always going to be friends.

A few days later, Jessie and Percy see Marcus and Bridget off on their road trip. Percy suggests he and Jessie cheer themselves up over coffee and carbs at the diner. As soon as they walk in, they run into Manda, Len and Scotty with some unknown girl. When they find out that Bridget and Marcus are driving to California together, Manda comments on how much Jessie must trust him and how hot Bridget is. Percy even comments on how they might be in the wrong relationships after everyone else leaves.

July 31, 2003 Analysis

Marcus's recount of his seminar on happiness and negative events in our lives foreshadows the demise of his relationship with Jessie. Jessie asks an underlying question, asking Marcus if the concept applies to them. Marcus answers with a resounding yes. Events also foreshadow Jane and Marcus falling in love with each other, which will crush Jessie's relationship with both of them.

Jane is inferring that something is going on between Bridget and Marcus in California. This might explain why he doesn't want to go to the hair band jam with Percy and Bridget being there. To make it seem like that isn't the reason he's not going, though, he puts the blame on Jessie doing something that she doesn't like to do just because Jane wants to do it.

Because everything that Marcus says and does has a meaning, Jessie finds it ironic that Marcus says he's only wearing white t-shirts now because he mother bought him a package. Jessica starts to question whether she desires to spend so much time with Marcus but then when she has a chance to do so she doesn't because she's afraid that he will change his mind about her or vice versa.



December 15, 2003

December 15, 2003 Summary

Jess is writing a letter to Hope while she is on the bus heading home for Christmas break. Jess reminds Hope of her first big pimple, which is also when she had her first clarinet solo for the local cable channel show. Jess points out the zits she had for all of her other famous and important times in her life. She mentions a time, three months earlier, when she's standing in the bathroom waiting for the results of a pregnancy test. Jess says she knows whether she is on Accutane or not that she would have to get rid of the baby either way. Jess says she got her period 27 days late and was ignoring messages from Marcus because she was tired of telling him everything in absentia. Jess tells Hope she's tired of telling her everything in absentia too, but that she's very sorry for not writing sooner.

When Jess arrives home, her mother drags her to show Jess her present. It's that she gave Jess's room a makeover. Jess immediately wants to know where all of her stuff is. Her mother explains that she redid Bethany's room too as practice for her future career as a real estate stager. She reveals Bethany's room as a baby blue nursery for a boy. This leads Jess to wonder if this is representative of her mother dealing with her dead brother.

Jess finds out her stuff is in a container in the basement. She goes down there and rummages through the collage of pictures of her, Hope and Marcus. Marcus's latest email says he knows her lack of communication with him over the last semester isn't because she's too busy.

On the 24th, Jessie is waiting with her sister and Marin for Marcus to arrive. G-Money is working at the donut/ice cream shop. Jessie has just completed her third semester at Columbia and is almost out of the inheritance her grandmother left to her. When Marcus arrives, he kisses Jessie and she forgets everything else.

On Christmas day, Jessie thinks about how Christmas traditions are different now that Marin is there. It's better because it gives Christmas more of a reason and makes it more fun. While singing to entertain Marin, Marcus mentions the title of a paper Jessie wrote in high school. This makes her realize how much of a history they have together and she thinks he deserves to know the truth. She decides to wait until tomorrow to tell him. Marcus gives Jessie a ring he made out of a quarter and she gives him a scarf she knitted last semester. Marin makes them both laugh when she shows how she gave the Virgin Mary from the nativity scene a makeover.

Bridget and Jessie have been hanging out while Marcus is out of town visiting his brother and Percy is away visiting family. Marcus will be back on the 31st to spend New Year's Eve with Jessie. Bridget mentions that the movie based on Hy's book is about to come out. Bridget auditioned for a part in the movie but didn't get it. Bridget talks about



how it's tough for her and Percy to be in a relationship because of the interracial factor and being apart, but that they love each other. She reminds Jessie that all Marcus did was talk about Jessie the whole 3,000 miles to California.

When Marcus gets back from visiting his brother, he tells Jessie about everything they did. When she asks why he didn't invite her, he says he didn't think about it and that he isn't well versed in boyfriend-girlfriend protocol. They are walking to the park and realize that it has been totally redone. Jessie admits that she cheated on him. Marcus stops her from telling him everything. He says he doesn't hate her, but she wonders why he isn't mad. He says she's not listening—that he is mad but the reason he's not saying anything is that he has too much to say. He gets in his car and drives away.

December 15, 2003 Analysis

There is an inference that Jess had an abortion and didn't want to tell Marcus until they are face-to-face. If it's not an abortion, then it's that she cheated on him but wants to wait to tell him the truth until they are in the same room with each other. Jessie questioning her actions further drives home the point that she did something that is going to upset Marcus when she tells him.



June 1, 2004

June 1, 2004 Summary

Jessica tells Hope about her summer psychology internship in a letter. Jessica also talks about Google-stalking Marcus. When she Googles his name, five listings appear. The one that most interests her is the last one. It is a picture of Marcus sleeping on a couch with a caption calling him the "infamous Marcus Flutie" by Butterfly.

Marcus has been writing one-word postcards to Jessie. So far she has received two. The first one says "I." The second one says, "wish." Jessie stops hanging out with Jane because of the things Jane says about Marcus. Jessica's new best friend is Dexy. Dexy loves to sing, even though she can't carry a tune, and dresses almost like she is in costume.

William, the guy Jessie cheated on Marcus with, turns out to be the RA for their dorm for the summer. Jessica and William talk about what happened between them. He assures her that it will not cause him to treat her any differently. Jessie is also having guilt-free sexual fantasies because she feels as if she is single and can do so. She is even having them about her Spanish grad student, Bastian, that she gets paired up with for the Storytelling Project.

