

The Husband's Secret Study Guide

The Husband's Secret by Liane Moriarty

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Plot Summary

The Husband's Secret by Liane Moriarty is a modern day take on the story of Pandora and her box. It details the lives of three women who are impacted by the murder of a teen girl that happened nearly thirty years ago. The end of the novel includes an ironic twist as author Moriarty shows how tiny decisions can change the scope of dozens of lives.

Cecilia Fitzpatrick thinks that she has her life under control. Her illusion is shattered when she finds a letter written to her by her husband John-Paul. Her husband had intended for the letter to be read in the event of his death. Though Cecilia doesn't open the letter immediately, she reads it eventually. In the letter, her husband confesses to the murder of a teenager named Janie Crowley. Cecilia decides not to turn her husband in because doing so will hurt her family. This decision leaves Cecilia questioning her own moral character. She also struggles to reconcile that John-Paul is a murderer, not the upstanding man who was a good husband and father.

Meanwhile, Rachel Crowley, mother of the murder victim, deals with another blow as she learns her son and daughter-in-law will be moving to another country. They will be taking their son Jacob, who is Rachel's beloved grandson. After her daughter's murder and the deaths of her husband and parents, Jacob has been Rachel's reason for living.

Browsing through some videotapes one night, Rachel finds a tape of her daughter and Connor Whitby together. She believes the video is incriminating evidence that Connor was responsible for Janie's death; however, the police don't seem to agree. Rachel is outraged that the authorities don't take the evidence seriously. In a split-second decision, Rachel decides to take matters into her own hands. When she sees Connor crossing the road, she hits the accelerator on her car. Instead of hitting Connor, however, she hits young Polly Fitzpatrick who has ridden her bike into the street trying to get Connor's attention. Though Polly survives, she is seriously injured. Ironically, it was John-Paul, Polly's father, who had admitted in the letter that he had killed Janie. Now, Janie's mother has unintentionally injured his daughter.

Cecilia tells Rachel it was John-Paul, not Connor, who was responsible for Janie's death. John-Paul is left with the guilt of his daughter's injury. If he had confessed to the murder of Janie Crowley, Rachel would have never gone after Connor. Polly would not be facing life as an amputee.

The novel's three stories are intertwined in many ways. While timing plays a significant role in the characters' lives, it is the guilt that is carried within each that determines their ultimate fate.



Chapters 1-2

Summary

In Chapter One, Cecilia Fitzpatrick, one of the main characters, is looking for her piece of the Berlin Wall in her attic when she finds a letter written to her by John-Paul, her husband. He had labeled the letter to be read after his death. Since her husband is still alive, Cecilia debates whether or not she should open it. Although Cecilia is known for her perfectly organized life, her daughter's activities, and wonderful dinners, the letter takes away her focus. She recalls seeing a little boy hit by a car and killed a year ago. She believes the experience has made her more aware of how quickly one's life can become abnormal.

When she was twenty years old, Cecilia had visited the Berlin Wall. Now, she tries to remember some details about the visit for her 10-year-old daughter who is suddenly interested in the Berlin Wall. It was while looking for this piece of history that she happened to find the letter. She wonders how she would have found the letter had John-Paul actually died. She talks to John-Paul and tells him that she has found the letter and has read its label. At first, her announcement is met with dead silence.

In Chapter Two, Tess Curtis, another main character is introduced. Tess believes that her husband Will and cousin Felicity are joking with her when they tell her they've fallen in love with each other. They try to soften the news by saying that they have not had sex yet. Felicity and Tess had been friends their entire lives. Tess had been thrilled when her cousin had lost weight, believing she would finally meet someone nice; but, she didn't intend for that person to be her own husband. Although Tess believes she has social anxiety, she has served as the account executive for the company that she, Will, and Felicity run. She decides to take her son Liam to stay with her mother, who has just broken her ankle. She is determined, however, to keep Liam from suffering through his parents' divorce as she did when she was a child.

Analysis

Two of the novel's main characters, Cecilia and Tess, are introduced in these first two chapters. The ladies are completely opposite from each other. Cecilia is the massively organized mother of three girls. She sells Tupperware and works at her children's school. She keeps a spotless house and raises her children as best she can. Cecilia, however, has found a letter, written to her by her husband. The letter indicates it should be opened only in the event of his death. Cecilia feels disturbed by the letter because she is unsure if she should open it or not. She finds herself distracted and unfocused. Her husband's odd reaction when she asks him about the letter makes Cecilia even more curious about the letter.



Tess, on the other hand, believes that she has social anxiety. Her anxiety does not improve when her husband and cousin tell her they have fallen in love with one another. Although Felicity, her cousin, had always shared her life, Tess did not expect her to try to share her husband as well. Will and Felicity suggest that they all continue to live in the same house together. Tess, however, takes her son to Sydney where they will stay with her mother.

