

# **Hello From the Gillespies Study Guide**

**Hello From the Gillespies by Monica McInerney**

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## Plot Summary

No matter how irritating they may be, the love of family members for one another can overcome all obstacles. This long-suffering love of family is explored in the novel "Hello From the Gillespies" by Monica McInerney. A ranting letter accidentally sent out by the Gillespie family instead of its typical Christmas greetings gave neighbors an unexpected glimpse into the troubles being faced by a family everyone had always thought was perfect. The letter also shook up relationships between the seven members of the family. Even as the family struggled with the aftermath of the letter, and then later nursed Angela through memory loss after a serious car wreck, they sometimes lost their patience with each other but never lost their love. This novel gives a look into the intricacies of family life and the way one family's love for its members helped it to overcome tough times.

Although Angela usually enjoyed writing her family's Christmas letter, this year she struggled to present a positive picture. As a release she decided to take her friend Joan's advice and write the truth. She had just finished with her ranting letter about her children's failures, her husband's sudden distance from her and her own fantasy life when her son Ig accidentally cut off part of his finger with a carving knife. In her rush to care for Ig, Angela left the letter on the computer screen where her husband saw it and sent it out to his wife's Christmas email list, believing he was doing her a favor. As Angela's family members learned about the letter and what had been written about them, they each reacted in different ways. After the children initially blew up at their mother, they recovered from their anger and realized she had written the truth about them. Angela's husband Nick, however, grew even more distant.

Because she'd been having painful headaches, Angela traveled to Adelaide to see a specialist just after Christmas. While there she decided to drive to a lookout point that Nick had taken her to just a few days before their wedding. As she drove, Angela was frightened by a huge spider that crawled across the inside of her windshield. She screamed and took her hands off the wheel, allowing her car to careen into a tree. When Angela finally regained consciousness several days later doctors discovered she was suffering from memory loss. She believed the fantasy life she'd written about in her ranting letter was her real life. In her fantasy she, her husband and daughter were going to vacation on Errigal, the sheep station where Angela actually lived with her family.

When she was physically able, Angela went to Errigal believing she was a guest. Her family treated her as they would one of the visitors who often visited their station for vacations. As Angela began to get to know her family on a different level, she found herself fantasizing about Nick, her real life husband. It was Celia, the no nonsense, interfering aunt who finally decided she'd had enough of Angela being coddled as a guest. Hoping to spark Angela's memory, Celia left a folder with all of the Gillespie Christmas letters that Angela had written over the past 33 years on Angela's bedside table. The letters seemed to work as Angela asked Ig the next day if she was his mother.



On the computer, Angela found an email Nick had written to her just before her accident that she had never read. In it he explained the huge debt the family was facing as well as his belief that he was a failure because he hadn't been able to keep the sheep station running. In this email he suggested he and Angela make a new start in a house by the sea. When he walked into the office to find her looking at real estate site for a house by the sea, he knew his wife had not only regained her memory but also that she had forgiven him for the distance that he had allowed to develop between them.



# Chapters 1-2

## Summary

In Chapter 1, Angela Gillespie prepared to write and send her family's traditional Christmas letter. She'd been sending these letters every year on Dec. 1 ever since she'd married Nick Gillespie 33 years ago and moved from England to his family's Australian sheep station. Writing the letter was usually easy for her but Angela was having trouble getting started on this year's letter. Her children were growing and making their own decisions. The relationship between herself and her husband was strained. She thought about the letters she'd written in the past where she'd passed over any problems the family had. She felt her headache getting worse and wanted to get finished with the letter so she could lie down. She had recently confided in her best friend Joan that she constantly felt the need to tell the truth. Joan encouraged her to do so.

Angela thought back to how about how she'd met Nick by chance one night while filling in for a friend who worked in a pub in Sydney. They'd married within a year of meeting each other and had twin girls a week before their first anniversary. Another daughter, Lindy, had come later, and then much later, their son, Ig. Soon the whole family, including Nick's Aunt Celia, would be coming to the house for Christmas. This year Angela missed the support Nick had always given her in the past. As Angela thought about Joan's advice to tell the truth, she began to write a new letter.

In Chapter 2, Angela's letter reported that everything had gone wrong for the Gillespies that year. Genevieve had been working as a hairdresser for an American film company and had become very indiscreet about her clients, her mother believed. She wished Genevieve would move back to Australia. Victoria, the other twin, had an affair with a married radio announcer. When that announcer came to work drunk and high, and blasted some powerful people while he was live on the radio, Victoria was blamed for his actions and was fired from her job as a radio producer. She wished Victoria would come back to South Australia as well. She had always thought Victoria would be the one who would take over the sheep station from her father.

Lindy was debt ridden after trying her hand at a variety of different jobs. She's begun a new business making personalized cushions but ordered 16 crates of material. Her father found a truck driver to bring Lindy and her 16 crates of material home but since she'd been there all Lindy had done was cry and follow her mother around. Angela continued her letter to report that Ig, her son, was turning into a very weird boy who had run away from boarding school multiple times. He also had an imaginary friend even though he was ten years old.

Angela wrote she was also worried about her husband, Nick. He'd announced he'd leased out half of the station to a mining company. Even though she'd asked him to talk more about his decision about the lease, he would shut down instead of talking. She



wondered how the decision would affect her station stay program and if the mining would destroy the landscape. Even though Nick hadn't told her about any of the reactions from the neighbors when he told them about the mining lease, Angela had learned through Joan there had been some jealousy. Despite their troubles, the only thing Nick seemed to care about was organizing a Gillespie reunion in Ireland. She also suspected he'd been having a cyber affair with Carol, a woman who was supposedly helping him to plan the reunion. Angela had to fight back tears as she typed how she and Nick rarely even talked anymore.

Angela also shared her concerns that Nick's Aunt Celia, whom Angela felt openly disliked her, was coming for Christmas. She hoped Celia wouldn't suck the joy out of their celebration. At the conclusion of her letter, Angela shared her concerns about her headaches and her fear that there was something major wrong with her. Among her top wishes were her wishes that she and Nick would start talking again. She also wished her children were happy and independent and she could feel she'd done a good job raising them.

Angela also wished she could put her life on pause and just have some time for herself. She wondered what might have happened if for some reason she had not met Nick in the Sydney pub. She shared her dream life, that she was married to Will, her childhood sweetheart. They lived a perfect life with one perfect child. Angela stopped typing because she realized writing about her fantasy life was going too far. As she thought about the perfect life she dreamed about with Will, Lindy's voice broke through her dream telling Ig to get down. Just as Angela was about to delete all that she'd written in her ranting letter, Lindy screamed for her urgently.

## Analysis

Family stands out immediately as a theme in the novel as Angela struggled to reconcile her aggravation with her changing family. She's thinking about her family more seriously on this particular day because she's trying to write the traditional family Christmas letter she'd sent out each year on Dec. 1. Remember this Christmas letter, along with the mention that Angela had written Christmas letters each year in the past years as these letters are a major unifying symbol throughout the novel. Notice also Angela's reference to these letters as historical documents, as this reference as well as the letters' role as historical documents will become important later in the novel.

From this section of the novel it can be surmised that Angela is the main character of the novel. It appears she is the one who had kept her family running sanely throughout the years. Not only did she accept a big change in her life by beginning a family almost as soon as she got married, she also made a big change because she moved from England to Australia. The two countries have drastically different climates and landscapes. This move also took Angela far away from her family and her support system. Angela's ability to start a new life in this very different country spoke to her strength, so the reader can surmise that Angela was not a person who was always



complaining and finding fault. Her ranting letter and her feelings of frustration were not usual for her.

Notice in these chapters the mentions of longstanding family traditions. For instance, Angela and Nick decided on their wedding night that if their children were girls Angela would get to name them. If they had boys, Nick would get to name them. The family also had a tradition of taking a family portrait in front of the gates of their station in the same position with the house in the background. Copies of each of these photographs were framed and hung on the wall of the family's computer room.

It is clear that Angela loved her family, but was struggling to understand their challenges and new behaviors. These struggles Angela faced leads to another important topic in the novel; that of the double-edged nature of truth. The truth has the ability to both heal and hurt, a truth that is seen in several instances in the novel. In writing her letter Angela decided to take the advice of her friend Joan and write the truth. In this case, the truth did not put any of Angela's family members into a particularly favorable light. Her daughters appeared to be irresponsible and immoral, and her son strange. Her husband appeared to be unfaithful and inattentive. Something that the reader needs to keep in mind, and a point that leads to another theme in the novel, is that Angela was venting about her family in regard to her own perspective of them. She was reporting what she was seeing of their actions without completely knowing their motivations. This idea of perception is particularly important when it comes to Nick's actions and the distance that Angela felt between the two of them.

Another theme in the novel that will become important is the theme of communication. In order for Angela to completely understand how her family has morphed into what it has become, she needed to be able to communicate with them. She particularly felt irritated with her husband because he would not communicate with her as she felt he should have. As she pointed out in her tirade "But we can't start fixing it if we don't know what the problem is, can we?" (p. 27). In this particular case Angela was indicating she believed there was something wrong with Lindy that she wasn't telling her parents. Her idea that communication was important to fix the problems being faced by the family extended also to her husband who Angela believed was intentionally leaving her out of important financial decisions.

A final theme that is introduced in this section of the novel is that of coping mechanisms. This idea of an activity of fantasy life that a person turns to in order to help him through the hard times will become even more important later on in the novel. Angela's coping mechanism is the fantasy family that she has dreamed up for herself. Even Angela seemed concerned that her thoughts about her made up family with Will and Lexie were becoming too detailed to be healthy. She indicated this family had become her lifeline and had kept her afloat through the hard times she was experiencing in her real life. Angela, however, is not the only one who appeared to be retreating into other activities as a way to cope with reality. For Nick, the research work he's dedicating to his family reunion seems to be some sort of coping mechanism. Angela indicated he spent so much of his time working with Carol, the woman who was supposed to be organizing the family reunion that she feared he was having an affair.



Remember in the end of Chapter 2 that Angela intended to delete her ranting Christmas letter but had not done so because Lindy called for her so abruptly and urgently. Angela's failure to delete this letter will lead to a series of unforeseen events as the story unfolds.

## Discussion Question 1

What is your first impression of Angela and her family based on her ranting Christmas letter? Do you think the letter gave a full picture of each member of the family's real nature?

## Discussion Question 2

Do you believe a retreat into a coping mechanism is healthy? Do you think a person can go too far in depending on one of these mechanisms to help them deal with life? Why or why not?

## Discussion Question 3

Do you think it is always best to tell the truth? Why or why not? What about when the truth will reveal something that will embarrass or hurt another person?

## Vocabulary

transformed, annual, dispatches, decades, endorphins, presumed, sentimental, speakeasy, paraphernalia, operative, feral, indulging, adjoined, aboriginal, veranda, heir, vitality, hostel, effusive, deconsecrated, valiantly, obligations, fortnight, indiscrete, hybrid, liberating, libelous, niche, foray, dubious, insufferable, reverie





## Chapters 3-6

### Summary

In Chapter 3, Angela found Ig and Lindy in the kitchen. Ig was surrounded by blood. There was part of a finger on the floor. Lindy told her mother he'd been standing on the table trying to cut his hair with the carving knife when he'd jumped down, slipped and landed on the knife. Angela went into automatic mode wrapping up Ig's bleeding finger and putting a bandage on him. She put the piece of finger in a towel and the towel into a bag of ice. Ig insisted his mother be the one to take him to the hospital.

Four hours later, Nick got a phone call from Angela. Angela told him everything would be okay. Once they'd reached the hospital in Hawker, Ig had been taken by ambulance to a bigger hospital in Port Augusta. He had already had surgery to re-attach his finger. After Nick hung up with Angela, he thought of all the things he should have asked her. He'd talked to his doctor about his inability to talk to Angela. His doctor encouraged him to start talking to her again.

Nick went to the office and sat down at the family's one computer. He recognized Angela's Christmas letter on the screen. He decided he could do something nice for her so he went ahead and sent it as he knew she always did on Dec. 1. He didn't read it before he sent it.

In Chapter 4, Genevieve was running late for work when her twin sister called her to check what time she'd be arriving in Sydney. Genevieve had been out the night before with a man who was obviously gay but kept her talking by encouraging her to tell more stories about her famous clients. After she got off the phone with Victoria, she checked her voice mail. Several messages had been left asking her if she had seen the New York Post that morning. The gay man who told her he worked as a graphic designer at the paper was also a gossip columnist. He had written everything she'd told him the night before in his column. Luckily he didn't name Victoria as a source, but the actress had announced she was off the project. She would come back only if the responsible person confessed.

Until then, the investors were losing tens of thousands of dollars in profit while those on the set were in danger of losing their jobs if the production were to shut down completely. Genevieve decided she had to confess. Her confession was taped by the director and Genevieve was escorted from the set. A man named Matt, whom she'd known only as a coffee guy, turned out to be a security guard. He was the one who escorted her off the property and confiscated her set pass. As Genevieve walked away, her phone rang. She thought it was Victoria, but it turned out to be Lindy calling to tell her about Ig's accident.

In Chapter 5, Victoria's phone rang, but it was Lindy. Victoria decided she'd call her back. She wanted to talk to Genevieve so she could tell her she'd decided to move to



New York with her. While waiting for Genevieve to call Victoria went through her morning routine of checking for photographers, to make sure she could check her mail without being photographed. Victoria's phone rang again. Victoria answered without looking at the caller ID78, assuming it was Genevieve and told her she was going back to New York with her after Christmas. Lindy, who was actually the one on the phone, told Victoria that she couldn't go to New York with Genevieve because she'd just talked to Genevieve and that Genevieve had gotten fired.

In Chapter 6, after Ig got home from his accident Angela was too busy to work on the computer. The one time she'd had a chance to use it the satellite connection had been down. Angela had learned that both the twins would both be coming home to stay for a while as well. All that day, Lindy had been following her mother around asking questions about how the twins had lost their jobs, where they would stay and what Angela thought about it. Angela thought to herself that Lindy had no right criticizing the twins as she'd come home when she got into money trouble. She didn't realize she'd voiced her thought out loud until Lindy complained. Lindy told her mother she'd been acting weird lately. She also admitted to her mother that she thought she was a failure compared to her older sisters. Angela suggested Lindy check her email to see if she'd gotten an order for a cushion. To cope with the stress she was feeling, Angela turned to thoughts of her fantasy life with Will.

Lindy was excited to find she'd gotten an order. She got Ig to help her open all the crates to find the colors of material that she needed. Lindy had promised Ig he could use the boxes she emptied to build a cubby. After she left Ig with the boxes, the thought about how strange the rest of his family had been acting lately. He was glad Robbie wasn't that way.

## Analysis

Nick is responsible for the major action in this part of the novel as he sent out Angela's Christmas letter believing she would have wanted him to do so. Note that he didn't take the time to read the letter before sending it. It was his action of sending the letter, coupled with Angela's action of forgetting to delete the letter that will soon complicate their lives.

Also in this section of the novel Angela learned that her entire family would not just be coming home for the holidays but would also be staying for a while. Lindy, her youngest daughter, had already come home licking her wounds from several unsuccessful attempts to begin a career. Soon her two oldest daughters would be back as well. Notice how Angela interpreted Lindy's behavior as being needy. Lindy followed her mother around asking questions about her sisters until her mother "accidentally" mentioned out loud that Lindy had come home because she was in debt, just like her sisters were doing.

Developing the theme of truth are Genevieve's actions on the set in New York. She told the truth about an actress on the set to a man who turned out to be a gossip columnist



from the New York Post. Even though the things she told the man might have been the truth, Genevieve had no right sharing what she'd learned about the actress with any one else, even if it got her attention. Genevieve, however, also fixed the situation by telling the truth. Although she might have been indiscreet about the actress' secrets as her mother had mentioned in the Christmas letter, Genevieve realized what a serious situation she had caused for all of the people who worked at the set. Because she was mature and realized how much was riding on her confession, Genevieve told the truth about being the one who'd leaked the information about the actress.

Notice in this section that after Angela had her stressful conversation with Lindy in which she accidentally voiced out loud her frustration that Lindy had also come home when she found herself deep in debt, just as the twins were doing Angela retreated into her fantasy life. She imagined her husband bringing her a drink laced with gin because he knew she'd been working hard. In this section of the novel it appeared that Ig also had his own coping mechanism of sorts. Isolated on a sheep station with three older sisters, Ig had developed an imaginary friend, Robbie, who was his playmate. Ig admitted he didn't understand women because they talked and cried so much. To make matters worse, his father had also been distracted with Carol. He was glad Robbie didn't act like the women or ignore him as his father was doing.

Lindy's conversation with her mother about Genevieve and Victoria's plans to return home addresses the theme of perceptions. Lindy compared herself to Victoria and Genevieve and saw herself as a failure. In reality, all three of the girls are a failure of some sort. These failures have caused all three to have to move back home with debt. In this sense, none of the girls are any more of a failure than any of the others. What Lindy doesn't see when she considered herself a failure was that she had the opportunity to begin another career for herself. Lindy's attitude about herself did greatly improve, however, when she learned she had received an order for a cushion.

Each member of the family begins to develop his own personality in this section of the novel. Lindy was, indeed, a drama queen. She was hysterical when Ig hurt himself, teary when she thought of herself as a failure and exuberant when she learned she'd gotten an order on her cushion website. Genevieve was perhaps indiscreet, but she also had a conscience. She could not bear the thought of others losing their jobs and perhaps even their living because of her mistake. Even though she was not world wise, Genevieve took charge of her life and accepted responsibility for her own actions. Victoria, meanwhile, was trying to recuperate from her bad deal with her job when she got bad news not only that her rent was going up and she couldn't get any money from the radio station from a lawsuit but also that she now owed a big lawyer's fee. Interesting is the close relationship between Victoria and Genevieve. They seem to have a true "twin bond." Younger sister Lindy seemed to be an odd wheel in the twins' lives as she tried to get ahead of the pair to be able to know things first and share news. The twins also appear to prefer the company of each other to that of Lindy, a preference of which Lindy seemed to be aware.



## Discussion Question 1

In this section of the novel Lindy compared herself with her older sisters and believed she was a failure compared to them. Do you think her “failure” was any worse in comparison to those of the twins? Why or why not?

## Discussion Question 2

Discuss the way the truth both helped and hurt Genevieve in this section of the novel.

## Discussion Question 3

What do you think will be the result of Nick’s action in sending Angela’s Christmas letter? Do you think Angela will be as pleased as he hoped she’d be?