One day, William walks up to where Jessica and Bastian, the grad student, are set up for the Storytelling Project. He tells the story of the bet that led to him and Jessica hooking up. As the project goes on, Jessica categorizes the top nine types of stories people tell. She's also bored out of her mind. Bastian spends his time evaluating the expressions of the people as they tell their stories, which is for his dissertation.

While eating at a Mexican restaurant, Jessica asks Dexy if she would sleep with a married man. Since Dexy is promiscuous, she admits that she already has. Dexy also questions whether this has anything to do with Bastian, since he is a married man. When they return from the restaurant, there is another one-word postcard from Marcus that says, "our." So far, the message reads "I wish our..."

June 1, 2004 Analysis

At this point in Jessica's mind, she and Marcus are unofficially broken up. She is overanalyzing every situation she finds herself in. She is especially obsessed with overanalyzing things about Marcus, even though their only contact is the two postcards he has sent her thus far.



July 4, 2004

July 4, 2004 Summary

Jessie writes Hope a letter wishing her a Happy Bastille Day, because she is responding to Hope's letter when Hope was in France. Jessie is back in Pineville. Jessie also writes Marcus a letter wishing him a Happy Independence Day. It's the first letter Jessica has written Jessica since they returned to their separate schools. She admits that she misses him and that his postcards will present his message to when he's ready. She also says Marin misses him, which Jessica can tell from her disappointed expression when Jessica shows up without Marcus.

When Jessica steps off the bus from New York City in Pineville, the town is invaded with cicadas. On the ride home from the station with her parents, Jessie finds out that they sold the house and are moving into one of the new townhouses recently built in town. When Jessie arrives home, she writes Marcus and Hope letters.

Even though Jessie is only supposed to be in Pineville for the fourth of July holiday, she ends up calling in sick to her internship and staying. When Jessie is still home on the 10th of July, she sees her writing instructor from a summer program she attended, interviewing on Oprah for his new novel. When Bridget finds Jessie on the front lawn of her parents' home instead of in New York, she asks Jessie what's wrong because Jessie always fakes an illness when she can't deal with a situation. Bridget tells Jessie that she got accepted into NYU. This starts to make Jessie wonder if things might work out with her and Marcus if she transferred to Berkeley.

Bridget convinces Jessie to go out with her and Percy to celebrate. They wind up at a bar in Seaside Heights, where they run into Scotty and Sara. Sara asks Jessie how she's holding up since Marcus ran off to the desert and joined a cult. Jessie explains that it's not a cult, that it's a program. Scotty hits on Jess, but she turns him down.

At the end of July, Jessie is still in Pineville, yet she is asking herself why. Her mom and dad sit her down at the kitchen table and talk to her about her work ethic—her not working the last two summers to help pay for her tuition at Columbia. They also tell her that once they buy the new house that they won't be able to give her anymore money. When Jessie goes into the living room, she sees a letter she wrote to Marcus in the pile of mail, stamped "Addressee Unknown."

The next day, Jessie goes to talk to Marcus's parents. They tell her that Marcus is not at the Gakkai program anymore, but has transferred to Pure Springs, which is a college in the desert run by the student body. A few days later, Jessie calls Bastian and arranges for him to pick her up from the bus station in New York City. On the train ride together, Bastian tells Jessie to tell him her story and she does.



Jessica tells how she met Marcus. He is a year older than she and Hope, but was in their grade because he was held back a year for mysterious reasons. He was one of Hope's brother's druggie friends before Hope's brother overdosed. Marcus was always stoned and was a ladies' man. When Jessica and Marcus started to talk, they would talk deeply about some issues but never talk about others. Marcus didn't really step into Jessie's life until Hope's brother died and Hope moved to Tennessee.

By the time Hope decided to give her virginity to Marcus, Marcus confessed that he was doing and saying things to get into her "goody-goody" pants.

July 4, 2004 Analysis

The invasion of cicadas in Pineville is a biblical symbol. It's as if the bugs are part of the apocalypse as it is told in the bible. Jessie's writing instructor was instrumental in her decision to turn down her scholarship to Piedmont and attend Columbia instead. Jessie sees herself as the polar opposite of her mom. While Jessie believes that her mother chooses to be ignorant, Jessie thinks that her going away for college is what is saving her from turning into her mother.

Ironically, Jessie ends up drinking and having a good time with Sara and Scotty, even though she hates them. It seems as if Marcus left his Gakkai program in the desert because the letter Jessie mailed to him was returned to her. His parents tell Jessie that one of the rules of the college is total isolation, which means Marcus can't talk to anyone and nobody can talk to Marcus that is outside of the program. Jessica realizes that Marcus transferring to the new college is the true demise of their relationship. It's a finality for her now, even though she suspected the relationship had unofficially come to an end.

It seems as if Jessica and Marcus getting together was based on grief. Jessica was grieving the loss of Hope for moving away, and Marcus was grieving the death of his friend from a heroin overdose.



July 31, 2004

July 31, 2004 Summary

Jessie writes a letter to Hope in France, saying that nothing is going on in her life is half as interesting as everything Hope is experiencing in France. Jessie also writes a letter to Marcus, telling him that the previous letter she wrote and sent to him at Gakkai was returned to her. She says it's probably for the better because there were a lot of things in the letter that are better left unsaid.

On the sixth of August, Jessie finds herself on the doorstep of her sister's house. G-Money answers the door, and Jessica is surprised to see that in the six months since she last saw him, he has gained about 30 pounds. G-Money says that Bethany and Marin are at the park.

