

Eleanor & Park Study Guide

Eleanor & Park by Rainbow Rowell

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Plot Summary

Park is a half-Korean boy growing up in Omaha, Nebraska. In 1986, he is sixteen years old and struggling to fit in. One day he looks up during his morning bus ride to school, to discover that a large girl with red hair is trying to find a seat. He doesn't want to make a target of himself by offering, but allows her to sit by him. Over the coming weeks, they share a seat on the bus and gradually begin to share their thoughts about books and music. Park finds himself reading comics on the bus and allowing Eleanor to read over his shoulder.

Eleanor's situation at home is desperate. She has four younger siblings. A year earlier, she had argued with her stepfather, Richie, and he kicked her out of the house. Her mother left her with friends and it took a full year for her to bring Eleanor to their new home. Richie is always on the verge of an explosion and the rest of the family tries not to anger him. They are not always successful and violent fights are common.

Park's home life is vastly different. His father is hard on Park because he wants Park to be a different kind of teenager. Park's mother is petite and kind. Both love Park and want what's best for him.

Eleanor is picked on at school and Park comes to the point of wanting to protect her from the bullies. He gets in a fight one day and some of the tormenting slacks off. Someone continues to write sexually explicit words on her school books. She eventually reveals that Richie is the one writing on her books and it becomes clear that she is in danger of being molested if she remains at her mother's home.

Eleanor runs away from home but can't figure out how she can possibly get away from the danger Richie represents. Help comes unexpectedly from a teenaged girl named Tina who had been among those tormenting Eleanor. Tina realizes that the situation has turned dangerous for Eleanor and helps her hide. Tina and her boyfriend Steve contact Park and he knows he has to help her escape, even though he doesn't want them to be separated.

Eleanor has an uncle in Minnesota and she plans to hitchhike here. Park decides he will take his parents' car and drive Eleanor to her destination. He tries to sneak out of the house but his father intercepts him. Park explains he situation and his father agrees that he can go. He gives Park extra money and urges caution. He says that if Eleanor's uncle doesn't allow her to stay, Park is to bring Eleanor back to their house. He promises to help ensure that Eleanor is safe from the situation.

Eleanor's uncle does allow her to stay and provides more in security and material possessions than her mother had. Park writes to Eleanor, sometimes every day, but Eleanor doesn't write back. A year passes. Park gets a job and goes to the prom with another girl and is relieved that she is nothing like Eleanor. He eventually stops mailing the letters, but continues to write them. Then one day, Park's father enters the room and

announces that Park has a postcard. It's from Eleanor and there are only three words written on the postcard.



Chapters 1-8

Summary

In Chapter One, Park is on the school bus as usual. It's chaotic, with a teenager named Steve leading most of the conversation along with his girlfriend, Tina. During the conversation, Steve points out Park's appearance and says Park's mother is Chinese, meaning he should know about something Steve calls "Drunken Monkey karate." When another boy says he'd always believed Park to be Mexican, Steve calls the boy a racist. Tina corrects Steve, saying Park's mother is Korean.

The conversation is interrupted by the arrival of a new girl on the bus. Her hair is bright red and wild. Her clothes are not those of a traditional teenaged girl. No one will allow her to sit with them. Park initially ignores her as well, but then sees that she's about to cry and scoots over, giving her part of his seat.

In Chapter Two, Eleanor thinks about the possibilities of avoiding the bus ride home. She doesn't know how to get there on foot, her mother doesn't have a phone or car, and there's no one else who could give her a ride. She knows she can't accept her stepfather's offer of a ride each morning and that she'll have to ride the bus each day. She resolutely boards the bus that afternoon.

In Chapter Three, Park has spent the day trying to figure out how to get out of sharing his seat with Eleanor, who he still knows as "the new girl." Steve and Tina are among the "bullies" who sit at the back of the bus. Park admits to being glad Eleanor is there for them to pick on because it means he'll probably be left alone. Park takes his normal seat and puts on his headphones with the music loud, just in case Eleanor tries to talk to him.

In Chapter Four, Eleanor recalls her homecoming the previous evening. She'd expected her siblings to be glad to see her but the event was anti-climatic. Her stepfather, Richie, is there. Eleanor is distressed to see her eight-year-old sister, Maisie, sitting in Richie's lap. Her eleven-year-old brother, Ben, barely acknowledges her. Her younger brother, known as Mouse, is the only one to greet her with a hug. The baby of the family doesn't even remember Eleanor.

When Eleanor arrives home from school, she finds that her mother has saved a few of her possessions from their previous house. The family has moved since the day Richie kicked Eleanor out.

In Chapter Five, Park accepts that their teacher, Mr. Stessman, is going to make them memorize and recite a poem. He says they will forget most of what he teaches but will always remember the poem they memorize. He urges them to choose something romantic so they'll have a use for it someday.



In Chapter Six, Eleanor isn't surprised when Tina is in her gym class, knowing that it's rotten luck that she should have expected. She spends quite a bit of time thinking about the bus ride and the "Asian kid" she sits beside. Park has begun to feel uncomfortable with the silence.

Park lives with his father and his Korean mother, known as Mindy though her name is Min-Dae. He has a younger brother named Josh who is already taller than both Park and their mother. Park and his father aren't close but Josh is very much like his father. Back at Eleanor's, the five siblings have to share a room. Eleanor confronts Maisie about the fact that the others now call Richie "Dad." Maisie says Rich is is their father now. Eleanor hates that things have changed so much and recalls a time when she and her siblings had been united against Richie.

In Chapter Seven, Park talks with his best friend, Cal, who announces plans to ask a very pretty girl out. Park advises against it but Cal is adamant. Eleanor plans to use "Caged Bird" as the poem she's to memorize.

In Chapter Eight, Park realizes that Eleanor is reading his comic books over his shoulder during the bus rides. He doesn't object but begins holding the book so Eleanor can read more easily and waiting longer to turn pages to ensure she has time to finish. Eleanor arrives home to find her mother has locked the kids out of the house. She won't open the door to Eleanor, either. Eleanor wonders what they'll do when winter hits and Ben says Richie had put them to bed extremely early the previous winter.

Analysis

Eleanor's relationship with her stepfather, Richie, is an important theme throughout the book. Richie and Eleanor don't get along, mainly because Richie is always close to an explosion and his outbursts are usually physically violent. He beats Eleanor's mother, Sabrina, and seems on the verge of physically abusing Eleanor's siblings. The story of how Eleanor came to be living with friends isn't fully revealed until much later. The fact that Sabrina forces Eleanor to live with friends for about a year indicates she doesn't particularly care about protecting Eleanor from Richie.

Richie apparently offers to give Eleanor a ride to school each morning. Sabrina has told Eleanor about the offer, saying the school is on Richie's way to work, but Eleanor doesn't intend to accept the offer. Eleanor doesn't like Richie and she's afraid of him, but this may be the first indication that Eleanor thinks Richie is capable of sexually molesting her. Richie apparently doesn't make any moves in this direction other than writing on Eleanor's school books, and the fact that he's writing on the books isn't revealed until near the end of the story.

From Park's first encounters with Eleanor, he's conflicted and that's partly because he thinks about the reactions of the various important people in his life. Park considers sitting somewhere else but he doesn't really want to make Eleanor sit alone. He knows that his father would think Park is a weakling for this attitude. However, he knows his



grandmother would be disappointed that Park doesn't immediately step up and do the right thing. The fact that Park thinks about these reactions is a statement of his character. He really does want to do what's right in the eyes of his family members.

Eleanor's first moments in English class appear in Chapter Three and it defines her as a student who loves literature. The teacher, Mr. Stessman, calls on her to read a poem. The opening line is "I had been hungry all the years." Eleanor is a large girl and there have already been jokes about her weight. While Mr. Stessman is not intentionally bullying Eleanor, there's no doubt he is adding to her problems. He and other teachers don't seem to recognize what's happening to Eleanor, or they choose not to intervene.

Eleanor stays with the the Hickmans when Richie kicks her out. They are friends of Eleanor's mother and agree to let Eleanor stay because everyone thinks Richie will cool off in a week or so and allow Eleanor to return. They have children of their own and Eleanor sleeps on the couch in the living room. There's no doubt the situation was very inconvenient for the Hickmans but it was also difficult for Eleanor. What's surprising is that they didn't involve the police or child welfare services which would likely have ended with Eleanor being placed in foster care. At one point, Eleanor overhears the Hickmans talking about her and she realizes they are on the verge of calling the authorities. She makes certain from that point that she doesn't do anything to call undue attention to herself, including eating only one helping of anything that's offered at mealtime. This is in Eleanor's nature and it's different from most teens. Eleanor is accustomed to hardship and doesn't make demands that she knows her mother can't meet. She doesn't ask for new clothes or even basic necessities. Early in the story, a toothbrush becomes an issue for her and she doesn't have one of her own for some time after moving back in with her mother.

Discussion Question 1

Describe the reaction to students on the bus when Eleanor gets on for the first time. Why do you believe they react this way?

Discussion Question 2

What does Park do when he discovers Eleanor is beginning to read over his shoulder? Why do you believe he does this?

Discussion Question 3

What is Eleanor's life like while she's living away from her mother and how does this shape her attitudes?



Vocabulary

Irrevocably, fascist, spacious, liquefaction, crass, differential, poignant, diverged, statuesque, parody, spectacular



Chapters 9-14

Summary

Park decides that he's going to tell Eleanor that she'd done very well reading her poem in class. He knows that she is really the only one who "recited it like it was a living thing" and he is impressed. Park takes taekwondo lessons each Wednesday night and he always gets new comic books after the class. This time, he waits until Thursday morning on the bus to begin reading so that Eleanor can read along with him. Eleanor is aware that Park knows she's reading his comics and it upsets her that he's so polite. When she gets off the bus one day, Park insists she take one of the books home with her. She is extremely careful not to damage it, and reads it three times. Park briefly worries that she might not give it back but she hands it to him as soon as she gets on the bus.

In Chapter Ten, Eleanor gets on the bus the next morning to discover that Park has left a stack of comics on Eleanor's seat. She takes them but doesn't begin reading in front of him. She says it would be like "admitting something," apparently indicating that she doesn't want him to know how much she enjoys reading them. Park notices that she always returns them undamaged though they smell like roses. Park and Eleanor still don't talk on the bus, but the silence between them is calmer.

One day they are discussing the play, "Romeo and Juliet," in class. Mr. Stessman calls on Eleanor who says she doesn't believe the play is a tragedy about love. She says Romeo and Juliet are "rich kids who've always gotten every little thing they want." She says they can't be in love because they don't know each other. She says it's only physical attraction but they think they want each other, which prompts the action of the play. Eleanor says she believes Shakespeare is making fun of the two characters. When Mr. Stessman calls on Park, Park says he believes the play has survived because people want to remember what it's like to be young and in love.

