

The Cupcake Queen Study Guide

The Cupcake Queen by Heather Hepler

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Plot Summary

The Cupcake Queen is a novel by Heather Hepler. The story follows the main character, Penny, as she tries to put the pieces of her life together after her parents separate and she moves with her mother from New York City to Hog's Hollow. Penny's mother, Lizzie, opens a bakery that only sells specialty cupcakes. Penny is the primary designer, sketching and finding ways to turn the sugary creations into works of art. When Penny and her mother first move to town to live with Gram, Penny believes the move is only temporary. She can't wait until the day comes when her parents tell her they are getting back together and she and her mom are moving back to the city.

Penny meets her arch nemesis, Charity, when she is helping her mother set up for Charity's Sweet 14 party of the Hog's Hollow Country Club. When Charity's father sends the refreshment table to collapse, Penny and her mother take the blame for it and Charity vows to make Penny's time a living hell. A few days later, school starts, and sure enough, Charity and all of her friends continue to taunt and bully Penny.

Penny makes two new friends, Tally and Blake. She also has a crush on a boy, Marcus. Slowly, Penny finds her way in the town of Hog's Hollow. During her journey, she also uncovers some details about her mom that she once didn't know, such as the fact that her mom was Hog's Hollow Queen for the four years she was in high school—even beating out Charity's mom all four years. In the end, Penny has the choice to go live with her father or stay living with her mother. She chooses to stay in Hog's Hollow because she has come to think of it as home and just the way that her life should be.



Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary

Penny is a fourteen-year-old girl, helping her mother decorate cupcakes in the cupcake bakery she owns in Hog's Hollow. When the college girl who helps Penny's mother, Lizzie, set up for events calls in sick, Lizzie decides she has to take Penny to help her. Lizzie gives Penny a quick makeover—changing her black jeans, t-shirt, low ponytail and blue mascara for a white t-shirt, high ponytail, red lipstick and no mascara. When they arrive at the Hog's Hollow Country Club to set up for Charity's Sweet 14th birthday party, Penny realizes that she is going to have to meet some of the girls in the new town she has just moved into.

Chapter 1 Analysis

Something caused Penny and her family to move from New York to Hog's Hollow, which is where Lizzie grew up. As the story unfolds, the secrets of the family that caused Lizzie to change from an art gallery director in Chelsea to the owner of The Cupcake Queen bakery in Hog's Hollow will be revealed. The opening chapter also foreshadows that Penny is in a stage in her life where she is trying to discover who she is—and moving to a new town and having to make new friends is an added challenge.



Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary

Penny helps her mother set up the cupcakes, plates, glasses, and other items on the refreshment table. Penny sees her mother approach a large woman, who she later finds out is Charity's mother, Mrs. Wharton. The two mothers introduce the daughters because they are the same age and both girls are going into ninth grade together. As soon as their mothers turn their back, Charity's nice demeanor toward Penny turns to a mean demeanor.

Mr. Wharton, who appears to weigh close to four hundred pounds, leans on the refreshment table, which causes the table to collapse. As everyone runs and scrambles to try to save the cupcakes, watermelon boats, dishware and other items, everything winds up damaged and on the floor. Lizzie apologizes, promises to refund their money, and she and Penny clean up the mess. Charity emerges from the bathroom, changed out of her dress and wearing a sheet and promises to see Penny at school.

Chapter 2 Analysis

Charity appears to be a mean girl. She acts nice in front of adults, but her true side comes out when the adults are not around. Charity blaming Penny for the mishap at her party foreshadows Charity and her friends making Penny's life at school and in town a living hell.



Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary

On the drive home, Lizzie is very agitated. They unload the equipment at the bakery and then head to Gram's house, where they are living for now. When they arrive, Penny heads down to the shore. While she is gone, she thinks about how her parents separated and then how her dad moved out. Shortly after her dad left, she and her mom moved to Hog's Hollow for the summer. Now, it's extending past the summer. When Penny returns to the house, she overhears her mother telling Gram everything that happened, and the two women start laughing. Gram mentions she is surprised Eugenia Wharton asked Lizzie to do the cupcakes after everything that happened.

Chapter 3 Analysis

It seems as if Lizzie and Eugenia have a past. It could be that Eugenia was a mean girl to Lizzie when they were growing up. Now, the cycle could be repeated with their daughters Charity and Penny. Penny also believes that if her mom is happy here then they will never move back to New York, so it foreshadows Penny trying to make her mom dislike Hog's Hollow.



Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary

On the first day of school, Penny is so nervous that she wakes up at 4 am. She walks to school and manages not to make eye contact with anyone as she enters the front office to get her schedule. She mentions to the secretary there must be a mistake because she has French first period, but Penny takes Spanish. Penny arrives at French to find two of Charity's friends that try to trip her on her way to a desk. In art class, Charity and a table full of her friends are there. A boy walks into the art class and hands the teacher a note. He looks like a boy Penny saw when she was at the beach. Charity mouths to Penny the word "Mine," talking about the boy. During lunch, Penny goes to her locker. When she opens it, pennies pour out all over the floor. A girl from her art class, Tally, helps Penny pick up the pennies and tells Penny to meet her under the clock after school.