Marin is very excited to see Jessie. Bethany and Jessica talk about their parents selling the house. Jessie is mad because her parents paid for her sister's college education but they refuse to pay for her ivy league one. Jessie tells Bethany she hasn't talked to their parents in awhile. Bethany says that they love their new house and that their mom's business is really taking off.

Bethany chastises Jessica for being selfish. Bethany says Jessica is mad because their parents are finally doing for themselves instead of their selfish daughter that never appreciates it. Bethany also says Jessica is made because Marcus is off at "gay cowboy camp." Jessica knows that her sister is right.

Jessie goes to a party bashing Republicans with Dexy. They run into Jessie's high school crush, Paul Parlipiano, who is also gay, but has broken up with his boyfriend. Cinthia "Hy" Wallace, the author of the novel about Jessie's high school and NJ sub-culture. Hy turns out to be someone J actually likes. Hy even condemns her own novel, saying that nobody should allow 17 years old to write.

When Dexy and Jessie return to the dorm, they find police cars, ambulances and fire trucks surrounding the building. They find out William is dead. He died from natural causes.

Dexy mourns William's death with full regalia—black clothes, hat with veil and Jackie O sunglasses. Everyone is concerned about Jessie but she's handling it well. On the 16th, Jessie realizes her parents are at home mourning her brother's death because it is the day that Matthew would have celebrated his 24th birthday.

Jessie arrives to a one-word message from Dexy. She goes to Dexy's room to find Dexy on her bed and all her things in garbage bags. Dexy says she has to leave school. Jessie realizes Dexy is manic depressive. Her behavior includes taking a bottle of pills when her boyfriend dumps her when she's 16.



It's the last day of the storytelling project. Henry tells them about being in love with a movie star that he fell in love with as a boy. They meet as senior citizens when she's dying and they fall in love.

Jessica cries, but for her and Marcus, not Henry and his love. Jessica tells Bastian she wants to go to his apartment. She realizes in the bathroom when she sees his child's rubber duck that she can't sleep with him. After leaving Bastian's apartment and returning to her dorm, Jessie receives a two-word postcard from Marcus so she now has the message, "I wish our love..."

July 31, 2004 Analysis

Jessie lives in her own world and thoughts. Until her sister points out to Jessica how selfish Jessie is being, she doesn't realize it. Jessie simply thinks that the entire world is against her, but she's not thinking about how everyone else feels. Bethany pointing this out to Jessie forces Jessie to see life from her parents' point of view.

It seems as if Jessie is drawn to Dexy for the similarities she has with Marcus. Dexy is innovative and unique. Marcus is the same. Dexy doesn't care what anyone thinks about her and Marcus is the same. Marcus is mailing Jessie one-word cryptic messages on postcards. Dexy often leaves one-word cryptic notes of Jessie's dorm room door. It's also ironic that Dexy is suffering a major breakdown from William's death, but that Jessie seems almost unaffected by his death.



December 15, 2004

December 15, 2004 Summary

Jessie walks in on her parents having sex in the living room of their new home. Christmas sucks for Jessie. One present is a gift certificate for a mother-daughter spa day when she asked for books.

On New Year's Eve, Jess runs into Sara at the mall. Sara goes on and on about how she heard that William killed himself because he loved Jessie and Jessie didn't return his affections. Jessie denies this. She tells Sara that he died of an undetected heart defect, which is true. What she doesn't admit is that they did find unsent love letters to Jessie. When Jessie gets home, the final postcard from Marcus awaits her. It completes the statement, "I wish our love was right."

December 15, 2004 Analysis

It is ironic that William dies of a whole in his heart because he felt unbroken that Jessie didn't feel about him the way he felt about her. Marcus's message to Jessie is complete. The message Marcus states is something that Jessie has known all along but has also been denying. Seeing the truth in black and white, however, forces Jessie to realize that she and Marcus are not meant to be together.



December 31, 2004

December 31, 2004 Summary

Jess writes a letter to Marcus regarding the final message that he wishes their love was right. Jessica returns to her dorm on campus. She runs into a couple of other people that live in her dorm that have returned to school early—before winter break ends. One of the girls is Kazuko, who is the girl that told Jess and Dexy that William was dead while they were waiting on the sidewalk outside of the dorm. Another guy is Kieran, who says he was supposed to go skiing with his girlfriend, but that they broke up and he's still heartbroken over it. A third person is a guy named Josh, who they call ALF because they swear he landed from another planet. Tanu is another girl that is staying at the dorm. She and Jessie were friends before, but Jessie found Tanu so boring that their friendship kind of fell off. They call their hodgepodge group, The Winter of Our Discontents. They hang around with each other and keep each other company while the rest of the campus is deserted.

Nine days into the group forming, Bridget calls Jessie. Bridget says she and Percy just returned from visiting his family in Chicago. Bridget and Percy too join the group. One night when they're hanging out, Bridget and Jessie are alone in one area of the room and Bridget guesses that Jessie is going to sleep with Kieran. Bridget says that Kieran is exactly like Marcus and Jessie says that he's not exactly like Marcus. When Kieran joins Bridget and Jessie, Bridget starts questioning him about his relationship with his ex-girlfriend. Bridget says that he and Jessie are alike. The three launch into an in-depth discussion on monogamy. When the rest of the group joins them, they decide to play spin the bottle. Kieran picks up a bottle, points it at Jessie and then kisses her. She whispers something suggestive in his ear and they had out to have sex. When he takes his clothes off, Jessie confesses to never seeing an uncircumcised penis, which Kieran has. The sexual encounter is awkward for Jessica.