Park discovers that Eleanor has written the names of songs and bands on her book covers along with characters from the various comics. She reveals that she doesn't know most of the bands or the songs, but has heard about them. That night, Park makes a tape of some of his favorite music.

In Chapter Eleven, Eleanor wakes to Richie yelling and her mother crying. The five children huddle together in fear but know they can't stop the fight. The next morning, Eleanor is relieved to find her mother is alive. Her younger brother, Mouse, has wet the bed and Eleanor has to wash up before school. She rushes out of the house without her books.

In Chapter Twelve, Park gives Eleanor the tape he'd made. She says she has no way to play it at home. Park places the headphones from his Walkman on Eleanor's head. At school, Park says that Eleanor has now heard one of the groups she'd heard about, "The Smiths." Eleanor laughs. She later thinks she has revealed something too personal



by telling him she doesn't have a cassette player and thinks she might as well tell him that she also doesn't have a phone, a washing machine, or even a toothbrush. She does consider asking the counselor, Mrs. Dunne, for a toothbrush and wonders what would happen if she told Mrs. Dunne all about her home situation.

In gym class, Eleanor discovers someone has plastered Kotex pads all over her locker. Some are smeared with ketchup. Two black girls, DeNice and Beebi, help her get rid of them and invites her to sit with them at lunch. That afternoon, Park offers to lend Eleanor his Walkman. She declines but accepts the batteries and the tape. She listens to the music until the batteries are completely dead.

In Chapter Thirteen, Eleanor is hesitant to talk to Park the following day but finally tells him the music was “so awesome.” They begin to notice small details about each other. That night, Park makes another tape with a song Eleanor had particularly liked and tells his grandmother he wants lots of batteries for his birthday.

In Chapter Fourteen, Eleanor's friendship with DeNice and Beebi grows. One evening, Park goes to Eleanor's house. Richie answers the door and Park immediately realizes he isn't welcome. Eleanor and Park go to the nearby grade school and read Park's newest comic book. Richie verbally berates Eleanor when she returns inside.

Analysis

Park has begun to like Eleanor a little by Chapter Nine. What he feels for her can't yet be defined as friendship, but he has come to see her as a person rather than someone for Tina and Steve to torment. This realization brings a feeling of guilt for how he spoke to her when he gave up his seat for the first time. He scooted over but when she hesitated, he swore at her. He now deeply regrets swearing at her. The two of them are still reading the comic book in Chapter Nine, and Park hands it to Eleanor as she's getting off the bus. She's caught off-guard and Park refuses to take it back. Park's motivation for giving her the book isn't revealed but it seems that it's merely in his nature to be nice to people, and he's impulsively following that nature. Later, when he has time to think it through, he worries that she might not bring the book back. It's important to remember that Park hasn't yet finished the book either. He decides that he'll no longer have to feel guilty about swearing at her if she doesn't return the book.

In Chapter Ten, the reader learns a little more about Eleanor's home situation. She shares a room with all four of her siblings. Her brother Ben is just younger than Eleanor. She also has a younger sister named Maisie, a younger brother they call Mouse, and a baby brother who was just a baby when Eleanor left to live with the Hickmans. She learns upon her arrival at home that Ben had cried when he was told he'd have to give up his bed for Eleanor. There is a set of bunk beds in the room, but several of the children have to sleep on the floor.

The house is very small for a family of this size. The bathroom is next to the kitchen and the only privacy is a sheet that partitions the space from the kitchen. Later, “someone”



tears down the sheet and anyone using the room is literally visible from other parts of the small house.

Eleanor still refers to Park as “that stupid Asian kid” in her thoughts. She doesn’t seem to have real animosity toward him but she seems to feel resentful. That resentment is never fully described but it seems that Eleanor knows that Park’s life is much better than her own chaotic life at home.

There are new details revealed about Eleanor’s life and the violence that is common at home. One night, Eleanor and the kids wake to the sounds of a fight between Richie and their mother. Eleanor notes that they would have intervened a year earlier, before Richie kicked Eleanor out of the house, but now they don’t dare. Eleanor and her younger siblings rush to each other for comfort and they all know not to cry out or make noise that might attract Richie’s attention. Eleanor winds up sleeping with Mouse and Mouse wets the bed.

The next morning, she has to slip out to the bathroom and wash up, a fact that upsets her mother. Sabrina fears that Richie will smell the urine and get angry again. There are several important points here. First, Sabrina is allowing Richie to disrupt the lives of her children and she’s putting them all in danger by remaining in the situation. She is obviously afraid of Richie but isn’t able to break away. Another point is that Eleanor is willing to do whatever it takes to avoid a confrontation with Richie. Sabrina fears that Richie will smell the urine and get angry again, so Eleanor wears her dirty clothes from the previous day so she doesn’t have to open the bedroom door and risk Richie detecting the odor. She also leaves the house early and without her school books though she must know this could get her in trouble at school. Whatever trouble she might have at school is, in Eleanor’s mind, less of a problem than causing more trouble at home.

Park’s attraction to Eleanor is becoming more pronounced by Chapter Twelve. He walks with her to her locker on the day after sharing music with her for the first time. It’s the first time they’ve associated outside the bus ride. They talk briefly and Park notes that “Eleanor laughed.” The emphasis on the two words means they are important to Park, which indicates his growing affection for Eleanor.

Discussion Question 1

Describe how the relationship between Eleanor and Park is evolving.

Discussion Question 2

Why is Eleanor relieved to find her mother alive the morning after Sabrina and Richie fight? Is she overreacting?



Discussion Question 3

What is Eleanor's opinion of "Romeo and Juliet?" What does this suggest about her?

Vocabulary

pristine, conscious, fragile, confrontational, insignificant, jocular, ruffians, intangible, stereotypical, irrelevant, empowered, luminous, viciously



Chapters 15-18

Summary

In Chapter Fifteen, Eleanor reassures her mother that she didn't invite Park to visit and that she'll tell him he can't come back. Park apologizes on the bus, saying he feels he probably got Eleanor in trouble. They talk about the comic they read the previous evening and Park holds Eleanor's hand.

In Chapter Sixteen, Eleanor begins to hate Saturdays because it means there's a lot of time before she'll be back on the bus with Park. Eleanor notices that someone has written a vulgar question on one of her book covers.

Park's relationship with his father is somewhat strained. His dad is trying to teach him to drive the truck, which has a standard transmission. Park believes he could drive it if his father wasn't "fuming" each time Park makes a mistake. He also knows his father hates that Park's mother stands up for Park when his father pushes him.

In Chapter Seventeen, Mrs. Dunne says Eleanor's biological father has called the school looking for Eleanor. She allows Eleanor to use a phone to return the call. He says he and his fiancé have plans to go out Friday and asks Eleanor to babysit his fiancé's son. He promises to pick her up at school and to pay her ten dollars. Eleanor is thrilled, mainly because it means she can talk to Park on the phone. In Chapter Eighteen, Sabrina is furious, saying their father seems to have forgotten he has four children and says he should pay his child support. Maisie begs to go along. Eleanor finally says she doesn't care about her father but wants to get out of the house for an evening. Sabrina relents but says Eleanor will have to share the money she earns.

The next morning on the bus, Park sees vulgar words on Eleanor's book cover. He asks why she wrote it but she says she didn't. He wants to figure out who did and she wants to tell him that she hasn't always been the girl people pick on. She wants to tell him that she had friends and a normal life at her previous school, but she doesn't. She finally manages to turn the conversation to the possibility of talking on the phone and Park helps her memorize his phone number.

Analysis

The moment of holding hands for the first time is magical for both Park and Eleanor, but Eleanor is still worried about her budding relationship for Park and she doesn't respond. Park is so caught up in the touch of her hand that it takes him awhile to realize that she hasn't wrapped her fingers around his hand in return. She doesn't look at him either, which makes Park worry that he's made a mistake by touching her. However, Eleanor spends most of the morning amazed at how she felt while they were holding hands. This is one of many signs of Eleanor's insecurity. She worries that Park will stop their friendship and she knows she'll be hurt if that happens. More than the hurt, she fears



that someone will know that she's been hurt and seems to fear showing that weakness even more than being hurt. Eleanor says the one thing she doesn't want to think about with regard to Park is why he likes her.

Up to Chapter Sixteen, the reader doesn't really know a lot about Park's appearance, other than the fact that he resembles his Korean mother. However, it's noted in this chapter that he tends to wear dark clothing all the time. He hasn't been described as "goth" up to this point but the clothing choices seem to point that direction. He later begins wearing eyeliner, which greatly upsets his father. It seems that Park's tastes and ideas run at least slightly different from most of the teens of his group, which may be why he sees something attractive in Eleanor that others don't see.

Eleanor's father isn't involved in the lives of Eleanor and her siblings. He apparently isn't paying child support regularly either, based on Sabrina's comments when Eleanor asks to go to her dad's to babysit. Sabrina says that Eleanor's father often breaks the kids' hearts, leaving her to pick up the pieces after each event. The reader doesn't learn any details about these situations but it seems likely that he makes promises that he simply doesn't keep. However, Maisie is frantic to go with Eleanor and pleads for the opportunity. Eleanor says she doesn't really care about her dad and sees the night as a means of getting out of the house for awhile. Sabrina apparently realizes that would be good for Eleanor and she gives in. It seems that Maisie might also be needing a break from the home situation but she isn't allowed to go.

It's in Chapter Eighteen that the reader gets the first glimpse of how the bullying against Eleanor is affecting Park. He is upset that someone is writing vulgar words on her books and he wants to protect her from that, but he's also fighting the feeling that the bullies are attacking him each time they bully Eleanor. He wants to feel only righteous anger on Eleanor's behalf, but the truth is that it's difficult to befriend someone who is being picked on. Park is undoubtedly feeling embarrassed that he's Eleanor's friend when it's obvious that she isn't liked by most of the students.

Discussion Question 1

Describe Eleanor's reaction the first time Park holds her hand.

Discussion Question 2

Why is Park upset that Eleanor is being bullied?

Discussion Question 3

What details are revealed about the relationship between Eleanor and her biological father?

Vocabulary

perverted, fuming, oversimplification, ecstasy, smirk, perversion, idiocy, retch, righteous, raucous



Chapters 19-22

Summary

In Chapter Nineteen, Eleanor's dad picks her up in a convertible. The top doesn't work and it's a cold drive to his home. She is anxious for her father to leave so she can begin eating the food in the house, and she plans to order a pizza as long as her father is paying for it. She finds records and remembers her parents listening to them.