Chapter 4 Analysis

Penny's worst nightmare is coming true. Charity and her friends are making Penny's school life miserable. It seems as if Penny and Charity's boyfriend might start a relationship, which make Charity's treatment of Penny even worse. Penny, however, will find an ally in Tally.



Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary

Tally and Penny walk to the bank to exchange the pennies for bills. On the way, Tally tells her Charlotte, one of Charity's friends, owns the bank, so that's how they got so many pennies. Another friend, one of the Lindseys works in the front office, which is how they got her locker combination. Penny sees the boy from the beach talking to another boy from school while they're walking. On the bank wall, she sees old pictures of the town and finds out her mother was once Miss Hog's Hollow. The girls cash in the pennies for \$75. Tally says she wants something chocolate, so Penny takes her to The Cupcake Queen. The girls exchange stories on how they wound up in Hog's Hollow. Tally's mom left when she small and her dad is a musician, so she stays with her Aunt Poppy who lives in Hog's Hollow. Tally invites Penny to her house Friday after school. Penny works on sketches for new cupcake designs. She mentions Charity inspiring a new design with her locker prank.

Chapter 5 Analysis

It seems as if Penny's mother has s secrets that she isn't sharing with Penny. Because they are living in her mom's old town, it foreshadows Penny uncovering information about who her mom is. It might finally reveal to Penny the person that her mom is and why her Gram thinks Penny is so much like her mom.



Chapter 6

Chapter 6 Summary

Penny changes her shirt three times because she keeps spilling stuff on it or finds a hole in one. She recalls how she's seen the boy on the beach twice, from her house, and couldn't get down there in time to run into him. In art class at school they are putting together collages of their life. Penny is working on her collage when Miss Beans asks her to take an envelope to the office. When Penny walks in, the boy from the beach comes out. He tells Penny the color Jolly Rancher she picks says a lot about her personality. He goes through what each color represents. When Penny return to class everyone has gone to lunch, but her collage is scattered and wrecked on the floor, with a footprint on it. She finds out the teacher was helping Charity with her locker, which gave Charity's friend time to wreck the collage.

Chapter 6 Analysis

The boy in the office and on the beach now knows Penny's name because the office lady asked her for it. The chance meetings she keeps having with this boy infers Penny is forming a crush on him. The boy could come to really like Penny or he could be playing along to make a fool out of Penny for Charity.



Chapter 7

Chapter 7 Summary

It's Friday. Penny walks up the beach instead of the road to get to Tally's house. Penny is hoping to run into the boy. She finds Penny in the living room with a guy with spiky hair, Blake. He is the other member of Rock Paper Scissors, which is Tally's group. Penny takes the two designs they are creating to sell t-shirts to raise money for the animal shelter and combines them into one design. Penny also learns that Tally is banned from planning Hog's Hollow Days, which is where most everyone else is while they're planning the fundraiser. In the kitchen, Penny sees Poppy's art, which are balls of glass. While walking on the beach, Tally talks about plotting revenge on Charity. Blake tells Penny about the boarded up house on the beach that belongs to Mr. Fish. Mr. Fish went crazy and moved with his son into town after a kayaking accident with his wife. It turns out that Mr. Fish's son is Marcus, the boy from the beach, the one who has the dog Sam and who works in the school office.

Chapter 7 Analysis

Penny is slowly uncovering the secrets of the small town. This will also include Penny's own family secrets as the novel unfolds. Penny now knows the name of the boy she has a crush on. That both she and the boy are missing a parent is foreshadowing of the bond Penny and Marcus form.



Chapter 8

Chapter 8 Summary

Marcus delivers a note to Miss Beans during Penny's art class. On his way out, he slips a grape Jolly Rancher on her desk. Charity spills paint all over Penny. The art teacher sends Penny into her office to change her clothes. When Penny and Tally have lunch, Tally tells Penny that her mom won Hog's Hollow Queen all four years. Charity's mom had lost. Tally says the reason Charity is tormenting Penny isn't just because of her party incident. Tally points out Marcus in the hall and reminds Penny that Marcus runs on the beach before dusk. Tally opens her locker and makes a big production of eating a spoonful of lard in front of Charity and her friends. Tally tells Penny to trust her.

Chapter 8 Analysis

Penny is starting to learn more about her mother than she has ever known before. Tally is putting the plan in place to seek revenge against Charity and her friends for tormenting Penny. Finally, Tally realizes that Penny has a crush on Marcus, so Tally is giving Penny information to try to get the two of them together.



Chapter 9

Chapter 9 Summary

Penny is staffing the bakery while her mom is at a meeting and Gram is shooting a family portrait. The UPS man delivers a padded envelope from an attorney addressed to Penny's mom. When her mother and Gram return, Penny overhears Gram asking if Lizzie has told Penny yet. Penny leaves the bakery and goes back to the house. Her dad calls and Penny finds out that her parents are selling their apartment in the Village and that there is an offer for someone to buy it.

When she hangs up the phone, she goes out to the beach. Sam knocks her over and Marcus helps Penny up. They sit on the beach together, joining about being in a club that speaks "Ocean." Then Marcus gets up to leave with Sam and tells Penny he'll get the sweatshirt he gave her back later. Penny goes home to an empty house.