## Vocabulary

retched, optimistic, opportunistic, divulge, confidentiality, notoriety, photogenic, affidavit, cordon, rampant, megalomaniacal, egotistical, scapegoat, ostensible, maudlin, cad, lynched, physiotherapy, litany, blithely, prodigal, transpired, dismantle



# Chapters 7-9

## Summary

In Chapter 7 as Angela was headed for her pottery studio the phone rang. It was Joan. She asked Angela what had gotten into her. Joan had received her copy of Angela's Christmas letter and began reading it out loud. Angela admitted to writing the letter, but didn't remember having sent it. Joan told her she did send it and that it went to more than 100 people on her mailing list. When Angela asked Joan's advice on what she should do, Joan told her she should do nothing. Just wait it out. Angela worried no one would come to the woolshed party the family was planning in a few weeks but Joan felt the letter would have the opposite effect.

When Angela headed to the computer room to read the letter again she heard Nick talking to Carol about his family. She believed he sounded like his old self as they talked about Nick making a trip to Ireland to help plan the reunion. Ig saw his mother and told her Nick was talking to Carol, his girlfriend. Ig asked his mother if she and his father were going to get divorced. She assured him that they were not.

Lindy showed her mother the work she'd done so far on her first cushion. Angela was praising her when Nick came out and told them the reunion was definitely going to happen, but didn't say anything about the trip Angela had just heard him and Carol talking about. She went to the computer to check her email. Nick followed to close his but Angela still saw the closing Carol had included on her last email with four x's representing kisses. Nick told her she just had Irish charm and that the kids were overreacting when they called her his girlfriend.

When she was alone, Angela tried to remember sending the Christmas letter. She reread it and cried when she realized it sounded like she wished she had a different life. Her inbox was full of emails. Surprisingly, the comments were positive with friends cheering her on for being truthful and offering advice. A few were shocked to learn about the mining lease. One came from the station manager at a radio station in Port Pirie asking Angela to have Victoria give him a call. When Nick came back into the office, he suggested they needed another computer. Angela filled him in on Genevieve's news, telling him that she would soon be home for good as well. She asked Nick if they could have a family meeting after dinner, hoping they could talk about the letter but Nick said he had a conference call arranged with some of his cousins from overseas.

In Chapter 8, Nick emailed Carol to tell her the reunion was on. Planning the reunion had given him some relief from his feeling that he was a failure. When he'd talked to his doctor about his recent feelings, Nick's doctor had told him he was suffering from depression. The doctor prescribed medicine, exercise and talk therapy with a psychologist. It was actually his doctor who'd suggested Nick research his ancestors as a way to keep his mind active. He remembered that when the mining company had contacted him about a possible lease, he'd prayed they would find something on Errigal.



He owed nearly a million dollars after a crash in wool prices and a long drought. When the miners had found evidence of diamonds on Errigal and offered Nick a lump sum to lease half the station he didn't talk to Angela because he felt ashamed and guilty. He knew it was his fault that their marriage had changed.

It was while Angela was at one of her pottery classes that Nick had decided to start working on his family tree. He'd felt like he was on a treasure hunt as he began reading stories of his ancestors and how they had lived through the good and bad times at Errigal. Deciding he wanted to have a family reunion, Nick had sent out a request for information. One of the responses was from a company claiming to do historical and genealogical work. He checked out the website and set up his bank information. That was how he met Carol. They negotiated a monthly rate and Nick had agreed even though money was still tight for the family. He'd been planning on taking Angela with him on his reconnaissance trip but hadn't told her yet.

In Chapter 9, Ig offered to check Angela's pottery studio before she went inside. He found and removed a huntsman spider, of which she was terribly afraid. Ig was not scared of spiders but was scared of snakes. As she sat in her shed with a ball of clay in her hands thinking about running away, she hid in her fantasy life. She and Will had more money than they knew what to do with and had no trouble paying their bills. A gift shop manager called asking for sculptures for Christmas. Using a card Lexie had sent her as a model, Angela fashioned robins for the woman. The birds sold quickly. Lindy interrupted Angela's dream to show her the work she'd done on her cushion. Ig joined them. Angela told them how much she missed the robins she'd seen in England. Ig said he'd try to draw her some.

## Analysis

At this point in the novel Angela had gotten some feedback concerning her letter. Her best friend suggested she do nothing about the letter that was accidentally sent and just wait it out. Joan congratulated her friend on telling the truth. It seemed from the responses that Angela received from her friends that more than a few were pleased that someone had decided to tell the truth about their family in a Christmas letter. These Christmas letters generally affect a person's perception of his own family. A positive glowing Christmas letter about the successes of the children and wonderfulness of the spouse can leave other families feeling as if they are somehow missing the mark. What the reader doesn't often take into consideration when reading one of these letters is that the writer has generally intentionally shined up the positives of the year and chosen not to include the negative things that had happened. Angela got sympathetic comments because others could relate to her struggles with her adult children returning home and her distant husband.

As the reader gets more information about what Nick was planning with Carol, he begins to realize that Angela's perception of the relationship between Carol and Nick was wrong. Angela believed that her husband was having an inappropriate relationship with Carol, the woman who was supposedly helping him to plan a family reunion in



Ireland. Even Nick and Angela's young son referred to Carol as Nick's girlfriend. In reality, Nick was hoping to take Angela along on his reconnaissance trip even though he hadn't shared that information with Angela yet.

Although Angela had the right to be concerned about Nick's unwillingness to talk to her, it appears she was worried for the wrong reason. She seemed to believe that Nick was not talking to her because he no longer loved her. In reality, Nick wasn't talking to her because he was afraid if he shared his troubles she would think he was a failure. The family was in a good deal of debt because of a drought as well as a drop in wool prices. Angela was not aware of how much debt had accumulated over the years. Nick had even gone so far as to assume that if his older brother had lived past his childhood he would have done a better job of managing the station.

Just as other members of the family had adopted a coping mechanism, Nick's work with his family reunion had become his way of coping with the disappointment he felt in himself. Nick had felt so badly that he had seen a doctor and had his condition diagnosed as depression. His doctor had suggested several things Nick could do to help him cope with his own feelings of disappointment in himself. One of the things that he suggested was an activity to keep Nick's mind busy, like researching his ancestry.

Notice that one of the positive aspects that came from Angela's truthful letter was that she began to get a good deal of communication from her friends and relatives. While some of the responses Angela got were discouraging and a few hateful, many people showed concern for Angela and the situation she was facing. Because she had communicated her problems instead of hiding them, Angela received a good deal of support and suggestions to help her handle these issues. Another positive aspect of Angela's ranting letter was that her daughter, Victoria, received a lead for more work once she arrived at home.

Remember Angela's fear of spiders that is mentioned in this section of the novel. She couldn't even bring herself to look when Ig brought the huge spider he'd found in her pottery shed out. Remember also the mention that Ig was afraid of snakes. Both of these fears will be important later in the novel.

## Discussion Question 1

Do you think Joan's advice to do nothing about the Christmas letter is the best advice? What else might Angela have been able to do?

## Discussion Question 2

Consider Nick's relationship with Carol. Do you think Angela was justified in believing that Nick was having an affair of sorts with the woman? Why or why not?





## Discussion Question 3

Just like Lindy believed she was a failure, Nick also believed he was a failure because he was unable to keep his family's sheep station up and running. Based on the information given so far in the novel what, if anything, might Nick have done to save his station? Do you think he was justified in blaming himself for what had happened? Why or why not?

## Vocabulary

demented, brazen, hypochondriac, reconnaissance, respite, quell, pastoralists, graziers, diversified, viable, delve, miniscule, surname, parochial, discernable, demonstrative, jauntily, cheeky, transit





# Chapters 10-12

## Summary

In Chapter 10, Megan and Genevieve met before Genevieve left New York. Genevieve asked Megan to give her a new hairstyle and get rid of the blue dreadlocks. Matt, the security guard who escorted Genevieve off the set when she was fired, called her while Megan was working on her hair. He asked her out for a drink. Ten minutes after the time for their date the following day, Genevieve thought she'd been stood up. Matt found her just as she was about to leave. He had been there on time, but hadn't recognized her because she'd changed her hair so drastically. When he walked up to her, Genevieve turned quickly and spilled her wine on him. For this reason, they'd had to go back to her apartment to rinse out his shirt. At her apartment they had sex multiple times.

In Chapter 11, Mr. Radio called Victoria and she allowed him to come to her apartment. As Victoria waited, she thought about Fred Lawson, the boy she had dated while in Australia. After four years of dating, he'd been offered a scholarship to go to Canada. She also thought about how she'd been the family member who'd been most surprised when her father announced the news about accepting the mining lease. She tried to talk to him about it but couldn't get much out of him. Mr. Radio finally rang her bell. They had sex. After he left Victoria would not let herself cry, but she decided she really wanted to go home.

Back in Australia, Lindy cajoled her mother into making her tea. She dreaded the twins coming back and wished she had more time with her mother to herself. She often felt left out around the twins. She moved her chair so she couldn't see Ig talking to his imaginary friend Robby about his cubby. Glancing at the woolshed, she thought of the party they'd be having there. She was worried because Jane Lawson was coming. The family called her Horrible Jane because she had bullied Lindy while the two were in school. Lindy had attempted to forget Jane when school was over but one night in Melbourne, she'd seen Jane again. She had been talking with a man named Richard when Jane had come up to them. Jane said Richard was her flat mate. Jane embarrassed Lindy by talking about her botched careers, even telling Richard that Lindy was not working at a law firm as she'd told him.

Lindy searched for her mother and found her making the bed in the governess' quarters. She asked to read that year's Christmas letter. She told her mother she wanted to know what was in it so she could be prepared for Jane's mockery. Her mother promised to get the letter for her later. Instead of showing Lindy the real letter, however, Angela typed out a new one that she gave her daughter.

In Chapter 12, after Nick returned from an overnight trip, Angela asked him to walk out to the bench by the tool shed with her. She knew she had to tell him about the Christmas letter. When she explained to him that she didn't know how it had gotten sent, he told her that he had been the one who had sent it. He was surprised that she



was unhappy he'd sent it. Just as she handed him the letter Lindy called wanting help with her cushion. Even though she didn't want to, she left Nick reading the letter alone. When she returned, he was still holding the paper. He looked desolate. He asked her if she was really that unhappy with her life on the station. When he pointed out the details of her fantasy life with Will, Angela reminded him of his own relationship with Carol. He told her he was planning on taking her with him on his trip. She apologized. He did as well, but stood up and walked away. When he finally came back at 9 p.m. he asked Angela to walk to the chapel with him. Once there, he asked why she'd never told him any of the things she'd put in the letter to his face. Like Joan, Nick told Angela they couldn't cancel the party. He also asked her not to say anything to the kids yet. He told her they had to present a united front while the kids and Celia were there. After that they could talk more.

## Analysis

In this section of the novel Angela finally told her husband about the Christmas letter and allowed him to read it. This act of showing Nick the letter adds to the theme of communication but it might be too little communication too late. Nick asked Angela if she felt so strongly about the things that she had included in her letter, particularly the things she'd said about him, why she hadn't ever talked to him about any of these things face to face. Also adding to the theme of communication was Angela's decision to give Lindy a false letter. She couldn't quite face Lindy's reaction to the letter. Angela's act of giving Lindy the fake letter also adds to the theme of truth in the novel. Even though Angela had bared her heart about her family in the letter, this truth wasn't something that she wanted to share with her family. Instead, she basically lied to her daughter about the context of the letter.

In relation to the theme of perceptions is Lindy's view of her mother. Lindy was unaware of exactly how much stress her mother was feeling but still felt that her mother was like a swan. In this simile Lindy compared her mother to this waterfowl that seemed to glide effortlessly across the water but under the surface of the water was paddling madly to keep up the appearance of her effortless. Notice also that when Nick read Angela's letter he saw it as a self-fulfilling prophecy. He admitted to Angela that he'd always thought she would leave him. He believed the letter that she had given him was proof that she was unhappy and planned to leave him just as he had always feared.

Notice in this section of the novel that Lindy moved her seat on the veranda so that she wouldn't have to watch Ig as he rearranged his cubby and talked to his imaginary friend. Just as Ig thought Lindy was crazy because she was always talking and crying, Lindy also worried about Ig because he behaved so strangely. Note also in this section of the novel that both Victoria and Genevieve had sexual relationships at about the same time.

Significant in this section of the novel is the introduction into Victoria, Genevieve and Lindy's love lives. Genevieve met up with a man she'd known from the movie set and had a fling. Genevieve showed her sense of humor after she had sex with Matt by



joking about having a butler that would bring them a drink and a cigarette. The teasing about the movie quotes and titles will become a running joke between the two.

Victoria allowed herself to have an affair with Mr. Radio one more time despite how much trouble he'd caused her. Notice that while Victoria's mother thought Victoria's weight gain was caused by comfort eating Victoria explained through her thoughts that she'd actually gained the weight because Mr. Radio had told her he liked women with curves.

Lindy, meanwhile, believed she was haunted by her neighbor Jane "Horrible Jane" Lawson. She'd met a man she'd really liked but Jane had turned up out of the blue claiming that Richard, Lindy's newest love interest, was her flat mate. The reader gets a feeling of empathy for Lindy when he learns how Lindy had been bullied and belittled by Jane for years when they were in school together. Through Lindy's thoughts, the reader also learns how strong the relationship had always been between Lindy's parents. She thought they had the perfect relationship. She hoped one day she would find a man who would look at her the way her father looked at her mother.

It is obvious when Angela finally showed Nick the Christmas letter that had been sent that the two are struggling with their relationship. Nick seemed hurt by the letter. Just as Angela had indicated in her letter, he didn't really discuss the contents of the letter with her except to ask if she were really as unhappy as it appeared she was in her letter. Nick went for a walk to think before he talked to Angela again about the letter. Even when they talked again in the chapel, Nick and Angela left their relationship open-ended as it was Nick who chose for them to try to keep things together through the holidays, and then talk again after Christmas.

## Discussion Question 1

After all that Mr. Radio had cost Victoria, why do you think she allowed him to see her again?

## Discussion Question 2

Consider Nick's reaction to the Christmas letter. Was it what you expected? How might you have reacted to learn such a letter had been written and sent?

## Discussion Question 3

Discuss Lindy's personality. How was her personality different from the twins? What challenges did she face as a sister of twins?



## Vocabulary

radioactive, skulking, scurrilous, unorthodox, obscure, dystopian, genre, subsequent, mantra, voluptuous, sated, tousled, ally, psychic, ostracism, malice, venue, biography, desolate, itinerary, hackles



# Chapters 13-16

## Summary

In Chapter 13, Nick picked Aunt Celia up from the bus stop in Hawker. Once she arrived at Errigal Celia made a comment about no one sitting beside her on the bus that Angela believed was a reference to the Christmas letter. Other than that, nothing had been said. Later, as Angela was waiting for Victoria and Genevieve's plane to arrive, Angela logged onto a computer and checked her email. Among the responses was one from an art gallery in Adelaide. The museum curator called her work amateur and ill thought out. He suggested she not bother sending her work to other galleries. Meanwhile, Ig and Lindy were trying to explain to Celia how Lindy's cushion website worked. Celia didn't seem impressed. Ig then showed Celia his new cubby. She insisted it needed a flag. After she called Ig's belief in Robby nonsense, Ig refused to put a flag up. On the way home from the airport, Genevieve and Victoria talked almost nonstop. Just before they arrived on the station, they asked for a quick update on all the news. Angela tried to ignore the fact they didn't ask anything about her.

In Chapter 14, with the party only four days away, Joan began coming to Errigal every day to help with preparations. Joan thought Angela should have told the girls about the Christmas letter by that time. She told Angela that because of the letter and because of the news of the lease, Angela and her family were the top topic of conversation in the community. Angela confided to Joan that Nick still wasn't talking to her. Joan encouraged her to be patient. Meanwhile, Genevieve and Lindy talked first about the possible mining and then about their father's addiction to the computer.

When Lindy heard that both Victoria and Genevieve had job prospects waiting for them she was jealous. The twins were shocked to learn that Horrible Jane had been invited to and would be attending their woolshed party. Victoria wondered if their mother was still sending out Christmas letters. Lindy said she was and that this year's had been short and boring. Wanting to read for herself, Genevieve pulled up the letter that had been mailed to her. She asked everyone to be serious when she noticed what she got was different from Lindy said the letter had read. Genevieve began to read the letter out loud.

In Chapter 15, Angela was confronted by all four of her children as she worked with Joan in the kitchen. After they demanded to know if that was what she really thought of them, Victoria asked if their father had seen the letter. As the kids voiced their frustration Joan told them she thought it was good Angela's opinions were out in the public. When Ig came in with a handful of printed letters and told his mother he knew her email password, she put her head in her hands. Lindy told them Angela was going crazy, just like she'd said. They asked if Celia had read the letter, and were surprised their aunt had come despite the way she was portrayed in the letter. As they talked about her Celia had appeared in the doorway. She told them she hadn't been run away by the



letter but that she did smell something burning. When Joan left that night she advised Angela not to apologize and not to try to explain the letter but to just try to deal with it.

In Chapter 16, the next day, Joan found Genevieve alone in the house wrapping silverware. She said the other members of the family were all upset. Genevieve voiced her concerns about her mother to Joan. They tried to get some information about Will on the Internet but were unable to locate anything. Joan tried to keep her from getting Ig to hack into his mother's email to see if there was any correspondence from him but wasn't successful.

Joan found Angela in her pottery shed and warned her that Genevieve was trying to break into her email to find information about Will. Angela told Joan that Genevieve wouldn't find anything. She told Joan she'd dated Will before she'd met Nick. Angela did admit she was worried that her marriage with Nick was over. Joan told her to be patient and advised her that every marriage was different. Joan showed concern when she noted Angela was still having headaches. She encouraged Angela not to wait until after Christmas to see a doctor. She made her stop working on the sausage rolls and go to the doctor right then.

Meanwhile, Victoria's old boss gave her a six-month contract to do a documentary series about life on the land in Australia. Victoria accepted it. At the doctor's office in Port Augusta Jane insisted the doctor see Victoria. She told him about Angela's headaches. The doctor arranged an appointment with a specialist the first of January. He believed the headaches, as well as the other symptoms Victoria shared with him, like her truthfulness in the Christmas letter, might be the result of stress or even menopause. Meanwhile in Port Pirie, Victoria went grocery shopping. As she loaded her purchases into the trunk, she heard Fred Lawson call her name.

## Analysis

It is at this point in the novel that Angela's family seemed to have hit a particularly low spot in their lives. Angela's real Christmas letter was out in the open and had been read by everyone. All members of the family were upset and were showing their frustration in different ways. They were angry with Angela and also with each other. Although not a member of the family, it was Joan who helped to calm and try to help the family members present a united force for their woolshed party.

Developing the theme of truth and the idea that it is a double edged sword is the letter that Angela received from one of the museum curators she had contacted in hopes of having a showing of her pieces. The man was brutally honest in his letter back to Angela. Notice that Angela didn't seem to be terribly surprised that he criticized her as strongly as he did. Even though she had hoped for different news, Angela was not surprised to learn the curator didn't like her art. Angela took this truthful criticism in stride. Her daughters didn't do so well in accepting the truth about themselves, particularly Lindy. Notice, however, that Genevieve was the one who accepted her mother's opinion of her most quickly. It was when Genevieve realized that what her



mother had said about Lindy being a drama queen was true that she considered that what her mother said about her might be true as well. With that in mind, Genevieve recognized herself in her mother's comments.