Discussion Question 1

If you found a letter such as the one Cecilia found, do you think you would open it? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 2

Compare and contrast Tess and Cecilia. In what ways are their situations similar? How are they different?

Discussion Question 3

Why is it so important to Tess that she and Will not get a divorce?

Vocabulary

decisive, ethical, presumably, meticulous, gullibility, anecdotes, decipher, intoned, flippant, rueful, tyrant, empathetic, negligible, covert, imploringly, staidly, innocuous, farcical, banal, sordid



Chapters 3-4

Summary

In Chapter Three, instead of hearing that she will be having another grandchild, Rachel is disappointed to learn her son and his wife are moving to America. They will be taking Jacob, her only grandson, away from her. She tries to be the perfect mother-in-law but believes it is all for nothing as she will lose Jacob. Rachel feels as if Jacob has been responsible for bringing her life back to her. As Rob and Lauren encourage her to come see them, Rachel wonders if her life might have been different if it hadn't been for a certain dividing date, April 6, 1984, in her life. When Rob goes to change Jacob's diaper, Lauren mentions to Rachel that she realizes the anniversary is coming up soon. Rachel tries to indicate to Lauren she doesn't want to talk by becoming chilly. Lauren mentions she knows that Rachel goes to the park; but, Rachel tells her she doesn't want to talk about it. Lauren tries to reach out to Rachel, telling her she knows how much she will miss Jacob. Rachel pushes her away and tells her that Jacob needs a haircut.

In Chapter Four, John-Paul asks Cecilia not to open the letter. He tells her he wrote it just after Isabel was born out of emotion. He claims what he wrote about might be embarrassing to him now. Polly takes the phone from her telling her she needs to talk to her father urgently. Cecilia looks at the letter. She glances at Esther's book about the Berlin Wall and reads the story of a teenaged boy who was the first to die when he tried to climb over the wall. She reads how it took the boy nearly an hour to bleed to death. Cecilia believes that if she were there, she would have done something. Then she reconsiders, thinking that she will never be tested and never have the chance to know what she might do on in that situation. Polly comes to her mother, telling her that she told her father the secret that she'd invited her physical education teacher to her party. Polly leaves, and Cecilia looks at the letter again. She is pretty sure that John-Paul was lying about his reasons for not wanting her to read the letter.

Analysis

It appears that periods of testing and the way people act in these periods of testing will be a theme in this novel. Cecilia thinks about what she might have done if she were near the Berlin Wall when the first boy who tried to climb it was shot. She believes she would have done something; but, then realizes that in that situation where she could actually be killed, she might not act as she believes she would. Cecilia believes that she will never have to opportunity to see how she might act if she were truly tested. At this point, her concentration is taken up by the letter she has found. John-Paul has insisted that she not open the letter. He makes the excuse that he wrote the letter several years ago when their oldest was first born. Cecilia feels that her husband is lying, but now that she has promised her husband she won't open the letter, she feels as if she shouldn't do so.



Another main character introduced in this section of the novel has apparently gone through a very painful time of testing in her life. She indicates that there is a dividing line in her life on a day in April of 1984. Lauren indicates the anniversary of the supposed tragedy is coming up. She tries to comfort her mother-in-law, but Rachel is already offended because the family is moving to New York. She believes that once Rob and Lauren leave with Jacob, her life will fall apart again. At this point, it is known only that Rachel's husband has died. It is unsure what the great tragedy in Rachel's life has been.

So far in this novel, three different story lines seem to have been introduced with very little to link them together. The television show "The Biggest Loser" is one – that occurs in both Cecilia's story and Rachel's story. Although there really isn't any reference to "The Biggest Loser" in Tess' story, her cousin Felicity is, in a way, a biggest loser as she has lost a good deal of weight.

Discussion Question 1

Why do you think that John-Paul is lying about the letter?

Discussion Question 2

What do you think the tragedy was that Rachel has faced?

Discussion Question 3

In what aspects are the three main characters in the story – Cecilia, Tess, and Rachel – facing similar situations? What differences are there in the positions in which they find themselves?

Vocabulary

meticulous, cloying, penance, querulous, contrite, anomaly



Chapters 5-7

Summary

In Chapter Five, Liam and Tess arrive at her mother's house after dark. It takes a while for her mother to get to the door. As she waits, Tess wonders if coming to her mother's house on such short notice was a bad idea. When her mother does get to the door, she asks Tess what has happened. As soon as Tess starts to tell her, her mother guesses that it is Felicity who is having an affair with Will.