Chapter 9 Analysis

The envelope from the attorney is divorce papers with a settlement offer from Penny's father. Penny realizes that her parents are not going to reconcile and that her life is changing for good and not just temporarily, as she once thought. Penny relates to Marcus, feeling as if her parents are ghosts even though they are alive. Marcus suggesting he'll get his sweatshirt back later, insinuates that there is a future between him and Penny. Penny going home to an empty house symbolizes how Penny feels—alone.



Chapter 10

Chapter 10 Summary

The next morning, Penny wakes with puffy and red eyes, swollen from crying. Gram is yelling from downstairs that she's going to be late. When Penny goes down to breakfast, Tally is eating oatmeal at the table. She gives Penny a t-shirt with the design Penny drew as Penny heads upstairs to change for school. On the walk to school, Tally tells Penny they're selling the t-shirts today. She also says she'll teach Penny how to play Rock Paper Scissors. When Tally gets to school, Tally hands her two wrapped power bars for lunch. Penny finds a fish cupcake in her locker with the icing fish replaced with a real fish.

Chapter 10 Analysis

Marcus works for the animal shelter that Tally is selling the t-shirts to fundraise for. When Marcus finds out Penny designed the t-shirts for the shelter, this will bring Marcus and Penny closer together. Tally is still building up revenge on Charity with the whole lard routine, but it is sure to produce a big finale.



Chapter 11

Chapter 11 Summary

Penny finds Blake and Tally selling the RPS t-shirts in front of the cafeteria. Marcus buys a shirt and tells Penny her design is cool. Charity tries to elbow her way between Marcus and Penny, but Marcus tells Penny he'll see her later. At the table, Blake and Tally are eating the power bars. Tally places the bar so the label faces up in order for Charity to see it. Penny finds out the reason Charity hates Tally is that Tally formed a protest when the HOG committee decided to pull the talent portion from the pageant. It was all because Mrs. Wharton was the chairperson and Charity doesn't have a talent. Penny questions Tally on the power bars and Tally tells her to read the ingredients, of which one of the ingredients is lard. Later that night, Tally calls Penny at home and tells her she has to show her something.

Chapter 11 Analysis

It seems as if the turning point of the novel is approaching. While Charity has been tormenting Penny, it seems as if Tally is about to unleash her revenge against Charity. It seems as if Tally is trying to convince Charity to eat the power bars, making her believe they are nutritious, when they are really fattening because of the lard.



Chapter 12

Chapter 12 Summary

When Penny gets to Tally's house, Tally has a diet website up on her computer. Then Tally pulls up a tournament for Rock Paper Scissors to show it to Penny. When they go downstairs to the kitchen, Tally tells Penny about touring with her dad. She admits that the last time he left her alone in a hotel room for three days. That's when Tally called Poppy and Poppy got on a plane to go get Tally. The phone rings and Tally asks Penny if she wants to go somewhere. Blake's mom picks them up in a pickup truck filled with manure in the back.

When they get to Blake's, they pick tomatoes in the greenhouse. As Blake pours a liquid manure mixture into the soil, they all make up funny names for the concoction that has to do with poop. At the end, Blake performs a friendship ceremony, uniting Tally and Penny as friends.

Chapter 12 Analysis

For the first time since Penny came to Hog's Hollow, she feels like she belongs. She realizes that she and Tally are more alike than she first thought. Tally and Penny also confirm their friendship in a fun way by having Blake perform the friendship ceremony.



Chapter 13

Chapter 13 Summary

On Sunday morning before dawn, Gram wakes Penny to go blueberry picking with her. On Monday, when Penny wakes up for her school, Gram has gone blueberry picking again. During art class, the teacher tells them they can design a float for the HOG parade. If their design is chosen, the HOG Queen and her court will ride on the float. At lunch on the lawn, Tally pretends to eat a lard sandwich. She talks loud enough for Charlotte to hear saying that lard is a large part of our diets and when we started eating no- and low-fat diets is when we started to get fat. The sprinklers turn on and drench Blake, Tally and Penny. They see Charity and her friends laughing and some other kids laughing at the windows. Tally tells them it's all how they handle it and they all take a bow.

Chapter 13 Analysis

Penny is learning how to turn the tables on Charity and her friends. Tally is definitely trying to trick Charity and her friends into starting a "lard" diet fad.



Chapter 14

Chapter 14 Summary

Penny stays late at the bakery and digs through the trash to find the envelope her mm threw away. She finds the envelope and a ripped up letter from an attorney that is a separation agreement. While walking home, she runs into Marcus and Sam. They walk and sit on the steps of his old house and talk about the stars. Marcus asks Penny to the dance at the end of Hog Days. Marcus walks Penny home, holding her hand, but Penny's mom is waiting for her on the front porch of the house.

Chapter 14 Analysis

Penny's mom is about to tell her about the separation, or that something has happened to Gram. Penny and Marcus continue to see that they have things in common and that they have a crush on each other.