In the theme of perceptions, now that the girls were certain everyone knew their faults, they were suddenly afraid to go out in public. They don't seem to realize that their faults were there all along, and people were probably even aware of these faults. Even though their mother had been careful in the past to include only positive aspects of her family's life, that didn't keep others from gossiping. Just as Joan mentioned, it was probably best for all them that the truth, as unflattering as it might have been, was finally out in the open.

In this section of the novel Nick's Aunt Celia is introduced. While Angela was correct in the analysis of all her other family members, she was also correct in her description of Celia. It turned out that Celia really was an interfering old bat. Although she did believe she had the right to interfere in Angela's family, however, Celia made no apologies for herself or her behavior. Unlike the other family members who were upset by Angela's assessments of them in her letter, Celia seemed to have taken hers with a grain of salt. Amusing is Celia's interaction with Ig when he gave her the tour of his new cubby. In her habit of interfering, Celia insisted that the cubby needed a flag. Ig had tried to humor the lady when he thought up a name for his playhouse, but after she told him that his habit of talking to an imaginary friend was nonsense, he put his foot down. Although the author chose not to include what Robbie's impression of Celia was, it can be assumed his assessment of her was similar to Angela's.

## Discussion Question 1

How did things change in the Gillespie family after Angela's Christmas letter had been read by all the members of the family?

## Discussion Question 2

Based on what has been included about each member of the family so far in the novel, do you think Angela correctly portrayed each member of the family? Why or why not?

## Discussion Question 3

Do you think Joan and Angela were right in insisting the family go ahead with its woolshed party? Why or why not?



## Vocabulary

mince, integrity, defeatist, succumb, antics, diligent, surveillance, smorgasbord, postapocalyptic, battalions, vibes, primitive, hysterics, incorrigible, taciturn, rampant, lapse, verify, viable, scandalous





# Chapters 17-20

## Summary

In Chapter 17, Joan called a meeting of the Gillespie family the day of the woolshed party. She challenged the family to get in front of the gossip by making light of their situation. She suggested they make speeches in which they would specifically mention the letter and their inclusion in it. Nearly three hundred people showed up for the party. Angela began the family's speeches by telling the guests the Christmas letter was already out of date and her family would give updates. All the family members spoke. Angela was surprised when even Nick stood up beside her. He apologized for accepting the mining lease, telling those gathered that he knew what it might mean for the land. Several men in the crowd spoke up that they understood. The crowd applauded when he thanked them for coming. It was nearly 9 p.m. before the Lawsons arrived. Lindy was surprised when she saw Fred come in with them, but even more surprised when she saw Richard was with them. Jane and Richard made their way to where the Gillespie sisters were standing. Genevieve learned from Jane that Fred was back from Canada for good and was not married.

In Chapter 18, Ig's friends questioned him about Robbie, his imaginary friend. The other boys tried to come up with names for their own imaginary friends. Meanwhile, Nick was at the bar with three of his neighbors. He was drinking soda instead of alcohol as his psychologist, Jim, had warned him about the dangers of alcohol. He still wasn't able to talk to Jim much about the troubles with his relationship with Angela.

Celia was sitting with some other older women who asked about her reaction to the Christmas letter. Celia told them she'd had to use her sense of humor to get past it but if she'd chosen to be mad she would have been alone for Christmas. At the same time, Richard approached Lindy. He assured her that he wasn't Jane's boyfriend. He asked for her phone number. Angela meanwhile had several neighbors approach her about her letter and gave their own family horror stories. Angela broke away under the guise of getting more food when she noticed Victoria talking with Fred. She went to greet him. Joan interrupted hugging him as well and asking if he was married. As Joan and Angela walked away, they wondered if Victoria and Fred would get back together. Also that night Kevin Lawson approached Nick with a proposition about Errigal.

Although they hadn't spoken since Celia had come to Errigal, Angela decided it was time she made a move to make amends with Celia. Celia was the one to bring up the letter, saying that Angela was not the first to call her interfering. Her daughter-in-law had done the same. Just as Angela was about to apologize, Celia told Angela she didn't appreciate Nick enough. She insinuated that the station would have done better if Angela had supported Nick instead of following her own pursuits. She went on to tell Angela her children were running wild instead of being the sensible children Nick needed. She capped off her tirade by telling Angela she'd ruined Ig by making a pet of him. Angela had to walk away to keep from saying something hateful.



At 2 a.m. Victoria and Genevieve were still talking to Fred. Angela found Nick in the office making arrangements with Carol to meet her in Dublin. She overheard Carol tell Nick her boss was insisting that she raise her daily rate. Nick agreed to the increase. Angry, Angela interrupted him asking if he planned to help her say goodnight to their guests. He asked her to do that alone. As Angela walked away she heard Nick tell Carol that it was “just my wife” (p. 228) to whom he had been talking.

In Chapter 19, as Angela thought about shopping for a Christmas meal, she retreated into her fantasy life in London. Genevieve overheard her mother muttering about her fantasy and asked her mother to admit she wished she never had to see another shopping cart or sink of dishes again. Angela admitted it and Genevieve told her she and the others would take care of Christmas dinner. Genevieve also expressed her concern about her parents' relationship and asked if there was anything they could do to help. Even though Angela had told Genevieve there was nothing the kids could do to help repair the relationship between she and Nick, Genevieve told Victoria as they cleaned up after the party that she thought her mother was lying. They decided to remind their parents of all the good times they'd had by using their mother's Christmas letters to put together a play for them.

In Chapter 20 Victoria and Genevieve were joined by Ig and Lindy for their trip to Port Augusta for shopping. They talked about the play the whole way there and back. When they returned, they decorated a tree outside the house at Errigal. Even though Ig generally was the one who got the honor of turning on the lights, he let Celia do it. The family noticed Celia seemed to be truly honored. Later that day when Angela finally had a chance to use the family computer, she saw a copy of her Christmas letter next to the computer, under a pile of paperwork. It appeared Nick had been trying to track down Will. Angela knew it was because of the way she'd publicly humiliated him. She looked up the Internet search history. As she did so, Angela realized Nick had been hurt more by the information about her fantasy life than he was about her publicly telling about the mining lease.

## Analysis

Family interactions continue to take a front seat in this section of the novel as the Gillespies manage to host a successful woolshed party despite their mixed feelings about hosting the members of their community. Even though he'd expected nearby station owners to be upset with him because he'd leased out part of his property, they were actually more understanding than he expected. Adding to the theme of communication, Fred Lawson, who worked the station next to Nick's, told Nick he wished that Nick had talked to him before he'd accepted the mining lease. The author doesn't share the proposition that Keith made to Nick but the reader can assume that it would be one that would benefit both of them. Keith's statement to Nick also shows that had Nick shared his problems with his friends, they might have been able to come to a solution without turning to mining.



Notice also the way the twins not only support each other, but also support Lindy when they see she needed it. Lindy was already feeling insecure because her nemesis Horrible Jane was there. She was waiting for Jane to publicly belittle her. Instead, Genevieve and Victoria put their twin action to work for her using Jane's comments about acting out the Christmas letters against her as they made fun of themselves, not giving Jane a chance.

Another theme touched on in this section of the novel is that of the truth. The truth was mentioned when Joan told the Gillespie family they should be proud of their mother because she told the truth, something that didn't happen very often. The truth was compared with gossip when Lindy caught Genevieve talking to someone about an actress for whom she had worked. Genevieve didn't seem to think that what she was doing qualified as gossip because she was telling the truth about the actress. Her comment shows that there is a fine line between telling the truth and gossiping.

Angela had been waiting for Celia to get her word in about the Christmas letter ever since Celia had arrived at Errigal. Angela seemed to think that Celia had softened against her when she mentioned that her French daughter-in-law had also said she was interfering. It seemed that Celia was only waiting for Angela to drop her guard to attack. Celia accused Angela of not being supportive of Nick and allowing her children to run wild. Although she does succeed in upsetting Angela, Celia also proved that Angela's assessment of herself was true as she tried to interfere not only in Angela's marriage but also in the lives of her grown children.

Notice also in this section that although Celia complained that Ig had been turned into a pet by Angela, she was touched when he allowed her the honor of turning on the lights on the family's outdoor Christmas tree. Although she made a fuss and seemed to poke into things that weren't her business it seems that underneath all her crassness, Celia wanted to be loved and accepted.

After the woolshed party, even the twins noticed the difference in their parents' relationship. Genevieve decided to do her mother a favor by planning, shopping for and cooking Christmas dinner. The twins also beg their mother to tell them what they could do to help their parents repair their relationship. They realize that even though they are family, with the two of them and Lindy being back home, they aren't given their parents the time or space they need to heal their relationship. Interestingly, the twins decided to act out snippets of their mother's Christmas letters to remind them how good their relationship used to be. Just as Angela had considered the letters to be historical documents, the girls plan to use the letters to remind their parents about the history of their family.

## Discussion Question 1

Discuss the reaction to the speeches given by the members of the Gillespie family at their woolshed party.



## Discussion Question 2

Discuss the reaction that Celia had to Angela's letter. She told her friends that she couldn't be mad about the letter or else she'd have to spend Christmas alone, yet she ranted at Angela when she got the opportunity.

## Discussion Question 3

Lindy felt she was on the outside of the powerful relationship between her twin sisters but when they knew she needed help, they bound together to help her. What does this say about their loyalty?

## Vocabulary

confidante, boycott, disarray, serum, incriminate, homophobic, clarification, livid, indulged, dismissive, prone, swot, montage, dubbed, effusive, mustering



# Chapters 21-24

## Summary

In Chapter 21, Christmas Day was hot. The Gillespies went through their traditions of going to Christmas mass and then opening gifts on the veranda. After gifts were opened the children began cooking. Lunch was a success. Later in the day the whole family played games. Genevieve mentioned that they were actually acting like a family. On Boxing Day, the kids decided to present their play in the morning instead of the afternoon because it was already so hot. Ig said his stomach was hurting but Genevieve told him it was only stage fright. She noticed Victoria was holding her stomach as well. Genevieve also began to notice she was having cramps. When the play started, Genevieve noticed the audience looked uncomfortable. Celia was first to excuse herself. Angela followed shortly after. They knew the play was over when first Ig, then Lindy, and then Victoria began throwing up. Angela later determined the family's malaise was caused by food poisoning from the prawns. They were sick for two days. Celia had to be admitted to the hospital for dehydration.

Two days before New Years the weather broke with a huge storm. The whole family, including Celia, gathered on the veranda to watch it. All the members of the family were happy the weather was cooler. As Angela continued to cook and clean she realized it took less time and energy to take care of her station stay guests than her own family. Joan told Angela it was her own fault as she was always taking care of the kids when they were home.

In Chapter 22, on the morning of New Year's Eve, the girls woke up early to watch the sun rise from Swing Hill. Nick had built a set of three swings there when the twins were seven. The girls talked briefly about what the mining might do to the landscape. Before Lindy left to help with breakfast, she told the twins she was glad to have them back and thought things were working out well. When she was out of earshot Genevieve admitted to Victoria she didn't like being back at home. She felt isolated and bored. Victoria shared with her that Fred had given her a letter the night of the woolshed party telling her he should have asked her to go to Canada with him. He asked if they could start seeing each other again. The girls discussed the ways in which Victoria and Fred had changed over the years and the chances they might actually get back together. As the twins walked back to the house Genevieve told Victoria she'd thought of a project for herself. She was considering starting a gossip website. Before they reached the house, Victoria told Genevieve her period was six days late. Genevieve reasoned it was just the stress. Genevieve admitted to Victoria she was five days late as well. They agreed it was probably stress but joked about asking their mother for pregnancy tests.

In Chapter 23, Angela went to her pottery studio. As she went through the motions of making a cup, she began to daydream about her fantasy life. She suddenly remembered a real memory of her fantasy lover. They had gone to the Horniman Museum, located across the road from the house in which Angela had grown up, on



their first date. Lindy came and interrupted her, asking what Angela thought of a dress she planned to wear on her date with Richard. She asked her mother how she knew Nick was the one when she met him. Angela tried to buy herself some time by suggesting she talk to Nick but Lindy said it was Nick who told her she should ask her mother.

In Chapter 24, Joan offered to go with Angela on her trip to the specialist but Angela refused saying she wanted to go alone. Ig and Genevieve had taken care of her hotel reservations. She'd hoped Nick would come find her before she left for her appointment but he did not. She went to the office where they had only a polite exchange. After she left, Victoria tried to record some broadcasting work but was interrupted twice by Lindy throwing a tantrum over a ruined cushion. Nick, meanwhile, closed the door to the office to keep out the noise. He needed to make a phone call to Angela. He wanted to talk to her, but not with the children listening. It had been Jim who'd made him realize he saw himself in what Angela had written. He knew everything she had written about him was the truth. He felt hurt that he had not been able to give her the fantasy life she desired. He thought she regretted marrying him. After the unfinished performance of the kids' play, he'd gone back and read all the letters Angela had written. He realized how she'd stayed positive even through the tough times. By trying to shield her from the truth, Nick realized he'd only wound up hurting her more. He decided to send her an email in which he would voice the things he knew he needed to say to her.

## Analysis

Family traditions, particularly those associated with the holidays are important during this section of the novel. The family went through the motions of attending Christmas mass and then opening their gifts on the veranda, things that had become traditions for the family. Notice that after the family spent time together, went through their traditions and even played games together that Genevieve pointed out that they were actually acting like a family. This comment indicated that before this Genevieve felt they hadn't been acting like the family she had known before. Another tradition that the girls of the family participated in was their morning trek to watch the sun rise the morning of New Year's Eve.

Just as Genevieve had done in a previous section of the novel, in this section Nick admitted that he knew that Angela had written the truth about him in her Christmas letter. He also recognized that it was his lack of communication with his wife that was causing a good deal of the rift between the two of them. Although he'd not told her about his troubles because he didn't want to worry he had found that not talking to her had worried her even more than being unaware of the financial trouble they were in. Both seemed to want to reach out to each other but were scared to do so because they didn't know how the other might react. Nick finally decided the best way for him to communicate his feelings to Angela was by sending her an email.

In this section of the novel Victoria and Genevieve face a new problem. Remember that they both had sex about the same time before they came home for Christmas. They



admit to each other that their periods are late. They don't seem to be too terribly upset that they are late and believe that it may just be because of stress. Remember, however, that when Angela talked to the doctor after she took Celia to the hospital that the prawns the family ate for Christmas lunch were probably responsible for the family's sickness. The bacteria that caused the sickness was particularly dangerous to children, the elderly and pregnant women.

Nick came to the same conclusion that Genevieve did in an earlier section about his wife's letter. He realized that she not only told the truth about him but that she also let him off easy. He's finally been able to talk to his doctor and his psychologist about the letter and how badly it upset him. Since he let Angela leave for her doctor's appointment without really saying anything to her, he realized the only way to communicate with her at that point was to send her an email message, something he'd never done their entire married life.

Developing the theme of coping mechanisms, Nick admitted to himself also that the research he was doing on his family was a way to avoid having to think about his problems with Angela and the farm. His doctor had suggested the research as a way to keep his mind active but Nick had taken it a step further. He delved into his research to the point that he avoided problems he needed to address.

## Discussion Question 1

How do you think Victoria, Genevieve, Lindy and Ig felt since they'd wanted to help their parents reconcile but both Christmas lunch and their play backfired so badly on them?

## Discussion Question 2

Do you think Nick's idea to email Angela his apology and explanation was a good one? What might he have done differently?

## Discussion Question 3

What does it mean that Nick had realized that his wife was truthful about him in her Christmas letter? Why do you think Nick was so much more upset about the contents of the letter and stayed more upset about the letter than the other members of the family?

## Vocabulary

reminiscent, ominous, marooned, domineering, salacious, eccentric, frieze, portico, infatuation, assuage





# Chapters 25-28

## Summary

In Chapter 25, on her way to Adelaide Angela thought about how she had wanted to try to fix things with Nick. She'd tried to take Joan's advice that it took one of them making a move to get things started but when she'd put her arm around him as he slept, she felt he had pushed her away. Again, she began thinking about what might have been different for her if she hadn't met Nick in the bar in Sydney. She considered that she and Will might even have planned a trip to Australia. She imagined herself even choosing they would stay at Errigal. A horn blast brought her back to reality. She realized it was the first time she'd blended her fantasy life with her real life. Angela also wondered what life might have been like for Nick had they not gotten married.

At her appointment, the doctor didn't think Angela had a brain tumor but wanted to have some different tests done just in case. When she called Genevieve, Angela told her daughter she'd have to stay two nights instead of just one. At the hotel Angela made up a story about it being her birthday and her family spoiling her by sending her away to a hotel. The receptionist even upgraded Angela to a suite for her special stay. Later, a porter came with a basket of fruit. Her doctor's receptionist called Angela's cell phone and told her the tests couldn't be scheduled until the following week. Again, Angela called Genevieve and lied to her telling her she might be away for three days with the tests. Angela called Joan and told her as well. Joan kidded Angela about just wanting to get away for a few days to stay in a fancy hotel and Angela almost thought Joan knew the truth. Angela considered confessing to Joan but Joan was called away to take care of her husband. She decided instead to enjoy her time.

In Chapter 26, Celia tried to talk to Nick first about Angela, and then about the reunion he was planning. When he asked, Celia told Nick she was actually interested. Her husband had also done some research about the family that Celia mentioned she would have brought if she'd thought about it. Celia then turned her conversation to Angela and the letter. Nick told Celia it was his fault the letter got sent out. When Celia continued seeming as if she was going to say something detrimental about Angela, Nick told her that Angela was his wife and his marriage was his business.

Meanwhile, Victoria and Genevieve helped Lindy get ready for Richard's visit. Genevieve had even bribed Ig to compliment Lindy. When the car pulled up they were all surprised Horrible Jane was with Richard. Two hours later they were happy to wave goodbye. Genevieve even agreed with Lindy that Jane had come as Richard's bodyguard. She wouldn't let him get a word in. Before they left, Genevieve arranged for them to pick Richard up from Jane's house the following day and take him on a sightseeing tour, without Jane.

In Chapter 27, Angela stayed in her hotel room all day. She talked to Genevieve and Joan, keeping up the lies that she was busy with testing. As she sat looking out her





window that night she thought about how she'd gotten used to the weather in Australia as well as driving various vehicles, using a UHF radio and shooting a gun. She also remembered Nick taking her to a lookout spot in Adelaide two days before their wedding. She began to miss Nick. She decided she should email him. By the time she got to the foyer she decided she was going to tell Nick he should come and join her. When she got to the business center, she learned it was closed. Maintenance was being done on the computers. They wouldn't be available again for an hour. While she waited, she decided to go on a drive to the lookout spot.