A brief snippet tells of the way that Ed proposed to Rachel. After her day with Rob, Lauren, and Jacob, Rachel is in bed eating the macaroons Lauren gave to her. They bring Janie to mind. She feels immediate pain. She calms herself, knowing she has been in that pain and that position before. She tries to sleep. She can't; so, she gets a photo album, looking at pictures of Janie. There is a picture of Janie with a boy that seems to make Rachel angry.

Chapter Six is a flashback which took place on April 6, 1984. Janie had taken her birth control pills which her parents know nothing about. Janie would die in eight hours.

In Chapter Seven, Cecilia thinks about sex during Sister Ursula's funeral. She suddenly realizes how strange it is that she and John-Paul have not had sex in six months. John-Paul has not seemed interested. She wonders briefly if John-Paul is having an affair. Then, she realizes he does not have the organizational skills to handle an affair or bigamy. She then wonders if John-Paul might be gay. She quickly realizes he can't be gay.

Analysis

The stories of the three women continue to develop separately. These stories continue to be loosely tied together by snippets from the television show "The Biggest Loser" and the Berlin Wall. Rachel's connection to the wall is described in a brief mention about newspapers reporting that Germans are fleeing in fear of a wall being built on the day that Ed proposes to Rachel.

Meanwhile, the reader learns that Janie has died. It is assumed that she died in some violent way by the way that her mother still has so much pain so many years after her daughter's death. In Chapter Six, some details of Janie's actions on the day of her death are given. She is taking birth control, which her parents don't know about, in preparation for her first sexual encounter. She seems to treat the subject of losing her virginity as a job for which she has "interviewed" applicants. She plans to inform the successful candidate that day. The chapter details what Janie might have done had she not died that day. It is also mentioned that Janie's feelings were hurt because she felt her mother has been slightly neglectful of her recently.



Meanwhile, Cecilia struggles with what John-Paul's strange letter might say. It is during the funeral of a nun that she has time to think about the lack of sex in their relationship. She wonders briefly if John-Paul is gay. She quickly realizes he is not even effeminate. She doubts he has the organizational skills to cover up a girlfriend or second marriage. She can find no reason why he has suddenly seemed to have lost interest in sex.

Discussion Question 1

Why is Cecilia so concerned that she and John-Paul have not had sex recently? What does this signify?

Discussion Question 2

What does the Berlin Wall symbolize?

Discussion Question 3

At this point in the novel, what do you think happened to Janie? Give reasons for your answer.

Vocabulary

myopically, piously, procurement, fete, debauched, banality, pristine, winsome, tantric, celibacy, amorous, liturgical, innate, effeminate



Chapters 8-9

Summary

In Chapter Eight, Lucy has made an appointment for Tess and Liam to visit St. Angela's. Tess knows it is because her mother is feeling badly for her and the way she has been treated. She wants to do something to help. Cecilia, who had attended Sister Ursula's funeral at the nearby church, sees them and walks over. Tess wants to run, but her mother says it is too late. Tess is overwhelmed and drained by Cecilia's outgoing personality. Cecilia invites them to Polly's pirate party, telling Liam they will be in the same class together. Cecilia mentions Rachel, and Lucy asks how the woman is doing. After Cecilia leaves, Lucy tells Tess that it was Rachel's daughter who was found with the rosary beads.

Rachel knows Tess and Lucy are thinking about Janie when they enroll Liam at St. Angela's. The principal, Trudy McDuff, comes into the office and turns her attention to Liam. She doesn't care for adults. She tells Liam about the Easter Egg hunt they'll be having the following day. After she leaves, Connor Whitby comes to pick up tennis camp forms. Rachel seems to think Connor has "eyes full of lies" as the police sergeant had said. Connor recognizes Tess and introduces himself.

On the way home from the school, Tess' father calls. The call is painful. He tells her he knows she's having trouble and that she should call if she needs him. He hangs up quickly. Tess' mother is critical of him.

In Chapter Nine, Esther tells her mother and Polly facts about the Berlin Wall as they ride to her speech therapy and Polly's dance class. In the midst of these facts, Polly tells her mother she no longer wants a pirate party. Cecilia insists on having the pirate party as she's already made plans and desperately wants to impress Tess. Cecilia snaps at the girls, then tells them she is just missing their father. Polly says that their father looks at Isabel in a strange way. This concerns Cecilia. After Polly gets out of the car, Esther tells her mother she doesn't think her father looks at Isabel funny but that she did catch him crying in the shower one day. Cecilia wonders if her husband is depressed. She remembers that he once tried to commit suicide. She had pressed him for reasons why, but he had never been able to give a satisfactory answer. Cecilia decides that when she gets home that night she has to read the letter.