Chapter 15

Chapter 15 Summary

Penny's mom says Gram is sleeping. She also tells Penny that she and her father are separating. Lizzie notices that Penny has highlights in her hair and says she's sad it took her two days to notice. Penny is working at the bakery when Tally tells her she's entering the Hog Queen contest.

Chapter 15 Analysis

It seems as if Marcus is one way with Penny at school and another way when they are alone. Marcus eats lunch with Charity, so it has Penny wondering if he really likes her or is just playing with her feelings.



Chapter 16

Chapter 16 Summary

Penny goes to Tally's house to find out what's going on. Tally tells her she was in a shop in town helping Poppy hang her witch balls, when Mrs. Wharton came in talking about Tally's "situation" and how Charity is a shoo-in for the Hog Queen. Tally says she has to go more mainstream, so she dyes her hair and wears contacts.

Chapter 16 Analysis

Tally going from crazy to normal is another change in Penny's life. Penny thinks Tally's crazy look always made her feel normal. Now that Tally looks like everyone else, Penny no longer feels normal.



Chapter 17

Chapter 17 Summary

Tally drags Penny into the bathroom to tell her she lost five pounds. Penny can tell that someone is obviously listening to their conversation from one of the stalls. Tally starts talking about the lard diet and gives the Web site she went to for more information.

Chapter 17 Analysis

The Web site Tally built is the one she's telling Penny about in the bathroom. She is purposely doing it so that Charity and her friends get on the diet, but end up gaining weight instead of losing it. It is the ultimate revenge for everything Charity and her friends have done to Penny.



Chapter 18

Chapter 18 Summary

Penny is decorating 480 cupcakes for a wedding the following day. She asks why Tally thinks Charity is going to fall for the diet prank. Blake and his brothers are the ones that built the site. Penny gave Tally the \$75 she got from cashing in the pennies to buy the server space. Tally and Blake are helping Penny mix up a new batch of buttercream icing when they realize they are out of butter. Tally calls the dairy and arranges for a delivery. She also tells Penny she should freshen up. When Penny returns from the bathroom, she walks in on Tally and Blake canoodling. They spring apart and then Marcus walks in with a box of butter. Marcus offers to help and they put him to work boxing up cupcakes with Blake. After they finish the cupcakes, while they're cleaning up, Blake asks Marcus what the deal with is with Charity because he saw Marcus playing soccer with her on the previous day. Marcus turns red but he says that there is no deal. Tally arranges it so that Marcus gives Penny a ride home.

Chapter 18 Analysis

Penny is starting to form real friendships with Tally and Blake. They even help her with the large decorating order for a wedding that Penny's mother can't help with because she is in another one of her meetings. It seems as Marcus and Charity do have some sort of connection, although he seems to have a crush on Penny—asking her to the dance and saying he wants to take her home after helping in the bakery.



Chapter 19

Chapter 19 Summary

As Marcus pulls a helmet out for Penny to wear, they climb on his four-wheeler and he starts it up. He asks her if she has to go straight home. She says she doesn't. Marcus takes her to the woods, where he shows her a big metal sculpture of Saturn. Marcus says it was his mom's idea before she died, but he and his dad have been building the sculptures for a year since his mom died. Marcus loops his pinky in Penny's pinky and then they get back on the four-wheeler so he can drive her home.

Chapter 19 Analysis

Marcus trusts Penny enough to open up to her about his mom's death. For the first time, Penny feels connected to Marcus. She also feels connected to Hog's Hollow for the first time. She realizes that it is much more real—with happiness and pain—than the city ever was when she lived there.



Chapter 20

Chapter 20 Summary

Tally and Penny are in art class. Penny is finishing up her sketch of the float design for the contest. She slides it into the envelope Miss Beans gave her and drops it into the art teacher's basket. When she gets to her locker, she finds sour milk—just one of the many things Charity and her friends continue to put in her locker. Tally wants Penny to go to the library so she can show her the update she made to the Web site, but Penny has to talk to the French teacher. The girls head to lunch first and notice that Charity and her friends are consuming lard. Tally and Penny continue to hold their secret meetings in the bathroom that Charlotte always seems to be listening to from one of the stalls. Tally tells Penny how the bloating from the diet is just temporary. Tally and Penny also notice that Charity and her friends are breaking out with acne. The French teacher suggests tutoring and points out Charity's name as the best tutoring option.

Penny borrows a book on planets from Gram. She makes a cupcake for each of the planets and takes it up to Saturn for Marcus and his dad, Mr. Fish.

Chapter 20 Analysis

Penny struggles to determine why Marcus is like two different people. He hangs out with his soccer buddies and even Charity at lunch in school. When they are alone, Marcus acts like he likes Penny—flirting with her and acting as if he likes her. Penny also sees her cupcakes as art for the first time when Mr. Fish says that she is a true artist.



Chapter 21

Chapter 21 Summary

As the rain pours down on Hog's Hollow, Penny is busy decorating cupcakes for the Thanksgiving orders. She tries to talk to her mom about the separation but she wimps out. Tally calls Lizzie to ask for advice. Lizzie confesses to Penny that she was Hog's Hollow Queen and then she and Gram tell Penny funny stories about being in the pageant. Lizzie helps Tally pick out a dress for the pageant. When Penny goes to hang it in Tally's closet she notices that Tally's closet is empty. Penny goes to the kitchen, where she finds Poppy wrapping a witch ball. She describes to Poppy what the winter trees look like in Central Park and Tally overhears. Penny finds out Tally hasn't heard from her father in three months. When Penny gets home, Miss Beans calls her to tell Penny her float design won. Her dad beeps in on call waiting and asks her if she has thought about moving back.