On the 10th, Kieran knocks on Jessie's door to try the sex again. They have sex three more times and it is better. They conclude that the relationship is just to get them over their previous relationships. By the 14th, Jessie is falling for Kieran.

December 31, 2004 Analysis

Jessie is attracted to Kieran. Since Kieran is somewhat of a vulnerable state, it seems as if they might hook up. Jessie and the other "refugees" on campus are bonding because each of them is in a situation that has them staying on campus during winter break instead of being home with their families and loved one. Odds are that when the normal semester starts again that the group will disband and not have the same connection they have now.

Jessie is going against her instincts. She is allowing herself to get involved with someone that she initially thought was an idiot. She is crossing the line of friendship she has with Kieran into a sexual realm that will most likely to a disaster.



June 1, 2005

June 1, 2005 Summary

Jessie writes Kieran a letter about all the things that annoy her about him. Kieran cheated on Jessie and she'll be homeless because they were going to be sharing an apartment. He's back with his ex that will now be attending Barnard, and living in the apartment with him.

Kieran blames it on Jessie working all the time. With no place to stay for the summer, Jessie goes back to Pineville. She's working for a college admission company that helps kids get into college. On June 6th, Jessie teaches her first college prep course. The kids start challenging Jessie right away. On the 11th, Jessie's mother wakes her up for an urgent phone call. It's Sara to tell Jessie that Len and Manda broke up because Manda cheated on him with a girl. Manda had oral sex with another girl. On the 16th, Jessie shares an excerpt from her class lecture. It urges the kids to find a college that is best for them rather than look at ivy league colleges only.

On the 19th, Jessie's mom asks her when they are going to get to meet her boyfriend. Jessie hasn't told them they broke up yet. Jessie confesses to her mother that Kieran cheated on her. After her mom comforts her, she gets on the phone to redeem the mother/daughter spa day for the certificate she bought Jessie for Christmas.

Jessie, Bethany and their mom head off to the spa for the day. Her mom and Bethany strip down naked and then have an animated conversation with each other. Jessie changes into her robe to try to be an example so that her mom and Bethany cover their bodies too. The spa employee enters the locker room to take Jessica to her appointment. Kayan, Jessica's massage therapist, is a gorgeous man.

Jessie thinks about how a massage is a very intimate experience. While she tries to relax, she can't because it's been so long since anyone touched her in certain areas of her body. It makes Jessica's mind drift back to the porn she watched with Kieran with her namesake, Jessica Darling, that's a porn star. Suddenly, Jessica gets a Charlie horse that Kayan spends the rest of her massage working it out.

Jessie and Bethany discuss where Jessie is going to live next semester. Jessie says some of her friends will let her stay with them. Bethany says Jessie should stay with them, but Jessie tries to change the subject and then says the commute will kill her. Bethany offers Jessie some money. Jessie ends the day of pampering more stressed than when she arrived.

Jessie calls the housing office and the woman tells her they might be able to offer her room in what is the crappiest dorm on campus with a freshman. This sends Jessie to work in a less than stellar mood. When the kids start pressuring her, Jessie tells them that none of this matters. She launches into a tirade. Jessie gets fired.



June 1, 2005 Analysis

Ironically, the students in Jessie's class are the students who don't need the class. Jessie has reverse roles with her students. They are teaching her about the realm of getting into college today. These kids already know what they want, while Jessie is not quite sure where her life is heading.

In another twist of irony, Jessie is a psychology major that has no interest in working with people. When Bethany offers Jessie some money, it reminds her of a time when Kieran offered her money.



June 30, 2005

June 30, 2005 Summary

Jessica writes a letter to her parents. She thanks them for waving rent for the summer and requests that they not to nag her for losing her job and having to work at Wally D's.

Jessie is working at Wally D's on the boardwalk on the fourth of July. The place is packed and everyone is demanding their cone of ice cream. She works the 6 pm to 3 am shift for \$6.15 per hour plus tips. On the 11th, Jessie is reading People magazine on the day shift, something she obtained for being so good with the customers, when Len walks up to her. He says he knows she knows about Manda and they talk for a little while. One of Jessie's co-workers tells her that a guy keeps coming in looking for after this. It turns out to be Len, who finally figures out Jessie's schedule and stops by the shop again. She ends up going out with him one night.

When Jessie's mom sees she's getting ready and finds out she's going out with Len, she asks if he's still studying medicine at Cornell. Len picks her up in the same car he's been driving since high school. They head to the diner, which she hasn't been to since she ran into Len and Manda there two summers ago. Len asks Jessie if she still thinks about Marcus. She says she doesn't. He seems to find solace in this because it means that one day he won't think about Manda either.

Jessie asks Len why she is so dumpable. Len says that he can only speak for himself, but it's because he knew Jessie would never change for him.

Jessie and Len have a routine of hanging out together on their nights off from work. On one Sunday night, he says they should meet at a bar, AJ's, instead of the diner where they usually meet. When Jessie arrives, Len admits that he doesn't want to be a doctor. Jessie admits that she doesn't want to be shrink. Len also admits to Jessie that he's still a virgin. To make Len feel better about walking in on Manda having sex with another woman, Jessie tells him about walking in on her parents having sex.

After this, AJ's becomes their routine. On the 31st, Len suggests that he and Jessie should have sex. He says his life needs a fling. Jessie tells him about Bastion to convince him that he's better off not doing with her even though Len thinks he wants to do with her. Later, Jessie devirginizes Len on the couch at Wally D's.

June 30, 2005 Analysis

Jessie feels like she has not progressed at all because she was working at Wally D's five summers ago and she's working at Wally D's again. While Jessie seems to be scattered in her thoughts and goals, Len is very focused and unchanging. It is somewhat ironic that they were ever a couple to start because they are so different from each other. While Len is so reliable, Jessica isn't.