Analysis

At the end of her distracted day, Cecilia decides she has an obligation to read John-Paul's letter. The more she has thought about and dissected his behavior, the more she is determined he is hiding something from her. She is even more determined when her daughters even report they've noticed their dad behaving oddly, crying in the shower and giving Isabel sad looks.



In Chapter Eight Tess and Cecilia meet one another. It is almost like two worlds colliding. Tess is overwhelmed with Cecilia's life, activity, personality, and the sheer amount of words that come out of her mouth. It is not until Chapter Nine that Cecilia admits to herself that she is just as intimidated by Tess. She gets the feeling that Tess has her life together and is almost offended by people like Cecilia.

As Cecilia thinks about Rachel's tragedy and the uncertainty surfacing in her life, she wonders if she wants a tragedy in her life. She thinks that, perhaps, she wants something that will make her feel as if she is not living an ordinary life. She thinks she does not want something terrible to happen in her life. She doesn't want a wall built in her town or a child killed; yet, it seems like these disasters are all around her.

Although it is not significant at the time, notice the flow of events. Tess had not intended to enroll Liam in school until after Easter. Trying to help, Lucy arranges a meeting at the school the day after Tess and Liam arrive in town. It is because of this meeting that Tess and Connor see one another in the school office. The story about Janie becomes more tangled as Rachel stiffens when Connor walks into the office. It is not specifically said that he had anything to do with Janie's death, but Rachel remembers the police sergeant saying he believed Connor had "lies in his eyes." That is all that Rachel needs to know to believe that Connor was somehow involved in Janie's death.

Discussion Question 1

Compare and contrast Cecilia and Tess.

Discussion Question 2

Do you think Cecilia is making the right decision in opening John-Paul's letter? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 3

In what ways do Cecilia's daughters make her even more suspicious of John-Paul's actions?

Vocabulary

irrevocable, recompense, vigilante, rampage, catatonic, impeccable, austere, impious, incantation, rhetorical, perceptible, abseil, enigmatic, elocution, lithe



Chapters 10-12

Summary

In Chapter Ten, Tess, Lucy, and Liam are reading when Mary knocks on the window. Tess' uncle Phil tells her he is ashamed of the way his daughter, Felicity, has acted. He takes Liam so Mary, Tess, and Lucy can talk. Mary tells Tess she doesn't believe Felicity had any intent for the affair to happen. Lucy is hateful to her sister. Tess thinks back about how well Felicity and Will had always gotten along together. Mary tells Tess that Phil hadn't wanted her to come. He was afraid she'd do more harm than good. However, Mary doesn't think that she can stand it if Tess and Felicity become estranged. Tess tells her that she may have to stand it.

In Chapter Eleven, Marla makes Rachel go to a Tupperware party, even though Rachel doesn't want to go. Thanks to the cocktails that Marla serves, Rachel enjoys the party more than she thought she would. By the end of the evening, Rachel had bought three hundred dollars worth of Tupperware and was a little drunk. Cecilia insists on driving Rachel home. On the way home, Rachel mentions to Cecilia that her Isabel reminds her of Janie. Cecilia mentions she has one memory of Janie.

In Chapter Twelve, Cecilia shares her memory of Janie comforting her after she tripped during a marching competition at school. Rachel mentions she should get out more and Cecilia suggests she bring Jacob to the pirate party. On her way home from dropping Rachel off, a cab pulls in front of Cecilia. To her surprise, it stops in front of her house. John-Paul gets out of the cab. He is home three days early. Cecilia is both happy to see him and frustrated because she will lose her chance to read the letter. She runs down the driveway to meet him.

Analysis

As her Aunt Mary tries to tell her that Felicity did not intend to fall in love with Will, Tess wonders if she should have noticed the attraction between Will and Felicity. She thinks to herself that she had always considered that both Felicity and Will adored her and they would never do anything to jeopardize that relationship. She recalls she had always felt better about herself because Felicity was so heavy. She'd never thought that Felicity's weight loss would have any negative affect on her life. Meanwhile, in her attempt to protect her daughter, Lucy responds to her sister's comments that Felicity had no choice in the matter in a sarcastic manner. Mary tries to deal with her pain that her daughter and her sister's daughter might never be friends again. She tells Tess she'd hoped she could make everything all right. In this case, circumstances are to the point no one can make them all right again.

Meanwhile, Cecilia tries to reach out to Rachel. She shares the one memory that she has of Janie though she is afraid the memory might be of no consequence to Rachel.



After she goes into her house, Cecilia wonders what sort of life Rachel has by herself with both her daughter and her husband dead. This follows the theme developing in the book of Cecilia's fascination with tragedy and the way people handle the tragedy in their lives.

