

# **Eight Hundred Grapes Study Guide**

## **Eight Hundred Grapes by Laura Dave**

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# Contents

<a href="#">Eight Hundred Grapes Study Guide.....</a>	<a href="#">1</a>
<a href="#">Contents.....</a>	<a href="#">2</a>
<a href="#">Plot Summary.....</a>	<a href="#">3</a>
<a href="#">Part 1: The Grapes: Chapter 1, “Sebastopol, California, Six Months Ago” - Chapter 7, “Mr. McCarthy”.....</a>	<a href="#">5</a>
<a href="#">Part 1: The Grapes: “Chapter 8,” A Guy Named Mark and a Guy Named Jesse” - Chapter 14: “Grown, Produced, and Bottled”.....</a>	<a href="#">9</a>
<a href="#">Part 2: The Crush: Chapter 15, “Ben and Maddie and Georgia and Jacob” - Chapter 22, “Exile on Main Street”.....</a>	<a href="#">12</a>
<a href="#">Part 2: The Crush: Chapter 23: “The Vintner Drinks Alone” - Chapter 31: “No Secrets”.....</a>	<a href="#">15</a>
<a href="#">Part 3: The Union: Chapter 32, “An Invitation” - Chapter 42, “Synchronization”.....</a>	<a href="#">18</a>
<a href="#">Part 4: The Last Harvest: Chapter 43, “The Waiting Room” - Part 5: Chapter 50, “Sebastopol, California, Present Day”.....</a>	<a href="#">22</a>
<a href="#">Characters.....</a>	<a href="#">25</a>
<a href="#">Symbols and Symbolism.....</a>	<a href="#">28</a>
<a href="#">Settings.....</a>	<a href="#">30</a>
<a href="#">Themes and Motifs.....</a>	<a href="#">31</a>
<a href="#">Styles.....</a>	<a href="#">35</a>
<a href="#">Quotes.....</a>	<a href="#">37</a>



# Plot Summary

NOTE: The following version of this book was used to create this study guide: Dave, Laura, *Eight Hundred Grapes*. Simon and Schuster, Inc., 2015.

When the reader is introduced to protagonist and Los Angeles attorney Georgia Ford, she is driving to her parents' vineyard in Sebastopol, California, in Sonoma County. Georgia relates the story from her first person perspective and has taken the nine-hour drive from Los Angeles in a panic after having discovered that her fiancé has been harboring a secret.

In the week before Georgia was set to wed Ben, she was at her last wedding dress fitting when she saw Ben with another woman and child on the sidewalk outside of the dress shop. Georgia confronted Ben and learned that he has a four-and-a-half-year-old daughter with an ex-girlfriend that he has only discovered recently. Feeling betrayed by Ben's decision to keep this information from her, Georgia has fled to her family home for comfort and to sort out her future.

When Georgia arrives in Sebastopol, still wearing her wedding dress, she sees her brother Finn at the family tavern before going to her parents' home at the vineyard. At her parents' home, Georgia is startled to discover a semi-naked man exiting her mother's bedroom and comes to learn that her parents are separated and have not told her. Georgia's mother, Jen, explains that she has been seeing another man named Henry who is a conductor for the San Francisco symphony.

Georgia also discovers that her parents have sold their winery, *The Last Straw*, to a company called Murray Grant Wines, a rival vintner. This move makes Georgia feel betrayed again upon learning that both of her brothers have known about and support the sale.

Through a series of flashbacks, the reader comes to know why Georgia's father Dan bought the vineyard after leaving a scientific career. He has dedicated himself to improving the soil on the land and developing multilayered and organic wines of high quality. Dan believes in the concept of synchronization and applies this belief in both winemaking and in life. Jen, who was once a musician in a symphony orchestra, largely left behind her dreams in order to follow Dan's dreams of winemaking.

The next secret that is unearthed at *The Last Straw* is the revelation that Georgia's brother Finn is engaged in an affair with their brother Bobby's wife, Margaret. Meanwhile, Georgia's fiancé Ben has overseen the move of his and Georgia's furnishings to London, where they plan to move after the wedding. As the days to the annual harvest party count down, Ben arrives at *The Last Straw* with his daughter Maddie and attempts to make amends with Georgia.

As Georgia attempts to reconcile her resentments and inner conflicts regarding her impending marriage and the separation of her parents, Bobby's wife Margaret comes to



speak with her. Bobby overhears their conversation and discovers the mutual attraction between Margaret and Finn, leading to more conflict. A fight breaks out between Bobby and Finn at the family dinner and wine tasting but is broken up by Dan.

In order to cope with her situation, Georgia throws herself into working at the winery with her father and they discuss Dan's plans for the future. After the sale of the winery is finalized, Dan intends to return to a vineyard in France where he originally learned winemaking. He intends to rent a yacht and travel the world with a woman he almost had an affair with many years ago. Dan also reveals that he had a heart attack in recent years and that event was what led to Jen's affair with Henry.

When the day of the annual harvest party arrives, Georgia files an injunction at the courthouse to stop the sale of the vineyard. At the party, tensions run high between the couples of the Ford family and Georgia learns from Ben's ex-girlfriend Michelle that Ben had visited London in the past month to care for Maddie while she was filming a movie. Georgia confronts Ben about this lie, as he said he was finalizing the purchase of their house in London at the time and never mentioned his daughter.

Georgia goes to the winemaker's cottage to get away from the situation and finds her brother Finn reheating a frozen lasagna made by their mother on the stove. While it heats, their mother interrupts to announce that Dan is making his final toast and the family gathers outside. During the toast, the cottage goes up in flames and the family rushes to put out the fire. Firefighters arrive along with a downpour of rain and the cottage is saved; however, the last block of grapes is threatened by the rain so the family rushes to the vineyard to pick them before it is too late.

While the family picks the final grapes, Dan collapses from another heart attack and is rushed to the hospital. This event leads to the resolution of many of the novel's conflicts: Georgia calls off her wedding with Ben and suggests that Ben move to London without her; Jen and Dan are reunited and renew their wedding vows; and Georgia manages to buy the vineyard back from Jacob, the CEO of Murray Grant Wines.

In the final chapter, Georgia looks out over her vineyard as Jacob and Finn arrive. Georgia has begun a relationship with Jacob and looks forward to her new and unexpected future. *Eight Hundred Grapes* incorporates the process of winemaking and the process of living life to explore themes of family, secrets, synchronization, and forgiveness.



# Part 1: The Grapes: Chapter 1, “Sebastopol, California, Six Months Ago” - Chapter 7, “Mr. McCarthy”

## Summary

Georgia Ford, the novel's protagonist, loves to tell the story about how her parents, Dan and Jenny Ford, met in front of Lincoln Center one wintry day when he jumped into her yellow VW bug instead of his co-worker's yellow VW bug. Her father always called it synchronization—the coordination of events working in unison—which is vastly different from the free-agency passiveness of fate.

In Chapter 1, "Sebastopol, California, Six Months Ago," Georgia is scheduled to be married in a week at her family's vineyard in Sebastopol, California, but today she is driving the nine hours straight from Los Angeles where she works as an attorney, straight home, all while wearing her wedding dress. When she reaches Sebastopol, she heads to a tavern owned by her brothers, Finn and Bobby. Bobby lives in San Francisco and leads a successful life; he bought the tavern for Finn to manage. Finn also works sporadically as a photographer. Finn is surprised to see Georgia a week ahead of her wedding and on the last weekend of the grape harvest.

In Chapter 2, "The Last Straw," Georgia drives to her parents' home at their vineyard, called The Last Straw. She receives a cell phone call from her fiancé, Ben, who is frantic to talk to her about her finding out about his daughter, Maddie, and Maddie's mother, Michelle. Georgia had been at the bridal salon earlier today for a gown fitting when she saw Ben walking with Michelle and four-and-a-half-year-old Maddie. Georgia ran out of the salon and confronted the trio and learned that Ben has a daughter that she did not know about. As Georgia now argues with Ben on the phone, she is shocked to see a naked, heavysset man walk out of her mother's bedroom.

In Chapter 3, "Regarding Henry," Georgia's mother, Jen, explains that the man in her bedroom is a former love interest named Henry. Jen and her husband, Dan, are temporarily separated and Jen has been seeing Henry. Georgia tells her mother about Maddie and how Ben had kept her a secret from Georgia. Georgia thinks this secrecy is a reason to possibly call off the wedding but her mother thinks it is not that serious. Jen also tells Georgia that she and Henry are old friends from Jen's symphony days in New York and he has just been named the conductor of the San Francisco symphony.