It turns out that Len and Jessie have more in common than she ever know. It comforts Jessie to know that she isn't the only one who doesn't know what they want to do with their future.



July 31, 2005

July 31, 2005 Summary

Jessica writes Len a quick note saying she's sorry, and that he should have lost his virginity to someone else.

Bridget finds out that Jessie devirginized Len. Jessie thinks it's so sad that Len waited so long and then finally has sex that is so meaningless. Bridget questions Jessica's choices in men—saying she chooses relationships that are doomed from the beginning. Jessica admits that she was trying to recreate the love/hate relationship she had with Marcus. Jessica concludes that she is just as sexually and emotionally frustrated as ever.

On August 7th, Jessica meets Len for coffee. Jessica says she feels awkward, but Len says he doesn't feel awkward at all. Len convinces Jessica that he doesn't regret what happened and that Jessica shouldn't either. Jessica mentions time travel in passing and Len launches into a big spiel on the topic. Ultimately, he concludes there is a place in space for each outcome of each decision that people make.

On the 16th, Jessica is on the boardwalk working at Wally D's when she realizes that nothing at Seaside Heights ever changes. She also notes that today is the anniversary of Matthew's death. Jessica thinks that her parents are not reacting to it like they usually do. She thinks it might be because they are living in their new house now.

On the 27th, Jessica goes to Bethany and G-Money's anniversary party in the Brooklyn Botanic Garden. When Sara shows up at the party, she is with Scotty. Sara says they are hanging out now. As Sara brings up Jessie and Len's encounter, Marin screams no and stomps on Sara's foot. The, it's time to play the Not-So-Newlywed Game, of which Jessica is the host.

Jessica has an epiphany that each relationship is unique. This causes Jessica to conclude that she shouldn't wish to have a relationship like someone else because no two relationships are alike. While she's thinking this, a guy that recognizes her but that she doesn't recognize says her name and approaches Jessica. He turns out to be the little brother of the best man at Bethany's wedding, Cal. Cal says Jessica denying him sex on the golf course the night of the wedding affected the way he treats women. Jessica realizes that she has an effect on people just like people have an effect on her.

Jessica approaches her sister and Bethany guesses that Jessica is going to move in with them.

On the 31st, Jessica receives an email from her former writing program teacher turned novelist. His letter of recommendation is what helped Jessica get into Columbia. He invites her to come and see him. He recites a quote that says the only thing that matters is the everlasting present. They discuss her major and what Jessica wants to do after



graduation. He asks if Jessica still writes a journal. She says yes and pulls it out of her bag, so he asks if he can read it. Jessica hands him an article she wrote instead.

He instills hope in Jessica by suggesting she should take a writing program to become a journalist.

July 31, 2005 Analysis

Jessica is analyzing the quirks of all of the people in her life. She is doing this because she is really questioning her own personality, goals and direction her life is heading. Jessica realizes that she is in a very dark place. Jessica is regretting the choice she has made in the past few years—especially those decisions she made about the men in her life.

Jessica understands that life affects everyone. She also starts to understand that how you choose to react to the things that life throws at you is up to you. Jessica thinks that from now on she needs to live more in the moment, and to feel and experience everything that life has to offer.

It's ironic that Jessica's former writing program instructor mentions that the only thing that matters is the everlasting present, since this is a conclusion that Jessica recently came to on her own.



December 15, 2005

December 15, 2005 Summary

Jessica writes a letter to Hope. She's responding to Hope's letter about Hope losing her virginity. Jessica says she was thinking of writing Hope about bumping into her former friend, Jane, when she received Hope's letter. She tells Hope about her disagreement with Jane about Marcus. Jessica gets into an elevator with Jane on one of her last days on campus before graduation. At the end of the elevator conversation, Jessica concludes they ended their friendship because they weren't good friends to each other. Then, Jessica tells Hope about her friendship with Dexy. Then, Jessica talks about her friendship with Bridget. Jessica says that Hope has always been a good friend to her but that Jessica hasn't always been the same to Hope.

Jessica decides not to walk in graduation. Her friends throw her a champagne soiree instead. Even Dexy shows up. All of the Winter of Discontents show up, except for Kieran. Jessica's writing program instructor and some of her friends from Pineville also attend. After the party, Jessica boards the train back to Pineville.

When she arrives back in Pineville, Bridget calls for Jessica to meet her because she has good news. When they meet, Bridget announces that she and Percy are getting married as she shoves her engagement ring in Jessica's face. Bridget says they're getting married in 2007 and then launches into the story on how he proposed. Bridget asks Jessica to be her maid of honor. Jessica says yes, even though she doesn't really believe in the institution of marriage.

On December 25th, Marcus returns to Pineville and shows up at Jessica's door. They leave her house and talk. He says that what he was going through was a phase—a phase that's now over. Marcus says he is going through a friend phase now, which leads Jessica to believe that Marcus now wants to be friends with her. Jessica launches a tirade on Marcus about not officially breaking up with her and writing her postcards instead of a real letter. Jessica launches on this tirade because she's come to the conclusion that everything about their relationship has always been on Marcus's terms and she's sick of it. Marcus apologizes and hands Jessica a present from the back seat of his car. It's a Barry Manilow toilet seat that Jessica wanted to buy from three summers earlier. Jessica chooses this time to blurt out that she slept with Len. Sans bitterness, Marcus says that it's good. When Jessica realizes they are starting to have the same fight they always do, she goes back into her house and watches from her window as Marcus leaves.