Of interest in Chapter Twelve is John-Paul's arrival at home early. Cecilia thinks first that now she will not be able to read the letter. She is glad to see him home; but, at the same time, she is irritated with him and wonders why he's home so early.

Discussion Question 1

How is Cecilia's fascination with Rachel's tragedy similar to Esther's fascination with the Berlin Wall?

Discussion Question 2

Why do you think John-Paul is home early?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Mary seem so determined for Tess to believe Felicity had no choice in her act of falling in love with Will?

Vocabulary

hypothetical, coup



Chapters 13-16

Summary

In Chapter Thirteen, Felicity calls Tess. She moans about how terrible she and Will feel. She tries to chat with Tess like old times but makes Tess mad when she remembers Connor as being sinister. In the end of the conversation, Tess tells Felicity to have her affair with Will and get it out of her system. She won't allow her to break up her marriage for Liam's sake, Tess says.

In a flashback to 1977, Mary and Lucy both see on the news three teens are killed during protests about the Berlin Wall. The deaths make them cry. They agree they are having boys and hope they will be best friends. Lucy, however, says they'll more than likely not like each other.

In Chapter Fourteen, Rachel has chosen to take a bath but is now afraid she will fall getting out of the tub. She thinks about the fact she didn't even know Connor and Janie were friends until she was told Connor was the last person who saw Janie alive. Later, when Connor had gotten the job at St. Angela's he told her that he still thought about Janie.

She thinks about the day Janie died, blaming herself for being seven minutes late to pick Janie up for a doctor's appointment. When Rachel did get to the place where she was supposed to pick Janie up, she wasn't there. She'd waited ten minutes, then gone home and canceled the appointment. She doesn't worry until later when Rob asks where Janie is and Rachel notices how late it is.

She later learns from the police that no one saw Janie waiting on the corner. It was known only that she had gone to Connor's house to watch a video. She left his house saying she had something to do in another town. No one saw her after that until two boys found her body in Wattle Valley Park. There is no information or evidence to show who might have hurt her.

The reason Rachel was late was because she had been flirting with Toby Murphy. She feels now she betrayed Ed because he felt jealous of Toby. She remembers how much she enjoyed knowing that Toby was looking at her legs. She thinks of how much she misses Ed. She remembers how angry she was with him when he had a massive stroke. When she looks at herself in the mirror, she wonders how her aged face can result in so much adoration from Jacob. She pushes a candle Lauren gave her off the bathroom counter, causing it to break.

In Chapter Fifteen, Cecilia and John-Paul have sex. John-Paul tells Cecilia it was because he wanted sex that he came home early. Cecilia is just about to go to sleep when John-Paul asks her where she put the letter. She tells him she put it back in the attic. She wakes up in an empty bed and hears noises coming from the attic. John-Paul



suffers from severe claustrophobia and told Cecilia once he would only go up there if it were a case of life or death. She retrieves the letter from where she has stashed it in the office.

In Chapter Sixteen, as Tess lies in bed, she remembers her mother telling her she knew it was Will and Felicity who were causing problems for Tess because Felicity had never let Tess have anything to herself. She believes Felicity suffocated Tess and made her shy. Tess, however, sees Felicity as the one who kept her from being alone. She remembers how Felicity helped her through her parents' divorce. When she begins thinking about her own feelings about her parents' divorce and how a divorce might affect Liam, she decides she has to get out of the house. She doesn't even change out of her pajamas. She just gets in her mother's car and drives. Realizing the car is almost out of gas, Tess stops at a gas station. The only other person there is a man on a motorbike. The man on the bike says "Hello," but she doesn't recognize him. She wraps her arms around her as if to protect herself. The man identifies himself. It is Connor.

Analysis

As Rachel sits in the bath feeling sorry for herself for all the people she's lost, she remembers her guilt associated with Janie's death. She has blamed herself for years because she was seven minutes late picking Janie up for a doctor's appointment. She was late because she was flirting with a man who was admiring her legs. When Janie is not at the specified spot to be picked up, Rachel does not seem to be terribly concerned. In fact, it is much later and at the suggestion of Rob, her younger son, that Rachel even begins to worry that something might have happened to Janie.

Following the theme set up in the prologue of the novel, the mythology of Pandora's box, Janie missing her doctor's appointment has far reaching consequences. Her mother feels guilty not knowing if it were her fault Janie was killed because she was late. Rachel also believes she has been left alone without her parents or husband because they died of broken hearts. She feels she is being punished by being allowed to remain alive.

Meanwhile, Cecilia becomes more and more concerned about what might be in John-Paul's letter. He has tried to make it appear the letter is of no consequence. However, Cecilia knows that when he hurries home from America and goes to the attic despite his crippling claustrophobia, the letter contains something he really doesn't want her to find out about. While he is still in the attic, Cecilia rips open the letter, scanning it first to see it has something to do with a confession he is making to her.