In Chapter 4, "The Contract," Georgia recalls growing up at the vineyard and how the earth and the business were such a huge part of her childhood. Georgia, however, chose a career in law because it was more predictable than the volatile business of running a vineyard.



Georgia heads to the winemaker's cottage to see her father but he is not there. She spots documents selling The Last Straw to a company called Murray Grant Wines and is perplexed because her father hates that company. She does not understand why he would sell the vineyard, let alone to them. Georgia's brother, Bobby, shows up and he is casual about the sale of the vineyard. Their father has already signed the contract along with Jacob McCarthy, the CEO of Murray Grant. Georgia and Bobby argue about whether this is something their father should do.

In Chapter 5, "The Secateurs," Dan tells Georgia and Bobby that he and their mother want to sell the vineyard. As a lawyer, Georgia wonders why they did not talk to her before signing a contract. Georgia also wonders if it might be a bad time to sell the business since her parents are having marriage problems.

Chapter 6, "Sebastopol, California, 1979" is related through flashback, describing the time when Dan had bought the land for the vineyard in Sebastopol in 1979. Dan knew it was a risk because the land was not as rich as the wine country in Napa Valley. Dan's scientific nature compelled him to buy the property and make it into more than it had been.

In Chapter 7, "Mr. McCarthy," Georgia calls her colleague, Suzannah, at the office to tell her where she is and Suzannah reminds Georgia of Georgia and Ben's upcoming move to London. Georgia and Ben are going to work in the London offices for their companies and their furnishings and personal items are packed for the move.

Georgia visits Jacob McCarthy to confront him on why he wants to buy The Last Straw. Jacob tells her that the deal is done and it is what her parents wanted. Jacob essentially tells Georgia that the sale is not any of her business, but she is determined to stop it in any way possible.

## Analysis

The main narrative of *Eight Hundred Grapes* is related from the first person perspective of its protagonist, Georgia Ford. This perspective allows the reader insight into Georgia's actions and her motivations for those actions. Chapters related in flashback, such as Chapter 6, "Sebastopol, California 1979," which describes Dan (Georgia's father) purchasing the vineyard, are related from the perspective of a third person narrator with focus on Dan's point of view.

Synchronization is both a big part of the Ford family and a thematic focus in *Eight Hundred Grapes*. Dan Ford, the head of the family, believes strongly in it and has ever since he first met his wife, Jen, in New York City. He was to meet his friend who drove a yellow VW bug but got into another yellow VW bug parked at the same place. Getting into the second bug put him face-to-face with Jen with whom he would fall in love and marry. Dan feels that synchronization is much stronger than mere fate because fate is too passive for what happened. It was synchronization, elements working together for a



purpose, which brought Dan and Jen together. He has believed in synchronization throughout their married life and their work at creating the vineyard.

While synchronization seems to be an overriding element in the lives of the Ford family, secrets coming to the surface is another thematic development that that author presents in this first section of the novel. Georgia is the first one to be impacted by a serious secret when she learns that her fiancé, Ben, fathered a child with his former girlfriend. The girl, who is now four-and-a-half years old, can no longer be kept in the background, even if Ben is right when he claims to have just found out about her. He did, however, wait several months to tell Georgia and she cannot help but feel betrayed by his silence and the fact that he now has another life that may pull him toward a different direction.

Georgia's mother, Jen, has a couple big secrets of her own that she has kept from her children. Georgia is surprised to learn that her parents plan to divorce and that her mother is seeing a man named Henry—an old friend of her mother's from her New York Symphony days. As if this news is not jarring enough, Georgia is startled to see Henry walking naked from her mother's bedroom.

Georgia also learns that her parents did not tell her that they sold the vineyard, The Last Straw. Georgia is desperately in need of some comfort regarding her relationship with Ben but she is not finding much when she returns home in distress. Nothing is as it used to be in the Ford household and more will be revealed as the story extends.

This section of the novel develops the main characters and gives exposition relating their back-stories and relationships. Georgia's discovery of the sale of The Last Straw also sets the rising action in motion, as Georgia's objectives have expanded from simply seeking refuge from her wedding, now to include finding resolution within her family's problems.

Important symbols and motifs seen in the first seven chapters include Georgia's wedding dress, which represents her impending marriage and which has been soiled along her journey home; the family vineyard itself and its significant name, "The Last Straw," which reflects upon Georgia's mindset upon fleeing from the wedding; and the process of winemaking (viticulture), which serves as a motif throughout the narrative, representing the power of family.

## Discussion Question 1

What is synchronization, and why is it an important theme in the story?

## Discussion Question 2

In what way has Ben betrayed Georgia just one week before their wedding?



## Discussion Question 3

Why did Georgia go into the practice of law instead of entering the family vineyard business?

## Vocabulary

synchronization, biodynamic, ignorant, optimistic, glimpse, subsequent, duress, sprawling, simultaneity, freesia, remnants, reflex, tulle, emphasized, disgraced, perpetually, morphed, glam, stiletto, tenuous, legacy, envisioned, connotation, mundane, vintages, decimating, confrontation, folio, slung, Pinot, perplexed, sustainable, reciprocal, bucolic, perplexed, cobbled, mews, diminishing





# Part 1: The Grapes: “Chapter 8,” A Guy Named Mark and a Guy Named Jesse” - Chapter 14: “Grown, Produced, and Bottled”

## Summary

In Chapter 8, “A Guy Named Mark and a Guy Named Jesse,” Georgia returns to her parents' home and joins Finn in the kitchen where he is eating from a pan of homemade lasagna. Eating their mother's homemade lasagna has been a ritual in the Ford household for years. Georgia talks to Finn about their parents' relationship problems but Finn declares that it is their issue to work out. Finn reminds Georgia that Georgia had made her siblings sign a contract that they would never take over the vineyard—a contract that she also signed. Finn also reveals that he and Margaret, Bobby's wife, have strong feelings for each other. Just then, Bobby, Margaret, and their twin boys pop into the kitchen for a family visit.

In Chapter 9, “The Wedding Crashers,” Ben calls Georgia to tell her that he oversaw the move of their furnishings today and that everything is on its way to London. Even though Georgia is not happy that Ben has kept the secret of Maddie from her, Ben went ahead with the move in hopes that everything will work out. Georgia also wants to know about Michelle Carter, the movie star who is Ben's ex-girlfriend and Maddie's mother. Ben explains that he had learned about Maddie only a few days after he had proposed to Georgia and did not know how to handle the information or what the best time to tell her was. What Ben says he knows for sure is that he wants Maddie in his life. Ben tries to get Georgia to understand that he has never been unfaithful to her but Georgia does not understand why he kept his former relationship and daughter a secret.

Chapter 10, “Sebastopol, California, 1984” is another chapter related in flashback from a third-person narrator. In 1984, the vineyard was not successful but Dan hated to sell out because of everything he and Jen had done to keep it going. Dan thought that he could get his old job back at the university in San Francisco and Jen could get a job with the symphony. Jen, however, did not want to leave and told him they would make it somehow.

In Chapter 11, “The View from 8 A.M.,” back in the present, Dan and Finn wake Georgia early the next morning to join them in the vineyard's tasting room to help prepare for the Sunday morning winemaker's tasting of last year's vintage. Tonight will be the family dinner to mark the end of the harvest and then the big harvest party will be held the following night. Georgia's wedding will take up the following weekend at the vineyard. At the tasting room, Dan plays Bruce Springsteen music because it was the music played



at the cutting of the grapes so it is fitting that it should be played at the tasting; it is all about synchronization for him.

Dan talks to Georgia about marriage and how he had almost married a poet but he chose the vineyard instead. He wants Georgia to know that it's okay if things do not work out with Ben but it is okay if she wants to make it work too. Ultimately, Dan feels that people should not test the people they love.

In Chapter 12, "The Wine Thief," The Last Straw Vineyard holds its annual tasting for local winemakers, affectionately nicknamed the "Cork Dorks." Georgia is not pleased to see Jacob there. Dan and Jen are toasted for creating a nice vineyard after years of hard work; only their children know that they will be going their separate ways very soon. Georgia is overcome with emotion, drops her glass of wine, and rushes out of the tasting room.