In Chapter 28, on his special day out, Ig took the opportunity to get his sisters to buy him all of the junk food he could handle. Meanwhile, Lindy and Richard had a flat on the way home from Pugilist Hill. He was impressed she knew how to change a tire. Jane was angry because they were running late. Richard asked how long Jane had been jealous of Lindy. He asked permission to drive in order to make up for not being able to help with the tire. Lindy warned him to slow down and watch for stones. Suddenly a car of tourists going too fast passed them. A stone flew up and shattered their windshield.

## Analysis

Even though Angela had angered her family her family be writing a letter in which she told the truth about their faults and shortcomings, when it came time for her to get some time to herself, she felt she had to lie to them. Notice how uncomfortable she felt when she lied to her family even though she thought it was the only way she could get the time to herself that she needed.

Remember in this section of the novel that Angela expanded her fantasy life to the point that she imagined what it might be like if she and her fantasy husband and daughter were to have visited Errigal. This fantasy scared Angela because it brought her fantasy life so close to her real life. As she thought about her fantasy, she realized that the family she imagined herself a part of would not be able to visit Errigal as it was. She suddenly wondered what Errigal might have been like had she not been there. Notice how unsettled she was when she thought that if she had really married Will, Nick might have married another woman. She wondered what his life might have been like if he had married someone else, if he might have been more happy in that alternate life.

Interesting also in this section is Richard's interest in impressing Lindy. It was apparent that he was impressed by her abilities. He hadn't expected her to be as capable as she was. She knew how to change a tire, a task he couldn't complete, and how to use the UHF radio in the truck. Notice even as flighty as Lindy appeared, she was better grounded in her abilities than Richard. Where others were generally giving Lindy advice on how she should act, with Richard it was Lindy who continued to suggest to him that he slow down. Richard wouldn't listen, as he wanted to show Lindy he was capable of doing something. He soon learned even driving in the outback was a learned skill as he managed to get the windshield broken.



## Discussion Question 1

Do you think Angela was wrong for lying to her family about having tests and staying in Adelaide longer than she really needed to? Why or why not?

## Discussion Question 2

Consider the interaction between Lindy and Richard during this section of chapters. Do you think that Jane was jealous of Lindy as Richard suggested? Why or why not?

## Discussion Question 3

Discuss the interaction between Nick and Celia. Why do you think Celia disliked Angela so much? How did Nick defend his wife without being overly hateful to Celia?

## Vocabulary

reconciliation, hostel, astute, immaculately, porters, toiletries, claustrophobic, noncommittal, ute, excruciating, conceded, spontaneously, propagated, conjure, asylums, salvage



# Chapters 29-33

## Summary

In Chapter 29, about halfway to the lookout point, Angela was scared by a huntsman spider on the inside of her windshield. She screamed and took her hands off the wheel. Her car crashed into a tree. When she regained consciousness, Angela was aware of people around her wondering if she were alive. The paramedics arrived and got her out of the car but had to shock her heart because they could not find a pulse. Later she realized she was in an ambulance being taken to a hospital. When someone started reading out the information found in her handbag, she didn't recognize her last name. She believed she was Angela Richardson, not Angela Gillespie. She believed she was married to Will and had a daughter named Lexie.

In Chapter 30, Nick told Celia Angela had been in an accident. He remembered he didn't have a car. He called Genevieve on the radio to find out how far away she was. He told her about the accident and asked her to get back as quickly as she could. He also called Lindy telling her to get home right away because Angela had a car accident. Lindy told her father about the windshield, and then told Richard they had to go. Jane called again on the radio because Richard wasn't home yet. Lindy told her off. On their way home from Port Augusta, Genevieve and the others spotted their father coming toward them on the station's motorbike. He turned the car back toward the main road. When Lindy called telling them she could see their lights and begging them to wait, they did. Lindy left Richard with hurried directions to the Lawson's station. Nick told them what he knew about the accident on the way. He told them paramedics had to restart her heart and that she had some sort of internal bleeding. A nurse called from the hospital and said Angela's spleen had ruptured. She was now in surgery. Her heart had stopped again during the operation. In the hospital they sit in a waiting room. Ig laughed with Robbie and became angry when Genevieve asked him to be quiet.

In Chapter 31, Genevieve visited the nurses' station for information finally bringing back news that Angela was out of the operating room and in intensive care. She had not yet regained consciousness. A doctor finally came to talk to them, explaining about the surgery. He said that so far it did not appear she had any other injuries but they would have to wait until she woke up to know more. The doctor suggested they go home and get some sleep. Ig suggested they go to Celia's house.

The next morning, Victoria called the hospital right at 7 a.m. and learned their mother was still unconscious. Visiting hours didn't start until 10 a.m. She'd knocked on her father's door but got no answer. As the kids sat down to eat breakfast, Nick came in with a newspaper and milk. They learned he'd been at the hospital.

Later, when Nick began to search Celia's house for the family tree information she'd mentioned, Genevieve got angry with him. She told him they'd all noticed something was wrong with Angela even before she had her car accident. She seemed sad and



depressed. As Genevieve was chiding her father for his friendship with Carol, Lindy interrupted asking why she had two pregnancy tests in her purse.

In Chapter 32, in the waiting room Genevieve and Nick sat in different corners. Lindy told Victoria she hadn't meant to get Genevieve in trouble. Victoria suggested to her she shouldn't have said anything about the pregnancy tests while Nick was around. The twins pretended the tests had been bought on a dare. At 1 p.m. Ig had drawn 20 pictures for his mother's room. He demanded to see his mother and then took off down the hall. Two nurses caught Ig but he cried and struggled. He calmed down when a doctor asked him to do so. The doctor allowed the whole family to go in but asked them to be as quiet as possible.

After their visit Genevieve remembered their mother was supposed to be having more tests that day for her headaches. She called Joan for the name of Angela's doctor. Genevieve learned her mother wasn't scheduled for tests until the following week. Genevieve and Victoria went to the hotel to get their mother's things.

In Chapter 33, Angela still hadn't woken up by the third day. Ruth Morgan, the hospital's neuropsychologist, explained her condition to her family. Because Angela had not regained consciousness, the doctors were afraid some damage had been done to her brain because of blood loss caused by her spleen rupturing. The doctor requested permission to do testing on Angela's brain. Permission was given. Victoria and Genevieve decided to wait until after their mother woke up to do their pregnancy tests. Genevieve finally told her father she'd learned that Angela hadn't really been scheduled for any tests for her headaches. Genevieve also wondered why her mother had been driving up in the hills. Even though Nick had an idea, he didn't share it with Genevieve. A few hours later, Lindy went to the airport to say goodbye to Richard. He asked if they could keep in touch.

Genevieve had been trying to keep up with all the concerned texts she and her father were receiving. She finally decided instead of returning texts, she would send an email. They decided to send the email to everyone on their mother's list who received the Christmas email. Ig insisted Robbie's name be included in the closing. He also asked Genevieve to allow him to press the send button with her.

## Analysis

These chapters in which the family learned about Angela's car wreck and waited to see if any damage had been done to her brain because of her blood loss are a turning point in the novel. It was at this point in their lives that the family realized that Angela might not always be around for them. They'd always counted on her to be there and take care of them. After her car wreck, the family members are faced with the possibility they may have to take care of her, and that she might never be the same.

Ironic in this section is that it was the very Christmas letters that the Gillespie children hated so badly that Genevieve found so useful in sending out updates about her



mother. Instead of trying to return hundreds of text messages, Genevieve decided to send out a mass email to let their friends know how Angela was doing. In order to send out this email, Genevieve used the greeting her mother used on her Christmas letters “Hello from the Gillespies” and also mailed her updates to everyone on the Christmas mailing list. Notice that when Genevieve sent the first email update Ig took comfort in helping his sister push the send button. It was a tradition he and his mother had started with the Christmas letters. Being able to take part in this small familiar tradition probably made the youngest member of the Gillespie family feel more grounded.

As the family tried to deal with the tragedy they all reverted to coping mechanisms of different sorts. Ig depended more strongly on Robbie and his company to help distract him from his fear. He also drew pictures for his mother’s hospital room. Nick continued to delve into his family tree. While his wife was still unconscious he searched Celia’s house for the folder of information that Celia had told him was there. He spent his time in the waiting room looking through that information. Lindy distracted herself by thinking about Richard. Genevieve, the more no-nonsense of the twins, reacted differently than any of the other family members by doing what she could to help her mother. She was the one who sought out updates from the nurses and who remembered that her mother might have tests scheduled that needed to be canceled. She was also the one who went to Angela’s hotel to gather Angela’s things and settle her bill. Having such a no-nonsense personality Genevieve quickly became frustrated with the other members of the family when she saw they were trying to avoid thinking about their mother’s accident. Genevieve even lectured her father for still seeming interested only in his family tree information when their mother was in such bad shape. She had several spats with Lindy in which Genevieve told Lindy she was immature for being pleased Richard had sent her a message when Angela was sick. She even told Ig to stop talking and laughing with Robbie while they were in the hospital waiting room.

In the background of the true emergency of Angela’s accident, the twins still haven’t had a chance to take their pregnancy tests yet. Because the situation was so tense between Genevieve and her father, Lindy’s question about the pregnancy tests was almost comic relief. Being her usual flighty self, Lindy found the tests in her sister’s purse and thought she had to ask about them right away. It does not appear that she was trying to get Genevieve in trouble, she was just shocked and wasn’t thinking.

## Discussion Question 1

During this particularly stressful time in the family’s life, why was it so important for Ig that Robbie be included in the family? How did it help Ig to cope with the stress to believe that Robbie was with them?

## Discussion Question 2

Discuss how you might react if a family member had a serious accident. How was this a turning point for the Gillespie family?



## Discussion Question 3

How does Genevieve take advantage of her mother's Christmas letters in sending out updates about her mother to family friends?

## Vocabulary

concierge, bitumen, excruciating, oblivious, defibrillator, mutinous, regressed, inquest, engrossed, phantom, torrent, hypoxia, mundane, pristine



# Chapters 34-38

## Summary

In Chapter 34, the family was told Angela had some changes in her brain because of the blood loss. It was unknown what these changes were until she woke up. Joan came to visit the following day. It was while Joan was visiting with Angela that Angela opened her eyes for a moment. Later that night, Angela opened them again. Ruth told the family to continue to stay positive. That night, Celia returned home from Errigal. She'd thought it was silly for the rest of the family to be at her house while she was alone at Errigal.

Genevieve sent an email update about her mother that night. She also received an email from Megan, her friend from the New York set, telling her that Matt had been mugged and had lost her contact information. Megan gave him Genevieve's email. Another ping alerted Genevieve she had an email from Matt as well. She was about to call for Victoria when her father came to tell her that her mother was awake.

In Chapter 35, as Angela began to regain consciousness, she wondered where she was and where Will and Lexie were. She forced herself to open her eyes. She realized she was in a hospital. A man, three young women and a child that she couldn't determine if it was a boy or a girl were looking at her. She hoped Will would get there soon.

In Chapter 36, Ruth met with the family the following morning. She said Angela had an unusual form of memory loss that had affected both lobes of the brain. She was in what they called a state of confabulation where the brain made up a story to fill in the memories that had been lost. Ruth believed that over time, Angela's real memory would come back. After Ruth left, the family members talked. They realized Angela was living out the fantasy life from her Christmas letter. Joan and the others convinced Nick to allow the letter to be given to Ruth.

The next day, Ruth told them Angela believed she'd come to Australia for a station stay on Errigal with her husband, Will, and her daughter, Lexie. Ruth explained to them it wouldn't do any good to tell her about her real life as she will not believe anything that doesn't fit with her current view of reality. She said she believed Angela had recognized them all subconsciously but that they must remain patient. Angela would stay in the hospital at Adelaide for about another week then would be transferred to Port Augusta for at least a week. Ruth planned to stay active in Angela's case and felt the best place for her to be would be at home as soon as she was physically able to go. Ig and Genevieve asked permission to go and talk to her.

In Chapter 37, Ig and Genevieve introduced themselves to Angela. They told her they were from Errigal and asked her about her family. She went to sleep a few minutes into the conversation. Although Genevieve told the rest of the family Angela was different, Ig was convinced she was still his mother. The next time Angela woke up, Nick went to see her alone. He introduced himself as being from Errigal. He was surprised at how chatty





Angela was. When Angela began talking about Will and Lexie, Nick couldn't think of anything to say to her. He was relieved when Ruth and another doctor came into the room and asked him to excuse them.

In Chapter 38, Ruth told the family that although they might be uncomfortable with Angela's new memories, Angela was at ease with them because their existence fit the story her brain had made up about staying on Errigal for a visit with Will and Lexie. Angela's transfer to Port Augusta went well. The family was staying in a nearby motel. One day during a visit Genevieve noticed the tension was gone from her mother's face making her look younger. The nurses at the hospital told her that Angela had asked for nothing for pain since she'd been at the hospital.

Victoria heard Fred's voice when she went into the hospital that day for a visit. He'd left them a basket of food, books and other things to keep the family fed and occupied. When he asked Victoria how she was, she burst into tears. He hugged her. She told Fred she'd like to try going out with him again. Later, when she was alone with Genevieve, Victoria worried her decision had been shortsighted, as she didn't know yet if she were pregnant. The twins decided to take the tests as soon as they got home.

When Ruth Skyped with the family to tell them Angela was clear to go home, she had them all go through their daily activities and advised them on how they could make their schedules work smoothly around Angela. She told Nick to go ahead with his trip even though Angela's memory hadn't returned. She did suggest they take down pictures that included Angela around the house because it was actually other things like smells and sounds that had a more prominent affect on a person remembering his past.

## Analysis

In the theme of perceptions, Angela woke from her coma with a whole new perspective on her life. She believed she was really married to Will and had a daughter named Lexie. Notice her first impression of Ig. She remembered seeing him standing by her bedside, but was unsure if he was a girl or a boy because his hair was so long. Ruth, the doctor who was in charge of Angela's memory loss, encouraged the family to go along with Angela's belief that she would be a visitor at Errigal because Angela would not accept the truth even if they tried to tell her.

Notice in this section of the novel that the twins continued to put off taking their pregnancy tests. They seemed to be of the mindset that there would be a better time to learn if they were pregnant. It was almost as if they thought that if they didn't know the truth, they wouldn't have to deal with it yet. The twins act of putting off their tests put Victoria in a sticky situation when she told Fred Lawson that she'd like to begin seeing him again. Later when she told Genevieve about her decision to accept Fred's suggestion of dating again, Victoria worried that she'd been unfair to Fred by agreeing to date him without telling him that she might be pregnant.





Family is important in this section of the novel because Angela's family will have to learn to interact with her on a whole different level. Instead of thinking of her as their mother, they'll have to become accustomed to treating her as a guest. Although the family does have its differences, like any other family, the members will have to put aside their differences and work together to care for Angela.

Notice in this section that Ruth continually told the members of the family that they would need to be patient with Angela. It was a term they will become frustrated with as they wait for their mother to regain her memory.

## Discussion Question 1

What do you think of Ruth's suggestion to Nick that he go ahead with his plans to visit Ireland despite Angela's memory problem? Do you think you would have gone ahead with the trip if you were Nick? Why or why not?

## Discussion Question 2

Consider the situation with Angela's memory. Do you think it might have been because she spent so much of her time in her fantasy life that this was the reality to which her brain reset itself? Why or why not?

## Discussion Question 3

What is your opinion of Victoria and Genevieve's decision to put off taking their pregnancy tests? Are they just trying to delay possibly bad news?

## Vocabulary

terminology, hypoxicischemic, hippocampus, manifest, disorientation, aviary, adamant, commune, lucid, confabulation, factual, hypnotize, inconsistencies, subconsciously, occupational, jovial, vague, amenable, stimulate, postoperative, doppelganger



# Chapters 39-41

## Summary

In Chapter 39, the twins arrived home before Angela did to fix up the governess' quarters for her. Since they had some time to themselves, they took their pregnancy tests. One was positive, the other wasn't. Once Angela arrived home the twins showed her to her room. They noticed she remembered the trick to opening the French doors, but nothing else seemed familiar to her. Nick had told the girls he was fine but they didn't believe him. Hearing her refer to Will and Lexie as her family was upsetting him more than he wanted the children to know. He tried to block out his negative thoughts, as Jim had instructed him to do but found it harder and harder to do.

Genevieve called Joan to tell her how the homecoming had gone. Angela was resting and relaxing and not doing any of the things she usually did. Genevieve also told Joan she needed some cooking lessons and asked her to try to get Angela talking about her real life. When Angela learned Genevieve was a hairdresser, for the fourth time, she asked Genevieve to cut her hair. Genevieve fought tears as she realized her mother really had no idea who she was.

In Chapter 40, the rest of the family reminded Ig he had to treat Angela as a guest instead of as his mother. He later showed her where he'd cut his finger off and how his mother had taken care of it. He also offered to show her his mother's pottery wheel. Genevieve and Victoria were concerned it might not be a good idea for Ig to take Angela to the pottery shed but agreed they didn't know what was good and what wasn't anymore. When Ig came to the kitchen for some food for a picnic, the girls questioned him. He said he was taking Angela out to look at birds. Later when she was alone, Angela thought about how much she enjoyed the Gillespies, especially Ig. She's noticed how sad Nick looked and wondered what was wrong with him. The girls had also noticed that Nick and Angela had very little communication. The girls asked him again if he was all right. Although he hadn't told them it was getting harder and harder for him to deal with the new version of his wife. He felt so badly that he called Joan for an emergency talk. They met halfway between their two stations. He first asked Joan if Angela had wanted to leave him. When Joan explained Angela's concerns with Nick's lack of communication, Nick began to explain to her what was happening with him. Joan told him that he should have told Angela all those things. Now, she said, he just had to be patient and let Angela get to know him again.

Meanwhile, Victoria and Genevieve talked about their pregnancy tests. Victoria's had been positive. Genevieve tried to reassure her the test could have been faulty. They decided to go to Port Pirie after they dropped Ig off at school the next morning. Genevieve invited Angela to go with them. They lost sight of Angela within 20 minutes of arriving in the city. They finally found her at a tourist information spot getting brochures for Will and Lexie. When they arrived at home and told Nick what had happened, he was as close to getting angry with them as he had been since Angela's accident.



Victoria changed the subject by telling them she would get together a roster to organize the haphazard way housework was being done. The following day Victoria took two pregnancy tests. They were both positive.

In Chapter 41, after Angela had been at home for two weeks she still didn't remember her family but the family had developed a routine. Joan continued to visit and talk to Angela about Angela's family. She confided in Genevieve that Will and Lexie sounded too good to be true, Joan preferred Angela's real family. Joan said Angela had seemed most interested in the stories about Ig running away from boarding school. Even with amnesia, Angela thought Ig was too young to be a boarding school, the same thing that Angela had believed as Ig's mother.