Park's mother, Mindy, is doing Tina's hair in the salon. Tina asks Mindy if she's met Park's girlfriend. Mindy says Park doesn't have one but Tina says Eleanor and Park are inseparable on the bus. Park denies they are more than friends. Later, Park worries that Eleanor won't call because he denied their relationship. She does call and they agree they'll talk about things they can't say on the bus. Eleanor manages to avoid answering most of Park's questions about her life. They stay on the phone for a long time. Eleanor almost dozes.

Park asks why she always seems angry at him but she says she isn't angry. She can't explain her true feelings. She asks why he likes her. Park says he doesn't like her as much as he needs her. Eleanor says she lives for Park. She says she thinks about him all the time and panics every time they're together. She talks a little about home, saying she hates Richie and he hates her, which puts Sabrina in the middle. Park says Eleanor would be welcome at his house. The conversation ends when her father arrives at home. Park ends the conversation by saying, "I love you."

In Chapter Twenty, Eleanor's father only has seven dollars and he gives that to her. She takes three new toothbrushes and some Dove soap with her when she leaves his house. Park regrets saying "I love you" because he fears Eleanor will think it's too soon. His family talks about his budding relationship with Eleanor, including his brother, Josh. His grandmother says she isn't surprised that Park has fallen for a redhead.

In Chapter Twenty-One, Eleanor gives Park a tape she made of the Beatles while she was at her father's house. She tells her mother that she might go visit a friend after school. When Sabrina asks which friend, Eleanor says it's "Tina" because that's the first name she can think of. That afternoon, she goes to Park's house and meets his parents, but almost immediately feels ill at ease and leaves.

Eleanor thinks about herself compared to other females, such as Tina and Mindy. She feels overly large next to them and that meeting Park's "pretty, perfect mom" and his "normal perfect house" was too much for her to handle. She doesn't feel she'll ever belong in his house, which seems out of place in "this crappy neighborhood."

In Chapter Twenty-two, Park's feelings are obviously hurt on the bus the following morning. He says Eleanor made up her mind to leave before she even arrived at the house. Led by Steve, several students on the bus begin to chant, "Go Big Red," which



embarrasses both Eleanor and Park. As they get off the bus, Park and Steve get into a fight. Park, having studied martial arts for years, kicks Steve in the face. Park then shouts at Steve to “leave my girlfriend alone.” Steve says he wouldn't have picked on Eleanor if he'd known she was Park's girlfriend, but Park says Steve shouldn't have been picking on Eleanor at all. Park is suspended for two days and Steve, who has been in trouble before, is suspended for two weeks. Park's dad picks him up and is obviously impressed that Park managed to get the kick in. Back at home, Mindy blames Eleanor for causing the fight but Park's dad says Park did the right thing, and argues that it was “only one fight.”

Later, Eleanor tells Park that she doesn't care about the bullying as long as Park likes her. Park is grounded but Eleanor visits.

Analysis

In Chapter Nineteen, Sabrina tells Eleanor that she should call “if things got weird with her dad.” Eleanor doesn't voice her thoughts, but she immediately compares anything that might happen to her current situation. She is still living in a house where the bathroom doesn't have a door. She sarcastically thinks about the comparison.

As Park's family begins to discuss Eleanor, Park struggles with the idea of having Eleanor visit. He tells her on the phone that she would be welcomed and seems to believe that, at that moment. However, when he looks at it later, he wonders how his family will actually react. There's no doubt that Eleanor isn't the typical teenaged girl, either in appearance or actions, and Park has come to care about her because of her differences. He isn't certain his family will see through those to realize that Eleanor is a wonderful girl.

Park's mother is upset when Park gets into a fight and she blames Eleanor for it. She doesn't like Eleanor at this point, partly because of the fight but also because of Eleanor's actions and appearance on the previous visit to Park's house. She will later become more tolerant.

When Eleanor gets home the day after the fight, she discovers that her mother has “found” some money. The money was apparently in Richie's pockets and she has learned that he will assume he spent it at the bar and won't ask about it. That means the money is available for Sabrina to spend on things the family needs. She has become adept at hiding things from Richie, including food that the kids can eat later. On this particular occasion, she uses some of the money to buy used jeans for Eleanor, who desperately needs them. The fact that Eleanor and her siblings are not getting their basic needs met is a recurring theme in the story. She doesn't reach out for help from her counselor, though she briefly wonders what would happen if she were to do so. Eleanor and her mother are doing what they can to meet the family's needs with their limited resources, but the fact is that the children are not being properly cared for.



Discussion Question 1

Describe the fight between Steve and Park. Why do they fight and how do Park's parents react?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Park worry about his family's reaction to meeting Eleanor? Are his concerns founded? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 3

The importance of appearances is a recurring theme in this story. Give at least three examples of this theme up to this point.

Vocabulary

critical, curdling, evade, exasperated, protagonist, repertoire, slouched, goon, indignant, incoherent, chrysalis, gingerly



Chapters 23-27

Summary

In Chapter Twenty-three, Park is “more relaxed” on the bus since the fight. His mother says he will remain grounded “long enough to make you sorry you fight.” Everyone is talking about the fight and some even ask Eleanor if Steve and Park were fighting over her. Park asks his father how long he's grounded but Park's father defers to Mindy. Park's father then says he'll intervene if Park learns to drive the truck. Mindy, however, rants about the situation. She says she has heard that the entire “family is trouble,” and cites the fact that Eleanor cried the first time she visited the Sheridan house.

Park goes to his grandparents' house and stays for supper and a television show afterward. He realizes he hadn't expected his mother to like Eleanor immediately, but also hadn't expected that Mindy would outright reject Eleanor. When Park returns home, his dad is waiting for him. He says Mindy is sorry her reaction hurt Park's feelings, and she now wants Park to invite Eleanor for dinner. Park is also no longer grounded. Though he feels uneasy, he's excited at the possibility of finding some time to be alone with Eleanor.

In Chapter Twenty-four, Eleanor realizes she sometimes sleeps through the screaming fights that happen in her house. One night she hears gunshots and, fearing what she might find, slips out the window and to the neighbor's house to call police. The officers arrive but aren't very helpful and leave without really questioning Richie. After the police leave, Richie asks if Eleanor is trying to get rid of him. Sabrina intervenes, saying Eleanor thought she was protecting the family from intruders. After Richie leaves the room, Sabrina says Richie had fired the gun to scare off some kids playing basketball at the nearby school. She then points out that there are “things in the house” that could have resulted in Richie's arrest. When she leaves the bedroom, all the children are trying not to cry aloud. Eleanor gets into bed with Maisie.

In Chapter Twenty-five, Park wants to tell Eleanor his news first thing but she seems distant. Eleanor is wondering where she'll be sent if Richie decides to kick her out again. She considers what her welcome might be if she returns to the Hickmans. Eleanor knows that she will do anything now to stay with her family, even if it comes to begging Richie for forgiveness. Park notices that Eleanor remains withdrawn for the entire day, paying little attention in the classes they have together. That afternoon, he tells her he is no longer grounded, which means she can come over. He says it's only if she wants to and misses Park. She nods and says she's “really tired” as a way of explaining her mood.

In Chapter Twenty-six, Eleanor knows that Park would run away if he knew how much she cares about him and misses him when they are apart.



In Chapter Twenty-seven, Eleanor feels better the following morning. She tells her mother she might go visit Tina that afternoon and her mother agrees. She meets Park at the bus stop and playfully pushes him. Park asks for Eleanor's name, saying she can't be his girlfriend because that person is "sad and quiet and keeps me up all night worrying about her." Park is torn, feeling that he is keeping secrets by not telling Eleanor what Mindy thinks of her but knowing that telling her would make her sad again. Eleanor is happy all day. Eleanor worries about meeting Park's family again but reassures herself that she'll have Park beside her. She also knows that she would do anything to spend more time with him.

Analysis

DeNice, Beebi, and Eleanor are becoming closer and their friendship is becoming more important to Eleanor. After the fight between Steve and Park, DeNice asks Eleanor for details. Eleanor isn't really comfortable talking about the fight or the reason behind it, but DeNice says Eleanor should learn to "stand in your own light." She means that Eleanor should be proud of her moment of triumph. DeNice has a boyfriend and she says she would be singing the theme from the movie "Rocky" if her boyfriend had been the one to beat up Steve. DeNice's attitude is a statement of her character and the fact that she is far more self-assured than Eleanor.

There are several important factors revealed when Park and his parents are arguing over how long Park will be grounded. Park is obviously respectful of his parents but is not afraid like Eleanor is afraid of Richie. Park raises his voice slightly when arguing with his mother, but he can't bring himself to yell. Another issue is seen in Mindy's prejudice against Eleanor which is based on hearsay and on Eleanor's appearance. She says that "good girls don't dress like boys," which is an indication that she's judged Eleanor partly on her clothing. Mindy hasn't yet realized that Eleanor's home situation is serious and that Eleanor has very few options available.

The story of how Eleanor came to be living with friends is revealed in Chapter Twenty-five. Eleanor has an old typewriter and Richie complains about the noise she's making as she types. She doesn't stop typing when he tells her to, and Richie rushes into her room, shouting obscenities at Eleanor. He then demands that she leave the house and Eleanor fully expects that her mother won't allow it. However, Sabrina takes Eleanor to the home of a friend and leaves her there. This has to be very difficult for Eleanor because she is kicked out of her house and her mother supports that decision. Eleanor later realizes that Richie already knew that Sabrina will back him up while Eleanor had not yet seen that her mother's allegiance had shifted from her children to Richie.

As Park pays more attention to Eleanor and her appearance, he is realistic enough to see that other people might see her as strange even though he loves how she looks. He wonders at one point if she has traditional girls' clothing but doesn't really care. He believes that Eleanor looks very much like a girl, regardless of her clothing. There's an important look at Park's impressions of himself in this passage. He says the fact that he likes Eleanor wearing clothes more suited to a boy is "another gay thing about him."



There seems to be no indication that Park is actually gay but he also doesn't fit his father's idea of what a teenaged boy should be. This seems to be the major reason Park and his father aren't as close as some fathers and sons.

The issue with the pickup truck is at the heart of Park's relationship with his father. Park's father wants Park to learn to drive the truck even though Park can already drive the family's car. The car is an automatic, meaning Park doesn't have to shift gears. Park has trouble managing to shift the truck with his father seated next to him, probably because his father's obvious anger makes Park more nervous. The truck represents a milestone in the eyes of Park's father and it seems that he believes he can respect Park more if Park will learn to drive the truck.

Discussion Question 1

Describe Sabrina and her attitudes toward family members. How do these attitudes affect Eleanor and her siblings?

Discussion Question 2

What happens to Park after the fight with Steve? Why do you believe this change occurs?

Discussion Question 3

Why is it important to Park's father that Park learn to drive the truck?