In Chapter 13, "The Ride Home," Georgia wants to drive away in the first vehicle she sees, Finn's truck, but cannot find the keys. Jacob has followed her outside and offers her a ride as Georgia happens to see Henry waiting for her mother. Georgia does not want to see her mother and Henry embrace so she takes Jacob up on his offer, even if it means walking seven miles to get to his car in town.

In Chapter 14, "Grown, Produced, and Bottled," Georgia describes Dan's favorite wine he produces as one called Concerto, an ode to Jen's musical interests. They also like that it alludes to the synchronization of the two parts of a concerto—the soloist and the orchestra. As Georgia and Jacob walk home, he tells her that he practiced law for a very brief period but did not like it at all. He also tells Georgia that he had been engaged to a woman named Lee but they never got married even though they still live together. Jacob advises Georgia to not let the situation with Ben linger too long because she will eventually run out of time to make the best decision. When Jacob and Georgia reach her parents' home, she is surprised to see Ben, Maddie, and Michelle waiting there.

## Analysis

Along with wine, another motif that reappears throughout *Eight Hundred Grapes* is the lasagna that Finn is seen eating directly from a big pan that his mother has made. Throughout their childhoods, the Ford children loved their mother's lasagna and it became a source of comfort for them. Now that the family members are in turmoil and transition, the lasagna appears as a symbol of comfort, unity, and constancy.

Secrets continue to emerge as the story moves along. Finn reveals to Georgia that he is in love with Bobby's wife, Margaret, and that she loves him too. Finn and Margaret had been friends before she married Bobby so there had been a foundation of love and respect but it has crossed the line of impropriety because Margaret's marriage to Bobby is on shaky ground.

Georgia is still stinging from Ben's having kept Maddie a secret from her but the secret is exacerbated when Georgia learns that Bobby's ex-girlfriend is a beautiful celebrity.



Now she knows that Bobby will have two pulls on his heart—his young daughter and a beautiful woman he obviously cared for at some time. Georgia believes that Ben was not unfaithful to her but she, as his fiancée, feels betrayed because he decided to keep the secret when he should have talked to her immediately upon finding out about Maddie.

The theme of synchronization continues to be explored also in this section of the novel. Dan plays Bruce Springsteen music during the harvest because the same music was played during the beginning of the season. In Dan's world, everything works because of synchronization, whether it is a grape harvest or feelings of love.

## Discussion Question 1

What secret does Georgia learn about Finn that could potentially impact the entire family?

## Discussion Question 2

Why does Ben go ahead with the move of his and Georgia's belongings to London even though they are fighting? How does Georgia respond to this action?

## Discussion Question 3

Why does Dan play Bruce Springsteen music in the tasting room? What does this reveal about his character?

## Vocabulary

reinforcements, annoyance, assured, bistro, beeline, exponentially, disdain, impromptu, impending, venture capital fund, flirtatious, siblings, taunting, encouraged, tabloid, fodder, contemplating, impotent, exaggeration, entree, bankrupt, verisimilitude, intoxicating, compelled, recruits, migrated, scrumptious, dapper, colleagues, midair, conjunction, soloist, exemplified, faltering, terrain, distracted, reconciling



## Part 2: The Crush: Chapter 15, “Ben and Maddie and Georgia and Jacob” - Chapter 22, “Exile on Main Street”

### Summary

In Chapter 15, “Ben and Maddie and Georgia and Jacob,” Georgia recalls meeting Ben when he came to the law firm where she works to sign some contracts related to his architectural business. They have been together ever since. In the present, Georgia and Jacob reach her parents' home and Georgia confronts Ben about showing up unannounced with Maddie. Ben tries to make small talk with Jacob but the mood is awkward.

In Chapter 16, “Sebastopol, California, 1989,” the narrative enters flashback to the day of the harvest party, which was Dan’s perceived final one after ten years of running the vineyard. Dan recalled being asked to go to work for Murray Vineyards many years ago because of his skills. Dan did not accept, though, because he was more interested in changing the land he owned and accepting Murray’s offer would have sent him in the wrong direction.

In Chapter 17, “The Terroir Has a Story,” the narrative returns to Georgia’s perspective as she describes her father Dan as having always believed that the most important part of winemaking was the soil, so he spent most of his efforts on cultivating it. Most other winemakers thought differently, adding chemicals and sulfites to improve the fermenting process. It had been Dan's impassioned views on the land that made Jen fall in love with him.

In the present, Ben suggests to Georgia that they just forget about the recent trouble between them and move on but Georgia is not able to get there yet. Georgia, Ben, and Maddie walk through the vineyard and Georgia explains some its workings to the little girl.

In Chapter 18, “The Last Family Dinner (Part 1),” Georgia tells her mother that she still feels that Ben is withholding part of the story about Maddie and Michelle from her. Jen tells Georgia that it takes work to make a relationship good and Georgia contends that Jen is not doing that with Dan. Jen gets a text from Henry inviting her to a French restaurant at 10:00 tonight. Jen can sense Georgia's hostility about Henry but also about her thoughts that Georgia resents her parents for selling the vineyard. She tells Georgia to worry less, especially about things that are not really about her.

In Chapter 19, “Spontaneous Fermentation (and Other Ways to Lose the Love of Your Life),” Georgia is interrupted during a bubble bath by Margaret who wants to know about Michelle and Maddie. Margaret also tells Georgia about her marital problems with



Bobby, but says that even though she and Finn have strong feelings for each other, they have not slept together. Bobby, who has been listening on the other side of the bathroom door, storms into the bathroom demanding that Margaret confess to what she has done.

In Chapter 20, “Sebastopol, California 1994,” the narrative flashes back to 1994 with Dan in the south of France studying winemaking. He spent a lot of time with Marie, the winemaker on an estate, and he almost succumbed to a romantic affair with her.

In Chapter 21, “The Last Family Dinner (Part 2),” Georgia’s narrative returns. She relates that the Fords had built the Great Barrel Room as a place to hold Bobby and Margaret’s wedding. Now it holds some treasured barrels of wine and is the site of exclusive tastings. Tonight it is the site of the family dinner and Bobby and Margaret are outside arguing while other guests arrive. Finn arrives with a flashy woman and it is clear they have already been drinking. Bobby and Finn break out into a fight over Margaret and Finn swears that nothing has happened between them. It also comes out to the rest of the family that Maddie is Ben’s daughter. The fighting is stopped by Dan who demands that his sons meet him in the vineyard in the morning for his last day of working there.

In Chapter 22, “Exile on Main Street,” Georgia drives Finn away from the dinner. When she tries to give him advice about fixing his relationship with Bobby, he tells her to fix her own life first. Finn feels that if Georgia truly loved Ben, she would not have run away when he told her about Maddie. Georgia is so rattled that she drives into a fire hydrant and Finn is angry that she has wrecked his truck. Georgia walks away toward town and she spots Henry outside the French restaurant waiting on her mother. Georgia and Henry talk for a few minutes, with him telling her that he loves her mother. He had loved Jen from the moment he saw her many years ago but he had a family that he could not abandon.

## Analysis

The flashbacks seen in Chapters 16 and 20 give the reader further insight into Dan’s history and his character development in relation to the vineyard. In Chapter 17, “The Terroir Has a Story,” the author further connects Dan to the motif of winemaking in the descriptions of Jen’s first meeting with Dan: “Over stuffed cabbage and pork dumplings, she asked him what a winemaker did. What he actually did: ‘If you do your job,’ he said, ‘then you make good soil.’ She liked how he said it, even if she didn’t understand what he was saying” (105).

Dan’s commitment to the vineyard lies in not only wanting to create a successful business, but also wanting to improve the soil in which he grows his grapes. He had never wanted the vineyard to be a huge business because of the methods those companies employ to chemically enhance the products they produce. It has always been Dan’s theory that improving the soil each year would improve the end product and he has stayed true to that position.



Meanwhile, in the present-tense timeline, life continues to be a series of disappointments and forgiveness as Ben and Georgia are working through their issues related to secrecy and trust. Ben tries valiantly to get Georgia to understand that he loves her and needs her forgiveness for his behavior but she has not reached that point yet because she is still too hurt by his indiscretion and secrecy.

## Discussion Question 1

Why did Dan not go to work for Murray especially when the salary would have been phenomenal? What does this say about Dan's character?

## Discussion Question 2

What was it about Dan that made Jen really fall in love with him? What does that say about Jen's priorities? Do they still seem to be the same priorities, or have they changed?

## Discussion Question 3

Why does Finn think that Georgia does not really love Ben? Do you agree?