Celia called each day for updates. She also insisted she be allowed to stay at Errigal while Nick was away in Ireland. Genevieve asked Nick to discourage her from coming but Nick wouldn't do so. After asking her father to show her his itinerary for his Ireland trip, Genevieve asked if she could talk to him about Angela. Genevieve suggested her father take Angela on a sightseeing tour. Sensing that he was shy around the New Angela, as they'd taken to calling her, she arranged the trip for him. Angela began asking questions before they even got in the 4WD. Nick felt as nervous as he had on their first tour of the station when he and Angela were married more than 30 years ago. Even though he wouldn't have told a stranger about the family's situation, he told Angela their problems. Angela asked if he was planning his family reunion in order to make up for losing the station after his family had started it from scratch.

When Nick asked Angela about Will, he noticed that she named off the yearly picture taking and the trading of the special birthday card as being one of their traditions. She also indicated she'd met Will in a pub in Sydney, telling him the story of how she'd met Nick. When they got back home all Nick would tell Genevieve was that their tour went well. As Angela prepared for bed she found herself beginning to fantasize about Nick.

## Analysis

Interesting in this section is Angela's changing perception of her family since she has met them, in a way, as a stranger. When she was back in her old life, Angela fantasized about Will to provide relief from her reality. After she lost her memory and thought she was really married to Will, Angela was fanaticizing about Nick and thinking of how handsome he was. Notice also there were bits of Angela's memory that related to her real life. She remembered the trick to opening the French doors in the governess' quarters. She also remembered the traditions she and Nick had of giving each other the same card on their birthday each year even though she credited this tradition to Will. When Nick asked Angela how she'd met Will, she told him the story of how she met Nick. Just as Ruth had said she would, when Nick questioned Angela about the inconsistencies in her story, she brushed off her inability to reconcile her story.

Just as Genevieve had been frustrated with the other members of her family during her mother's time in the hospital, Genevieve was frustrated with her mother's inability to



remember things she'd just been told about them no matter how many times she'd been told. Notice that it was when Angela agreed to allow Genevieve to cut her hair that the reality of her mother's memory loss really set in. It was at this point that Genevieve realized the woman who had raised her and cared for her for the past 32 years really did not know who she was.

Notice also in this section of the novel that Angela and Ig develop a special relationship. Angela seemed to have some sort of mothering instinct toward him even though she didn't realize he was her child. Even though he was the youngest member of the family Ig seemed to be the one who adjusted to this "new" Angela most quickly. It almost seemed as if Ig were trying to take advantage of the time he had with his mother while she wasn't busy working.

Nick, on the other hand, was so distressed with the changes in his wife that he had to call on Joan to help him deal with his emotions. Nick also finally opened up to Joan about his financial problems and the reasons that he didn't tell Angela about their financial issues. He asked Joan if Angela had been seriously unhappy with him before her accident and if she had said anything about wanting to leave him. Through this period in their lives, Joan is an important fixture in the family as she counseled both Nick and the children. After hearing Angela talk so much about Will and Lexie, Joan confided in the family that she preferred Angela's real family despite its faults.

Hoping to get her father talking to Angela again, even if Angela didn't know who Nick was, Genevieve arranged for Nick to take Angela on a sightseeing tour of their station. Genevieve was insightful as she realized that her father might have felt uncomfortable asking Angela by himself. As Nick showed Angela the sights and talked to her about the history of the farm, he was reminded of the first time that he'd taken Angela on that same tour.

## Discussion Question 1

How was Joan important to the Gillespie family as Angela recovered from her memory loss?

## Discussion Question 2

Discuss the difficulties the family faced in dealing with Angela's memory loss. Which family member do you think handled her amnesia best? Why did you choose the character that you did?

## Discussion Question 3

What was significant about the story that Angela told Nick about how she and Will met?

## Vocabulary

apprentice, plait, interrogated, recalibrating, haphazard, roster, socialist, dictator



# Chapters 42-45

## Summary

In Chapter 42, Celia called to say she'd sprained her wrist. She asked to come to Errigal while she recovered. The family started to have an argument when Angela interrupted. Genevieve later went and apologized to Angela. She told Angela that Celia would be coming and that Nick would be leaving soon on his trip to Ireland. When Genevieve left, Angela thought to herself how interesting the Gillespies were. As she tried to think about her own family she realized she couldn't remember what Will looked like. Meanwhile, Victoria was glad to be back at work. Her boss, Keith, took her to a coffee shop where he asked about her mother's progress. He asked her to have dinner with her the following Saturday but Victoria turned him down. Instead she called Fred and asked him out on a date.

In Chapter 43, Ig liked the new version of his mother because he got to spend more time with her even though he had to call her Angela. He'd learned a good deal about her childhood. Meanwhile, Genevieve and Nick picked Celia up at the bus stop. They had tea before they got home to talk to her about some rules in dealing with Angela. Celia clearly thought the family was being too protective. After they returned home Genevieve was irritated with Lindy's excitement when Richard told her that he wanted to visit. Genevieve was almost angry with her sister but Victoria suggested Richard was a way for Lindy to cope with their mother's illness. Genevieve tried to talk to Lindy about their mother's condition and got so irritated with the girl she wanted to slap her, as Lindy seemed to be taking it all in stride. Meanwhile, Nick had gone to Port Augusta to see Jim under cover of picking up some last minute things for his trip. Jim suggested Ruth was right in telling Nick to go ahead with his plans for his trip. After Nick left Errigal for his trip, Angela thought about how she'd had the urge to hug Nick when he'd come to her to say goodbye.

In Chapter 44, when he arrived in Dublin after 36 hours of travel Nick expected Carol to be waiting for him. She wasn't. After waiting 90 minutes he took a taxi and checked into a hotel. After sleeping three hours he called Carol and got no answer. He located her office building, a dilapidated looking place that rented temporary offices. No one there knew Carol. At a café he tried to access Carol's website. It wouldn't load. He realized he'd been scammed. He went to the police. As he began to think how stupid he'd been Nick forced himself to stop thinking that way. He reminded himself he might not be in charge of the situation but was in charge of how he reacted to it. He decided to take out his uncle's research notes. As he looked at them he realized they were all wrong compared to what Carol had found.

In Chapter 45, Genevieve had Ig set up her gossip website. When Ig asked for secrets to put on the site, Victoria shot down everything Genevieve mentioned as being none of other people's business. Genevieve decided to change her perspective to hairdressing horror stories. She couldn't think of any so she put out requests for other stylists to send



in their disaster stories. Lindy asked to interrupt Genevieve on the computer so she could see if she had any new cushion orders. When she looked at her site she thought it was a joke when she saw an order for 200 cushions. Genevieve suggested it was a typo but Celia's voice behind then informed them it wasn't a typo. She had made the order for keepsakes from the family reunion. Celia was pleased when Lindy jumped up and hugged her great aunt.

Genevieve and Victoria went to Port August for a doctor's appointment after they'd done interviews and haircuts at the Ryans' station. Victoria told Genevieve she felt for sure she was pregnant. She knew it was Mr. Radio's but she wanted to keep it anyway. The doctor confirmed for Victoria that she was pregnant. Genevieve suggested to Victoria that she not tell anyone for a while but keep the baby as their secret. The next day, Victoria went out for a walk with Angela. Without even thinking, Victoria confessed to Angela that she was pregnant. Angela started to give her advice on what to do for morning sickness but she forgot what she'd done. Angela mentioned she'd had multiple pregnancies, she almost said three, but remembered she'd just had one. Victoria asked Angela to keep the news to herself. Later when Victoria told Genevieve, Genevieve was angry and was afraid Angela would leak the secret.

The next day Celia and Lindy organized Lindy's supplies in the woolshed. Genevieve took a bath as Victoria kept an eye on Angela. Angela, meanwhile, made her way out to the pottery shed. The roses climbing on the shed gave her a memory but she couldn't remember exactly what that memory was. Inside the shed Angela got a lump of clay and decided to start with a robin. Even after three tries her robin didn't look like a robin. The other birds she'd tried to make didn't look like they were supposed to either.

## Analysis

In this section of the novel it was Victoria who suggested to Genevieve that Lindy's excitement about Richard coming to see her was a possible coping mechanism. Genevieve was frustrated with her sister because she seemed to be taking her mother's injury and memory loss so lightly. Genevieve was so upset with Lindy that she wanted to smack her. It was the more emotional Victoria who suggested to Genevieve that perhaps Lindy was using her relationship with Richard to give her a way to retreat from the stress of Angela's memory loss.

Perceptions came into play again when Nick arrived in Ireland. He had perceived the woman with whom he was communicating on the Internet as a business professional. In reality she turned out to be a scammer. Despite the glowing recommendations and impressive website, Carol was not what she said she was. This misperception not only caused Nick to be angry with himself, but also cost him a good deal of money.

Celia entered the picture again in this section of the story. Genevieve had tried to convince Nick to make Celia stay at home when he was away but since she had broken her wrist, Celia didn't need to be alone while she recovered. Notice that the family, Genevieve particularly, believed that Celia might try to interfere with Angela's recovery.





Instead, Celia seemed to put an effort into being more of an asset to the family because she ordered 200 cushions as keepsakes for the Gillespie reunion. She took Lindy under her wing by helping Lindy to organize her cushion material in the woolshed.

Meanwhile, Victoria and Genevieve had learned that Victoria was pregnant but Genevieve was not. Genevieve tried to convince Victoria not to tell anyone about the baby yet but to keep it as their secret. Although she promised her sister, Victoria couldn't help but tell Angela that she was pregnant. The reader has to wonder what Angela must have thought about Victoria sharing such a personal secret with her. Angela, however, took Victoria's news in stride.

It was during their discussion about Victoria's pregnancy that Angela showed that pieces of her memory were returning. For instance, when Angela mentioned she would tell Victoria her cure for morning sickness she mentioned that she'd used the cure each time she was pregnant. Angela caught herself as she realized she believed she only had one child but her subconscious seemed to be pushing through the information that she actually had four children and had been pregnant three times. When Angela visited the pottery shed alone, she got a strange feeling about the rosebush, as if it had some special significance to her. She couldn't bring to mind what that significance was but it was that rosebush that had been a gift from Nick on their first anniversary. Angela was also disturbed because she felt the urge to give Nick a hug when he told her goodbye before he left on a trip to Ireland. All of these instances showed that Angela's memory was slowly coming back. Although it had nothing to do with her memory returning, Angela also discovered she wasn't able to form birds out of clay as she had imagined herself able to do in her fantasy life. She couldn't determine why her hands were unable to make the shapes she had believed she was able to make only a few months before.

## Discussion Question 1

Why was it significant that Angela was not able to remember what Will looked like and that she was not able to make the bird sculptures? How did she explain these two things to herself?

## Discussion Question 2

Celia did have a tendency to interfere in issues that didn't involve her but do you think she would have intentionally done something to endanger Angela's recuperation? Why or why not?

## Discussion Question 3

How did Celia help Lindy during her time at Errigal? Were you surprised it was Lindy that Celia decided to take under her wing?





## Vocabulary

charade, cabaret, tenants, karma, atrophying, heckling, gossipmonger, anonymously, boisterous, verge, cynical, elusive, misnomer



# Chapters 46-50

## Summary

In Chapter 46, Nick had decided to try to verify his uncle's notes. He got information from a family research office and learned his ancestors were indeed from Ireland. He discovered his ancestors had been tailors and shopkeepers until his two cousins had started the station in Australia. Nick was disheartened as he had thought he'd feel some connection with Ireland but the place he found only make him homesick for Australia. As he tried to enjoy music in a pub, Nick realized he wasn't happy in Ireland because Angela wasn't there.

In Chapter 47, Ig told Genevieve she had an email from Matt. He wanted to come visit her. She and Victoria walked to Swing Hill to talk about Matt's plan to visit. Genevieve decided to write back telling him she'd be glad to see him. She knew Ig was standing behind her. He asked how her website was going. She said she'd had only one post, a complaint. She decided instead to put up pictures of cats that looked like celebrities. Ig made the website live and Genevieve moved traffic toward it by putting catch phrases on several websites and chat rooms. All of the family was in the kitchen working on lunch when Angela came in to tell Victoria she remembered the best cure she'd found for morning sickness was dry toast.

In Chapter 48, Nick decided to go to Cobh because he knew his ancestors had come from there. Meanwhile, Victoria tried to cover up Angela's comment about morning sickness but was not successful. Angela apologized. Lindy tried to guess whose baby Victoria was carrying and assumed it was Mr. Radio's. Genevieve told her it was someone else's. When Lindy commented that Victoria must have been busy Victoria ran from the room crying. Genevieve went to comfort her sister. They were surprised when Angela knocked on the door. Angela told Victoria she needed to tell her mother she was pregnant. The two asked her what advice she'd give Lexie if she were pregnant. Angela advised Victoria that she had to do what was best for her. Angela mentioned getting pregnant the first time with twins but then corrected herself. She also said she didn't know what she would have done if it hadn't been for Joan, then corrected herself again. After those two slips Angela quickly left the room. The two girls agreed their mother was coming back to them. Genevieve decided she and Victoria needed to start treating Angela like their mother again.

Meanwhile, when Nick got closer to Cobh he began to see the Ireland he'd expected. He finally called Genevieve and told her about Carol. Genevieve laughed. Nick said he thought about canceling the reunion but Genevieve encouraged him to delay his decision. Later, Genevieve began teasing Lindy about her relationship with Richard. Angela had told them to stop bickering, just as she would have if she were their mother. Victoria was gone on her date with Fred so Genevieve couldn't tell her what she'd learned about Carol. In the living room Angela and Celia were watching a gardening program when Angela began to cry. She told Genevieve it was because she missed her



husband. Even though Genevieve hoped she'd name her husband as Nick she said his name was Will Somers. Later, Genevieve was able to find Will on the Internet since Angela had given his last name. She stayed awake until Victoria came home. Even though she had planned to, Victoria had not told Fred about her pregnancy.

In Chapter 49, Cobh was what Nick had expected from Ireland. He got a room at a waterfront hotel Carol had mentioned. The manager of the hotel took him on a personally guided tour of the facilities. He was overwhelmed by Fintan's talk about pricing. He wondered if he did decide to go ahead with the reunion if his children, and more specifically if Angela would come. Genevieve called and told him about Angela's crying spell after the song about the rose. She also gave him Will's full name. Nick wondered what it was about Will that had attracted Angela. He also wondered if they'd had contact recently. That night, Nick booked a flight to London.

In Chapter 50, Ig invited Angela on a bird-watching walk. Celia demanded to go as well. Before they went, Celia asked Ig to turn on the computer for her. She then distracted him by asking him to get some sheep's wool from the woolshed for her next-door neighbor's grandson. While Ig was gone, Celia looked for Angela's file of Christmas letters. She had written a note on the file and put it on Angela's bedside table before Ig returned with a handful of dirty wool. Ig was not happy that Celia joined them in their walk. She bossed them around and dictated where they went. He and Angela had been waiting to see an eagle. He was so disappointed when Celia spotted one and told Angela all about it, information he'd wanted to give her. To end the walk Ig faked a stomachache. Back at the house Celia turned on a television program. Ig took the opportunity to sneak off with Angela to a look out point to watch the storm. They were still at the point when the storm broke. They took cover in the car. In his fright Ig grabbed hold of Angela and called her "Mum." He told her he'd called her that accidentally. She held him close. Ig decided not to tell anyone else about his slip up.

## Analysis

Just as Genevieve had feared, Celia decided to interfere with Angela's recovery. When Genevieve and Nick had first told Celia about the special ways in which they dealt with Angela's condition, letting her live with them as if she were a guest and not their mother, Celia had thought they were being ridiculous. When Angela cried and created such a stir when she heard the song about the rose, Celia had had enough. She took matters into her own hands and put the folder of Christmas letters on Angela's bedside table so she would see them. It was unsure what Celia hoped would come of Angela reading the letters but it can be assumed that Celia hoped something in them would spark Angela's memory. Remember at the beginning of the novel when Angela thought of her Christmas letters as historical documents. When she thought that she probably had no idea that one day she would be reading those letters as a way to remember her own past.

Meanwhile, there are more and more signs that Angela's real memories are beginning to push through. When she talked to Victoria about her pregnancy, Angela admitted she



didn't know what she would have done if Joan wasn't around. In reality it had been Joan who had helped Angela through her pregnancies so it appeared Angela's real memories were beginning to surface even though she was fighting to keep from accepting what was becoming more and more obvious to her. Notice also that when Ig slipped up and called Angela "Mum" her surprise didn't really last very long. It was almost as if she expected it. Instead of questioning the child or running away, Angela took Ig in her arms just as a mother would do for her child.

Perceptions continue to play a role in this section of the novel. Notice that even after Nick realized that Carol had conned him, he still believed that the information she had gathered about his family might have been correct. In all reality, she'd probably been playing him all along and telling him only what he wanted to hear. Nick, in fact, was so determined Carol hadn't given him bad information that when he began looking at his uncle's notes he was surprised at how many things his uncle had "wrong." It was when Nick began comparing his uncle's notes to research that Nick had done himself that he realized it had been Carol who had been giving him bad information all along.

Also in this section of the novel Genevieve and Nick came closer to learning the identity of Angela's fantasy husband. When Angela had gone into her crying spell over the song about the rose, Genevieve had tested her and asked her for her husband's name. Genevieve had hoped she would say Nick, but instead she said it was Will Somers. Genevieve was finally about to locate Will on the Internet because she finally had his last name. Remember that in her fantasy, Angela had kept her maiden name instead of taking Will's last name so up to this point Angela's family knew only that their mother fantasized about a man named Will but had no way to locate him.

## Discussion Question 1

What signs do you notice in this section that Angela's memory was returning?

## Discussion Question 2

How do you think Angela will react to the Christmas letters that Celia left on her bedside table? Do you think they will help Angela remember her real life or will they just confuse her?

## Discussion Question 3

If you were Nick would you want to meet the man that your wife fantasized about? Why or why not?

## Vocabulary

unscrupulous, mantra, queued, tallied, authentic, repartee, prospect, dissipated, bedraggled, cynical, diligent, deluded, demented, falsified, venue



# Chapters 51-53

## Summary

In Chapter 51, Nick located Will's office in London. Nick decided Will looked blotchy. He couldn't tell what color his hair had been. Meanwhile in Errigal Ig asked Angela to tuck him into bed. As Angela went through the motions she noticed they felt familiar. She was also getting snippets of memories about a party in the woolshed. It was then that she noticed the file folder of letters on her bedside table.

Back in London, Nick was surprised that Will couldn't bring Angela to mind immediately. Will admitted he hadn't thought about Angela in years. He agreed to meet Nick later at a pub. In between time, Nick located the house in which Angela had grown up. He even visited the Horniman Museum and took pictures as Genevieve had directed him. Back in Australia, Ig woke up early. He and Angela were planning to paint a mural on the side of the shearing shed. He knocked on Angela's door. She was still asleep but he noticed there were letters all over the floor of the room. Angela had him close the door so she could ask him something. After the door was shut, she asked if she was his mother.