Vocabulary

adamantly, heinous, frantically, tramping, veneer, submissive, humiliating, argyle, urge, tourniquet, irritable



Chapters 28-32

Summary

In Chapter Twenty-eight, Park telephones his mother to let her know Eleanor will be coming over after school. He reminds his mother to be nice to Eleanor. Eleanor is obviously nervous. Eleanor knows Mindy doesn't like her. She tries to feel superior to Mindy but can't. Eleanor visits again on Thursday, Friday, and Saturday. On Saturday, Park's father invites Eleanor to stay for dinner and she agrees. Park walks her part way home and they kiss in the alley near his grandparents' house.

In Chapter Twenty-nine, they continue to notice details about each other and discuss the "White Album" at length because it gives them time to stare at each other.

In Chapter Thirty, Eleanor's friendship with DeNice and Beebi continues to grow and they know she's been spending time with Park. One day, Park sees vulgar words written on Eleanor's book cover and tries to figure out who might be writing it. Eleanor obviously thinks Tina is behind it but Park sees it as too cruel for Tina. Park begins to wonder if Eleanor is writing the words herself.

In Chapter Thirty-one, Eleanor skips school on the last day before Christmas vacation, telling her mother she's sick. Park wants to apologize and hates that Eleanor can cut herself off from him just by staying home. Eleanor's mom seems to realize something is wrong but doesn't pry. Eleanor believes Sabrina realizes that letting Eleanor live with friends for a year means she doesn't really have the right to pry into Eleanor's life.

In Chapter Thirty-two, a box of pineapple arrives. It's a gift from Eleanor's Uncle Geoff who has offered to let Eleanor stay with him to attend a gifted students' camp the following summer. The camp is near Geoff's home in Minnesota and Richie immediately objects. Maisie and Ben fight over the pineapple box until Richie gets upset. He passes out gifts including a racetrack for Ben, monster truck for Mouse, teddy bear for the baby, and electronic keyboard for Maisie. He then gives Eleanor fifty dollars with instructions to buy something for herself.

Later, Sabrina insists that Eleanor join the entire family for a trip to the grocery store though it means the four older children have to ride in the back of a pickup. They all go inside except Richie. Once in the store, Eleanor hands the fifty dollars to her mother and Sabrina accepts it without a word.

Park and Mindy are also at the grocery store. They see Eleanor and her family but Park refuses to talk to them. At home, Mindy gives Park a gift with instructions to give it to Eleanor. She says Eleanor comes from a large family, just like Mindy's, and that means "nobody gets what they need." She says everything is spread so thin that there's never enough of anything to go around. After his parents are in bed, Park taps lightly on Eleanor's window. She mouths the word "school" at him and he meets her at the nearby



school campus. They both apologize and remain outside, talking and kissing, until the cold drives them in.

Analysis

Park has trouble complimenting Eleanor in the traditional sense because she isn't dressed pretty or well-groomed. She's clean but wears boys' clothing with odd accessories. One day, Park tells her that he likes how she looks. Eleanor counters, saying that doesn't mean she looks "nice." Park then says that Eleanor looks like a hobo which, ironically, captures Eleanor's attention. Park elaborates, using words such as sad, gypsy, and clown. He then says that he likes it. It seems that Eleanor might have been upset by Park's words, especially since they seem sincere. However, she seems to appreciate that Park is being honest about her appearance, which may reassure her that he's also being honest about the fact that he likes how she looks. This idea was presented earlier by Park's father after Mindy called Eleanor "weird." Park's father points out that Eleanor is weird and that Park apparently likes it.

Park's love for Eleanor is growing with the time they spend together. When he tells Eleanor that she looks like a hobo, she smiles at him. Park feels that "something broke inside him" because of her smile, and realizes that's his reaction each time he sees her smile.

In Chapter Thirty, the reader learns that Park had been Tina's first boyfriend. This explains why Park is teased but not bullied to an extreme degree. Tina is very popular and the fact that she chose Park as a boyfriend gives Park a level of immunity. No one would bully Park too seriously because it would mean that Tina had chosen poorly, and no one wants to face Tina's wrath.

Park points out that Eleanor writes in lower case letters on her book covers and that the vulgar words that keep appearing there are written in lower case. This seems to indicate that Park believes Eleanor is writing the words herself. She denies it, saying she would at least use correct punctuation but it seems that the author is leading the reader to Park's way of thinking. Eleanor is obviously upset about Park's idea though Park doesn't say it outright. It seems possible that Eleanor has such low self-esteem that she might write these things on her own book, but it's later revealed that Richie is the one writing them.

Park realizes that Tina is still somewhat infatuated by him and it makes him uneasy. He isn't interested in Tina as a girlfriend for several reasons. He knows that Tina and Steve are together and that Steve would want to fight again. He also realizes that a relationship with Tina would be "boring" because they have nothing in common. However, Park likes the fact that Tina sometimes pays attention to him and he hates that he is flattered by the attention. He knows that he has found yet another instance of shallowness in himself at a time when he'd hoped he was past caring what other people think.



Mindy's attitude changes dramatically toward Eleanor once she sees the family. She never talks about her life in Korea or her family there, but she tells Park that she had a large family with several younger siblings. She says that makes life difficult and that she never wants Park to experience that kind of hardship.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Park think Eleanor might be writing the vulgar comments on her book covers? Does his idea have merit?

Discussion Question 2

Describe the relationship between Tina and Park. What are they able to offer one another?

Discussion Question 3

Describe Christmas at Eleanor's house. What does this say about the family and each member's role within it?

Vocabulary

imply, genre, mechanics, seducing, prerogative, surreptitiously, currency, caste, shallow, exotic, solitude, heaved, crypt, forfeited, vile



Chapters 33-38

Summary

In Chapter Thirty-three, Sabrina asks Eleanor about going to stay with Geoff the following summer. Eleanor now says she doesn't want to go but doesn't say it's because she doesn't want to be apart from Park. Park sleeps until noon on Christmas day. His gifts include a fifty-dollar gift certificate from the Drastic Plastic, a "punk record store downtown, some black sweatshirts, and a keyring from his dad. His father won't let him get his license until he masters the gears in the truck but Park is no longer particularly interested in taking the test.

Park and Eleanor talk about her home life and Park asks if she's afraid of Richie. She denies it, saying she just has to avoid him as much as possible. At noon, Sabrina makes Eleanor join the family for dinner. The meal is wonderful but Richie becomes violent when he discovers Sabrina didn't make pumpkin pie, which he says is a necessity for the meal. Richie leaves, saying he's going to buy pumpkin pie. As soon as he's gone, the family eats their fill of the remaining food and watches Christmas movies on television.

In Chapter Thirty-four, Eleanor arrives at Park's house the next day. Mindy doesn't seem surprised to see her. Park gives Eleanor an expensive necklace for Christmas. He says he would understand if she can't accept it. Eleanor knows she shouldn't take it, but she desperately wants it and allows Park to put it on her. She gives Park her copy of "The Catcher in the Rye." Park also presents Eleanor with his mother's gift. It's perfume and Park asks Eleanor to never wear it.

Eleanor spends most of her time at Park's house. Sabrina thinks Eleanor is spending time with Tina. She says Eleanor can invite Tina over but both Sabrina and Eleanor know that's not really true.

In Chapter Thirty-five, Eleanor is leaving Park's house one evening when Park's dad stops her. He says he knows that things must be difficult at home and that she's welcome to visit anytime, for as long as she wants. He also says she's welcome to stay for meals whenever she wants, but that he's going to stop issuing the invitation every time she visits. He says she should consider it an open invitation and Eleanor smiles her gratitude.

One evening, Mindy insists on giving Eleanor a makeover. She adds some makeup and fixes her hair. Eleanor is embarrassed but knows she can't bring herself to say no. Mindy is called away just as the process is finished. Eleanor cries and Mindy takes it as tears of happiness. She makes Eleanor a kit with all the necessary makeup and hair products to recreate the look.



Park is aware that Eleanor tries to look different partly because she's afraid of being like everyone else. The morning after the make over, Park spikes his hair and puts on eyeliner. His father is furious but Mindy stands up for Park's right to change his appearance as he pleases. Park's father predicts the other students will "tear him apart" for the eyeliner but Mindy ushers Park out the door to school. Steve notices immediately and says that Park looks like a rock star. Eleanor doesn't have words for how Park looks but she kisses him "with tongue" during the bus ride to school.

In Chapter Thirty-six, Park expects to be grounded and Eleanor doesn't come over after school. Mindy questions Park about his reason for wearing the eyeliner. He assures her he doesn't want to look like a girl and she lets it drop. That evening, Park's dad asks where Eleanor is. Park says he'd expected to be grounded, which is why Eleanor is at home. His father doesn't ground him but says he has nothing to say to Park.

In Chapter Thirty-seven, Eleanor uses some of the products Park's mom gave her and Mindy notices that Eleanor's hair looks better with the proper care. Mindy says she wishes she'd had a daughter and Eleanor wishes she had a family like Park's. Eleanor "only sometimes" feels like she's betraying her own family with the thought.

In Chapter Thirty-eight, Maisie and Ben reveal that they know Eleanor has a boyfriend. They promise not to tell but try to make Eleanor take them with her to Park's house. She refuses, saying there isn't a whole family of kids for them to play with. Eleanor agrees to let Maisie use her makeup and Ben to read the comics, but urges them to be careful. She points out that if Sabrina and Richie find out about the possessions, no one will be allowed to use them. Eleanor knows that it's only a matter of time until Sabrina and Richie find out about Park and that her time with him is limited because of that.

Analysis

Park and Eleanor have a frank conversation about Eleanor's home life around Christmas when they make up. It's then that Eleanor says any one of her siblings could wake up while she's sneaking out of the house, and that any one of them would tattle on her. This is an important look at Eleanor's family because the children were once allied against Richie. That has changed while Eleanor was away, probably at least partly because she has lost important bonding time with her siblings. Despite the fact that they are no longer as close as they once were, Eleanor is devoted and fears leaving them at Richie's mercy. Another piece of information to come from this conversation is Eleanor's take on her mother's situation. Park asks why Sabrina doesn't simply leave Richie. Eleanor responds that she doesn't think Sabrina is able to leave. She says, "I don't think there's enough of her left," which indicates that Sabrina has been beaten down for so long that she's no longer able to really stand up for herself. This may not be entirely true because Sabrina later leaves Richie, taking all the children with her.

Park believes that they will stop having secrets from each other once Eleanor opens up about her family, but he's wrong. He can't tell her everything about his home life because Eleanor would be hurt to know Mindy's earlier opinions. Park says he can



accept anything about Eleanor but she fears that he will not be able to handle the entire, ugly story of her home.