## Vocabulary

tortoise-rimmed, martini, architecture, precise, anxiety, insulting, biodynamic, festivities, unadulterated, relented, bastion, terroir, organic, compost, destemming, additives, fermentation, jarring, tentatively, yarrow, chamomile, insignificant, flailing, sailcloth, apologetic, elite, discriminating, deposition, devastated, entrenched, synchronization, robust, supportive, distracting, unraveling, declassification, fiance, idolizes, vintner, fermenting, commitment, entranced, astute, mesmerized, intimidated



## Part 2: The Crush: Chapter 23: “The Vintner Drinks Alone” - Chapter 31: “No Secrets”

### Summary

In Chapter 23, “The Vintner Drinks Alone,” Georgia returns to her parents' house but everyone is asleep so she heads to her father's cottage where she finds her father sitting on the porch drinking wine. Dan has been studying his spreadsheets about dates for harvesting the last of the grapes. Dan and Georgia talk about her inability to separate her angst over what is happening with Ben and the family's sale of the vineyard. Dan thinks that people should fight sometimes—especially for what really matters.

In Chapter 24, “Pancakes at the Violet Café,” the next morning Georgia takes Maddie to The Violet Cafe for pancakes and she learns about Michelle's boyfriend, Clay, who moved to Los Angeles to be with them but is not in the picture any longer. On the way out of the cafe, Georgia meets Jacob's girlfriend, Lee.

In Chapter 25, “Perfect Red,” Georgia and Maddie return to the house and find Ben and Michelle drinking coffee together. Michelle has come to pick up Maddie. Georgia takes Ben outside to tell him that she is concerned that Michelle wants to get back together with him. Ben contends that Michelle knows that he loves Georgia and that Michelle only wants them to be good parents to Maddie together. Georgia wants to know if Ben wanted to move to London for his new job or if he really just wanted to move there to be close to Michelle and Maddie. Georgia tells Ben that he should leave.

In Chapter 26, “Sebastopol, California 1999,” the narrative flashes back to 1999 as Jen had told Dan that Henry Morgan offered her a five-month job with the New York Symphony. Jen wanted to go. It would be the quiet period at the vineyard but Dan still was not wild about going. Jen offered to go alone and return for visits but Dan did not like that idea either. Jen wanted to experience her musical life again and Dan thought it might be good for her to go to see that she made the right choice but he did not tell her so.

In Chapter 27, “Home,” it is back in the present timeline as Georgia calls Suzannah to tell her the wedding is off because Michelle is still in love with Ben. Suzannah tells Georgia that it is not too late to work things out with Ben because they are meant to be together.

In Chapter 28, “The History of Wine,” Georgia throws herself into work with her father. She talks to him about what he plans to do when he leaves the vineyard and he says he is going to return to the vineyard in France to visit a friend. Then they are going to rent a



yacht and travel the world even though he hates boats. Jen, however, loves boats and Georgia cannot help but think that he is planning Jen's dream trip without her. Dan reveals to Georgia that he had had a heart attack while driving a few years ago and that everything changed with him and Jen that day. Jen was scared about what would happen to her if Dan died and her solution was Henry. It becomes clear to Georgia that her father does not want to be at the vineyard if her mother is not there. Dan gets angry when Georgia insists that there must be a way to change things and he leaves, angry at the whole situation.

In Chapter 29, "Note By Note," Georgia tells Jen that she knows that she still loves Dan and Jen agrees but she says that she loves how Henry loves and understands her and her music in a way that Dan cannot. Georgia tells her mother that she just wants her to be happy and her mother says that she is—even though she is crying when she says it.

In Chapter 30, "Falling Out of Sync," it seems to Georgia that things are in a state of desynchronization—that everything is lining up so that the wrong people are together and the right ones are apart. Georgia heads to Jacob's corporate office and barges in on him in a meeting and demands that he sell her the vineyard. Jacob tells her that he knows she thinks that would save her family but it will not. Jacob warns Georgia to stay out of the deal and to stop barging in on his life.

In Chapter 31, "No Secrets," Georgia returns to her parents' home to find Ben waiting for her in her old bedroom. He has finished making last minute arrangements for the wedding. Ben tells Georgia that even though Michelle has complicated his life, he is in love with Georgia. Georgia asks him about staying in Sebastopol after the wedding to figure out how to keep the vineyard and he readily agrees.

## Analysis

The theme of secrets is continually developed in this section of the novel as Georgia slowly realizes that the life she imagined she would have is not to be. She cannot get past Ben's secrecy over Maddie and Michelle because it implies that a life with them is something Ben was considering during the time he kept them a secret from her. Even though Ben tells Georgia that he loves her, it is clear that she will always come in second because he now has a daughter who will consume much of his life. Maddie has a right to be loved and supported by both her parents, but this is not the life Georgia thought she would be marrying into so she feels betrayed.

Likewise, Georgia's discoveries in Chapters 28 and 29 further threaten her emotional security with the break-up of her parents' marriage. Georgia finds it difficult to reconcile the fact that her parents love each other but that her mother cannot stay and watch her father have another heart attack. Georgia feels that the only reason Dan sold the vineyard is because he does not want to be there if Jen is not there. It seems as if this is flawed logic, but love is not logical. Georgia hopes that if she keeps talking to her parents, they will come to understand what she is saying to them but it does not look hopeful at this time.





Georgia and Ben, however, seem to have called a truce because Ben tells her that she is the one he loves and he agrees to remain with her in Sebastopol to try to make the vineyard work.

## Discussion Question 1

Why does Georgia think that Ben and Michelle could possibly get back together? What does this suggest about Georgia's character?

## Discussion Question 2

In what ways does Jen undermine her life in trying to protect herself from heartache?

## Discussion Question 3

What does Georgia mean by desynchronization regarding the relationships of the people around her right now?

## Vocabulary

ferment, vintner, barricade, Pinot Noir, espresso, dollop, eviscerated, duplicitous, relented, gorgeous, clones, distracted, compost, hysterical, sashayed, reconcile, facility, irritation, panicking, corporate, knack, grateful



## Part 3: The Union: Chapter 32, “An Invitation” - Chapter 42, “Synchronization”

### Summary

In Chapter 32, “An Invitation,” it is the day of the harvest party and Ben tells Georgia that Maddie and Michelle want to come to the party. Georgia is unsure at first but relents and tells Ben to invite them.

In Chapter 33, “People Who Screw Up,” Georgia tells Bobby that their father wants the family to pick the special Block 14 group of grapes together tonight after the harvest party. Bobby tells her that Margaret and the twins are away visiting a friend today but they will all be back in time for the party tonight. Bobby is still in shock that Margaret is in love with Finn. He also tells her that people screw up sometimes and she should not be so hard on Ben.

In Chapter 34, “High Yields,” Georgia drives to the courthouse in Santa Rosa to file an injunction to stop the sale of the vineyard. The judge is out of town but Georgia can get her case heard as soon as he returns from vacation. On the way out of the courthouse, Georgia gets a call from a state trooper who needs her to come get Finn.

In Chapter 35, “The Starkville City Jail,” Georgia proceeds to the Starkville City Jail where Finn has been since being found intoxicated last night. He is also being held for destroying the fire hydrant in town but Georgia sets the trooper straight and tells him that the destruction of the fire hydrant was her fault. Finn thanks Georgia for coming to get him and asks how she is dealing with the fact that Michelle is still around. Georgia tells him that Michelle has been invited to the harvest party in an effort for Georgia and Ben to heal their relationship.

In Chapter 36, “The Wine Cave,” Georgia finds her parents in the wine cave, selecting the wines for tonight's event. She tells them about the injunction she has filed and that she and Ben want to work out a plan to buy the vineyard. Her father tells her that she cannot keep her law job and run the vineyard because the commitment to the vineyard does not allow for anything else. Her parents end the conversation but Georgia cannot help but remember that they have told her to be careful of what you give up because sometimes you get it back any way you can.

In Chapter 37, “Sebastopol, California 2004,” the action flashes back to 2004, with Dan and Jen worried about Bobby's wedding to Margaret because they were not sure if he still loved her. Dan was also sad because none of his kids wanted the vineyard.



Chapter 38, “Have-to-have” returns to the present, with Georgia arriving at her parents' house to find the wedding vendors setting up. Suzannah is there too and Georgia is happy to see her. Suzannah has changed her mind about Ben and now thinks that Georgia should not marry him. Georgia tells her, though, that she and Ben are working it out and everything is fine.