In Chapter 52, Genevieve was surprised when she learned her site linking cats with celebrities had gone viral. In London, Nick realized he hated Will. He was boring and self absorbed. Nick asked if Will had any pictures of Angela. They went to Will's home where Nick learned Will had been forced to sell the family home and was living in the dirty, smelly basement apartment. Nick stayed only a short while before he realized there was little hope of Will having a picture of Angela.

Meanwhile on Errigal Lindy was devastated because Richard broke up with her. He had begun dating Jane. Ig and Angela were painting the wall of the shearing shed. Angela had realized the Christmas letters were about her life. She gave Ig a big hug but asked him to keep her memory coming back a secret as she had some things she needed to work out. Genevieve got a call from Nick saying that Angela should be glad she didn't marry Will. He was also on his way home.

In Chapter 53, Victoria woke Genevieve up because she was bleeding. She was afraid she was having a miscarriage. They went to Angela's room. She sat up with them. Joan, who was a nurse and who had two miscarriages, was called. Joan confirmed Victoria had probably miscarried the baby. Lindy and Celia were told what had happened. Joan took Victoria to a doctor in Adelaide on the same day she went to pick up Nick. After they left, Lindy followed Genevieve around feeling sorry for herself and comparing her situation to Victoria's until Genevieve finally snapped at her. She told Lindy she was cute when she wasn't feeling sorry for herself and offered to give her a new haircut. Lindy agreed. Ig complimented the new look without having to be bribed. Later that day, Genevieve waited impatiently for Matt to arrive. Once he was there, she took him to see the sights.



## Analysis

There are several important developments in this section of the novel. The most upsetting was Victoria's loss of her baby. Even though she had known it would be difficult to raise a baby and be a single mother, Victoria had felt she was up to the challenge. She was getting older and was afraid she might not have another chance to get pregnant. Notice at this point that the girls felt comfortable enough with Angela to wake her when they suspected that Victoria was having a miscarriage. Even though she didn't seem completely aware of their relationship, Angela had grown close enough to both girls that she stayed with them and comforted Victoria through the night.

Meanwhile, Nick met Will and discovered that the perception Angela had given him of her ex-boyfriend was all wrong. Instead of being charming and thoughtful, Will was an alcoholic who had lost his family property and now lived in the basement apartment. Even though it was not mentioned, Nick probably thought he had one-upped Will just because he had at least been able to hang onto his family land even though he wasn't running sheep any longer. Nick found Will was unattractive not only physically but also as a person because he talked about his two divorces and children who would have nothing to do with him.

Another perception that was destroyed in this section of the novel was Genevieve's perception that people were interested in and liked to share and learn gossip. She'd tried to start a gossip website but had no luck with it. She discovered she had more success when she introduced a website where she paired pictures of celebrities with pictures of cats that looked even vaguely similar to those celebrities. Genevieve was shocked how much more popular the cat website was than the gossip one.

Significant in this section is Genevieve's decision to be patient with Lindy. Lindy's boyfriend had broken up with her in favor of Jane. It was ultimately Lindy's worst nightmare. Even though Lindy's loss was not as big as Victoria's Lindy insisted that Genevieve was not feeling properly sorry for her. As Genevieve faced Lindy the reader can almost see in his mind Genevieve steeling herself not to completely lose patience with her whiney younger sister. One has to wonder if Genevieve thought about how their mother put up with Lindy so patiently through the years. Although Genevieve did tell Lindy that she didn't think her loss was as earth shattering as Victoria's, Genevieve did manage to make Lindy feel better about herself by complimenting her on the positive factors of her personality and giving her a new haircut.

Note also in this section that Angela's special relationship with Ig continued as he was the first one she told that she remembered that she was his mother and mother to the three girls. It is interesting that out of all the people Angela could have confided in she chose Ig. Just as Celia had hoped, it was the Christmas letters that had helped Angela to put the memories that were coming to her mind in their proper places and proper order. Angela does, however, ask Ig not to share her news for a while because she had some things she felt she still needed to work out.



## Discussion Question 1

Why do you think that Genevieve has so much better luck with her cats website than her gossip one?

## Discussion Question 2

How did your impression of Will change when you learned what he was really like? Do you believe Nick was right to go and meet him? Why or why not?

## Discussion Question 3

Discuss how Victoria's loss of her baby affected the whole family. What role did Angela play in helping Victoria through her loss?

## Vocabulary

minimal, intimidating, infuriating, brevity, tedious, vintage, alimony, haunt, alleged, nemesis, dystopian





# Chapters 54-Epilogue

## Summary

In Chapter 54, the doctor suspected the food poisoning at Christmas might have been responsible for the miscarriage. In the car, Victoria told Joan she wanted her mum. Joan held Victoria as she cried and talked. They took a walk and Victoria asked Joan to talk about her own miscarriages. Meanwhile at Errigal Genevieve was looking for Ig. She was getting really worried because she couldn't find Ig in any of his usual places. Genevieve told Angela not to worry but Angela reminded Genevieve how scared Ig was of snakes. When Genevieve asked how she knew about Ig's fear of snakes, Angela said he had been scared of them since he was a little kid. Genevieve realized Angela was beginning to act like a mother, not a guest.

Neighbors came to join the search. After the sun went down, Matt noticed a light flashing. It led them to Swing Hill where Ig was curled up in the middle swing shaking and crying. When they got him home, Angela took over caring for Ig. After Angela gave him a warm bath, she called Nick to carry Ig to bed. Angela tucked Ig in and stayed with him until he went to sleep. Angela told them the whole story. Ig had gone up to Swing Hill after Genevieve and Matt. He'd seen them kissing and gotten shy. After they left he'd seen a King Brown snake, one of the most poisonous in the country. He'd taken refuge on the swing and had been too scared to get down.

In Chapter 55, Joan and Angela were the first ones up the following morning. Angela asked Joan to walk with her out to the old chapel. Angela confessed to Joan she knew who she was. She asked Joan to explain what had happened to her as her mind was still muddled. She asked Joan to also help her understand the tension between her and Nick. After they talked, Joan went home and Angela went to the office. She found the email Nick had sent to her before her accident. In the email he apologized for the way he'd been acting and explained why he'd made the deal with the mining company. He told her about his depression and his visit to the psychologist. He told Angela that he had hoped when they were in Ireland together he could ask her if she would be willing to make a fresh start with him. He wanted to leave Errigal and get a house by the sea. Keith Lawson wanted to buy or lease what was left of Errigal. Nick said he wanted Angela with him because life was better when she was around.

Angela had closed the letter and logged into a different Internet search when she heard Nick behind her. He asked her what she was looking at. She replied she was looking at real estate listings for houses by the sea. She told him she'd just read his email for the first time and that she was back. When Ig woke he could hear his mother and father talking. Ig called for Robbie but got no answer. Robbie hadn't been there the night before on Swing Hill either. He decided to go see his mum and dad in the office. They were hugging. Ig coughed. His mum called for him to join them.



In Chapter 56, Angela continued to improve and moved back into the bedroom with Nick. Victoria approved of Matt and thought he was the right one for Genevieve. Victoria was still heartbroken about her miscarriage but she had told Fred what had happened. He told her he was sorry. Nick and Angela spent a good deal of time talking about what had led up to Angela's Christmas letter and how Nick had felt after her accident. Angela said she had realized she wanted to continue being herself but to also stop feeling like she had to be in charge of everything.

A few days later Nick drove Angela to her appointment with Ruth. Genevieve got them a room in the same hotel in which Angela had stayed alone. Nick told her about Ireland. He even told her about going to see Will to size up his competition. After her appointment, the two went and sat on the beach together. They'd decided to take the Lawson's offer. When he talked to Genevieve on the phone that night he told her they'd have to stay an extra two days for tests.

In Chapter 57, Ig and Angela unveiled the mural on the shearing shed. Lindy had taken charge of the Gillespie reunion. After the Lawsons took over the lease on Errigal in December, Fred would live in the homestead. Victoria had taken over the station stay business from her mother. It was known they would get married one day, when it suited them. Before Ig, Angela and Nick settled down in Adelaide they would be taking a three-month tour of Australia in a rented camper van. Genevieve had gotten a job as a hairdresser on the set of Matt's historical documentary to be set in Canada.

In the Epilogue it was December 1 again. The Gillespies were preparing for their road trip. In eight months they'd be going to Ireland for the reunion. Celia had given them enough money to cover their travel expenses. Nick was putting the final touches on the last email he would send out about the Gillespie reunion, as Lindy would be taking over the project completely. Angela had decided not to send out a Christmas letter that year. In honor of that tradition, however, Nick called Ig in to help him push the send button.

## Analysis

After a very eventful year, things finally seemed to be calming down for the Gillespies. Angela had regained her memory. She and Nick had begun talking and repairing their relationship. Lindy took over planning her father's family reunion. Through her planning and work with Fintan at the hotel Lindy found a calling in the hospitality business. Genevieve got another job as a hairdresser on a movie set through Matt, her new boyfriend. Notice that Matt must be the one for Genevieve because Victoria approved of him. Just as her parents had always thought, Victoria chose to stay on at Errigal. Even though she wouldn't be running it as a sheep station, Victoria had taken over her mother's position in the station stay program.

Perhaps the biggest surprise of the novel in regards to character transformation is the generosity that Celia showed to the family. Celia had always been critical of Angela and the children. The family allowed her to visit because she was family and because her own children had moved too far away for her to comfortably visit them. Angela and the



rest of the family dreaded Celia's visits. In the end, Celia became a mentor to Lindy, teaching her the techniques she had used to keep her husband's business running. Celia also decided to sell her house and move into a retirement community. Celia surprised the family by giving them the money they would need to attend the reunion. She additionally gave them enough that Angela, Nick and Ig could spend some time traveling. Although the family did not host Celia in hopes of getting anything from her, their care for the elderly lady paid off in ways they never imagined.

The search for Ig gave the novel a climactic end. The whole family and members of the community bonded together to search for the boy. Freshly back from his trip to Ireland, Nick noticed the changes in Angela. She was acting like a mother instead of a guest. Notice that Nick knew his wife well enough that he noticed the changes in her right away. Genevieve became suspicious of her mother when Angela talked about how scared Ig was of snakes. When Angela mentioned Ig's fear it didn't appear to be an accident or slip of her subconscious. Remember that Ig was aware that his mother had regained her memory but that no one else knew for sure that Angela remembered them.

Notice also that it was through communication that Nick and Angela began to put their relationship back together. They had finally begun talking again. Once Angela understood the reasons why Nick had been acting so strangely, she understood his odd behavior. Just as she'd said in her first chapter about her suspicions that something was wrong with Lindy besides just being unsuccessful, the characters learned that it was impossible to fix a problem if they were unwilling to talk about it.

## Discussion Question 1

What surprises you most about the way this novel ends?

## Discussion Question 2

How does the author use the climactic story of Ig's disappearance to close the story?

## Discussion Question 3

How does Angela let Nick know that she has regained her memory? How does the email he sent her help her understand the troubles they'd faced? Do you think it would have made a difference in their relationship if she'd read the email before her accident?

## Vocabulary

apparition, dictated, keen, crockery, mentor, discrepancies, pine, assessed, bequeath, exemptions



# Characters

## Angela Gillespie

Angela Gillespie is the wife of Nick Gillespie and the mother of Genevieve, Victoria, Lindy and Ig. She was a native of London, England and had moved to Australia only after she married Nick who was set to inherit his father's sheep station located in the outback. Angela was a dedicated wife and mother but as her children grew, changed, tried to find their own ways in life and failed, Angela became discouraged with them. To make matters worse, her husband had suddenly become distant and was spending a good deal of time talking to Carol, a woman who was helping him organize a family reunion. As a result of her frustration Angela decided to take her friend Joan's advice and write a Christmas letter in which she told the truth about her family instead of one that was candy coated like those she'd written in the past. Angela intended to delete the letter once she finished but was interrupted when her son, Ig, was injured. Before Angela got a chance to get back to the letter, Nick saw it and sent it believing that he was doing Angela a favor.

Angela's letter caused a stir not only in her own family but also in the community in general. The family was in charge of hosting the community's annual woolshed party. Angela thought at first she should cancel the party but with the help of Joan decided it would be best to go ahead with the party. Taking Joan's advice Angela had the members of her family stand up at the party and give "updates" to the information that had been included about them in the letter.

After the holidays, Angela went to the doctor to have tests done because she'd been having bad headaches. During the four-hour drive to the doctor's appointment Angela daydreamed about her fantasy family. She even imagined them going on a trip and staying at Errigal. Although her doctor wasn't able to schedule her for any tests that day Angela lied to her family and told them she'd need to stay away for several more nights to have tests done. She wanted some time away from her family. That first night she decided to drive up to a lookout point that Nick had taken her to just a few days before their wedding. On the way there Angela saw a spider in her car. She was deathly afraid of spiders and reacted by screaming and taking her hands off the wheel. Her car crashed into a tree.

Because of a loss of blood Angela suffered memory loss when she finally woke up from surgery to remove her spleen. The hospital's neuropsychologist told Angela's family that she was in a state of confabulation to fill in the spots of her memory that were missing. Angela imagined that she was really married to Will, her childhood sweetheart, and had one daughter named Lexie. She believed that she was in Australia because she and her family were going to stay at Errigal for a vacation.

Once Angela was physically well enough she went home to Errigal where she believed she was to stay until her husband and daughter came to join her. Meanwhile, she



became reacquainted with the members of her own family on a different level. Angela began to make slips in her conversation that indicated her memory was returning. It was not until after Celia left the stack of Christmas letters Angela had written about her family over the years on Angela's bedside table for her to read that Angela really remembered her place in the family. Ig was the first one Angela told that she remembered them. She spent time with Joan trying to understand what had happened between herself and Nick. She also checked her email and found a message from Nick, one she hadn't gotten a chance to read before her accident. In it he suggested they make a new start by finding a house by the sea to rent. When Nick found her in the office and asked her what she was doing she told him she was looking for houses by the sea, a sign to him that she had read the email and forgave him his faults.

## Nick Gillespie

Nick Gillespie is the husband of Angela Gillespie and father of Genevieve, Victoria, Lindy and Ig. Nick believed he was a failure because the sheep station he had taken over from his family was no longer running sheep. In reality the station failed because of a combination of a drought and a drastic drop in wool prices. By the time the area finally began to get regular rains and wool prices rebounded, Nick was so far in debt that there was no way he could afford to pay his debts. Because of the debt, Nick agreed to lease part of the station to a mining company that had found evidence of diamonds on the station.

In order to make up for the guilt he felt and as a coping mechanism Nick put all of his emotion and energy into planning a family reunion in Ireland. He hired a consultant to help him plan the reunion. He spent so much time talking to this woman that Angela, as well as his children believed he was having a cyber affair with her. Although he didn't tell any of his family members or friends, Nick was suffering from depression. His doctor put him on medication for his inability to sleep as well as his feelings of despair and emptiness. He was afraid if he told Angela about what he was going through that she would think less of him. He later realized that by not being truthful with Angela he'd actually made her feel alienated and unloved, intensifying his problems.

Even after Angela's car wreck and amnesia Nick followed her doctor's advice to go ahead with his trip to Ireland to prepare for his family reunion. Once he was there and Carol didn't meet him at the airport like she was supposed to do or answer her phone, Nick realized that he had been scammed. Even though he did not have her help, Nick still visited the waterfront hotel in Cobh that she had suggested for the reunion. Instead of going ahead with his trip throughout Ireland as he had planned, Nick decided to fly to London and check out the man that his wife believed was her husband. Although Angela portrayed Will as the perfect husband, the man that Nick met in London was less than perfect. He was broke, crass and appeared to be addicted to alcohol.

Before Angela had her car wreck, Nick had written her an email telling her that he'd gotten an offer from Kevin Lawson to lease the portion of Errigal not being leased by the mining company so that he could enlarge his sheep station. In the email Nick had



suggested to Angela that they rent a house by the sea and try to make a new start there. Nick knew his wife was back when he found her in the computer room researching houses for rent by the sea in Adelaide.

## Genevieve Gillespie

Genevieve Gillespie was the eldest twin born to Angela and Nick Gillespie during their first year of marriage. She was 32 years of age when the novel opened. Genevieve had a habit of taking charge of the situation when she needed to. She was a hairstylist on the set of a movie in New York. Genevieve spent an evening gossiping about the star of the movie with a gay man who was an employee at the New York Post. The man told her he was a graphic artist but it turned out he also worked as the writer of a gossip column. Even though he didn't name her as a source, the man quoted Genevieve's stories word for word. Genevieve knew that if she did not confess to what she had done production at the set would stop. Many would be without a job while millions of dollars would be wasted because of her. Matt, the security guard who was in charge of escorting Genevieve off the set, told her he was impressed with her actions. He later asked her out on a date and the two hit it off. When Victoria met Matt, she decided he was the one for Genevieve.

After she was fired from her position as a hairdresser Genevieve also went back to Errigal. Although she didn't have much to do before her mother had the car wreck, Genevieve seemed to be the glue that held the family together during Angela's hospitalization and period of amnesia. Genevieve was the one who served as the family's spokesperson both with the doctors and nurses as well as with friends and family. Although she knew she might have been overstepping her bounds, Genevieve stood up to her father and asked him to make things right with their mother. At the end of the novel, Matt got Genevieve a new job as hairdresser for a movie he was working on in Canada.

## Victoria Gillespie

Victoria Gillespie was the youngest of the twins born to Angela and Nick Gillespie during their first year of marriage. She seemed to be the more deeply emotional of the two girls. Victoria had worked as a radio producer in Sydney until a radio announcer had gone on the air with a drunken, drug fueled tirade. Victoria was fired because of the announcer's behavior even though she technically was not in charge of his behavior. Unfortunately, Victoria was also having an affair with this announcer who was referred to only as Mr. Radio. Victoria got pregnant during a rendezvous after she was fired but before she moved back home. Although Victoria had decided she wanted to keep the baby, she had a miscarriage. A doctor told her it might have been a result of the food poisoning she suffered during the Christmas holidays. Once she was back home at Errigal Victoria began working again at the radio station in Port Pirie. She also reconnected with her old boyfriend, Fred Lawson, who had come back to Australia after





studying in Canada. Victoria ultimately took over her mother's station stay business after Angela and Nick decided to move away from Errigal.

## **Ignatius “Ig” Sean Aloysius Joseph Gillespie**

Ig was the young son of Nick and Angela Gillespie. He was 10 at the time of the novel. Ig was a surprise to his family not only because he came along so late but also because he was a boy. Ig was strange as he had long curly hair that he refused to have cut. Even though he was sent to the same boarding school his father attended Ig hated the school and ran away several times. The principal finally kicked Ig out of school and Ig was sent to a daily school closer to his home. Ig was also considered strange because he admitted that he had an imaginary friend to whom he regularly spoke. The imaginary friend seemed to be a coping mechanism for Ig because he had three much older sisters and little companionship on the sheep station. After Angela's accident it was with Ig that she spent a good deal of time during her recuperation. Ig was the first member of the family to learn she remembered who they were and that she was their mother. At the conclusion of the novel Ig's parents were considering enrolling him in a school for children with an exceptional IQ ability after they finished a three-month trip around Australia.