Cal is a minor character in the story. He is Park's best friend though they spend less time together now that Park spends so much time with Eleanor. The friendship doesn't seem to be vital to Park's happiness but Cal does drive some of the minor action. For example, he tries to get Park to attend events with him in order to get closer to a girl named Kim. One day, Park tells Cal that he's involved in a relationship with Eleanor. Cal wants to know why Park hadn't mentioned it earlier and Park says he didn't expect Cal to "get it." Cal makes a joke about sex and admits that Eleanor frightens him.

Eleanor is frantic when she discovers that Maisie and Ben know about Eleanor's frequent trips to Park's house. They threaten to tell, which is another example of the fact that the siblings are no longer banded together against each other. After they argue, Eleanor agrees to let Maisie use the makeup and that Ben can read the comic books Park loans to her. She says that she would have shared with Maisie if Maisie had just asked. Maisie calls Eleanor a liar. Eleanor doesn't verbally answer the accusation but she admits to herself that Maisie is right. The level of discord among the children has reached new heights. Eleanor isn't using the makeup but she also isn't willing to share with Maisie.

Eleanor says she "only sometimes" feels guilty that she wishes her family was more like Park's. This is evidence of Eleanor's love and devotion to her mother and siblings despite the fact that she doesn't like her home situation. It is natural that Eleanor would wish for a better life.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Park wear eyeliner and how do others react?

Discussion Question 2

Describe the scene in which Maisie and Ben confront Eleanor about Park. What does the scene reveal about the three children?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Eleanor say she is "only sometimes" ashamed that she wishes her family was more like Park's?

Vocabulary

demonic, access, pretentious, scintillating, intimate, intriguing, bleak, speculating, rhetorically, certifiable, dissolve, deftly, swooped, incomprehensible



Chapters 39-43

Summary

In Chapter Thirty-nine, Eleanor is visiting Park. He wants to go to his room to listen to music but Eleanor doesn't really want to be in Park's bedroom. He finally convinces her to join him and they sit on the floor while listening. Park's tastes are moving toward punk and new wave and Eleanor doesn't really like all of this music. They kiss and break a tape by leaning on it. Eleanor later looks back on the way she'd tried to suck in her stomach when Park's hand touched her waist, causing her to lose her balance. She wants to tell Park about the problems with Maisie but doesn't, realizing that he can't do anything to stop whatever is about to happen.

In Chapter Forty, Eleanor asks again about Tina. Park says nothing prior to his relationship with Eleanor is worth mentioning and that he can't imagine anything after his relationship with Eleanor. Eleanor says their lives will continue past this relationship but Park indicates he believes it will be forever.

The next day in gym class, DeNice and Beebi go to lunch ahead of Eleanor. When she reaches her locker, she discovers her clothes are missing. A teacher finds them in the toilet. She gives Eleanor a bag to carry them in and tells her to go to Mrs. Dunne's office. Eleanor struggles with a better answer and considers throwing the clothes away, but knows she doesn't have enough clothes to do without them. She goes around the main hall but encounters Park before she can reach Mrs. Dunne's office. His face is red and he doesn't say anything. Eleanor is mortified. At home, her mother says she doesn't have to go back to school but Eleanor knows she can't stay home all day. She doesn't go to Park's house that night.

In Chapter Forty-one, Park thinks back on the encounter. He knows he should have said something but he was caught off-guard by how much of Eleanor's body was revealed in her gym shorts.

In Chapter Forty-two, Park remains at home while his parents and brother attend a boat show. Eleanor comes over and they spend a lot of time kissing and touching each other until dark when Park realizes his parents might come home at any time. Park's parents return and seem happy to see Eleanor. When she gets home, Richie is up. He asks what she spent the Christmas money on. She knows she has to tell him something because he might want the money back. She says she bought herself a necklace and he doesn't question it further.

In Chapter Forty-three, Park's parents are arguing. Park and Josh know the argument is bound to be about one of them and Josh claims to have overheard Park's name. Park can't think of anything he's done wrong lately but wonders if it's because he and Eleanor were kissing and touching the previous day. After school, Mindy picks Park up and tells Eleanor that she'll have to wait to see Park after they run an errand. Mindy then tells



Park that she's taking him to get his driver's license. She says it has nothing to do with Park's father and tells him to study during the ride. He passes. The next morning, he shows the license to Eleanor.

That afternoon, Park convinces Eleanor to let him take her photo. She says they should wait for a memorable occasion but he insists. When she gets home, Sabrina tells Eleanor that a friend has announced her daughter is pregnant. The friend's daughter is Eleanor's age and Sabrina says Eleanor is being smart by not becoming involved with boys at an early age.

Analysis

Eleanor knows that Park liked Tina years earlier and this bothers her. She can't stop asking him about his feelings for Tina and why he likes her. It may seem like pure jealousy but there's another level of emotion at play here. Eleanor is not self-assured and she worries about the reasons Park likes her. She fears that he will lose interest or that whatever attraction he feels will dissipate. This makes her more inclined to compare herself to Tina because she wants to be assured that Park's love is not a passing phase. At one point, Eleanor points out that she and Tina are very different. She says she can't imagine why Park would be attracted to both of them. She jokingly asks if Park had a "life-changing head injury in junior high," laughingly indicating that might explain his attraction to both of them.

The encounter in the hall when Eleanor is wearing her gym suit is confusing for both Park and Eleanor, and Eleanor misinterprets Park's reaction completely. Eleanor usually wears jeans and Park doesn't see much of her body that isn't clothed. Seeing her in the gym suit is a shock because he is suddenly seeing much more of her than usual, and he wasn't expecting it at all. He is very aware of her physically and he feels more attracted because of the skimpy clothing. Later, when he discovers why she was in the hall in her gym suit, he's ashamed of feeling that way.

After the incident in the locker room, Eleanor is probably feeling more vulnerable than ever. The culprits are never revealed but it's obvious Eleanor believes Tina is responsible. It's not clear why Park thinks Tina could be bullying Eleanor to this level but insists that she couldn't be the one writing on Eleanor's books. Apparently, the writing is more serious in Park's mind. An important aspect of this scene is that the teacher who helps find Eleanor's clothes advises Eleanor to stand up for herself. She says Eleanor shouldn't let the bullying get to her, apparently as a way of trying to help Eleanor cope. It's not nearly enough for a girl in Eleanor's situation. The teacher then sends Eleanor through the school to the counselor's office without considering that Eleanor will be embarrassed even more by being forced to walk through the halls.

The importance of Eleanor's friendship with DeNice and Beebi is seen after Eleanor's clothes are shoved into the toilet. DeNice and Beebi had gone on to the lunchroom ahead of Eleanor that day but the pledge not to leave her alone again. They say that the bullies need to understand that Eleanor has friends. Their willingness to stand up for



Eleanor is a statement of their good character and indicates that they have compassion for Eleanor.

The reason Mindy takes Park for his driver's license on this particular day is not revealed. Mindy and Park's father argue the night before, apparently about this situation. It seems that Mindy is standing up to Park's dad who has insisted that Park can't get his license until he can drive a standard. It may be that Park's mother sees that Park needs some positive reinforcement in his life and that the driver's license would fill that need.

Discussion Question 1

Describe the scene in which Eleanor's clothes are put in the toilet and the reactions of Eleanor, her mother, the teacher, and Park.

Discussion Question 2

What has been stopping Park from getting his driver's license, and why do you believe Mindy takes him to get his license in Chapter Forty-three?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Eleanor feel her time with Park is going to come to an end?

Vocabulary

melodic, discernible, collateral, skeptical, serendipity, figuratively, literally, gender, illicit, inappropriate, remission, explicitly, affronted, scoundrel



Chapters 44-50

Summary

In Chapter Forty-four, Eleanor feels safer, even when she isn't with Park and it's all because of Park's love for her.

In Chapter Forty-five, Park's dad is hunting and Josh is visiting a friend. Park, Eleanor, and Mindy are at Park's house together. Mindy says she doesn't feel like cooking and suggests that Park and Eleanor should go out together. She gives Park the car keys and sends them on their way. They are ecstatic about having time together but Eleanor hides on the floor until they are well away from the neighborhood. They go downtown where they visit a record shop, eat, and walk around. Eleanor knows she could never afford a prom dress. She knows that even if she had money to buy a prom dress, there are many necessities she'd buy instead. She realizes that she would actually just give the money to her mom. They spend some time downtown and some more time laying together in the backseat of the car.

In Chapter Forty-six, Eleanor reluctantly goes home to find Sabrina and Richie fighting. Her siblings are asleep. When Eleanor gets to the top bunk, she discovers the comic books are torn and the makeup bottles smashed. She finds words written on a box that held her few possessions. It reads, "do you think you can make a fool of me?" Eleanor recognizes the handwriting as being the same that has been written on her book covers and realizes that Richie is to blame. In Chapter Forty-seven, Eleanor "considered her options" and realizes she doesn't really have any.

In Chapter Forty-eight, Eleanor leaves the house at a run but doesn't know where to go. She heads for Park's house but can't bring herself to actually go there. Tina, who is among the teenagers hanging out in Steve's garage, calls out to her. Tina says Richie has been driving through the neighborhood in search of Eleanor. Tina says no one at Steve's house told Richie about Park but predicts someone will eventually give up that information. Tina then tells Eleanor that she can hide in Steve's garage until things cool down.

Steve says he will kill Richie because he is already planning to kill Tina's stepfather. Once Eleanor is out of sight, Steve asks what she plans to do. She says she's going to go away but wants to tell Park before she leaves. Steve climbs up to Park's window and Park joins them at Steve's garage. Eleanor and Park talk briefly and Park agrees that Eleanor has to hide. As they leave the garage, Steve warns them to be careful, saying Richie has been driving around in his truck. Eleanor thanks Tina for her help.

Park takes Eleanor to his grandparents' camper, parked near their house. Eleanor says she can't return home and reveals that Richie is the one who has been writing on her books. She says she can't bear the way he looks at her. In Chapter Forty-nine, Eleanor



says she pretends that Richie isn't looking at her even when she knows that he's just waiting for the right time.

In Chapter Fifty, Eleanor says she'll go to her Uncle Geoff's house in St. Paul, Minnesota. She says she'll catch a bus but she really plans to hitchhike. Park says he'll drive her. Eleanor agrees to wait in the camper until Park can come back.

Analysis

While Eleanor and Park are downtown, they talk about the possibility of going to prom together. Park obviously wants Eleanor to go with him but she knows Richie wouldn't allow it. They discuss the idea along with scenarios of how they might manage it. Eleanor at one point suggests that her "mouse and bird friends" could make a dress for her to wear. She's talking about the fairy tale, "Cinderella." In some ways, Eleanor's life resembles that of the imaginary girl. She is treated poorly at home but has a cruel stepfather instead of a stepmother. However, her relationship with Park has put her in a position that seems to Eleanor much like a dream.