In Chapter 39, “The Harvest Party,” the day of the harvest party has finally arrived and Georgia is sad that they are celebrating her father's last harvest. Georgia is also distressed that her mother is attending the party with Henry. She then spots Ben, Michelle, and Maddie and is unnerved by how happy they look together. She tries to run from the party but bumps into Jacob who is accompanied by Lee. Jacob brings up the topic of the injunction and how this makes everything more difficult for her father because no judge is going to rule in her favor.

Georgia joins Ben, Michelle, and Maddie and Michelle tells Ben to leave so they can have some girl talk. Michelle tells Georgia that when she and Ben had been in Surrey last month, she had advised him to tell Georgia about Maddie but she realizes he clearly had not done that. Apparently, Ben had gone to England to take care of Maddie while Michelle was filming but he never told Georgia about it. Georgia had thought Ben was in London finalizing the purchase of their home. She also learns that Michelle's house is very close to Georgia and Ben's new house in London.

In Chapter 40, “A Few Good Men,” Georgia confronts Ben about his going to Surrey and not telling her about it. She thinks that Ben is also interested in still seeing Michelle as well as Maddie. Ben admits that it did occur to him that having his little family would be nice but he feels that the thing to focus on is that he chose Georgia. Georgia does not believe Ben so she moves away from him, grabs a bottle of wine, and moves to her own table. Lee invites herself to share Georgia's wine and tells her that she is moving to take a job in Seattle and that Jacob is going with her and can run his business from there.

In Chapter 41, “The Defrosting,” Georgia finds Finn in the winemaker's cottage, defrosting a frozen lasagna over a burner on top of the stove. He tells Georgia that he will be moving to New York to work on his photography business. As they talk, Georgia turns the heat up under the pan of lasagna. They are interrupted by their mother who tells them that their father wants to see them for the good-bye toast at the dinner and all three of them head back to the party.

In Chapter 42, “Synchronization,” Dan gives his final toast at the party and introduces Jacob as the new owner of the vineyard. Suddenly Henry screams that there's a fire in the house and everyone scrambles to help until the fire department gets there. It starts raining which helps put out the fire. However, the same rain is destroying the last grapes in Block 14 so the family members rush out there to begin pulling them off the vines. Suddenly, Georgia sees her father on the ground with her mother kneeling over him.



## Analysis

Several instances of foreshadowing serve to build tension to the night of the harvest party, which is the climax of the story. All the relationships that are in jeopardy seem to reach some sort of turning point tonight. Bobby and Margaret are still wounded by Margaret's infidelity with his brother, Finn. Dan is hurt by Jen's relationship with Henry. Georgia is stinging from Ben's relationship with Michelle.

The revelation of Ben's time with Michelle and Maddie in Surrey foreshadows the conflict that then erupts between Georgia and Ben. In Chapter 41, the symbolic image of the frozen lasagna again represents comfort and security, but now this object also serves as foreshadowing of the fire that will threaten the vineyard. Ironically, Georgia's attempt to seek comfort along with Finn by eating the lasagna and by warming it up on the stove will be the action that will lead to the fire and to the potential destruction of the family and vineyard that she seeks to preserve.

The revelation of secrets in this section of the novel also intensifies the conflicts for Georgia as the novel's protagonist and for her family. At this point in the story, all of the secrets have been laid out on the table (just as the wine has been), and the main characters must deal with the conflicts that these secrets present. The rush to pick and protect the grapes from Block 14 symbolically reinforces the idea that Georgia too must be hasty in her decision about what to do about her marriage to Ben—as time is running out. The rain which threatens the grapes also saves the house and brings all of the characters together in a shared action of synchronization.

However, the main turning point is that Dan has collapsed on the ground, having suffered another heart attack. This event foreshadows the family coming together in unison to resolve their conflicts—both internal and external.

## Discussion Question 1

Why do you think that Bobby suggests that Georgia not be so hard on Ben? What do you think this suggestion says about Bobby's character?

## Discussion Question 2

Why does Georgia file an injunction against Jacob's company?

## Discussion Question 3

Why doesn't Georgia believe Ben when he tries to make her believe that he wants a life with her, not Michelle?

## Vocabulary

sediment, newfound, appreciative, alienating, awkward, ingest, enormous, scumbags, lawsuit, trepidation, roam, consolation, altercation, narc, clammy, wrath, injunction, untethered, torts, nostalgic, obvious, betrayal, chaos, enjoin, injunction, mesmerizing, basking, slew, ruefully, fixated, headway, hustled, listless



## **Part 4: The Last Harvest: Chapter 43, “The Waiting Room” - Part 5: Chapter 50, “Sebastopol, California, Present Day”**

### **Summary**

In Chapter 43, “The Waiting Room,” Dan has had a heart attack and is in the hospital. Jen confirms that he has had another heart attack, which surprises the children who did not know about the first one. Dan is stabilized but needs rest so the kids leave the hospital, but Jen stays with him.

In Chapter 44, “Sebastopol, California 2009,” the narrative flashes back to 2009, with Jen and Dan spending a month in Big Sur for a vacation. Jen was frustrated with Dan because he was not putting forth any effort to having a good time; all he wanted to do was be at the vineyard. They were having marital problems and Dan did not know how to fix anything.

In Chapter 45, “The Details,” the narrative returns to the present, with Georgia going to the hospital the next morning and speaking to her mother. Jen wants Georgia to know that Dan's heart attack was not caused by the sale of the vineyard; actually he should have sold it sooner to prevent another heart attack. Georgia cannot help but notice how happy her mother looks; she has decided to stay with Dan. She tells Georgia that Ben is a good man who tries and sometimes that is all you need to know. Georgia takes her mother home for some well-needed rest.

In Chapter 46, “The First Contract,” Georgia goes to the winemaker's cottage to survey the fire damage and she finds Bobby, who has overseen the harvest of the last of the grapes. He tells her that he is going to stay for a little while to help out while Margaret has taken the twins home, hoping that a little break will help things between them. Finn joins them and shows the contract that Georgia had made them sign promising to never take over the vineyard. Georgia's signature is missing, however. Bobby and Finn reconcile and they all watch the sunrise over the vineyard.

In Chapter 47, “The Other Line,” Georgia finds Ben in her childhood bedroom and she tells him that he has to leave and start his life in London. Georgia tells him that it is not about Maddie; it is about the part of him that did not tell her about Maddie when he should have. She also knows that Ben wants to try to work things out with Michelle because of Maddie. Ben acknowledges this and also knows that Georgia needs to be at the vineyard.

In Chapter 48, “Everything Worth Doing,” Georgia returns to the hospital to see her father. She tells him that she has told Ben to go. Her father tells her that it was the right thing to do but she needed to reach that conclusion on her own. Georgia tells her father



that she is moving back home to find new land and start another vineyard. She will even fight to get The Last Straw name back from Jacob. Dan reminds Georgia that winemaking is a life over which a person has no control, but she will not be swayed. Dan also wonders if Georgia is interested in staying because of Jacob but she tells him that is not the reason.

In Chapter 49, "The Wedding," it is five days after Georgia was supposed to get married that her parents renew their vows. Jen wears the blue beret she was wearing the first time she met Dan. They plan to sail around the world with Jen guiding the journey. Jacob joins Georgia as she stands surveying the party and the vineyard. Georgia knows that she lost her battle with Jacob over the winery but she is happy that her parents are together again. Jacob tells Georgia that Lee has left to take her job in Seattle. Georgia says that she plans to buy land to start her own vineyard but Jacob surprises her by handing her the deed to The Last Straw. Jacob will sell it to her but she will have to change the name. Georgia cannot believe that he is handing her a future she had not even known she wanted. Georgia can tell that Jacob wants her to stay and then he kisses her.

In Part 5: An Unnamed Vineyard: Chapter 50, "Sebastopol, California, Present Day," Georgia surveys her vineyard. She has spent the winter fixing the cottage and learning all she could from local winemakers. She smiles when she sees Jacob and Finn headed down the driveway. Jacob has stopped to tell her he is cooking dinner for them tonight; Finn is headed to a photo shoot in San Francisco. Georgia is not yet 25-years-old and she has been told that it takes ten years to figure out what you're doing with a vineyard. She smiles, looking forward to every minute of it.