Discussion Question 1

Why is it significant that Lucy believes her child and her sister's child would want to kill one another while Mary hopes they'll be best friends?



Discussion Question 2

How does Rachel's guilt figure into her grief about Janie's death?

Discussion Question 3

When Cecilia hears John-Paul rummaging in the attic for the letter, she knows he must have written something really important in it. At this point in the novel, do you have a theory about what is in the letter? What do you think it is and why?

Vocabulary

kryptonite, impassive, blithely, arbitrary, glandular, incorrigible, rankled, trite, emanating, cornices, bemused, heinous



Chapters 17-22

Summary

In Chapter Seventeen, Rachel wakes up after sleeping only a few hours. Knowing she won't be able to get back to sleep, she sets up the ironing board and searches for a video to watch. Rachel finds a video Janie had used to record "Sons and Daughters" and plays it. At the end of the show, Rachel is surprised to hear Janie's voice coming from the videotape. Janie and Connor are on the video. Rachel wonders why Janie was actually in Connor's bedroom. She is pretending to interview Connor. Rachel can tell he is smitten with Janie. She asks him if he has a girlfriend, a question Connor turns around on her. He gets angry when she tries to flirt with him. Rachel suddenly believes she has new evidence and calls Sergeant Bellach.

In Chapter Eighteen, Tess and Connor chat at the gas pump. Tess tries to remember how their relationship ended. He asks if she'd like to go for a coffee with him to catch up. Answering Rachel's fears, Connor tells her he knows she's married. He just wants them to catch up. Learning that Connor's sister, Lisa, has died, Tess agrees.

In Chapter Nineteen, John-Paul comes downstairs to find that Cecilia has read the letter. In the letter, he admits that it was he who killed Janie. She first asks if it is true, then how he could have left that admission for her to deal with. Their voices wake Polly, and she calls for her father. While he is out of the room, Cecilia tears up the letter and wonders what she can do to fix this situation. She realizes John-Paul must confess and that he will go to jail, even though he suffered with claustrophobia. She briefly believes he is evil; but when he returns, she realizes how difficult it will be to tell the girls what he did.

In Chapter Twenty, Rachel shows the video to Sergeant Bellach. While Rachel argues the video is proof of Connor's guilt, Bellach isn't convinced.

In Chapter Twenty-one, on the last day of her life, Janie sat next to Connor on the bus and told him there was something she needed to tell him.

In Chapter Twenty-two, the alarm wakes Cecilia at 6:30. The night before John-Paul had told her all the details of Janie's death. He says he was obsessed with Janie. He thought she was his girlfriend. The night of her death Janie had asked John-Paul to meet her at the park. She told him she had chosen another boy as her boyfriend and had laughed at him when he suggested he'd thought he was her boyfriend. He didn't think he'd had his hands around her neck long enough to kill her, but she was limp in his arms. Although he'd planned to confess if the police ever questioned him, he was never considered as a suspect. He tells Cecilia he fell in love with her goodness. She learns that when they lived on Bell Avenue when Isabel was a baby he would put off going to work so he didn't have to see Ed walking his dog and think about what he'd done to the family, not because he couldn't bear to leave the baby.



He'd stopped rowing and had stopped having sex because he decided to give up anything that gave him too much pleasure. He'd volunteered to do community service as if it were a sentence. As the girls had gotten older, John-Paul's guilt was becoming unbearable. For a time, he'd thought Isabel was beginning to look like Isabel. Cecilia struggles the following morning trying to decide how she feels about John-Paul when Polly jumps onto the bed between them. Cecilia knows that it is for the children that she must accept that John-Paul was not completely evil.

Analysis

Chapter Nineteen appears to be a turning point in the action of the novel. It is here that both Cecilia and the reader learn for certain who it was who killed Janie. It was John-Paul who was responsible for Janie's death, not Connor as Rachel believes. John-Paul killed Janie because she chose Connor as her boyfriend instead of him.

Notice John-Paul's belief that he had stopped himself in time, that he hadn't choked Janie long enough to kill her. He left her with his mother's rosary beads in Janie's hand. Keep in mind it was public knowledge that Janie was found with a set of rosary beads in her hands. It is in this section of the novel John-Paul tells Cecilia that it was his mother's rosary beads that he put in the girl's hand before he left her.