## **Rosalind “Lindy” Gillespie**

Rosalind “Lindy” Gillespie was the youngest daughter of Nick and Angela Gillespie. She often felt the lone wolf of the family with no one in which she could confide because her older sisters were twins. Lindy was prone to feeling sorry for herself and was often referred to as a drama queen. She seemed the one of the Gillespie children who was most unstable and lacking in self-confidence. Lindy tried several different jobs with no success before she had to come home deep in debt. While at home Lindy tried to develop a business making personalized cushions. Lindy's great aunt Celia helped Lindy's business by ordering 200 cushions as favors for the Gillespie reunion. Lindy not only developed a close relationship with Celia, she also found her calling in the hotel business when she took over planning her father's reunion for him.

## **Celia Gillespie**

Celia Gillespie was Nick's aunt by marriage. Celia spent many of her holidays with Nick and Angela because her own children disliked her so much. In her Christmas letter Angela described Celia as being an interfering old bat. Celia did have a habit of interfering but it was her interference that perhaps helped Angela to remember her past more quickly by leaving the file folder of Christmas letters in Angela's bedroom. After Celia began helping Lindy with her cushion business, the two became close. Lindy even began referring to Celia as her mentor. After Celia sold her house and moved into a retirement community she surprised the family by giving them enough money for the



entire family to attend the reunion and then for Angela, Nick and Ig to travel a few months afterward.

## **Fred Lawson**

Fred Lawson is the son of Kevin Lawson. He and Victoria dated for years before he decided to go to school in Canada. Victoria tried to forget him. Fred, however, returned to Australia to help his father on their sheep station at about the same time that Victoria returned home after she was fired from a radio station in Sydney and returned home. Fred initiated a new relationship with Victoria and she accepted. At the end of the novel, Fred and Victoria were living in the homestead at Errigal while Fred helped his father run both their station and part of the Gillespies' station.

## **Mr. Radio**

Mr. Radio was the radio announcer in Sydney with whom Victoria had an affair. The man encouraged Victoria to gain weight because he said he liked women with curves. One day the man came in drunk and on drugs and went on a rant on the air. Even though Victoria technically had no control over Mr. Radio she was fired because of his behavior. Although he was able to later get a job in radio, Victoria was unable to find another job. Just before Victoria went back home to live she had a final fling with Mr. Radio. Victoria had stopped taking birth control pills before this fling and she got pregnant.

## **Will Somers**

Will Somers was the name of Angela's childhood sweetheart from London. He was also the man whom Angela chose as her fantasy husband. The real Will Somers was completely different from the man Angela imagined herself married to. Angela imagined Will as being a rich architect who was successful and considerate. The real Will Somers was a selfish, ugly man who was so unsuccessful at his business that he had to sell his parents' home and was living in the basement apartment of that house.

## **Kevin Lawson**

Kevin Lawson was the owner of a station next to Errigal. When he learned the trouble that Nick was having after the droughts and the crash in wool prices, he offered to buy or lease to part of Errigal that hadn't been leased to the mining companies to expand his own farm. At the end of the novel Nick and Angela agreed to lease part of their station to Kevin.





## Jane “Horrible Jane” Lawson

Jane Lawson is the daughter of Kevin Lawson. The Gillespies called her “Horrible Jane” because she bullied Lindy so badly when the two were in school together. Richard told Lindy that Jane bullied her so badly because she was jealous of her. Lindy believed it was because of spite that Jane stole Richard from her.

## Richard

Richard was the man whom Lindy met in a bar in Melbourne. He was Jane Lawson’s flat mate. Richard again met Lindy when he attended the Gillespies’ woodshed party. Richard and Lindy communicated for a while by Skype and email but in the end Jane Lawson stole Richard from Lindy.

## Ruth Morgan

Ruth Morgan was the neuropsychologist for the hospital in Adelaide who was called to take Angela’s case. She worked with the Gillespie family throughout Angela’s recovery giving them advice on how they should handle Angela’s memory loss and how they would best be able to help her regain her memory.

## Fintan

Fintan was the manager of the waterfront hotel at which Nick stayed when he went to visit Cobh. When Lindy took over arrangements for the family reunion and flew to Ireland, Fintan and his girlfriend took Lindy under their wings. Lindy began working for them in the hotel.

## Joan

Joan was Angela’s best friend. She served as Angela’s confidante and advisor after her Christmas letter was accidentally sent. Joan also served as a confidante and advisor to Nick and to Angela’s children during Angela’s amnesia.

## Carol

Carol was the woman who claimed to work for a company that researched people’s genealogy. Nick spent so much time talking to Carol in such familiar terms that Angela believed he was having a cyber affair. The children jokingly referred to Carol as Nick’s girlfriend.



## Alexandria “Lexie” Somers

Alexandria “Lexie” Somers was the daughter that Angela imagined herself having with Will. After they’d read their mother’s ranting Christmas letter the Gillespie daughters described her as being too good to be true.

## Keith

Keith was the station manager at the radio station in Port Pirie. Victoria did her first radio work with Keith. When Keith got Angela’s Christmas letter he contacted Angela offering Victoria a job.

## Megan

Megan was a makeup artist who was Genevieve’s friend from the movie set in New York. It was Megan who helped Matt get in touch with Genevieve after he lost her contact information when he got mugged.

## Robbie

Robbie was the name that Ig gave to his imaginary friend.



# Symbols and Symbolism

## Gillespie Annual Christmas Letter

The annual Christmas letter sent out each year by Angela Gillespie is a central symbol in this novel. The letter sent the particular year in which the novel is set symbolized Angela's decision to tell the truth about each of her family members. It was upon this letter and the fact that it was accidentally sent out to all of the people in Angela's mailing list that a good deal of the action of the novel hinged. The letters written in the past years were used in two different aspects. In the first, the children used the letters to put together a play they hoped would remind their parents of the good times they had in their relationship. These letters also helped Angela to remember the facts of her real life after she was diagnosed with amnesia.

## Genevieve's Security Pass

Genevieve loved the security pass that allowed her access to the New York set on which she worked as a hairdresser. This pass was symbol of Genevieve's success as a hairstylist. When Matt took her pass from her when she was fired from the set, it was as if she were giving back her success.

## Blue Dreadlocks

The blue dreadlocks that Genevieve had for a short while when she was working in New York were a symbol of her indiscretion both physically and in her career. Genevieve chose to get the dreadlocks cut off when she returned to Australia to live with her parents. It was because she had her dreadlocks cut off that Matt almost didn't recognize her when he went to the coffee shop to meet her for their first date.

## The Prawns

The prawns, or shrimp, eaten by the Gillespie family during Christmas lunch were believed to be responsible for the food poisoning the family suffered. It was this food poisoning that Victoria's doctor believed might have been responsible for the loss of her baby. The prawns represent the cause of Victoria's loss.

## A Set of Three Swings

This set of three swings was a symbol of the Gillespie children before Ig joined the family. Nick built this swing set with one swing for each of his three daughters so that they could go to a lookout spot and watch the sunrise on the last morning of each year. The family named the spot on which Nick built the swing set Swing Hill. This swing set



also had an important role in the novel as it was on the middle swing of the swing set that the family found Ig after he had disappeared. Ig had been scared by a snake and took refuge on the swing.

## **A Letter from Fred**

During the family's woolshed party Fred gave Victoria a letter asking her to begin dating her again. The letter symbolized Fred's attempt to restart the relationship he'd had with Victoria many years before.

## **The Rosebush**

This rosebush that grew beside the woolshed on Errigal was a symbol of Nick and Angela's marriage. Nick had given Angela this rosebush as a gift for their first anniversary. Angela cared for the rosebush even when she felt her marriage was falling apart because she believed if she allowed the bush to die she would symbolically allow her marriage to fail as well.

## **An Enormous Huntsman Spider**

This enormous huntsman spider symbolized the thing that Angela feared most. It was when Angela spotted one of these spiders on the inside of her windshield that she screamed and took her hands off the steering wheel of her car, causing herself to have a car wreck.

## **Nick's Uncle's Research Notes**

The research notes that Nick's uncle made were a sign that much of the information that Carol had given him about his family was false. When Nick at first began looking at these notes he thought his uncle had gotten all of his facts wrong. It was only after he began to do his own research that Nick realized that his uncle had the information about their family right all along.

## **The Mural**

The mural that Angela and Ig created on the wall of the shearing shed was a symbol of their new, different relationship that they developed since Angela had her car wreck and was diagnosed with amnesia. Before Angela developed amnesia she never had time to do things with her children like plan and create a mural. Since she had forgotten all the responsibility that usually consumed her Angela with amnesia actually had time to spend with her children.



# Settings

## Errigal

Errigal is the name of the sheep station in Southern Australia owned by Nick Gillespie's family for four generations. It is the setting where the majority of the action in the novel took place.

## A Bar in Sydney

It was in a bar in Sydney that Angela happened to meet Nick when he came in to ask directions. Angela had only happened to be working there as she was doing a favor for a friend who had gotten sick.

## New York

New York is the American city where Genevieve had worked as a hairstylist on a movie set until she was fired. She admitted to telling secrets about the main actress on the set to a gossip writer who included the information in a column.

## Sydney

Sydney, Australia is the place where Victoria worked as a radio producer until she was fired after the announcer went on a drug and alcohol induced rage on the air. It was also in this town that Victoria had an affair with that same announcer. She became pregnant with the man's baby during their final tryst in Sydney.

## Port Augusta Hospital

The Port Augusta Hospital is the hospital to which Angela was taken after she had recovered adequately at the hospital in Adelaide. It was also to this hospital that Ig was taken to have his finger re-attached.

## Angela's Pottery Studio

Angela often took solace in her pottery studio. The building had formerly served as a toolshed.



## Swing Hill

Swing Hill is the place where Nick had built a swing set for his three daughters. They sat on these swings on New Year's Eve to watch the sunrise. When Ig went missing, he was found on this hill. He'd seen a snake and was afraid to get down from the swing where he'd gone to get away from the snake.

## Horniman Museum

The Horniman Museum was located across the street from Angela's childhood home in London. Will and Angela went to this museum on their first date. Nick visited this museum when he went in search for clues about Angela's relationship with Will.

## Pugilist Hill Lookout

Lindy and Richard were on the way back from this point of interest when Lindy learned her mother had been injured in a car wreck.

## Aunt Celia's House

Nick and his children took up residence in Aunt Celia's house while they were waiting for Angela to wake up from her coma.

## Hospital in Adelaide

Angela was taken by ambulance to the hospital in Adelaide after she had her car accident. Ruth Morgan, the neuropsychologist who handled Angela's case, was an employee of this hospital.

## The Old Governess' Quarters

The old governess' quarters were the suite at Errigal where Angela's station stay guests generally stayed. Celia also stayed there when she visited the family. When Angela returned home after the accident when she believed she was married to Will, she stayed in these quarters.

## The Chapel

Angela loved this tiny chapel located on Errigal. She'd wanted to have her wedding there but they would not have been able to fit all of the guests into it. When she and Nick wanted to have private talks they would often go to this chapel.



# Themes and Motifs

## Family

Family and the importance of family is a major theme in this novel. The story covers about a one-year time span in the life of one family as it dealt with unexpected challenges including a ranting Christmas letter that wasn't supposed to be sent, a car wreck, financial troubles and an unexpected pregnancy. Even with their differences and disagreements, the members of the family bonded together to get through the tough times.

Even before Angela wrote, and then Nick sent, her ranting Christmas letter, the Gillespie family was unsettled. Their youngest son Ig insisted on running away from his boarding school and had developed an imaginary friend at the age of ten. Lindy, the youngest daughter, had already returned home practically jobless and deep in debt. Her older sisters soon followed. These grown children returning home made an already distant relationship between Angela and Nick even more distant. Nick believed his wife would no longer respect him if he told her how deep in debt he'd allowed them to get, so he just chose not to tell her. Angela interpreted his silence as anger. She voiced her frustrations with her family in a letter she never meant to send. When Angela finally did let Nick read the letter that had been sent, things went from bad to worse as Angela felt guilty and responsible for hurting her husband. In families, it seems that the ones we love most are the ones we hurt most and the ones that we find it the hardest to make amends with. This was the case with Angela and Nick.

After Angela's car wreck and resulting amnesia she and the members of her family had to get to know one another on a whole different level. Although this change was stressful for Angela's children and husband, they perhaps developed a better understanding of all Angela did to keep the household running smoothly. The girls seemed surprised that Angela acted like a guest instead of doing the things she usually did at home like cooking, cleaning and organizing. As they watched Angela relaxing and even taking naps, they wondered if she had wanted to do those things instead of working so hard.

Meanwhile, while she believed she was a guest at Errigal Angela got to know her family again on a different level. Although she'd fantasized about Will when she began having trouble in her marriage to Nick, Angela began noticing how attractive Nick was and fantasizing about him when she believed she was married to Will. Angela's amnesia also gave her a chance to get to know her children again. Even though she didn't realize she was related to any of the children, she began to realize that she liked all of them.

After Angela's memory came back, she and Nick finally reconciled. The family reached a new normal as she and Nick decided to make a change and live by the sea instead of continuing to struggle to make a living at Errigal. Victoria took over her mother's station



stay business and Lindy found her calling in hospitality. Genevieve found a job as a hairdresser for a movie being filmed in Canada while Ig's parents found a tech school in which they decided to enroll him.

## Truth

The double-edged nature of the truth is a major theme in this novel. There are two clear instances in the novel where the characters learn that the truth can both be helpful and be hurtful. The first, and most obvious, came when Angela's ranting letter was accidentally sent to her entire Christmas mailing list. The second came when Genevieve lost her job for gossiping about an actress for whom she worked.

Because Angela was having difficulty beginning her traditional positive Christmas letter to her friends and family she decided to take her friend Joan's advice and tell the truth. She vented all the frustrations she was feeling about her changing family, the mistakes she felt they were making and the things she felt they should be doing differently. Angela meant to erase the letter but her husband sent it believing he was helping her. Angela dreaded her family reading the letter but Joan told her it was important that her family be aware of how she was feeling. When her family first read the letter, they were understandably upset. As time passed, however, most of them began to see the ways in which their mother had actually told the truth about them in the letter. Because they recognized their faults and owned them, they were able to make a change.

Genevieve was also a character who learned first hand that truth could both be hurtful and be helpful. She had shared gossip about an actress to a man who turned out to be a gossip columnist. Genevieve learned that the actress had demanded the person responsible for the spread of the stories about her either be fired or she would quit her work at the film. Genevieve knew that if the actress stopped the production thousands of dollars would be lost and many people would be out of work because of her. Genevieve knew that in order for her to fix what she'd done, she would have to tell the truth and confess. When she told the movie director that she was the one who had leaked the actress' secrets, Genevieve was fired but the other employees at the movie set got to keep their jobs.

Another aspect of telling the truth that is explored in the novel is the fine line between telling the truth and gossiping. Lindy chastised Genevieve when she heard her sister gossiping at the woolshed party about an actress. Genevieve told Lindy she didn't think what she was doing was considered gossiping because she was telling the truth. Later when Genevieve tried to start a gossip website Victoria shot down all of the information that Genevieve wanted to put on the website saying that it was too personal to share even if the information might have been the truth.

## Coping Mechanisms

As the story progresses, all of the immediate members of the Gillespie family engage in some sort of coping mechanism to help them deal with troubles. These coping





mechanisms range from imaginary friends to overeating. Whatever the case, these mechanisms were intended to help the person deal with their stress.

Angela Gillespie, the main character of the novel, created an intricate fantasy about a perfect life with her old childhood sweetheart as her husband and an imaginary daughter. Angela would immerse herself into thinking about this family every time she became too stressed in her real life. Angela's use of this coping mechanism was particularly significant because when she lost her memory after her car wreck, she believed her fantasy life was her real life.

Nick Gillespie coped with his disappointment in himself and his financial troubles by delving into research about his genealogy and planning a family reunion. Nick's doctor actually suggested Nick research his family tree in order to keep his mind active and relieve his depression. The doctor probably did not expect Nick to get as involved in his research as he actually did. Nick's coping mechanism actually caused more troubles for him when he was scammed out of a good deal of money by a woman who claimed to be helping him do his research.

Ig, the youngest of the Gillespie children, coped with his loneliness by inventing an imaginary friend. It was ironic that Angela was frustrated with her son for having this imaginary friend because she had her own imaginary family. Ig was fairly laid back about Robbie until his mother was hurt in a car wreck. While she was in the hospital in a coma Ig almost became combative when Genevieve asked him to not talk about Robbie in the waiting room. After her incident with Mr. Radio, Victoria developed her own coping mechanism. She'd begun to gain weight because Mr. Radio said he liked women with curves. After she was fired, her eating seemed to become more about comfort than pleasing her lover. Although she'd thought about starting to exercise and eat less, Victoria always managed to find reason to wait until later to get into better shape.

Lindy seemed to use her emotions and other people's approval as her coping mechanism. When her mother was in a coma, Lindy was overjoyed when Richard sent her a message asking if he could see her. Genevieve's coping mechanism of choice seemed to be that of taking charge of a situation and getting things done. Because she was so nonsense, Genevieve would get frustrated with the other members of her family when they did retreat into their coping mechanisms because she believed they were hiding from reality.

## Perceptions

The idea that things aren't always as they appear is an important theme in the novel. People often put on a show to make people perceive them differently than their true natures. In this story there are two instances in which the perception of something turns out to be different from its reality. Also in the novel the Gillespie family's perceptions of Angela were turned upside down when Angela lost her memory and had to be treated as a guest instead of the mother of the family.



The annual Christmas letter was a major instance in which the way the Gillespie family was portrayed in the letter wasn't always the whole truth. Angela noted she tried to keep her Christmas letters positive. For this reason she didn't include much of the bad things that happened to the family throughout the year. The thirty-third letter that Angela wrote, however, she decided to tell the truth about her family and their situation. Angela hadn't meant to send the letter, but forgot to erase it in the excitement when Ig cut off part of his finger. Nick found the letter and sent it without reading it, thinking that was what his wife would have wanted him to do.

Although the letter showed the Gillespie family in a light they'd never been seen before many people contacted Angela offering her support and help for the problems she wrote about in her letter. Angela's family was embarrassed by the way they'd been portrayed, but probably never stopped to think that even though it wasn't always pointed out in such a clear way, people often saw through the fake happiness of a Christmas letter. No family was as perfect as it appeared in these annual letters.