## Analysis

In the falling action of the narrative plot, Dan's heart attack serves as the catalyst for forgiveness and mending broken relationships. Jen decides that her love for him supersedes anything that she got from her relationship with Henry and that they will stay together. Bobby and Margaret still need some time to work on their marriage but he and Finn call a truce from the fight they had over Margaret's affections. Georgia also lets Ben go from her life, partly because he needs to be near his daughter and partly because he is still attracted to Michelle. Amazingly, Georgia forgives Ben and releases him to live the life he was destined to live.

The news that comes as a result of all the emotional transitions brings the novel to its denouement. Dan and Jen plan to sail the world, this time with Jen leading the course of their lives. This reversal in their roles suggests that both Jen and Dan will find satisfaction in their lives as well as a greater connection with one another. Finn is moving to New York to pursue his photography. Bobby and Margaret will continue to work on their relationship. Ben, Michelle, and Maddie will become the little family they now are.



The biggest fresh start though is for Georgia, who not only releases her fiancé and the life she thought she was going to have, but also decides to quit her law career and stay and run the vineyard. A relationship with Jacob is looking positive, and although there will be considerable work ahead for her, she seems happy with the new course her life is taking.

## Discussion Question 1

What was Dan's heart attack most likely caused by? What does the heart attack signify in the narrative?

## Discussion Question 2

What decision does Georgia make about Ben? What does this say about her character?

## Discussion Question 3

What is Dan's reaction to Georgia's ultimate decision about a life with Ben? Why did he not advise her one way or the other?

## Vocabulary

mishmash, acknowledge, groggy, neglected, enormous, intrinsically, enormity, laminating, intoxicating, insignia, derive, bizarre, definitive, tiebreaker, scrutiny, perspective, accumulate, subsidiary, pesto, lush





# Characters

## Georgia Ford

Georgia Ford is the protagonist of the story. She is a young woman with a new career at a law firm in Los Angeles. Georgia selected a law career because she grew up on her family's vineyard in Sonoma County where life was very volatile and she wanted something more logical and controllable. While working at the law firm, Georgia met a handsome architect named Ben and they fell in love.

However, Georgia's world is shattered a week before her wedding when she learns that Ben has a young daughter he has never told her about. Georgia seeks comfort at her parents' home but she must come to terms with transitions and tenuous relationships of those she loves. Georgia's methodical mind wants to put some reason to what is going on and she struggles with the human condition of how messy relationships can be. Georgia stays true to her code, however, and ends her engagement to Ben because of the secrets he has kept from her.

Of all the characters, Georgia makes the biggest transitions by ending her engagement, buying the vineyard, and starting a relationship with Jacob.

## Ben

Ben is an architect who fell in love with Georgia when he met her at the law firm where she works in Los Angeles. Ben is a very polished, yet sensitive man. He is British and Georgia is drawn to his dignified air and sharp good looks.

Ben has a secret, however, which will be the undoing of his relationship with Georgia. Ben had been in a relationship with a beautiful celebrity with whom he fathered a child but he did not find out about his daughter until she was four-and-a-half years old. This recent revelation should have been something he told his fiancé, Georgia, but unfortunately he did not do that. Ben is not sure if he really wants a life with Georgia because he is drawn to a life with Michelle and their daughter.

Ultimately, Ben and Georgia part ways because of his secrecy.

## Dan Ford

Dan Ford is the owner of The Last Straw vineyard in Sebastopol, California. He is Jen's husband and father to Bobby, Finn, and Georgia. Dan is committed to creating a vineyard dedicated to organic farming and care of the earth. Dan fell in love with Jen almost immediately upon meeting her and has been in love with her ever since. Dan is an easy-going man and is the rock for his family. He is a strong believer of synchronization both in his life and in the management of the vineyard.



Upon Georgia's return home, she discovers that her parents are separated and that her mother has been seeing a symphony orchestra conductor named Henry. Further, Georgia learns that her father had a heart attack, and that was the event that prompted her mother to seek out an affair.

During his final harvest party, the winery cottage catches fire, the family rushes to put out the fire, and then rushes to save the last of the grapes from Block 14 due to rain. While the family picks grapes, Dan has a second heart attack. This event leads to the reunion of Dan and Jen and the renewal of their wedding vows.

## **Jen Ford**

Jen Ford is Dan's wife and mother to Bobby, Finn, and Georgia. She is a musician at heart but gave up her musical career to raise a family with Dan in California. When her marriage becomes routine, she gravitates to a former music colleague, Henry, for a brief relationship because he can see the side of her that no one else can anymore. In the end, though, Jen loves Dan and makes the decision to stay with him. The only difference this time is that she will be leading their sailing adventure around the world instead of following Dan's lead like she did all her married life.

## **Finn Ford**

Finn Ford is the son of Dan and Jen and brother to Bobby and Georgia. Finn is Bobby's twin but they are very different. Finn is laid back with no real direction in his life, content to run the family tavern and do some photography on the side. Finn has issues with structure which also includes entertaining a romantic relationship with Bobby's wife, Margaret. Georgia calls Finn her good brother, though, because he is not judgmental and lets people make their own decisions without interference.

## **Bobby Ford**

Bobby Ford is Dan and Jen's son and Finn and Georgia's brother. Bobby is Finn's twin but they are not alike at all. Bobby leads a very structured life in that he is married with twin boys and has a very high-pressure job in San Francisco. Bobby has all the trappings of a successful life but his emotional life suffers, especially when he and Margaret have problems. Bobby thinks there are solutions for every problem but is also forgiving, as he is open to forgiving Finn's indiscretion with Margaret.

## **Margaret Ford**

Margaret Ford is Bobby's wife. She was Finn's friend before she became romantically involved with Bobby, though, and that friendship has recently blossomed into more romantic feelings, causing problems in her marriage and in the relationship between Bobby and Finn.



## **Maddie**

Maddie is Ben's four-and-a-half year old daughter. She has only recently met Ben, her mother having kept her a secret from him. Maddie is bright, polite, and articulate for her age and seems well adjusted in spite of the recent swirl of events related to her existence.

## **Jacob McCarthy**

Jacob McCarthy runs the wine business that has purchased The Last Straw from Dan. Jacob had been a lawyer but went into the wine business because it is more interesting to him. Jacob is attracted to Georgia even when she is hostile toward him regarding the sale of the vineyard. He eventually wins Georgia over and they begin a relationship formed on their mutual interest in the wine business.

## **Michelle**

Michelle is a beautiful celebrity and Ben's ex-girlfriend. She has a young daughter who is Ben's child but she kept that secret until recently when she told Ben about her. Michelle is used to getting what she wants because of her beauty and celebrity and she has set her sights on Ben who ultimately returns to her.



# Symbols and Symbolism

## Yellow VW bug

The yellow VW bug that appears in the flashback scenes in the novel represents synchronization and the relationship between Dan and Jen. Dan and Jen met because of a yellow VW bug. His friend drove one and he was supposed to get into his car but Jen, who also drove a yellow VW bug, was also waiting at the curb and he got into her car instead. Dan calls it synchronization that he ended up in the wrong car, but with the right woman.

## Lasagna

Jen's lasagna appears twice in the novel and represents family, comfort, and security. Jen is famous for her homemade lasagna and her kids love it as their ultimate comfort food. During the course of the story, a pan of lasagna appears first when Georgia has just arrived at her parents' home and then later on the night of the harvest party. Ironically, it is when Finn attempts to heat lasagna on the stove and leaves it that a fire breaks out, creating immediate anguish but ultimate reconciliation for his parents.

## Blue beret

The blue beret that appears in *Eight Hundred Grapes* represents Jen and her initial meeting with Dan. Jen was wearing a blue beret on the day that Dan got into her car instead of his friend's car. She wears the same beret when they renew their vows prior to setting off on their sailing adventure to see the world.

## Wedding Dress

Georgia's wedding dress symbolizes her approaching wedding to Ben and also serves as a visual indication of Georgia's emotional upheaval in the beginning of the novel. Georgia is having her final wedding dress fitting when she spots Ben, Michelle, and Maddie walking on the sidewalk. She is so distraught that she drives nine hours to her parents' home, all while wearing her wedding dress. The dress is worse for wear from the long trip, symbolizing what will soon happen to the engagement and wedding day.

## Eight hundred grapes

Eight hundred grapes stand as symbolic representation of family and working together. From the title of the book, it takes eight hundred grapes to make a bottle of wine. That's a large number, symbolizing the amount of time and care that goes into creating just one bottle.