At one point while Eleanor and Park are downtown, the conversation turns to Park's appearance. He obviously doesn't consider himself attractive and says there are no good-looking Asian actors as a means of pointing out that Korean men aren't handsome. Eleanor corrects him and says he is really cute. Park's impression of himself isn't nearly as important to the story as Eleanor's impressions of herself, but the fact that he doesn't see himself as a cute teen is a statement of his character.

The fact that Tina steps up to help Eleanor when she's running away from Richie is an important aspect of Tina's character. For the first time, the reader sees that Tina has a difficult life at home and that her bullying may very well be an effort to take control over some aspect of her life. There's no doubt Tina has been unkind to Eleanor. However, when Eleanor is truly in danger from Richie, Tina steps in and helps.

Chapter Forty-nine is written from Eleanor's perspective. The chapter is only a few sentences in length and describes Eleanor's feelings about Richie. She notes that he has been watching her and that it's obvious he is thinking about her in a physical way. Eleanor hasn't mentioned this in her conversations up to this point. The writer also hasn't revealed any of this in Eleanor's thoughts. It could be that Eleanor has tried to avoid thinking about it or it could be that she hasn't really put it all together until she discovers that Richie is the one writing on her books.

Discussion Question 1

Describe Eleanor's attitude about going to prom with Park.



Discussion Question 2

How does Eleanor learn the identity of the person who has been writing on her books?
How does this discovery make her feel?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Tina step in and help Eleanor hide from Richie?

Vocabulary

relentless, chicanery, cotillion, deprecatory



Chapters 51-58

Summary

In Chapter Fifty-one, Park plans to wait until his parents are in bed before returning to Eleanor. Eleanor knows she should feel bad that Park is helping her because she knows he'll be in trouble later, but she also knows that his punishment won't be that serious. Eleanor has time to worry about her younger brothers and sister but convinces herself that she can't.

Park gathers up the cash he has on hand and leaves a note for his parents. He is intercepted by his father who wants to know where Park is going. Park explains about Eleanor's situation and his dad agrees that Park has to help. They briefly discuss the route. His father gives him some additional cash and tells Park that his only condition is that Park has to take the truck. Park agrees and pulls smoothly out of the driveway.

In Chapter Fifty-two, Eleanor sleeps part of the way. Park is relieved that she's sleeping but then angry because she's sleeping through the last few hours they'll have together. At one point, they stop and almost have sex. Eleanor wants to but Park says they have to wait. Eleanor fears they'll never again be together but Park says he has to believe that isn't true.

In Chapter Fifty-three, they finish the trip and stop at a gas station to ask for directions to Eleanor's Uncle Geoff's house. In Chapter Fifty-four, they arrive. Eleanor says Park shouldn't wait after she's inside. He makes her recite his phone number so they can stay in touch. Park promises that everything is going to work out okay "because I love you." Eleanor asks if Park's love is the reason everything is going to be okay and he says it is.

In Chapter Fifty-four, time has passed. Park's parents gave him the Impala and he no longer rides the bus. He never listens to the stereo because of the memories of Eleanor.

Eleanor settles into life with her Uncle Geoff and Aunt Susan. On the day of her arrival, her aunt and uncle are welcoming and consider how to get the other children out of Richie's grasp. One day Park learns from Josh that Eleanor's brother is no longer attending school and that the entire family has apparently moved. One day, a new friend asks Eleanor if she's ever had a boyfriend. Eleanor says she hasn't because she considers Park her champion rather than her boyfriend.

In Chapter Fifty-six, Eleanor finds herself unable to write a letter to Park. Park writes to Eleanor all the time. He has a job at Drastic Plastic. He tells her that Steve and Tina have eloped. He eventually stops mailing the letters but continues to write more for months.

In Chapter Fifty-seven, almost a year has passed. Park is by Eleanor's old house one day when Richie arrives home. Park wants to confront him but Richie is so drunk that he



falls down. Eleanor struggles when she's getting letters from Park and never opens or reads any of them. She struggles even more when the letters stop arriving.

In Chapter Fifty-eight, Park attends prom with a girl from work named Cat. She's nothing like Eleanor and he's relieved. Then Park gets a postcard from Eleanor. It has only three words.

Analysis

Eleanor has some time alone in the camper while she's waiting for Park to return. She worries about her younger siblings and briefly considers returning home to check on them. She also considers the possibility of taking some or all of them with her. It seems reasonable that Richie will turn his attention on Maisie if Eleanor is gone, and Eleanor wants to protect Maisie from that. However, she decides against it because she knows that her mother might not make a big scene if Eleanor is gone but will call the police if Maisie is also gone. This seems to indicate that Eleanor believes Sabrina is more dedicated to Maisie than she is to Eleanor, and that might be the case.

As Park and his dad talk in the moments before Park is leaving with Eleanor, it's evident that Park's dad believes Eleanor is in danger. He curses about Richie and seems to be determined to help Eleanor. He asks if Eleanor's uncle will really take her in and says that Park should bring Eleanor back to their house if that's not the case. This is another example of the character of Park's father. Though he is often a difficult man and is sometimes harsh with his dealings with Park, he obviously believes in doing what's right.

The final lines of Chapter Fifty-one indicate that Park pulls the truck smoothly out of the driveway, "Because he knew how to drive a stick." Park has gone over driving the standard transmission so many times that he really can drive it, but he has struggled anytime his father is in the truck. It's important to Park's father that Park drive the truck and he puts that as a demand before allowing Park to leave the house with Eleanor. It seems that Park's dad knows Park can drive the truck and this provides a meeting place for the two.

The reader who wants or expects a neat ending to the story will be disappointed. Park and Eleanor seem to have grown completely apart though both are unhappy with the situation. When Park has apparently given up any hope of reconnecting with Eleanor, he receives a postcard with three words. The reader is left to decide what those three words are.

Discussion Question 1

Compare the story of "Romeo and Juliet" to the love and lives of Eleanor and Park.



Discussion Question 2

What do you believe the three words are on the postcard Eleanor sends Park?

Discussion Question 3

Why is Park relieved that the girl he takes to prom is nothing like Eleanor?

Vocabulary

problematic, deliberately, frequent, melodramatic, temporarily, embossed, anticlimactic, jaggedly, summon, commissioner



Characters

Park Sheridan

Park is a sixteen-year-old teenager when the story begins. He is the son of a Korean mother and American father and is very conscious of his ethnicity. He doesn't believe he fits in and feels insecure because of it. Park is sitting alone the day Eleanor gets on the bus for the first time and his initial reaction is to ignore her. He isn't able to continue ignoring her when he realizes that she's about to cry.

Park's home life is stable but he isn't really happy. His father hates some aspects of Park's life but Park refuses to change to meet his father's dictates. His mother is somewhat over-protective but is willing to do what she can to ensure Park's happiness.

Once Park begins to spend time with Eleanor, he focuses on something bigger than himself. When he learns that someone is picking on Eleanor, he wants to put a stop to it. He eventually gets into a fight with a boy named Steve. Park's father is impressed that Park got into a fight though he doesn't officially condone the act. When Eleanor is in danger from her stepfather, Park steps in and helps her leave even though it hurts him to be separated from her.

Park is, in many ways, a typical teenager though he is overly serious in some ways. He loves music and comics. He wants to fit in without being teased by other teenagers. He believes he has found true love with Eleanor and doesn't want to lose that.

Eleanor Jackson

Eleanor lives a chaotic life with her mother, four siblings, and her stepfather, Richie. She has only recently reunited with her family after almost a year of living with another family after a fight with Richie. Richie insisted that Eleanor leave the home and Eleanor's mother met that demand by dropping Eleanor off with a friend. Eleanor's reunion with her family means she begins to attend Park's school.

Eleanor is a large girl compared to many her age. She has bright red hair which makes her the target of jokes and teasing. She has few possessions and very few clothes, but she has a flair for dressing out of the ordinary. She has to be creative with her limited wardrobe and often uses ties and cheap jewelry as accessories. These choices make her stand out even more and makes her the target of more teasing. She tends to try to ignore the bullies but it's obvious her feelings are often hurt.

Eleanor is devoted to her family though that devotion is not returned to the same degree. When she receives fifty dollars as a Christmas gift, she gives it to her mother for groceries. Her mother accepts the money without question, apparently not even considering that Eleanor should be able to spend even some of the money on herself. When Eleanor discovers that her stepfather is thinking about molesting her, she decides



to run away but briefly considers going back to ensure that her siblings and mother are alright.

Eleanor is, in many ways, a typical teenager. Her harsh life means she has limited hopes and dreams for her future. She enjoys music and comics, interests she shares with Park. She also loves to read and it may be because she looks at literature as a means of escaping her life.

Tina

Tina is a teenage girl in Eleanor's class who rides Eleanor's bus and lives in the neighborhood. She seems to be a bully and there's no doubt that she harasses Eleanor and others. She is very popular and seems to believe that means she has the right to be mean. There is, however, another side to Tina. When Eleanor is running away from Richie, Tina helps her hide and advises her to avoid Richie until the situation has calmed down. She marries Steve at a very young age, probably as a means of escaping her own home which includes a stepfather.

Steve

Park's friend, he is something of a brash bully. He enjoys working on cars and spends most of his time in his garage. Steve makes fun of Eleanor which makes Park angry enough to start a fight. While he seems to be a bully, he is also willing to step up and help when Eleanor is in trouble.

Min-Dae Sheridan

Park's mother, she is known as Mindy. She is a Korean by birth and moved to the United States when she married Park's father. Mindy has a salon in her garage and does hair and nails for clients in the neighborhood. She is somewhat overprotective of Park but is also willing to allow him some freedom, as seen in the day she helps him get his drivers license.

Maisie

Eleanor's younger sister, Maisie is moving closer to Richie and that worries Eleanor, especially considering that Richie is apparently on the verge of molesting Eleanor. Maisie seems to be at least a little more accepting of Richie and their current situation. She often takes care of the younger children and seems somewhat resentful of Eleanor's return to the family.



Sabrina

Eleanor's mother, she is weak and unable to stand up for herself or her children. She is married to a man named Richie who is always on the verge of exploding and her answer to that situation is to tiptoe around in an effort to avoid his anger. She is never able to stand up for herself against him and even makes Eleanor move out when Richie insists. It's not clear what happens to Sabrina and the other children as the story comes to a close but they are apparently no longer living with Richie.

Richie

Eleanor's stepfather, he is often drunk and almost always on the verge of an explosion. His anger is seldom under control and even then, everyone is afraid that he will become angry over some minor issue. He is furious when Sabrina doesn't make a pumpkin pie for Christmas dinner. He openly uses drugs and fires off a gun to scare someone in the neighborhood. As the story ends, he is living alone and is so drunk that he can't stand up.