Chapter 21 Analysis

Apparently, Penny's dad talked to her mom about Penny moving back to the city with him, but her mom hasn't discussed it with Penny. Penny is feeling conflicted now that what she wanted is a reality. She has just started to feel at home in Hog's Hollow and now she has a chance to move back to the city. She infers that what she saw in Tally's closet were packed suitcases, which indicates that Tally is not settled in Hog's Hollow and erroneously believes that her father is still coming back to rescue her.



Chapter 22

Chapter 22 Summary

Penny ends up telling Tally that her parents are separated and that her mom is at another one of meetings in the city. Tally tells her that maybe they are trying to work things out. Tally asks Penny isn't that what she wants so she can move back to the city, but Penny says that sometimes you have to face reality. Tally walks away.

Miss Beans announces Penny's design won and passes around a sign-up sheet for the kids in art class that want to help build the float. Charity and none of her friends sign up. When the bell rings and Tally walks out without Penny, Penny goes to the library and finds Charity and Marcus bent over a book. She runs out of the library, even though Marcus is calling after her, and locks herself in the bathroom. Charity comes in after her to confront Penny on how Penny has ruined her life since she moved to Hog's Hollow. Penny leaves school and heads up to the woods, where she runs into Mr. Fish. Mr. Fish answer Penny's question about why he's building the planets, which is he and Marcus needed a lifeline after Mrs. Fish died. Mr. Fish drives Penny to the bakery, where he tells her that her mom named the bakery after her, Penny. Penny's mom tells her that they are divorcing and Penny gets to choose who she wants to live with because she is old enough to decide.

Chapter 22 Analysis

Tally takes the facing reality comment from Penny as a statement that Tally has to face the fact that her father is not coming back for her. It seems as if Charity is tutoring Marcus, but Penny has misconstrued the tutor-student relationship as a boyfriend-girlfriend relationship. It's harder for Penny to decide to move back to the city than it was a few months prior because now she has more roots and relationships in Hog's Hollow.



Chapter 23

Chapter 23 Summary

Penny goes to Tally's house to apologize and tell Tally that her parents are divorcing. Tally shows penny an envelope she sent to her father with a "Refused. Return to Sender" stamp on it. When Penny gets home, she tells her mom she's staying.

Chapter 23 Analysis

Tally has finally come to terms about her father and his leaving her behind for his own life. Penny realizes that where she truly belongs is right where she is—in Hog's Hollow with her mother and Gram.



Chapter 24

Chapter 24 Summary

Penny walks to Tally's house with a cupcake box in her hands. She isn't there, but Poppy offers to drive Penny to the ARK, the animal shelter where Tally works every Saturday. Before they leave, Poppy shows Penny the winter tree witch ball she designed from Penny's description of the winter trees in Central Park in winter. When Poppy calls Penny the Cupcake Queen, Penny mentions Mr. Fish says the same thing about her creations. Penny suggests they work on planet witch balls together.

Poppy, Penny and Gram arrive at the ARK. Tally has died her hair with three primary colors and given up her "normal" look. Penny tells her she's staying in Hog's Hollow. As they are walking outside between outbuildings, a turkey vulture collides named Snowball collides with Penny. Gram decides to adopt a white kitten she names Cupcake. As Penny, Poppy, and Gram are leaving ARK, Tally tells Penny that Blake says Marcus is failing French.

Chapter 24 Analysis

There is some foreshadowing that a relationship might form between Poppy and Mr. Fish. Blake telling Tally to tell Penny Marcus is failing French is his way of telling Penny that Charity is tutoring Marcus. Penny identifies with the turkey vulture, Snowball, that lost both of her wings in a hunting accident. She too has lost and has to adapt to her new life, just as Snowball has. So does Marcus, Mr. Fish, Tally and everyone else when life throws them curveballs.



Chapter 25

Chapter 25 Summary

While Penny and Gram try to get Cupcake settled, Penny returns her father's voice mail message. She tells her dad that she's decided to stay. Oscar, Penny's cat, is trying to paw his way under the door to get to Cupcake.

Penny goes for a walk on the beach while the snow is falling. She runs into Marcus and Sam sitting on the porch of their boarded up beach house. Penny tells Marcus that she's failing French and Marcus admits the same. Marcus puts the bracelet that he always wears and admits to making over the summer on Penny's wrist. Marcus confirms they are still going to the dance together and then Mr. Fish pulls up in his truck looking for Marcus. Penny heads home and Mr. Fish calls her Cupcake Queen again.

Chapter 25 Analysis

The truth finally comes out about Charity tutoring Marcus in French. In so many words, Marcus also admits that he likes Penny. The bracelet he gives her symbolizes their coming together as boyfriend and girlfriend. Mr. Fish arriving at the old beach house foreshadows that his next project will be fixing up and refurbishing the house so that he and Marcus can move back into it.