Cecilia is sickened by the things she learns about her husband after his confession. It was because of Janie that he tried to kill himself. It was because of Janie he stopped doing the things he enjoyed. It was because of his guilt about Janie's death that he volunteered for community service, not necessarily because he was community minded, as Cecilia had always thought. She struggles to reconcile the image of the loving man she'd always believed her husband was and the man who could commit such an evil act. Cecilia, who is a compulsive fixer, wonders how she can fix this horrible situation in which she has found herself involved.

Meanwhile, Rachel becomes more and more convinced that Connor is responsible for Janie's death. She happens upon a video Janie made of an "interview" with Connor. Janie flirts with Connor and strings him along, making believe she hasn't made up her mind if she likes him or not. Rachel, however, does not know that Janie chose Connor as her boyfriend. She believes that Connor's frustration with Janie's flirting is motive for her death. Rachel is so determined that Connor killed Janie that she gets frustrated with Sergeant Bellach when he tries to help her see the tape is not condemning evidence.

During a chance midnight meeting at a gas station, Tess and Connor make plans to get together to catch up. Tess begins to remember snippets of their relationship and the things they did while together. Also, she remembers it was with Connor that she had her first orgasm during sex.

Discussion Question 1

Does one act of violence mark one as evil for the remainder of his life? Why or why not?



Discussion Question 2

Do you believe the video that Rachel found of Janie and Connor proves that Connor is guilty of Janie's murder? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 3

When Connor tries to talk to Tess, she tries to remember how exactly their break up went. She comments that she was so caught up in herself as a shy teenager that she didn't pay much attention to the way her actions might have affected others. What does this say about Tess?

Vocabulary

maudlin, anorexia, reclusive, smitten, strident, petulance, preposterously, conclusive, valiantly, obtuse, fervent, modulation, rotunda, minuscule, vestige, besotted, debauchery, primal



Chapters 23-26

Summary

In Chapter Twenty-three, as Tess is walking Liam into the school, Liam tells his mother that he wants to go back home. The principal walks up to Liam just as he starts to cry. She distracts Liam by telling him his new teacher has turned their room into outer space for the Easter egg hunt. He goes with her. Tess is left feeling lost and wondering what she should say to Liam that night.

As Tess is walking back to her mother's house, Cecilia comes up beside her. Tess notices she's wearing shoes that don't match and acting oddly. She says she's forgotten Polly's gym shoes at home. Rachel walks up to them, mentioning the party and alcohol the night before as the reason she is walking. Tess wonders if anyone ever looks at Rachel without remembering her daughter was murdered. Cecilia seems distracted.

Tess wonders for a moment what she should do, then she remembers the tissue. She hands Cecilia tissues and a small bottle of water out of her purse. Tess offers to drive Cecilia home, then take Polly's shoes back to school. She hears Felicity's voice telling her she's being kind and civic. She informs the voice to be quiet.

In Chapter Twenty-four, Rachel wonders what is wrong with Cecilia. She briefly considers confronting Connor about the video she found, but decides against it. As she is thinking about finally getting Connor convicted and doing something for Janie, Rob calls. He tells asks her if she will agree to have Easter lunch with Lauren's parents as well. He also tells her that he and Lauren want to go with her to the park on Friday, the day of Janie's death. Rachel doesn't really want them there, but agrees.

In Chapter Twenty-five, at Cecilia's house Tess notices everything is in its place and tidy except for a few things left over from breakfast. Cecilia apologizes for the mess. She tells Tess she has an image at St. Angela's for being the opposite of the way she is acting that day. Tess offers to fix her a cup of tea to change the subject. She asks about Esther's books on the Berlin Wall. When Cecilia asks Tess if she's ever been to Germany, Tess almost answers based on Felicity's feelings.

In Chapter Twenty-six, as Tess drinks tea with Cecilia, Cecilia thinks about what she might say to Tess about her husband's guilt if she felt she could talk about it. She talks instead about a family who survived an escape attempt in Germany. All the while, she thinks about the price she will have to pay for John-Paul's freedom. She thinks about how angry she was with a teacher who made Isabel cry, even though Isabel doesn't remember the incident. As she wonders how Rachel must feel, she goes white causing Tess to assume she's coming down with something.



Analysis

Cecilia seems to have completely lost control of herself since she learned that her husband is a murderer. It is understandable that Cecilia isn't herself, but she can't tell anyone what exactly is going on with her. She arrives at school to drop off her children wearing unmatched shoes and without her daughter's tennis shoes. She is unable to speak to Rachel, though she'd been unusually kind to her the previous night. She throws up in the gutter after seeing the lady.