Another important instance where perspective is important in the novel is seen in the relationship between Lindy and Jane. Jane bullied and belittled Lindy while the two girls were in school together. Lindy had always thought this was because Jane was better than she. It was Richard who pointed out the insecurities that he saw in Jane when he asked Lindy how long Jane had been jealous of her. From Richard's point of view Jane was critical of Lindy because Jane felt insecure around Lindy.

## Communication

Communication is an important secondary theme in the novel as many of the problems faced by the characters could have been avoided if they had communicated with each other. Nick and Angela's problems could have been solved by communication. Similarly, if Nick had shared his financial challenges with his neighbors sooner, he might not have had to sign the lease with the mining company.

Angela made the point about the importance of communication in her ranting Christmas letter that if her family members — in this particular case it was Lindy of whom she was speaking — who wouldn't talk to her about their problems, so there wasn't much she could do to help them solve those problems. This seems to be an underlying theme that winds its way through the entire novel. As a family, each member is responsible for keeping the conversation going in order to keep disagreements and misunderstandings to a minimum.

When Nick followed in his father's footsteps and decided not to talk to Angela about the financial matters of the sheep station he began the problem that came to a head during the story. Had Angela known about the financial situation of the station, she would have understood the cause of her husband's stress. As it was, however, she could only assume the worst.



# Styles

## Point of View

The novel is told from the third person point of view of an omniscient narrator. This third person point of view is important in this novel because the development of the characters is just as important to the story as the plot itself. If the story were told from the point of view of any one particular character instead of an all knowing narrator, the other characters would not have been developed as fully and completely as they are. The use of an omniscient narrator allows the reader to have insight into the thoughts and emotions of all the characters. The reader also gets to observe the interactions between the characters without any of the bias that might have been apparent if just one character had narrated the story or if any one character's viewpoint was followed more closely than that of the other characters.

The story is told through both dialogue and exposition. A good deal of description of the landscape in Australia as well as that in Ireland and London is given through exposition. Parts of the story told through the thoughts of each character are also presented in exposition. The characters also interact with each other through dialogue, direct speech to one another. Email is another form of communication used often in the novel. The family's Christmas letter was sent as an email. Angela received a variety of email responses from the letter. Each time information included in the novel that was in the form of an email, that text is indented from the other paragraphs to set it apart.

## Language and Meaning

Since this novel is set in Australia there are some terms used often in Australian speech not familiar to some American readers. For instance, an apartment is called a flat. The "cubby" that Ig built was a sort of playhouse. The children also refer to their mother as "Mum" a variation of Mom. After Angela's car wreck she was operated on in the operating theater, another term for an operating room. The description of the Australian outback and its comparison with London is almost as interesting as the story line as the descriptions give the reader a sense of what life in the outback must be like with no cell service, distant neighbors and no close proximity to schools, hospitals or stores.

Another aspect of the language used in this novel is the specialized language used in describing Angela's medical condition. The author went into detail about Angela's injuries and described to the reader, just as the doctor might have described to the family, what parts of her body had been injured and how it might affect her. The author used medical terms like defibrillator when Angela's heart had to be shocked and gave medical names for the lobes of Angela's brain that had been damaged by her loss of blood.



## Structure

This 615-page novel is divided into 57 chapters plus an epilogue. The story covers about a one-year block of time in the life of the Gillespie family. The action begins on Dec. 1 of one year and ends about Dec. 1 of the following year. The story occurs in a linear fashion. The only flashbacks come in the thoughts of the characters as they think back over their pasts. Just as life in a family is complex, the plot of this story is complex and includes a variety of different subplots. The main plot of the story is the way the family dealt with the reaction to Angela's ranting Christmas letter and the way her past Christmas letters helped Angela to regain her memory and place in the family. Subplots include Ig's imaginary friend, the love lives of the three girls, the family's relationship with Celia, and the friction between Angela and Nick.



## Quotes

She secretly thought of them as historical documents. All the facts of their lives were there, after all, recorded in brief dispatches.

-- Narrator (Chapter 1 paragraph 5)

**Importance:** Angela's idea that her Christmas letters were historical documents became ironic, as it was these letters, filled with facts about her family that would later help her to remember her family.

She thought of all her Christmas letters over the decades. All those bright, happy letters, putting the best possible spin on their lives, making it sound as though the Gillespies were the luckiest, loveliest, most successful, well-balanced, supportive family in all Australia, and possibly even the world. She had always skipped over any troubles. Avoided mention of any tensions. Edited out any sticky subjects. It had felt like the right thing to do, even if she knew they sometimes sounded too good to be true."

-- Narrator (Chapter 1 paragraph 33)

**Importance:** Angela realized her past Christmas letters had made her family sound like it was better than it actually was because she put such a positive spin on their news. For her thirty-third letter, she had trouble coming up with positive things to write about as she was overcome with troubles and worry.

Oh, shush," Angela thought as they walked back to the line with another basket. "You ran home the second you got into financial trouble, didn't you?"

-- Narrator (Chapter 6 paragraph 49)

**Importance:** Angela believed she was only thinking to herself that she wished Lindy would stop complaining about her other sisters coming home because they were having financial difficulties when Lindy had done the same thing, but in reality, she had voiced her opinion out loud.

Angela, it didn't just go to me. It looks like it went to everyone you know.

-- Joan (Chapter 7 paragraph 25)

**Importance:** When Joan called Angela to talk to her about her letter, she informed Angela the letter had gone to more than 100 different people.

You're my oldest friend. Usually I loathe them. They're nothing but smug lie recitals, in my experience. At least you told the truth this time. It is all the truth, I gather?"

-- Joan (Chapter 7 paragraph 38)

**Importance:** Even though Angela was mortified that she had sent out her truthful letter, Joan applauded Angela for actually telling the truth about her family in her letter.



What had she been thinking when she wrote this? It read as if she regretted them all, as if she wished away her entire life here in favor of a different life. As if she hated Australia and wished she were back living in London. And she didn't. Did she?"

-- Narrator (Chapter 7 paragraph 141)

**Importance:** When Angela read back over the letter she had written and accidentally sent, she realized it sounded like she disliked her family and wished she were somewhere else. More surprising was that Angela actually wondered if she really did want to be someone else.

He knew he'd let himself down. Let Angela down. The kids. Not just his own family. His ancestors. He'd always been conscious this was a fourth-generation property. It was on the homestead gatepost, under the Errigal nameplate, 'Established 1887'."

-- Narrator (Chapter 8 paragraph 10)

**Importance:** Nick admitted to himself that he had not talked to Angela about the problems the family was having because he was ashamed of himself. He believed he had failed at keeping the station running that had been started four generations earlier by his ancestors.

It was like winning the lottery. Or was it more like a pact with the devil?"

-- Narrator (Chapter 8 paragraph 32)

**Importance:** Although the money offered to him by the mining company had allowed his family to get out of debt, Nick wondered if the results of the mining and the destruction it might do to the landscape would make him regret his decision.

He hoped that going away together might help bring them back together. Help her to forgive him for the mess he'd made of the station.

-- Narrator (Chapter 8 paragraph 53)

**Importance:** Even though he hadn't told Angela about the trip yet, he hoped that by taking her on his reconnaissance trip to Ireland that they would be able to begin to mend their relationship.

In the past twenty-four hours, she'd received forty new e-mails about her Christmas letter. They varied between concern or amazement about the mining lease to sympathy and amusement about her other troubles.

-- Narrator (Chapter 12 paragraph 3)

**Importance:** Angela was overwhelmed by the reactions she received from the people who had received her ranting Christmas letter.

He looked up at her. She was shocked at his expression. He wasn't angry. He looked desolate."

-- Narrator (Chapter 12 paragraph 47)



**Importance:** Angela had thought Nick would be angry when he read her letter but was surprised to see he looked grieved, almost as if he felt he had been abandoned by her.

She didn't allow herself to dwell on the fact that during the entire four-hour journey, they hadn't asked her one question about herself."

-- Narrator (Chapter 13 paragraph 79)

**Importance:** Angela was happy to see her two oldest daughters and enjoyed picking them up at the airport. She noticed even though they filled her in on all their news and even asked for updates on the other family members, they never asked anything about her.

As if Mum and Dad will ever split up. I've never known a couple so in love. It's sickening. Scarring too. How can I ever measure up to their example?"

-- Genevieve (Chapter 14 paragraph 43)

**Importance:** The children had always believed their parents had the perfect marriage. When they realized the truth, that their parents were having trouble, they didn't seem to know how to process that information.

Oh, stop being such a drama queen, Lindy,' Genevieve called after her. 'Hold on. If Mum was right about Lindy — '"

-- Genevieve (Chapter 15 paragraph 52)

**Importance:** After Genevieve realized that she agreed with her mother's assessment of Lindy in her Christmas letter, Genevieve wondered if what her mother had said about her was just as true.

Not quite as elaborate as yours, no. But what woman hasn't sometimes wished she was someone else? Or wondered how her life could have been different, if she'd made other choices?"

-- Joan (Chapter 16 paragraph 40)

**Importance:** Joan assured Angela that everyone, even she, had a fantasy life even though most weren't as detailed as Angela's.

At least your mother told the truth in that letter. How often does that happen these days? I say, stand up, be proud, get the gossip out of the way and then give your neighbors a party they'll never forget."

-- Joan (Chapter 17 paragraph 13)

**Importance:** When Joan tried to reconcile the Gillespie family, she lectured them for not appreciating their mother's truthfulness. She advised the family to stand together and find a way to get ahead of the community's gossip.

And now, when he most needs your support, what do you do? Embarrass him with that letter of yours. You should be ashamed of yourself."





-- Celia (Chapter 18 paragraph 117)

**Importance:** Celia had always been critical of Angela. She was no less so with Angela's Christmas letter. In this instance, she actually told Angela to her face that she didn't believe that Angela was the best choice as a wife for Nick.

In the meantime, Angela did what she'd always done when everyone was home. She cooked, cleaned, did the washing, swept the veranda, did more cooking and more cleaning. Not for the first time, she realized it took less work to look after her visitors than it did her own family. Her station stay visitors were much more appreciative too, willing to lend a hand as needed."

-- Narrator (Chapter 21 paragraph 47)

**Importance:** When all of her children moved back home Angela thought of the way her station stay guests were more appreciative and more willing to lend a helping hand than her own children were. She fell back into the routine of doing all the cleaning and cooking while her children relaxed.

Thirty-three years on, she couldn't let it die now. It didn't take much to draw parallels with her marriage."

-- Narrator (Chapter 23 paragraph 4)

**Importance:** In this quote, Angela drew a parallel between the rosebush that her husband had given her the first year of the marriage with their actual marriage. Angela did not want the rosebush to die of neglect. Neither did she want her marriage to die.

She'd imagined her alternative life, but she hadn't imagined Nick's. What would his life have been like if he hadn't walked into her pub that night? Who would he have ended up marrying?"

-- Narrator (Chapter 25 paragraph 31)

**Importance:** As Angela drove to her specialist's appointment in Adelaide she thought about her letter from a different perspective. Just as she had a fantasy life and wondered what might have happened to her had she made different choices, she wondered what life might have been like for Nick, who he might have married if they had never met.

She could do anything she wanted and no one was going to interrupt her, ask anything of her, be angry with her, judge her or ignore her."

-- Narrator (Chapter 25 paragraph 90)

**Importance:** At her hotel in Adelaide, Angela enjoyed peace and freedom for the first time in a long time.

All those things she said about you and me, not to mention her own children. If it doesn't turn out to be some kind of mental illness she has, the alternative is just as bad, really, isn't it?"





-- Celia (Chapter 26 paragraph 16)

**Importance:** Celia degraded Angela when she approached Nick about the letter that his wife had written. Instead of being accepting of her ideas Nick informed Celia that Angela was his wife, a simple and respectful way of telling her Angela's mental state and his marriage were none of her business.

That's what it looks like. She goes to a lot of trouble to put you down. Why does she do that? Because she's threatened by you."

-- Richard (Chapter 28 paragraph 58)

**Importance:** Richard interpreted Jane's bullying of Lindy in a different way. He saw that Jane was actually jealous of Lindy while Lindy believed Jane though she was better than Lindy.

Angela Gillespie? The Angela part was right, but that wasn't her surname. Her name was Angela Richardson. They must have found someone else's handbag.

-- Narrator (Chapter 29 paragraph 36)

**Importance:** When Angela was conscious briefly when she first arrived at the hospital she was confused because the hospital staff believed she was Angela Gillespie. Angela's mind, however, believed she was Angela Richardson and was married to Will, as she was in her fantasy life.

You think none of us noticed what was going on with you two? That big freeze? We all read her Christmas letter, Dad. We all felt hurt. But we got over it. Can't you?"

-- Genevieve (Chapter 31 paragraph 74)

**Importance:** After Angela's car accident Genevieve lectured her father about his inability to get over the upset he felt because of the way he was portrayed in Angela's Christmas letter. Genevieve pointed out the kids had even recovered after their unattractive portrayals and wondered what was wrong that he couldn't do that as well.

Something's wrong with her, Dad. It's not just the headaches. She's unhappy. Victoria and I noticed it as soon as we saw her at the airport. We think she's lonely. Depressed, even. It's all right for you; you've got a hobby, a new obsession, but what about her? What was she supposed to do day after day, night after night, while you were locked in the office, doing your research, flirting with your precious Carol—"

-- Genevieve (Chapter 31 paragraph 82)

**Importance:** Genevieve believed her father had been spending so much time involved in his family tree research and communication with Carol that he hadn't even bothered to notice that Angela not only was having terrible headaches but also that she seemed depressed.

Our brains don't like it when there's nothing going on. We all need a personality, a story about ourselves. That's what our mind is made of, thousands and thousands of



snapshots, memories, thoughts that tell us every second of our day who we are, what we are doing, what we want and need. In Angela's case, that knowledge, that memory of her real life, has been affected. So she is doing what we call confabulating.

-- Ruth Morgan (Chapter 36 paragraph 25)

**Importance:** Ruth Morgan, the hospital's neuropsychologist, explained that Angela's brain was making up a story about her past to fill in the parts of her memory that was missing. In Angela's case, she believed the fantasy life she had created as a coping mechanism was her real life.

The idea of a fantasy life, of retreating to your imagination to soothe or to calm, is perfectly normal. We all do it to some extent, especially when real life is a bit tough or times are hard.

-- Ruth Morgan (Chapter 36 paragraph 53)

**Importance:** After Angela's children let Ruth read the Christmas letter she told them, just as Joan had told Angela, that there was nothing wrong with Angela having a fantasy life.

This New Angela looked like his wife. Sounded like his wife. Smiled and laughed like his wife. But everything she said was tearing into him. She kept talking about this Will. About Lexie. London. Asking him the same questions about the station, the names of his children.

-- Narrator (Chapter 39 paragraph 57)

**Importance:** Nick was more upset than he let his children believe than he was about Angela's inability to remember him and their children. He was also upset by hearing her talk about Will and Lexie like they were her real family.

Change the radio station. Don't listen to the bad thoughts.

-- Jim (Chapter 39 paragraph 60)

**Importance:** Nick's psychologist taught him how to change his pattern of thinking when he realized he was becoming depressed or degrading himself. Even though Nick tried to take this advice when it came to Angela and her memory loss, he struggled with his inability to think positively about that situation.

It hit Genevieve then. This wasn't just a joke. This wasn't a game of pretend. She was talking to her mother, but her mother had no idea who she was.

-- Narrator (Chapter 39 paragraph 130)

**Importance:** It was after Genevieve made plans to cut Angela's hair that it really hit her that her mother had no idea who she was.

She stopped herself there. Good God, she thought. She was like a teenager with a crush. The sooner Will got here, the better."

-- Narrator (Chapter 41 paragraph 113)



**Importance:** Even though Angela thought she was married to Will, she began fantasizing about Nick. The situation was opposite what was happening in real life. In her real life Angela was married to Nick and was fantasizing about Will.

He checked the e-mail. It wasn't a Dublin bank account. It was a UK one. On Jersey, the island. An offshore tax haven.

-- Narrator (Chapter 44 paragraph 37)

**Importance:** When Carol didn't meet him at the airport and he couldn't get in touch with her by phone or email, Nick began to realize he had been conned. When he checked the bank account to which he'd been sending the money he'd been paying Carol, he learned it was an offshore tax haven, not a legitimate Dublin bank account.

Was that just what life was like when you were a mother? You were so busy with your children you didn't have time for your children? She felt a lurch inside her. Not the baby kicking; it was too early for that. But the realization. She was going to be a mother. She was going to have a son or a daughter. By the end of the year."

-- Narrator (Chapter 45 paragraph 96)

**Importance:** When Victoria thought about how different the old Angela was from the new Angela, she wondered if all mothers were like her mother, too busy cleaning up after and taking care of everyone to ever really have the time to spend with their families.

After the drama with that rose song the evening before, she'd decided that this had all gone on long enough.

-- Narrator (Chapter 50 paragraph 23)

**Importance:** On a whim, Celia decided to give Angela the copies of the Christmas letters that Angela had written over the years. She did not consult with any of the other Gillespies, but decided that the letters would be a good way to jump-start Celia's memory.

In more than thirty years of writing about her family. Year after year, Celia had looked for even a passing mention of herself. It was never there. The written — the unwritten — proof of how little regard Angela had for her.

-- Narrator (Chapter 50 paragraph 29)

**Importance:** Just like everyone else had his own opinion of Angela's letters, Celia was hurt by how rarely her name had appeared in Angela's letters. She believed this was proof of how little regard Angela had for her.

Why had that felt so familiar? Why did this seem to keep happening to her? Doing something and feeling like she'd done it before.

-- Narrator (Chapter 51 paragraph 31)



**Importance:** The more time Angela spent with her own family, the more the everyday things she had done for them everyday began to feel more and more familiar to her, as if she had done those things before even though she still didn't remember that she was Nick's wife and the mother to the four children who lived at Errigal. This feeling was particularly strong when she tucked Ig into bed one night.

The letters read as if the Gillespies were some kind of cross between the Waltons and the von Trapps.

-- Narrator (Chapter 55 paragraph 46)

**Importance:** Even when Angela read the Christmas letters from the viewpoint of an outsider, she realized how unbelievably perfect her family seemed.

Real estate Web sites." She paused. "I'm trying to find houses to rent by the sea in Adelaide."

-- Angela (Chapter 55 paragraph 81)

**Importance:** Nick came up behind Angela after she had finally read his email to her, the one he'd written before she'd had her accident. Angela let him know that she knew who she was by telling him she was looking for rental houses by the sea in Adelaide. A house like this for them was something Nick had mentioned in his email to her.

Nick, if I'd known anything about how you were feeling, I'd never have written that. I wouldn't have needed to. I would have understood. Like I understand now. I just needed you to tell me. To talk to me."

-- Angela (Chapter 56 paragraph 38)

**Importance:** Angela told Nick once she understood the problems with which he was struggling she no longer thought of him in the way she had described in the letter she had written. If he'd talked to her about his problems, she would never have voiced her frustrations in the way that she did.