Chapter 26

Chapter 26 Summary

Everyone is working on turning Penny's design float into an actual float. Charlotte even comes to help. Charity ends up winning Hog's Hollow Queen, even with her oversize body stuffed into her dress. Penny got special permission to change the tagline on the banner from the float to "Hog's Hollow—The Way Life Should Be" to "Hog's Hollow—The Way Life Is."

Chapter 26 Analysis

Everyone is settling into their life in Hog's Hollow. Even though things don't always work out the way you plan, they work out the way they should. The lesson is that half the battle is how you react to the things that life throws at you.



Characters

Penelope

Penny is a fourteen-year-old girl who has just moved from New York City with her mom to Hog's Hollow. Penny's father is a huge Beatles' fan, so she is named as a tribute to the fab-four, hence the name Penny Lane. Penny's mother is originally from Hog's Hollow, so when Penny's parents separate, she and her mother move in with Gram.

Penny is having a hard time adjusting from city life to small town life. In fact, she vows that her stay in Hog's Hollow is only temporary. She is making plans on a daily basis to return to the art galleries, cafes and busy city streets of New York as soon as she can. Penny is very artistic. She has always enjoyed arts and crafts. She excels at creating new designs for her mother's cupcakes, and then helping the sketches become a reality.

She takes her art to the next level when she wins the town's float design contest for the annual festival. Along the way, Penny makes friends, such as Tally and Blake. She even has her first boyfriend, Marcus. By the end of the novel, she no longer wants to move back to the city, but instead chooses to stay just where she is—in Hog's Hollow.

Gram

Gram is Penny's maternal grandmother. Gram is a photographer, so she shoots portraits of families in Hog's Hollow and in surrounding towns. Gram also helps out in the bakery. Gram becomes a confidante for Penny. When Penny cannot talk with her mom and dad about their separation and impending divorce, it is Gram Penny chooses to confide in.

Gram acts as a liaison in some ways. Her daughter, Penny's mother Lizzie, is suffering from the ending of her marriage. While Gram is trying to be a support system for Lizzie, Gram also doesn't agree with how Lizzie is handling the situation with Penny. Gram tries to get Lizzie to talk with Penny and be more open with her about what's taking place, but Lizzie seems paralyzed by her changing world.

Elizabeth - Lizzie

Lizzie is Penny's mother. When she was living in New York City, Lizzie ran an art gallery. Now that she lives back in Hog's Hollow, Lizzie runs her own bakery, which only sells cupcakes. Lizzie is having a hard time adjusting to the change in her marriage. She seems to be very withdrawn, anxious, and less confident than she was when she was living in the city. By the end of the novel, when Penny decides to continue living with her mother instead of going back to the city to live with her father, it seems as if Lizzie is returning to her normal outgoing self.



Jeannie

Jeannie is a college student who works for Lizzie at The Cupcake Queen bakery. Jeannie is a natural blonde and she drives a Mini-Cooper. Jeannie also has a boyfriend, whose name is Stuart. At the start of the novel she calls in sick, which is why Penny has to help her mother set up for Charity's birthday party. Jeannie never returns at any point in the novel, so it is inferred that she returned to college.

Charity Wharton

Charity Wharton is the fourteen-year-old girl having the birthday party that Penny is helping to set up for. Charity automatically blames Penny and her mother when there is a disaster with the refreshment table at the party. From this point on, Charity spearheads a group of girls at school to bully and pull pranks on Penny. Charity and Penny also have a crush on the same guy, Marcus.

Eugenia Wharton

Eugenia Wharton is overweight and she is Charity's mother. It turns out that Lizzie beat Eugenia out for Hog's Hollow Queen for the four years they were in high school together. Mrs. Wharton telling Tally that she's surprised at how well Tally is doing because of her situation is what prompts Tally to enter the Hog's Hollow Queen contest.

Mr. Fish

Mr. Fish is Marcus's father. He works at the dairy in town. Before Penny moves to Hog's Hollow, Mr. Fish's wife died in a kayaking accident. When his wife died, Mr. Fish lost his mind, boarded up their beach house and moved into town with Marcus. Mr. Fish and Marcus start building metal planet sculptures in the woods as a tribute to Marcus's mom, who was an amateur astrologist. Mr. Fish is also the one who reveals to Penny that her mother named the bakery after her.

Poppy

Poppy is Tally's aunt. Poppy went to pick up Tally up from a hotel room where her musician father had left her alone for three days. Poppy creates witch balls, which are glass creations or pieces of art. In the aftermath of Mrs. Fish's death, Poppy would feed Mr. Fish and Marcus.

Marcus

Marcus is the boy with the dog who Penny meets on the beach before school starts. He works in the office at school, so Tally has some run-ins with him after school starts.



Marcus is very cute, but somewhat mysterious. Penny can't seem to figure out why he hangs out with arch enemy, Charity, at school, but asks Penny to the festival dance and flirts with her.

Marcus works at the local animal shelter—ARK, where Tally also volunteers her time. The reason Marcus has to work there is because he got into trouble and had to do some community service hours. This is also where he adopted his dog, Sam.