## Contract

The contract regarding the winery represents family and perceived expectations of the future. Before they left home, Georgia made her brothers sign a contract that they would never take over the vineyard. Significantly, when the contract is found later, it is discovered that Georgia never signed her own name. This is good because Georgia now plans to take on the vineyard as her own.

## Harvest party

The harvest party signifies the end of the harvest and also represents the end of Dan's days as a winemaker. The harvest party was the celebration of the harvest, a year's worth of work completed. This year it also symbolizes the culmination and end of Georgia and Ben's relationship because of the secrets he has kept from her.

## Chocolate chip pancakes

The chocolate chip pancakes symbolize Georgia's attempt to get to know Maddie and her willingness not to hold any grudges against the child for the behavior of her parents. Georgia takes Maddie to the cafe for a stack of chocolate chip pancakes after she arrives at the vineyard.

## Boat

The boat represents promises for the future in the novel. Dan and Jen plan to sail around the world for the next adventure in their life. Dan doesn't like boats but he agrees to go, foregoing his discomfort for the sake of his wife who had given up so much for him and the vineyard over the years.

## Concerto

Concerto is the name of a wine created by Dan and it represents his love and dedication to his wife. Dan named his favorite wine Concerto as a nod to Jen's musical gifts. A concerto is a blending of two competing elements to create perfection which symbolizes Dan and Jen's marriage and partnership.



# Settings

## Sonoma County

Sonoma County is located in the wine country region of coastal California. It is the location of Dan and Jen's winery, The Last Straw.

## Sebastopol, California

Sebastopol, California, is the city where Dan and Jen's vineyard, The Last Straw, is located.

## Los Angeles

Los Angeles is a major metropolitan area in California. Georgia lives and works in a law firm there.

## London

London is the capital of England. Ben and Georgia have purchased a home there to start a new life after their marriage. That plan does not work out but Ben will live in London near Michelle and Maddie.

## The Last Straw

The Last Straw is the Ford family's vineyard located in Sebastopol, California.



# Themes and Motifs

## Secrets and the Revelation of Secrets

The impacts of secrets and their discovery serve as a source of destruction for the central characters and their relationships in *Eight Hundred Grapes*. The undercurrent of secrets runs through the story to touch most of the characters in ways that will forever change them.

The story's main secret is the one that Ben has kept from Georgia: the fact that he has a daughter from a prior relationship with a beautiful celebrity. Ben's daughter is four-and-a-half years old, and even though he just recently found out about her existence, it is a problem that he did not tell his fiancée, Georgia, about the little girl. Honesty about all things is crucial in serious personal relationships and Ben's decision to not tell Georgia does major damage to what they have.

Compounding this deceit is the fact that Ben had told Georgia he went to London to finalize plans for their move when, in actuality, he went to London to see his daughter and ex-girlfriend. Throughout the story, Georgia agonizes about how to handle this situation and she arrives at the conclusion that she cannot trust Ben any longer for the way he handled things. Georgia would rather suffer through losing Ben and the life she thought she was going to have in order to re-build her life with someone based on authenticity and truth.

The secrets between Ben and Georgia are not the only ones that have detrimental effects. Dan and Jen have kept their separation a secret from their children, thinking that it is not their business and they do not want any intervention. They had also kept Dan's first heart attack a secret because they thought their kids might overreact at the news. Jen is having an emotional affair with Henry that is a secret from her kids. Finn and Margaret are also sharing romantic feelings for each other that they have tried to keep secret from the rest of the family.

In all these cases, the secrets are eventually revealed and the reactions of the other characters are more intense than if the characters had been up front with their actions from the start. Hiding information and keeping secrets sets up major trust issues with people who care about one another and it is best to risk negative fallout at potentially unpleasant news by telling people the truth rather than risking broken relationships by keeping secrets.

## The Importance of Forgiveness

While the theme of secrets and deceit serves to bring conflict to the main characters in the novel, forgiveness is what brings the characters closer together and to the resolution of those conflicts. Even though Ben has hurt Georgia with his secrets and their



relationship eventually ends, she forgives him for the decisions he has made and honors what they did have together.

Ben's relationship with Michelle resulted in their having a daughter, and even though Ben was not aware of the child, he now has to make decisions that he had not anticipated. He, like Georgia, will not have the life he had envisioned. While Georgia may be hurt by the change in her life, it is to her credit that she can see what Ben must do and forgive him for making a choice of integrity.

Dan ultimately forgives Jen's indiscretion with Henry because he truly loves her. He has only wanted to love her through their entire married lives, and like most married couples, the intensity and focus slipped a few times. However, Jen forgives Dan for not totally being present for her at all times during their marriage. She returns to a place of love and forgives him, and herself, for being human.

Bobby is working toward forgiving Finn for his romantic interest in Margaret and, it is assumed that he and Margaret will come to a place of understanding and forgiveness as well.

Because of the revelations that Georgia encounters during her stay at her parents' vineyard, Georgia is also conflicted and distraught regarding the circumstances of her parents' separation and their decision to sell the winery. Georgia must grow as a person in order to gain empathy and reach forgiveness for the decisions—and the secrets—of her mother and father. She ultimately reaches that point and forgives her parents while taking over the vineyard as her own.

## Commitment

In order to find happiness and to overcome the obstacles faced by the main characters in the novel, each must reach a point of commitment and declaration of his or her commitment. Loyalty and dedication to relationships pose big questions for the story's characters.

After learning of Ben's secrets, Georgia straddles the fence on whether or not she should stay committed to a relationship that she does not feel is authentic. The reason for Ben's secrecy, at least according to him, is his little girl, Maddie. In the end, Ben and Georgia agree that he needs to focus his commitment on Maddie because she deserves it as his daughter.

Even though Dan and Jen are going through an estranged period, they truly do love each other and, in the end, decide that their original commitment to each other is of primary importance. This is symbolized through their renewal of vows on the day when Georgia's wedding would have taken place. Bobby and Margaret will probably come to the same conclusion about their marriage even though it is strained at the moment.





There is also commitment to a cause or a purpose, best exemplified by Dan's dedication to the vineyard. His intentions have always been to improve the soil and therefore, the quality of the wine, and he is fierce about his dedication to the land and the business. Georgia reflects her father's commitment when she effectively takes over the winery and commits herself to learning the craft of winemaking.

## Synchronization

Synchronization is a repeated motif in *Eight Hundred Grapes*, suggesting that the events and the characters of the story must work to operate a system in unison. This motif carries from the synchronization of the winemaking process to the synchronization of the members of the Ford family working together to find happiness and connection. Even Henry's character connects to the motif of synchronization, as a musical conductor serves to keep an orchestra in synch.

Dan has always lived his life believing in the principle of synchronization. To him, it makes sense that forces all work together toward a common goal; it feels better to him that just attributing things to fate. The best example of synchronization as far as Dan is concerned is the day he got into Jen's yellow VW instead of the yellow VW of his friend. Strong forces compelled him to make that choice which ultimately changed the course of his life. Dan continues his belief in synchronization throughout his life and another good example is beginning and ending the growing season with Bruce Springsteen music. To Dan, it feels like things are in place, that they have come full circle, when he feels the beginning and closure of a process in this way.

In terms of Georgia's journey, she must come to terms with herself and what she wants for her future. Georgia would not have begun this journey had she not encountered Ben with Maddie and Michelle on the day of her last wedding dress fitting. This catalytic event led Georgia to come to her parents' winery, where she then discovers the secrets and turmoil that have embroiled her family. In sorting out these conflicts, Georgia finds her own meaning and decides to buy the winery and pursue a future she had never anticipated.

## New Beginnings

New beginnings are an important facet of life and an aspect that each of the characters in *Eight Hundred Grapes* must pass through in order to complete their individual journeys. The novel begins with Georgia, who is about to make a fresh start in marriage, fleeing to her parents' home for comfort and advice regarding her revelation of Ben's child. Georgia does not expect that this journey will lead to many more fresh starts that she had not anticipated—from her decision to cancel the wedding to her decision to leave her career and become a winemaker.

To be a functioning human being is to be familiar with fresh starts. Every day, relationships, jobs, and plans morph and end, and it is critical to be able to make changes in order to minimize angst. Sometimes, as in the case of Dan and Jen, a fresh



start is something to look forward to. But in most cases, fresh starts come at the point of another way of life ending so there is some trepidation and angst at this transition period.