Park's Father

He is married to a Korean woman known as Mindy and lives next door to his parents. He has strong family values but is hard on Park, especially when Park acts in ways his father sees as strange. A strong example of this is when Park begins wearing eyeliner.

Eleanor's Biological Father

He is an absentee dad who seldom spends time or effort on Eleanor and her siblings. He calls on Eleanor to babysit when he and his fiancée have plans to go out, and says he'll pay her ten dollars for the evening's work. He only pays her seven. He lives in a much nicer house than Eleanor's family. Eleanor doesn't seem to love or hate him, or even resent him for his lack of caring.



Symbols and Symbolism

The play, "Romeo and Juliet"

A play written by Shakespeare, it's among the poetry discussed during a class attended by Eleanor and Park. When the teacher asks Eleanor about the play, she says Shakespeare was making fun of the "love" between Romeo and Juliet. She believes the emotion between the two young lovers wasn't real and fears that the relationship she has with Park will be equally fleeting.

Comic Books

Read often by Park, the comic books become a source of common ground for Eleanor and Park. The fact that Park is willing to share them and that they discuss them at length are evidence of Park's efforts to befriend Eleanor.

The Necklace

The jewelry Park gives Eleanor as a Christmas gift. It is an expensive necklace and Eleanor has to hide it from her family. She later lies about it, telling Richie she used the money he gave her for Christmas to buy the necklace.

The Book, "The Catcher in the Rye"

This is the book Eleanor gives Park as a Christmas gift. It's a means of showing him that she cares though she has no money to buy him a gift.

Gym Class

The physical education class is a place where Eleanor is at the mercy of bullies. There are several incidents here and the class becomes a symbol of the worst of the bullying.

Music

Music is one of the shared interests of Eleanor and Park, it's one of the first things they discuss. Park makes Eleanor a tape of some of his favorites when he learns she hasn't heard some of the groups and songs he likes. When he learns Eleanor doesn't have a way to play the tapes at home, he shares his player with her.



Toothbrushes

The fact that Eleanor doesn't have a toothbrush bothers her greatly and is an important example of the lack of basic necessities in Eleanor's home. There are no conveniences, such as a telephone and washing machine, but there is also a shortage of more serious things, such as food.

Dinner at Park's House

Eleanor begins spending a great deal of time at Park's house and his parents are open to having her there everyday after learning that Eleanor's house is chaotic and even dangerous. Eventually, Park's dad tells Eleanor she is always welcome and that he's going to stop inviting her everyday. He wants her to know that she is always welcome, especially if it's easier for her to be there than to be home. The dinners and evening activities at Park's house are a means of escape for Eleanor and she treasures them almost as much as she treasures her love for Park.

The Pickup Truck

Owned by Park's dad, the truck becomes an important symbol of what Park's father believes Park should accomplish. Park can't drive the truck when his dad is watching closely but is able to manage it when he is alone in the truck.

Prom

Park invites Eleanor to prom well ahead of the date. Eleanor wants to go but knows that she can't possibly go with him. The prom, to Eleanor, is like a fairy tale and she knows it can't come true though she relishes the dream.



Settings

The School Bus

The school bus is the transportation used by Park and Eleanor as a means of getting to school each day. The bus is typical of school buses. Park tends to use music to try to drown out the yelling of other students until he becomes friends with Eleanor. Both Eleanor and Park hate the bus until it becomes the place where they get to spend time together. This becomes a major setting for the action of the story, especially during the early chapters.

Eleanor's House

Eleanor, her mother, her four siblings, and her stepfather share a two-bedroom house. The house is run-down and very small. The bathroom is right beside the kitchen and there is no door separating the two rooms. This means anyone in the bathroom is in full view of a large portion of the rest of the house. There is a sheet up over the door for awhile but when it's removed, there is no privacy at all. Eleanor shares a room with all her siblings until her stepfather decides the oldest boy is too old to remain in the room and tries to banish him to the basement. Overall, Eleanor does not feel safe here and spends increasing amounts of time at Park's house.

Park's House

Park's house is very different from Eleanor's house. It includes his mother's touch with decorations throughout. The house is less chaotic and there is always plenty of food for the family. The garage has been converted into a salon where Park's mother provides hair services for paying customers. The house is a typical suburban home but seems to be at least somewhat nicer than many of the houses in the immediate neighborhood. It is a place where Park feels safe, which he seems to take for granted much of the time, and becomes a safe place for Eleanor as well.

Omaha, Nebraska

Omaha is where Park lives and where Eleanor moves to live with her mother and stepfather. The town is a real place, which lends a level of believability to the story. The majority of the descriptions about the town are provided only as a means of moving the action along. For example, there is a school next to Eleanor's house. Park and Eleanor visit a pizza place, ice cream place, and comics stores one evening. These are not described in great detail.

St. Paul, Minnesota

St. Paul is the town where Eleanor's uncle lives. The town and her uncle's home represents a safe place for Eleanor, which becomes even more important when Eleanor is in danger of being molested by her stepfather. Park and Eleanor travel to St. Paul as a means of getting Eleanor away from Richie. The town is described only briefly and there are few details about any part of the city, including the neighborhood where Eleanor's relatives live.



Themes and Motifs

Bullying

Bullying is a major theme in the book and is one of the reasons Eleanor and Park become friends. Eleanor is teased from the moment of her arrival at Park's school, mostly because of her appearance but also because she is new. It's important for the reader to remember that Eleanor had friends at her previous school, meaning she knows how to fit in. Her lack of acceptance at the new school seems to be at least partly because of the people she encounters first.

Tina and Steve are loud and harsh in their dealings with others. Park is subjected to some of their actions and he tries to keep his head down and avoid attracting their attention. However, he is not teased as mercilessly as Eleanor because he has grown up with Tina and Steve. Park is somewhat relieved when Tina and Steve begin to torment Eleanor because he knows it means they are not focused on him. He is somewhat ashamed of his actions and thoughts toward Eleanor but he's also embarrassed for her when she's bullied and teased. An extension of his feelings is seen as Park feels somewhat embarrassed because of his friendship with Eleanor during the early days of their relationship.

The teasing goes overboard when someone takes Eleanor's clothing from her locker. She finds the clothes in the toilet. An important aspect of this theme is seen in the teacher's reaction to the act. Eleanor is told to take her dripping clothing and go through the school's halls to the counselor's office. There's no doubt she will be embarrassed as she's subjected to more teasing from the students, but the teacher either doesn't think of that or doesn't care.

The bullying also comes from Eleanor's stepfather, Richie. Richie pushes Eleanor's mother around and is cruel in his dealings with Eleanor and her siblings. Richie's temper is always near the exploding point and he never cares who is hurt by his anger. His bullying reaches a dangerous level when it becomes obvious that he's thinking about molesting Eleanor. When that happens, Eleanor manages to escape and her action apparently prompts her mother into action because Richie eventually lives alone in the house.

Another aspect of this theme is Eleanor's attempts to deal with the bullying. She tries to ignore the taunts and pleads with Park to ignore the bullies and their comments. Eleanor feels that any reaction on her part will only make the bullying worse.

Eleanor's Relationship with Richie

Richie is Eleanor's stepfather and should be the person who loves and protects her. That's not the case, and their mutual hatred becomes a driving force behind the action in the story. Eleanor hates that Richie is often drunk, abusive, and cruel. He does many



things that are illegal, including the use of drugs. His temper is explosive and he becomes furious at tiny infractions. Eleanor is afraid of him but she's also resentful and unable to fully hide that resentment all the time.

Prior to the opening of the story, Eleanor and Richie argue and Richie demands that she leave the house. Though it seems somewhat unbelievable, Eleanor's mother agrees and leaves Eleanor with friends for about a year. That Richie kicks her out and that her mother allow it is an important statement of Eleanor's relationship with Richie. The reason Eleanor's mother brings her back home is never revealed but it's obvious she wants Eleanor to be nice to Richie and to avoid making him angry.

Richie apparently never tries to sexually molest Eleanor but it's also obvious that he's thinking about it. Eleanor discovers that Richie has been writing crude words on her school books and knows that her situation is becoming dangerous. When she runs away from home, Richie begins to search for her and Eleanor finds that some neighborhood teens are willing to help her hide from him. She leaves and lives with her uncle, never returning home. Richie continues to live in the neighborhood and it's obvious that he is a drunk with no future.

Love

The love between Eleanor and Park is a driving theme of the story. Their relationship begins slowly which gives them time to become more at ease with each other before committing to a relationship. One of the first steps toward love is seen when Park discovers that Eleanor is reading a comic book over his shoulder. Eleanor expects that Park will have finished the book during the day but that afternoon Park opens the book to the same page, giving Eleanor the opportunity to read along with him. They begin sharing much in much the same way and are soon spending every moment of their bus ride discussing music and comics. They are soon inseparable and want to spend every moment together. Park is the first to declare his love.

The depth of that love is seen when Eleanor is being bullied. Park wants desperately to do something to stop it and gets in a fight to protect Eleanor from Steve's teasing. When someone is writing crude comments on Eleanor's books, Park wants to find a way to put a stop to that as well. When Eleanor is in danger from Richie, Park agrees to help her run away. He wants to be with Eleanor but is love his already strong enough that he wants her to be safe more than he wants her near.

Another important example of this theme is seen in Park's parents. Their love for each other is deep and is part of everything they do, especially as parents. They sometimes argue and don't always agree on how to handle situations, but they always show their love for each other. Park is fully aware that they greet each other passionately, regardless of who might be looking. It seems likely that this impacts Park's idea of love as he falls in love with Eleanor.



The Importance of Appearances

Eleanor dresses in clothes that are not typical of the teenagers in her school. She dresses this way because she doesn't have many clothes and has few options available, but she also likes to dress differently. She wears men's shirts and sometimes uses a men's tie around her hair or wrist as an accessory. This appearance makes her less acceptable to the majority of students who tend to judge first on appearances. Park is among these. When Park sees Eleanor for the first time, he says that she is "a mess" and this is his honest opinion.

Her appearance, including the bright red hair, is part of the reason Eleanor is targeted by the bullies. Tina and Steve make fun of Eleanor from the beginning and call her names, including "Bozo." Many of the names are very derogatory and hurt Eleanor deeply.

Park's mother tries to change Eleanor's appearance by giving her a new hairdo and offering makeup advice. She wants to help Eleanor fit in by giving her a typical teen appearance, but it's obvious that Eleanor is uncomfortable changing her looks.

Park is another example of this theme. Park's mother is Korean and he has many of the typical Asian characteristics. As the story opens, Steve is pointing out Park's appearance and assuming that his Asian background makes him knowledgeable about karate. Park happens to know about karate, but it's not because his mother is Korean. Near the end of the story, Park begins wearing eyeliner, a statement that upsets his father. Park's mother says it's important for Park to have the opportunity to look like he wants.