Blake

Blake is a member of Tally's Rock Paper Scissors club. He has spiky hair and works in his mother's greenhouse helping her grow tomatoes and such. Blake and Tally have a crush on each other, but neither one of them comes right out and admits it. Besides Tally, Blake also becomes one of Penny's good friends. Blake even tries to look out for Penny when he thinks something might be going on between Charity and Marcus. Blake is the one who discovers Charity is simply tutoring Marcus in French.

Tally

Tally is a girl Penny meets from art class at school. When Penny first meets her, Tally has blue streaks in her hair. Tally is also very eccentric in the way she dresses. Tally's mother left when she was small. Her father is a musician, and Tally was traveling on tour with him until he left her alone in a hotel room for three days. Poppy came to rescue Tally and Tally has been living with Poppy ever since.

Throughout the novel, Tally holds out hope that her father is coming back to get her. When a letter she writes to her father is returned denied, she realizes that her father isn't coming back for her. Tally is very devoted to saving animals. She works at the ARK and even decides to enter the pageant as a way to win cash to help raise money for the ARK. Tally even creates t-shirts to sell, which Penny helps design, as a fundraiser for the animal shelter.

Additionally, Tally becomes Penny's best friend. Tally helps Penny seek revenge on Charity and her friends by making up a lard diet so they'll all gain a lot of weight.



Objects/Places

Hog's Hollow

Hog's Hollow is a small town where Penny's mother grew up. It is the town where Penny and her mother move and open a cupcake bakery when her parents separate. The town is also the setting for the entire novel. It is such a small town that everyone knows everyone else there and everyone knows everyone else's business there.

The town holds an annual festival, where they crown a queen. Penny's mother won all four years she was in high school. Penny wins the float design for the festival parade and Tally wins First Runner-up as Queen. Charity wins queen. The novel never states where Hog's Hollow, but is somewhere along the east coast shore because it has a beach.

The Cupcake Queen Bakery

The Cupcake Queen Bakery is the name of the bakery that Lizzie owns. It comes out later in the novel that she named the bakery after Penny, the cupcake queen. Penny works at the bakery, coming up with ideas for creative cupcakes. She also helps her mother fill special orders.

Cupcakes

The cupcakes they sell at the bakery become an artistic outlet for Penny. She sketches designs of cupcakes and then comes up with ways to turn her sketches into reality. A couple of times in the novel, she creates cupcakes to honor things that happen to her and her friends. For example, when Charity and her friends fill Penny's locker with pennies, Penny creates an Abe Lincoln cupcake. For Tally, Penny designs a series of Rock Paper Scissors cupcakes. For Marcus and Mr. Fish, Penny designs planet cupcakes.

New York City

Penny lived in New York City her entire life, until she moves to Hog's Hollow. Penny's father still lives in the city. All Penny wants is to move back to the city. That is until she finds happiness, true friends and a life in Hog's Hollow. Then, Penny chooses to stay in Hog's Hollow over returning to the city.



Penny's Locker

Penny's locker at school is where Charity and her friends place various items as a way of bullying Penny. The first day of school, they fill her locker with pennies. They spray shaving cream all over locker another day. A dead fish stuck in one of her cupcakes also makes it into her locker. The girls get her locker combination, even when she changes lockers, because one of Charity's friends works in the office.

Beach

The beach outside of Gram's house is a place of respite for Penny. Any time things are rough, Penny retreats to the beach to walk and watch the ocean. It is on the beach where Penny first meets Sam and Marcus.

Bracelet

Marcus wears a bracelet made out of leather. One night, he gives it to Penny by placing it on her wrist. He tells Penny that he made it the previous summer.

ARK

The ARK is the local animal shelter. Tally works there as a volunteer. Marcus also works there to fulfill his community service hours. During the novel, Tally makes several attempts to raise money for the shelter. When Penny and Gram visit the shelter with Poppy, Gram ends up adopting a kitten she names Cupcake.

Woods

The woods are a place of respite for Mr. Fish, who is working on a secret project up there. Nobody knows what he is working on but they all speculate. It turns out that Mr. Fish is building metal sculptures of the planets in the woods as a form of public art, which is to honor his late wife.

Float

The parade float Penny designs represents how life should be in Hog's Hollow. For Penny, it also represents how her life is. She creates a float with a rock, paper, scissors, cupcakes, planets and all of the items and events that have made the small town home to her.



Themes

Relationships

One of the primary themes running through the novel is relationships. The novel reveals that even the individuals that make up a family have different relationships among the family members. For example, Penny and her father have a closer relationship than Penny and her mother. Penny and her mother, however, have a unique relationship of their own.

Friendship is another type of relationship the novel tackles. First, Penny doesn't have any friends for the summer she spends in Hog's Hollow before school starts. As she starts school, Penny is able to form a close friendship with Tally and Blake. Even though Gram is Penny's grandmother, she tries to provide friendly advice to Penny to help get her through the tough times of her parents separating and having to start life over again in Hog's Hollow.

Romantic relationships are also tackled in the novel. Penny has a crush on Marcus and Marcus has a crush on Penny, but Penny thinks that Marcus likes Charity. In the end, Marcus and Penny become boyfriend and girlfriend. Tally and Blake are also boyfriend and girlfriend. In public, they act more like friends. In private, however, they have tender moments.