Georgia and Ben, for example, are both facing fresh starts, although not the one they thought they would be starting together. Ben will be moving to London, not to live with Georgia, but to be close to his daughter. Georgia will be staying in Sebastopol, running the vineyard and starting a relationship with Jacob, something she would never even have imagined just a couple of weeks ago.

Finn will be launching a fresh start by moving to New York to open a photography business, and, no doubt, Bobby and Margaret will come to some agreement about their marriage and move forward in a fresh start.



# Styles

## Point of View

The majority of the story is told from the first person narrative point of view. This means that the author tells the story directly in the words of the protagonist, Georgia. Georgia uses the pronoun of "I" throughout because the story is being told just as she sees it or experienced it. With the first person narrative point of view, the reader has access to the thoughts and feelings of the narrator only. What is going on in the heads of any other people in the story is only speculative, as the reader does not have the privilege of seeing them.

The chapters that are related in flashbacks to the early days of Dan and Jen's marriage and purchase of the winery are related from a third person narrator in the past tense. The perspective of the narrative is focused on Dan with limited insight into the thoughts of the other characters. Similarly, the last chapter of the novel, Chapter 50, "Sebastopol, California, Present Day," is related from a third person narrator with focus on Georgia: "She is not twenty-five years old. She has a new boyfriend who has usurped her father's winery, a useless law degree, no money to speak of in the bank. And no backup plan if this vineyard goes bust" (260).

These alternating perspectives provide the reader with a firsthand account of Georgia's thoughts and actions; lend insight into the motivations of Dan and Jen; and, as in the last chapter, allow the reader to stand back and see the effects of synchronization on all of the characters in *Eight Hundred Grapes*.

## Language and Meaning

Because *Eight Hundred Grapes* is set in modern day California, the language is current for the times. The author uses twenty-first century terminology and euphemisms in narration and dialogue to show authenticity. The author alludes to current movies and pop culture icons so that the modern day audience can relate to them.

The author expertly transitions tone to suit the various characters in the story. Georgia is an intense young woman of 25, full of energy and drive and her dialogue reflects that. Georgia's father, Dan, however, is more reflective and contemplative in his language and tone. Jen is more matter of fact and abrupt in her speech patterns, probably because she is not certain that she is making the right choices for her life and does not want to be challenged on anything.

## Structure

*Eight Hundred Grapes* is divided into five parts and is further divided into chapters. Each of the five parts is titled to reflect the process of winemaking: Part 1: The Grapes,



Part 2: The Crush, Part 3: The Union, Part 4: The Last Harvest, and Part 5: An Unnamed Vineyard. Part 1 is the longest section of the novel, comprised of 15 chapters. Parts 2, 3, and 4 are similar in length, whereas Part 5 is the shortest, comprised of only one chapter.

The novel is structured in a way to show Georgia's personal growth as the story extends. This type of "personal journey" narrative shows transformation as being important as opposed to an "event story," which is more concerned with action. It is easy to identify a character structure novel because there comes a point in the story when the main character reaches a point of frustration with life or a set of circumstances that are no longer acceptable for personal growth. The character then decides on changes, both small and dramatic, that will move the character's life in a different direction. The story concludes then when the character has resolved his or her issues and feels satisfied with the transformation or decides to stay in the current situation.

Events in the main storyline of *Eight Hundred Grapes* occur in chronological order. Some chapters are related in flashback, principally for the purpose of establishing Dan and Jen's back-stories, their relationship, and their motivations.

The inciting action of the plot is Georgia's discovery of Ben's daughter and his having hidden this from her. This event leads Georgia to her parents' vineyard, where more conflicts arise as Georgia uncovers even more secrets within her family. The climax of the plot occurs when the winemaker cottage catches fire, the family rushes to save the grapes from rain, and Dan has a second heart attack. Resolutions to these conflicts are reached in the story's falling action, when Jen decides to stay with Dan and Georgia chooses to cancel her wedding and buy the winery. The characters' after-stories are related in the denouement which comprises Part 5: An Unnamed Vineyard, Chapter 50, "Sebastopol, California, Present Day."



## Quotes

Synchronization. Systems operating with all their parts in synchrony, said to by synchronous, or in sync. The interrelationship of things that might normally exist separately. In physics: it's called simultaneity. In music: rhythm. In your life: epic failure.  
-- Georgia (chapter 2 paragraph 1)

**Importance:** The Ford family runs on the principle of synchronization, that everything is working in sync. This is opposed to fate which is more passive and where things just happen to people. Georgia's life is not working in sync right now and it is distressing to her.

Be careful what you give up.  
-- Jen (chapter 3 paragraph 7)

**Importance:** Jen gives advice to Georgia about being careful in making her decision regarding Ben. Sometimes hurt feelings can overshadow the complete relationship with a person and if that relationship ends, sometimes it cannot be recovered.

I can't help how I feel and I can't do anything about it. And that's not new.  
-- Finn (chapter 8 paragraph 8)

**Importance:** Georgia learns another family secret: that Finn and Margaret have romantic feelings for each other. They had been friends before Margaret married Bobby and their feelings have deepened as Margaret and Bobby's relationship strains.

The poet. She hadn't made it that easy for me. She told me she wasn't going to sit and watch me live my dreams in some small town when she could be in London, Paris. She said if I insisted on making wine, spending my life in a small California town, that was the last straw.  
-- Dan (chapter 9 paragraph 6)

**Importance:** Dan tells Georgia about a woman, a poet, whom he almost married. But when she did not want to live in a small California town, the engagement ended. She said it would have been the last straw to live such a small life which prompted Dan to name his vineyard just that: The Last Straw.

Most of the time a person wants something more than anything else. You can tell because at the end of the day that's what they're willing to fight for.  
-- Dan (chapter 9 paragraph 4)

**Importance:** Dan tries to advise Georgia that it is OK for Georgia to walk away from Ben or stay with him. The great life they have built together has as much value as the reason she feels she has now for possibly leaving him. Only Georgia can know what she is willing to fight for.



We know the secret, right? It's not just eight hundred grapes in this bottle. It's everything else that makes it heavy. Patience and focus and sacrifice... and fucking boredom.

-- Dan (chapter 12 paragraph 6)

**Importance:** When Dan gives a toast at the harvest party, he acknowledges that there is so much more to creating a bottle of wine than the eight hundred grapes.

That woman, on the phone, is the best part of my day. She makes me laugh and she makes me feel happy. She makes me feel like everything is going to work out as soon as she says hello to me.

-- Ben (chapter 15 paragraph 5)

**Importance:** Georgia recalls meeting Ben in person and how he won her heart. They had had a business relationship over the phone and he fell in love with her before he even met her.

It is, a little. If for no other reason, you'll forgive me for keeping her from you even if you don't accept why I did it. You'll forgive me because of her.

-- Ben (chapter 17 paragraph 3)

**Importance:** Ben tries to convince Georgia that they can work their problems out in spite of Maddie's existence. In fact, it may just be Maddie who brings them together again because Maddie will win Georgia's heart and all will be fine.

I'm just going to ask you this once but I want you to think about it. Have you considered that your desire for us to keep the vineyard has less to do with us and more to do with you?

-- Jen (chapter 18 paragraph 8)

**Importance:** Jen is trying to get to the heart of Georgia's angst and thinks that perhaps Georgia still needs the security of her parents living and working at the vineyard for some stability. If Georgia were secure enough in her own life and relationships, maybe her childhood home and related security would not matter as much.

I understand everything about your father, but your father doesn't understand me the way Henry does. And I don't fault him for that. But it is an amazing thing to be with someone who really sees you.

-- Jen (chapter 29 paragraph 2)

**Importance:** Georgia is having a hard time understanding why her parents are separating and Jen finally gives her her reason. It is possible that they have become so used to each other that they do not really see each other anymore and are looking for that validation in other places.

The important thing is what I decided. I decided to stay with you. It was the easiest decision I ever made.

-- Ben (chapter 40 paragraph 2)



**Importance:** Ben tries to validate his feelings for Georgia in that he came back from London and time with Michelle and Maddie and ended up choosing to stay with Georgia. Georgia is tempted to believe him but is suspicious when he shields his eyes when talking to her.

We are presented with options and we either take them, or we remember why it isn't worth it to take them. Why what we're giving up is too much.

-- Ben (chapter 47 paragraph 18)

**Importance:** Ben is conflicted about which path to choose and which direction to go. He loves Georgia and wants to marry her, but he now has a daughter he has to help raise and it is important for him to invest in her future on a real level.