Jessica receives a postcard from Marcus that says, "now." On the 27th, Jessica and Marcus have sex again. After they are finished, Marcus asks if she's happy and she admits she is. Jessica tells Marcus she loves him. She reaches for the medallions that are hanging off a leather rope around Marcus's neck. One says, "My thoughts create my



world." The words of Marcus's postcards come to Jessica's mind: "I wish our love was right now."

Hope and Jessica are about to embark on a cross-country road trip. They are in the car with their bags and munchies. They are going to towns and cities around the country with odd names, such as Toad's Suck, Arkansas; Yahoo Junction, Florida; Hell, Missouri; Virginville, Pennsylvania, etc. Marcus meets them with a red box in his hand before they pull away. Inside are a dozen composition notebooks, which are Marcus's journals. The journals are a compilations of letters addressed to Jessica.

Jessica comes to a final conclusion that nothing is forever and things and people in your life come and go. Marcus is one of the people in Jessica's life that will always be there in some shape or form.

Jessica asks if Marcus will be here when she gets back. He says he wants to be, but doesn't promise that he will be.

December 15, 2005 Analysis

Jessica understands what the true meaning of friendship is. She is learning what a good friend means and how she needs to be in order to be a good friend to those that have been good friends to her. Each group of people that show up at Jessica's graduation party represents a portion of her life. Each portion of Jessica's life represents the lessons that she has learned along the way.

As Jessica looks around at the different people at her graduation party, she realizes that she is the heart of the group. This is a metaphor because Jessica sees herself as the center or the reason why all of these different groups of people have come together for one event.

Jessica learns that everyone that comes into her life comes into it for a reason. Whether good or bad, they leave an impression on her life, which is true whether they continue to be in her life, or move on from being in her life.

Ironically, Jessica is happy to see Marcus when he shows up on her doorstep after being out of her life for two years. After spending some time with Marcus, Jessica wonders if their relationship is a viscous circle.



Characters

Jessica Darling

Jessica Darling is a college student at Columbia University. She is originally from Pineville, New Jersey. Jessica has been taking the acne medication, Accutane, to try to control the large cysts that she gets on her face.

Jessica is the youngest of three children. She has an older sister and an older brother. Her older brother, died when he was a baby, so Jessica never knew him. Jessica has a dark and negative view of the world. She is also a diehard Democrat.

She is head over heels in love with her boyfriend, Marcus Flutie. Jessica's best friend is Hope. After Hope's brother died of an overdose, Hope's parents moved her to Tennessee. Jessica writes letters to Hope throughout the novel to keep Hope up-to-date on what is happening in Jessica's life.

Jessica is a psychology major at Columbia. Close to graduation, however, she realizes that she doesn't want to major in psychology after all. In the end, Jessica winds up back where she started, in Pineville, New Jersey, trying to figure out what to do with life and a college degree.

Marcus Flutie

Marcus Flutie is Jessica's boyfriend. He was also the best friend of Hope's brother, prior to him overdosing and dying. Marcus is a former male slut, known for sleeping with as many girls as possible. He is also a recovering drug addict and alcoholic.

In a way to overcome his past, Marcus leaves for California. He is attending a Gakkai program near Berkeley. Marcus tends to come in and out of Jessica's life in the novel. At times, it seems as if he is hopeless in love with Jessica. At other times, it seems as if he is indifferent to their love.

He is known for the unique t-shirts he wears. Typically, the t-shirts have sayings. Later in the novel, he switches to wearing plain white t-shirts all the time. Marcus seems to be deep into connecting with his spiritual side, which leads him to enroll in a program in the desert, where he cuts off communication with all of the outside world.

He is so much of a free spirit, that even when he comes back into Jessica's life, she knows he won't be there forever.



Hope

Hope is Jessica's best friend. Jessica and Hope grew up in Pineville together. When Hope's older brother overdoses on heroin, Hope and her parents move to Tennessee. Hope has blonde hair and is beautiful. Jessica says that people are drawn to her and Hope makes friends naturally. Throughout the novel, Hope and Jessica are writing letters back and forth with each other to keep one another up-to-date on what's happening in their lives. At the end of the novel, Hope invites Jessica to go on a road trip with her, which will apply to a project for Hope's degree.

Percy

Percy is African American. He and Jessica were in French class together in high school, so Jessica calls him Pepe. While Percy once had a crush on Jessica, he has been dating Bridget for awhile when the novel starts. By the end of the novel, Percy is living and attending college in New York City and he and Bridget are living together and engaged to be married.

Mrs. Darling

Mrs. Darling is Jessica and Bethany's mom. She loves to shop from catalogs, so she often has some home supply catalog on hand. During the novel, she starts a real estate staging business. Mrs. Darling and Bethany, Jessica's older sister, have a lot in common. Mrs. Darling deals with the birthday and anniversary of her son's death in the same way—taking Valium and sleeping right through the events.

Mr. Darling

Mr. Darling is Jessica and Bethany's father. He loves to ride his bike. He rides his bike from dawn until dusk on the birthday and anniversary of the death of his, every year. Jessica's dad is also a staunch supporter of Jessica's running.

Bethany

Bethany is Jessica's older sister. She is married to G-Money and has a one-year-old daughter, Marin. Bethany is a stay-at-home mom. She, G-Money and Marin live in a huge townhouse in New York City. One of Bethany's favorite pastimes is shopping, so she is very close with her mother. Bethany typically talks to her mom on a daily basis.

Marin

Marin is Bethany's one-year-old daughter and Jessica's niece. Marin turns one and celebrates her first birthday when the novel first opens. Marin also becomes very fond of



Marcus. She says his name all the time and looks for Marcus often. Marin has a very spunky personality. She's very outgoing and tries to push the limit when it comes to behaving for her mother.