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 going through the separation and divorce of your parents, and bullying at school. Penny struggles with the fact that her coming of age includes having to make new friends and start a new life in a new place. Penny deals with the responsibilities in life of having parents that are divorcing, trying to figure out what is going on with her crush's mental state and trying to find out who she is as a person.

Penny also faces the rite of passage of having her first boyfriend. Penny especially struggles with her feelings about herself as a person when she was living in New York City and the person that she now in Hog's Hollow.

Family

Family is the central theme throughout the entire novel. This is because the storyline is about the lives of this particular family—the Lanes. While every family has their trials and tribulations, Penny's family has its own family dynamics that are the same and that are different from those of other families. In the end though, they are a family and they will get through it together, one way or the other.



Style

Point of View

The novel is written in the first person point of view, from the perspective of main character, Penny Lane. The novel swings back and forth between the present and the past. The present represents the time after Penny moves to Hog's Hollow. The past represents the time when Penny was living in New York City.

The point of view of this novel is intimate, allowing a reader to connect closely with the main character, Penny Lane. The book written in this manner allows the reader to get inside Penny's head, thoughts and inner struggles. The reader cares what happens to the narrator. The point of view also allows the author to interject 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 Hog's Hollow during the twenty-first century. The main characters are involved in the daily life of living in a small town. Penny is constantly trying to find a way to return to her life in New York City, but ends up learning to love her life in Hog's Hollow instead.

The setting of this novel works well with the plot. At first, the reader is not aware that the character suffers from bullying and her parents' impending divorce. However, as events unfold, the separation of her parents and the bullying is 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 author, however, interjects some foreign words, French, to fit into the setting of the novel. The language is from the twenty-first 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.

Structure

The novel is divided into twenty-six chapters. Each chapter ranges from five pages to twenty pages long. The chapters tell 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 Penny Lane. Another subplot is family relationships.



Quotes

"Try to make the best of it."
Chap. 1, p. 9

"So, you're new."
Chap. 2, p. 13

"I was surprised when you got the call to do the cupcakes for her daughter's birthday.
After everything..."
Chap. 3, p. 26

"The least you can do is take their money."
Chap. 4, p. 36

"You, Penny, are just like your mother. You can do anything you put your mind to."
Chap. 5, p. 46

"Grape people are artistic and like to be alone a lot."
Chap. 6, p. 53

"You've probably seen him. Just before dark, running on the beach. Just him and his
dog, Sam."
Chap. 7, p. 66

"That's Marcus."
Chap. 8, p. 74

"We should get home."
Chap. 9, p. 88

"Trust me."
Chap. 10, p. 96

"I have something to show you."
Chap. 11, p. 106



"Just a Web site I'm fooling around with."

Chap. 12, p. 109

"It's all in the way you spin things."

Chap. 13, p. 130

"Penny, you should come in now."

Chap. 14, p. 139

"Living three hundred miles away from each other already seems pretty separated to me."

Chap. 15, p. 141

"Different."

Chap. 16, p. 153

"I didn't believe it at first either, but I went to their Web site. Newlard.com."

Chap. 17, p. 155

"Maybe I want to."

Chap. 18, p. 168

"Your mom was an astronomer?"

Chap. 19, p. 173

"I made them specifically for you."

Chap. 20, p. 186

"About moving back to the city. You still do want to, right?"

Chap. 21, p. 200

"We'll talk later, okay? I promise."

Chap. 22, p. 215

"I guess it is better to know for sure what you're up against."

Chap. 23, p. 218

"She's really great."
Chap. 24, p. 227

"I'm failing French too."
Chap. 25, p. 232

"First Runner-up isn't exactly losing."
Chap. 26, p. 239

Topics for Discussion

Who is the true Penny Lane? Do you think she knows her parents are heading toward divorce, or is she in denial? When Penny has a chance to move back to the city with her father, why does she decide to stay in Hog's Hollow? When Penny confesses the divorce to Tally, does she do it out of a feeling of desperation or for another reason? What does Penny ultimately realize about her relationship with her mother?

Discuss the relationship between Penny and Charity. Are they schoolmates, foes or somewhere in between? Is there true competition in their relationship? How does Penny feel about Charity? How does Charity feel about Penny? How do Penny's feelings change after she wins Marcus? What does she do about it? What happens to Charity?

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

Discuss the relationship between Marcus and Penny. Are they friends, foes, girlfriend and boyfriend, or somewhere in between? Is there true competition in their relationship? How does Penny feel about Marcus? How does Marcus feel about Penny? How do Penny's feelings change after she discovers the relationship between Charity and Marcus? What does she do about it? What happens to Marcus?

Discuss the relationship between Blake and Tally. Why do they try to hide their romantic feelings for each other? What happens to their relationship?

Who is Marcus Fish? Is he a tortured soul, or simply a normal teenager going through a difficult time? Why do you think Marcus takes Penny to the woods? What role does Penny play in Marcus healing from his mother's death?

Discuss Penny's artistic abilities. What impact does it have on the characters of the novel? How does it motivate them and how does it derail their lives?