Basic Needs

Eleanor's home life is chaotic, violent, and devoid of comforts as well as basic necessities. Several times, Eleanor considers asking her counselor for a toothbrush. She tries to clean her teeth but knows she isn't doing a good job at it. When Eleanor is invited to babysit at her father's house, she accepts without question because she will have access to a telephone. While a phone is not necessary for human life, it is an accepted convenience for most teenagers. Eleanor has missed out on this kind of convenience and she relishes the opportunity to talk on the phone for an evening. As she leaves, she takes several new toothbrushes and some soap from her father's home.

The fact that all five children share a room means that none of them have any privacy. At one point, Richie orders Ben to start sleeping in the basement. While it might seem that Ben would prefer to have some space of his own, he's actually afraid of the basement and sometimes hides in the closet in order to avoid Richie's attention. While the children might wish for a room of their own, they are quick to huddle together whenever the fights between Richie and Sabrina turn violent. Their need for comfort is likely more important to them than their need for privacy.



Eleanor has very limited clothing options, including warm clothes. When someone puts her clothes in the toilet, her first instinct is to throw them away but she knows she doesn't have enough clothes to follow that instinct. The family also has limited food available and it's noted that the children eat plain food while Sabrina cooks a steak for Richie. There is not a great deal of discussion about hunger but it's accepted that Eleanor will hand over money to help pay for the family's Christmas dinner.

Styles

Point of View

The story is written in third person and the perspective alternates between Park and Eleanor, often within the same chapter. This means the reader gets a limited view of the action but sometimes sees the same action through the eyes of both Park and Eleanor, though never through any other characters' perspective. For example, the reader sees the scene in which Eleanor loses her clothing through Eleanor's perspective. She later tells about it but the truth of the situation, including who put the clothes in the toilet, is never revealed. Since Eleanor suspects Tina and Tina's friends are guilty, the reader is led to believe that same thing, but there is never any proof.

After Eleanor loses her clothes, she has to go into the school hallway in her gym suit. She is horrified that everyone will know she was bullied to this extreme. She encounters Park and takes his reaction to mean that he is embarrassed for her. It seems this might be the breaking point for Park but the reader later sees the scene through Park's perspective. He is actually caught off-guard because Eleanor's gym suit is very skimpy, leaving more of her body exposed than is normal for her.

The fact that the story is limited only to the two perspectives is lessened by dialogue and the actions of other characters. For example, Park's mother changes her view of Eleanor after discovering that Eleanor has a large family. She then tells Park that she understands how that family situation affects a person and she tells Park a bit about her own family. The reader wouldn't have known why his mother changed her attitude except for her conversation with Park.

Language and Meaning

The book is aimed at young audiences but there are curse words throughout the story. The language is obviously meant to be true to the language of teenagers of the day but some readers and parents may be uncomfortable with the language. There are also sexual references which may not be suitable for very young audiences. The basic story is of two teenagers who meet by chance but find they have a great deal in common once they get past the social concerns. The book deals with several issues facing modern-day teens, including bullies, sex, drugs, alcohol use, and family violence.

An important aspect of the book is that few of the issues are neatly wrapped up with a clear resolution. Tina continues to live with problems at home and elopes with another teenager before they are out of high school. There are several teens who are using drugs and alcohol, all without apparent consequence. Divorce is rampant, evidenced by the fact that at least two of the characters have stepfathers. These family situations are apparently chaotic and, at least in Eleanor's case, dangerous.



The words are fairly common and the reader with an average vocabulary will likely be able to read the entire book without a problem. The book is divided between dialogue and narrative, both realistic and appropriate to the story. There are a few references to pop culture of the day and modern-day teenagers may not understand them all. There are also some references to classic literature, including Shakespeare's "Romeo and Juliet." The reader doesn't have to be familiar with more than the basics of that play for the reference to make sense.

Structure

The book is divided into fifty-eight chapters. A name appears at the beginning of each chapter indicating that the reader will be looking through the perspective of either Park or Eleanor. In many chapters, the perspective switches multiple times. A couple of the chapters are very short. For example, Chapter Forty-Nine is thirteen sentences in length; it is Eleanor talking about Richie and how he seems to be always watching her. She says she tries not to notice.

The action occurs in chronological order beginning with the day when Eleanor catches the bus Park rides for the first time. She is obviously trying to find a seat but everyone refuses to allow her to sit down until Park gives up and has her sit with him. This begins their relationship. By Chapter Nine, they are beginning to forge a friendship based mostly on the fact that Eleanor is reading comics over Park's shoulder and their shared love of music. By Chapter Twelve, Park is beginning to realize Eleanor has problems at home though he doesn't know how serious it is. By Chapter Seventeen, the friendship is emerging into something deeper and both are beginning to care about the well-being of the other.

Chapter Thirty-Two takes place at Christmas. In Chapter Thirty-Five, Eleanor has been spending a lot of time at Park's house and is becoming more comfortable being there. By Chapter Forty-Nine, it's obvious that Richie is becoming overly interested in Eleanor and she realizes in the following chapter that she's going to have to leave home. In Chapter Fifty, Eleanor announces she's going to her uncle's house and Park agrees to take her. The following chapters include the trip to Minnesota. Chapter Fifty-five opens with Park's life after his return home and the final chapters cover the lives of Park and Eleanor in the year after their separation.



Quotes

And she was dressed like ... like she wanted people to look at her. Or maybe like she didn't get what a mess she was.

-- Narrator (Chapter 1 paragraph 41)

Importance: This is Park's first impression of Eleanor and it is his honest reaction. It takes time for Park to get past her appearance to find that he and Eleanor have a lot in common and that he likes her.

It made sense that Tina was in Eleanor's gym class because gym was an extension of hell, and Tina was definitely a demon. A weird, miniature demon.

-- Narrator (Chapter 6 paragraph 3)

Importance: Eleanor is having trouble with Tina already and is not surprised to discover that Tina has gym at the same time. This class becomes a serious issue for Eleanor as Tina and her friends make Eleanor's life miserable. The references to "miniature" is made because Eleanor feels she is very large, especially next to Tina, who is small.

She opened the bedroom door and smelled bacon. Which meant that her mother was alive.

-- Narrator (Chapter 11 paragraph 20)

Importance: Eleanor and her siblings hear yelling the previous evening and are helpless to try to break up the fight between Richie and Sabrina. The next morning, Eleanor wakes and smells the bacon. The fact that she thinks this "meant that her mother was alive" is a statement of how serious the fights really are.

And if that happened – if she got on the bus one day and he didn't look up – she didn't want him to see how devastated it would make her. So far, it hadn't happened.

-- Narrator (Chapter 14 paragraph 35)

Importance: Eleanor worries every single morning that this is the day Park will stop talking to her. She can't believe that he likes her and fully expects that he will back off in order to distance himself from the bullies who are picking on her. An important part of this fear is that Park doesn't understand why Eleanor likes him and fears that she will be the one to put a stop to their friendship.

He wished that he could feel defensive and protective of Eleanor without feeling ... everything else. Without feeling like they were making fun of him, too.

-- Narrator (Chapter 18 paragraph 85)

Importance: Park is struggling with his own emotions as Eleanor is being bullied. When others torment her, he can't help but sometimes feel embarrassed for her and he sometimes feels that he's being targeted because he's Eleanor's friend.



She went up to the hall closet, found three brand-new toothbrushes, shoved them into the front of her pants, along with a bar of Dove soap.

-- Narrator (Chapter 20 paragraph 3)

Importance: Eleanor is just about to leave her father's house after babysitting for him. He promised to pay her ten dollars but has only seven dollars to give her when the time comes to pay. It's a statement of Eleanor's desperation to meet the basic needs of her siblings that she takes toothbrushes and soap from her father's house.

Everybody in school knew that Eleanor was the reason Park Sheridan kicked Steve Murphy in the mouth. There was a new kind of whispering when she walked down the halls.

-- Narrator (Chapter 23 paragraph 19)

Importance: This is just after Park returns to school from his suspension for fighting. Eleanor has been the subject of ridicule since her first day at this school and the bullying has not lessened over time. However, now there are people who want to know if Park and Steve were fighting over Eleanor. The bullying doesn't stop but there is a new focus, at least for awhile.

As soon as they were inside, Eleanor put the wadded-up fifty in her mother's hand. Her mother didn't thank her.

-- Narrator (Chapter 32 paragraph 44)

Importance: Eleanor has fifty dollars given to her by Richie as a Christmas gift. She doesn't want the money because it came from Richie but her mother has insisted that Eleanor participate in the trip to the grocery store. It's not clear whether Sabrina has any money at all, but it seems evident that she needs the fifty dollars to purchase the groceries for the family's Christmas meal. The important part of this quote is that Sabrina doesn't even acknowledge the money, which is technically Eleanor's to spend. Another important point is that Eleanor doesn't hesitate to hand the money over to help the family.

I mean, we were kind of getting along for a while, because I finally got in a fight and because he thought my mom was being too hard on you.

-- Park (Chapter 37 paragraph 25)

Importance: Park is saying this to Eleanor as a way of explaining his relationship with his father. Park and his dad are very different. Though Park's father loves him, he is often exasperated and doesn't really understand Park. Their differences make it difficult for them to communicate. Ironically, one of the reasons his father is now on better terms with Park is because he believes Mindy has been too harsh in her appraisal of Eleanor.

But almost nobody cared. Not even his grandparents.

-- Narrator (Chapter 41 paragraph 16)

Importance: Park has worn eyeliner to school and his father seems to expect that



people will laugh at Park. His father is, in his way, trying to protect Park from that situation, but it simply doesn't happen. A few people make comments but most are simply supportive of Park's new look. It's interesting that his grandparents have the foresight to accept Park's experimental look. His grandfather even tells Park's father that he "should have seen what kids looked like while you were in Korea."

Eleanor considered her options. 1.

-- Narrator (Chapter 47 paragraph 1)

Importance: This is the entire chapter and it's meant to make a dramatic statement. Eleanor has just learned that Richie is watching her and that she's literally in danger from him. The number one appears as the first option of a list but it's obvious that Eleanor has few options available and that none of them are really ideal.

He lay on his bed and never turned on the stereo.

-- Narrator (Chapter 56 paragraph 9)

Importance: Park is struggling with his separation from Eleanor and is desperately trying to get on with his life. He remembers her in every part of his daily routine, including the Impala, the school bus, and school. Even Park's room has memories of Eleanor though she always refused to sit on his bed for fear that she would appear too forward. Their shared love of music means that songs remind him of Eleanor, and he even avoids the music in order to avoid the pain her memory brings.