G-Money

G-Money is the nickname Jessica has given to Bethany's husband. He is a former dot comer when they were living in California. After the market tanked, he moved his family to New York City. He invests and runs ice cream and sweet shops in tourist areas of New York and New Jersey, such as Seaside Heights.

Bridget

Bridget is one of Jessica's friends. She is also Percy's girlfriend. Bridget is blonde and beautiful. She aspires to be an actress. She is going to college at Berkeley when the novel first opens. She switches to NYU later in the novel so that she and Percy can be together.

William

William is one of the guys that lives in Jessica's dorm at Columbia. He is part of a group of engineering majors that creates the boyfriend breakup pool, gambling on the people who live in the dorm and their high school boyfriends or girlfriends and which couple will last the longest. Later in the novel, he bets with Jessica and when Jessica gets drunk, they end up hooking up.

William is very Republican. This puts William and Jessica at odds with each throughout the novel. William ends up dying of a congenital heart defect one night in the dorm, while Jessica and Dexy are at a beautiful people against Republicans' party.

Jane

Jane is a friend that Jessica acquires at college. Jane comes to visit Jessica in Pineville. When Jane says derogatory things about Marcus, Jessica gets mad at Jane. They end up ending their friendship, but running into each other in an elevator right before Jessica graduates.

Dexy

Dexy becomes Jessica's friend after Jessica dumps Jane. Dexy likes to dress in eccentric costumers. She also makes money by starring on various local network dating shows around the city. After William dies, Dexy becomes depressed and leaves school.



It turns out that Dexy is manic depressive, so William's death just exacerbates an existing problem.

Kieran

Kieran is the guy Jessica sleeps with and dates after Marcus. Bridget points out that Marcus and Kieran are a lot alike. Kieran ends up cheating on Jessica with his ex-girlfriend. He then moves into an apartment with her that he was supposed to share with Jessica during their senior year at Columbia.



Objects/Places

Pineville, New Jersey

Pineville, New Jersey is Jessica's hometown. Pineville is not a really small town, but it's small enough that the majority of the residents know each other. Not much changes in the town. It has relatively remained the same since Jessica was a child. It is a suburban town and the primary setting for portions of the novel.

Columbia

Columbia is the college that Jessica attends. It is in New York City and is a top American university. Jessica attending Columbia is a bone of contention between Jessica and her parents. Jessica had a full scholarship to Piedmont University, so when she decided to attend Columbia, her parents said she would have to pay the majority of her way through. Columbia is where Jessica meets many new people, such as William, Jane, Dexy and Kieran.

Park

The local park is a popular hangout for Jessica and Marcus. They were in the park in high school, when Jessica found out Marcus is trying to get her to lose her virginity over a bet he had with his friends. Marcus and Jessica return to the park to talk at several points throughout the novel. On one of these trips, they realize that the park has been redone.

Jessica's Room

Jessica's room in her parents' home is her respite. When Jessica left for college, she left many of her things as memories that she could return to when she is home visiting from college. On one visit home, Jessica discovers that her mother has remodeled her room as part of her staging business—and all of Jessica's things have been packed up and put in a box in the basement. For the rest of her visits there, Jessica feels like she is staying in a hotel room instead of her bedroom.

Barry Manilow Toilet Seat

Jessica spots a Barry Manilow toilet seat at an arts and crafts fair with Marcus. She tries to buy it, but the owner tells her it is just on display and is not for sale. At the end of the novel, Marcus gives Jessica the same toilet seat as a going away gift as Jessica heads out on her road trip with Hope. The girls prop the toilet seat up in the backseat of the car with their bags and snacks.



T-shirts

Marcus wears specialty t-shirts. It is akin to a uniform for him throughout the novel. At some point, Marcus switches his novelty t-shirts for plain white t-shirts. He starts to wear these plain white t-shirts for the rest of the novel. Jane refers to the t-shirts Marcus wears as his stick.

Journals

Jessica is constantly writing in her journal throughout the novel. She uses the black and white composition notebooks as journals. At the end of the novel, Marcus gives her a box of his own journals, the same types of composition notebooks, to read so that she can understand where he has been coming from throughout their relationship.

Postcards

When Marcus and Jessica separate after Jessica cheats on him, Marcus starts writing postcards to Jessica. On each postcard, Marcus prints only one word. Through the series of postcards Marcus mails to Jessica, he completes one message, "I wish out live was right now."

Cadillac

Marcus drives an old Cadillac. He has had sex with a lot of girls in the backseat of the car, prior to dating Jessica. This is one of the reasons Jessica refuses to have sex with Marcus in the car. When Marcus and Bridget drive back to California, they use Marcus's car for the cross country trip.

Bus

Jessica takes the bus back and forth from her hometown to college. She is on the bus when the novel opens, heading home for break. During her trips on the bus, Jessica writes letters to Hope. She also writes in her journal.



Themes

Relationships

One of the primary themes running through "Charmed Thirds" is relationships. The novel reveals that even the individuals that make up a family have different relationships among the family members. For example, Jessica is much closer to her father than she is to her mother. On the other hand, Bethany is much closer to their mother than she is to their father.

Friendship is another type of relationship the novel tackles. Jessica goes through many different friends as the novel unfolds. The only friendship that remains the same is the one between Jessica and Hope. Primarily, the girls end up just being pen pals, but they are able to reunite and take a road trip together at the end of the novel. One of the friends Jessica makes while at college is Jane. While Jessica and Jane get along very well, it turns out their friendship is superficial. In Jessica's friendship with Hope, Jessica is the needy one. In Jessica's friendship with Dexy, however, Dexy is the one that needs to depend upon and lean upon Jessica.

Romantic relationships are also tackled in the novel. The entire novel is about the relationship that Jessica has with Marcus. It also includes Percy and Bridget's relationship as the standard for a monogamous relationship. Even though the relationship between Marcus and Jessica wavers, in the end, they both realize that they love each other and something keeps them coming back to each other.

Coming of Age

One of the primary themes that run throughout the novel is growing up and coming of age, even against adversity, such as a breakup, and normal rites of passage, such as going away to college. Jessica struggles with the fact that her coming of age includes having her first true love attend college on the other side of the country from her, so that they are apart more than they are together. Jessica struggles with her love for Marcus and questions his love for her constantly.

Jessica and her fellow classmates are all struggling with the transition from high school students to college students. Additionally, they are experimenting with drugs and alcohol. Toward the end of the novel, the characters are also learning about transitioning from college students to adults working in the real world.

Family

Family is the central theme throughout the entire novel. This is because the storyline is about the lives of Jessica's family. Their family situation has affected how each member of the family deals with their emotions. Jessica deals with her emotions in writing. Mrs.



Darling shops or sleeps through traumatic events. Mr. Darling likes to ride his bike to reduce his stress. Bethany seems somewhat oblivious to the traumas of the Darling family.

Style

Point of View

The novel is written in the first person point of view, from the perspective of the main character and narrator, Jessica Darling. The novel sections are journal entries and letters, which is how Jessica narrates the story.

The point of view of this novel is intimate, allowing a reader to connect closely with the main character, Jessica. The book written in this manner allows the reader to get inside Jessica's head, thoughts and inner struggles. The reader cares what happens to the narrator. The point of view also allows the author to inject her own opinions into the narration and to expand on the events taking place around the other characters and the occurrences taking place.

Setting

The novel is set primarily in the town of Pineville, New Jersey. The other primary setting is New York City and Columbia University campus. The novel unfolds during the 21st century. The main characters are involved in Jessica's life during her college years.

The setting of this novel works well with the plot. At first, the reader is not aware that Jessica is traveling back to her hometown for one of the vacations from college. However, as events unfold, Jessica's life at college and her life at home are a constant part of the plot, the lives of the characters and even the outcome of the novel.

Language and Meaning

The language of this novel is relatively simple and easy to read. The language is from the 21st century, which is when the novel is set. The language is descriptive enough that it helps to explain the situations and is detailed enough for the reader to truly understand. In some instances, the narrator makes up her own slang words to describe the situation. Even when she does this, it is still easy to comprehend what she is saying from the context in which she uses the slang.

Structure

The novel is divided into the dates Jessica writes letters or her journal entries. The novel tells the story primarily in exposition and some dialogue. The narrator injects her own voice and thoughts throughout the book, providing her opinions and feelings of the events unfolding in the novel.



The novel contains one main plot and several subplots. The main plot is that of human relationships—friendship and romantic. One subplot is the coming of age of the characters, primarily Jessica. Another subplot is family relationships.



Quotes

"You don't want to be the type of girl that doesn't do things because of her boyfriend. But I'm the only reason you don't want to go."

June 1, 2003, p. 32

"I'm not giving head to get ahead."

June 30, 2003, p. 59

"One bad summer can't change everything..."

July 31, 2003, p. 74

"I was trying to find the right words. And I can't. So I'd rather say nothing right now."

December 15, 2003, p. 92

"Breakups are the new relationships."

June 1, 2004, p. 106

"You always fake an illness when you can't deal."

July 4, 2004, p. 124

"That maybe, just maybe, she bought the house of her dreams because she's tired of putting her dream aside for a daughter who never seems to appreciate it?"

July 31, 2004, p. 139

"There was a hole in his heart."

December 15, 2004, p. 164

"And I was only trying to point out how Kieran and Marcus are like, of the same archetype."

December 31, 2004, p. 177

"You need to take this job more seriously."

June 1, 2005, p. 199

"Look, Len. I know you think you want to do it with me. I almost fell into the same trap last summer with this guy."

June 30, 2005, p. 210

"My thoughts create my world."

July 31, 2005, p. 225

"You're always going to pull stuff like this, aren't you? Even though it drives me insane."
December 15, 2005, p. 236



Topics for Discussion

Who is the true Jessica Darling? Why do you think she falls in love with Marcus? When Hope leaves, how do you think this shapes the person Jessica becomes? What does Jessica ultimately realize about her relationship with Marcus?

Who is the true Marcus Flutie? Why do you think he chooses to attend a new age type school all the way in California? Why doesn't Marcus officially break up with Jessica? What does Marcus ultimately realize about his relationship with Jessica?

Discuss the relationship between Jessica and Hope. Are they friends, pen pals or somewhere in between? Is there true competition in their relationship? How does Jessica feel about Hope? Do you get a sense of how Hope feels about Jessica?

Discuss the relationship between Jessica and Kieran. Are they friends, foes, lovers or somewhere in between? Is there true competition in their relationship? How does Jessica feel about Kieran? How does Kieran feel about Jessica? How do Jessica's feelings change? What does she do about it? What happens to Kieran?

Discuss the relationship between Bridget and Percy. Do you think they are an example of true monogamy? Is there true competition in their relationship? How does Bridget feel about Percy? How does Percy feel about Bridget?

Who is Dexy? Why do you think she dresses in costume-like attire all the time? What role does Dexy play in Jessica dealing with William's death?

Discuss Jessica's attitude. What impact does this have on the characters in the novel? How does it motivate them and how does it derail their lives?