This section is mainly about Tess. Although she considers herself shy and believes she suffers from social anxiety, Tess is able to take charge of Cecilia and her situation. Tess is surprised at how quickly and efficiently she is able to care for Cecilia. As she helps Cecilia get into her car, she hears Felicity's voice telling her she's being "kind and civic." It can be imagined that Felicity's voice in Tess' mind is not encouraging as she suggests Tess will next be joining the parents and friends organization at the school. Tess does not cowl to Felicity's suggestion and pushes ahead with her plan to help out Cecilia, a woman who had overwhelmed Tess just the day before with her conversation, energy and self assurance.

Notice also in this section Rachel has begun to overcome her shock and sadness that Jacob will be leaving with the hope that Janie's murderer will be brought to justice. Although she doesn't want to, she agrees to have Easter dinner with Lauren's family and additionally agrees to allow Rob and Lauren to join her at the park on the anniversary of Janie's death. She seems to believe that if Connor is put in jail, everything will become acceptable.

Discussion Question 1

In what ways have Tess and Cecilia changed personalities in these chapters of the novel? Do you believe Tess is really as shy and socially inept as she believes?

Discussion Question 2

Does Rachel put too much faith in her belief that Connor will be brought to justice for Janie's death? What does a conviction represent to her?

Discussion Question 3

What is Rachel's opinion of Lauren at this point in the novel? Why does she dislike her daughter-in-law so much?

Vocabulary

sanguine, dotty, cynical, deft, malevolent, barrister, temerity



Chapters 27-31

Summary

In Chapter Twenty-seven, Tess takes Polly's gym shoes to Connor as Cecilia suggested. As Tess chats with Connor about the school, she thinks about their first kiss. Connor reminds her about the coffee. She suggests they make it a drink instead. He suggests they get together that evening. Tess agrees.

In Chapter Twenty-eight, Cecilia cries in her pantry. The doorbell rings. Cecilia momentarily thinks it is the police, but it is only John-Paul's mother. She asks how John-Paul is and mentions that he called that morning. Cecilia had insisted that he go to work although he'd not wanted to go. Virginia tells Cecilia she looks worn out. She mentions the prior night's Tupperware party and Cecilia's action in taking Rachel home. Cecilia mentions she invited the woman to Polly's party. Virginia seems to think that John-Paul wouldn't have wanted her to invite Rachel. Cecilia suddenly realizes that Virginia knows it was John-Paul who killed Janie. Cecilia asks Virginia if she remembers much about the murder. Virginia mentions the picture of the rosary beads with the mother of pearl crucifix. Cecilia realizes the rosary was Virginia's and that she must have recognized it in the pictures, but she never said anything. Virginia comforts Cecilia telling her even if Janie's killer were caught, it wouldn't bring Janie back. She tells Cecilia she must think about her family first. Although she doesn't put it into words, Virginia gets her message through to Cecilia clearly.

In Chapter Twenty-nine, Rodney Bellach finally calls Rachel to tell her he has passed along the video to an investigator at the homicide squad. He asks Rachel not to get her hopes up. Rachel feels disappointed, as if she has failed Janie again. Rachel is suddenly angry again. She's angry with herself and with God. As she watches Lucy and Tess talk and laugh in the parking lot she realizes she's angry with Connor for taking away all the future relationships she could have had with Janie. She feels as if she has been waiting 28 years for something that will never happen.

In Chapter Thirty, once they are in the bar, Tess realizes the drink might have been a bad idea. Connor takes her hand and leads her from the bar after a former student accosts him. Tess realizes she's considering cheating on her husband.

In a snippet from 1987, Tess' mother and father sit at the kitchen table and talk about their relationship. It is at the same time period that President Reagan is asking Gorbachev to tear down the Berlin Wall. Andrew tells her the problem is not that he can't forgive her for what she has done, but that he doesn't care. Lucy tells him she only did it to make him look at her. Andrew is already looking at the door.

In Chapter Thirty-one, Cecilia's girls want to know why Cecilia has fixed fish even though their father is home. Cecilia gets frustrated with their complaints and clears the table before they are finished eating. Meanwhile, Tess and Connor have just had sex in



the hallway of Connor's apartment. She asks Connor why they broke up. He reminds her that she and Felicity moved to Melbourne. Tess asks if she was horrible about the break up. Connor says she did break his heart, but it appears he might be kidding about it.

Analysis

Cecilia becomes even more distraught as she realizes that John-Paul's mother is aware that her son killed Janie. She has been quiet all these years because, as she tells Cecilia, she would do anything for her family. She basically issues Cecilia a veiled threat that she had better keep the information she has about Janie's death to herself. Cecilia retaliates by feeding the family fish that night for dinner even though she knows John-Paul doesn't like it. She spends her time reading Esther's books about the Berlin Wall instead of doing her usual work.

Tess and Connor's reigniting of their relationship is a significant issue in this section of chapters especially since the tidbit is included indicating that Tess' parents divorced because Tess' mother had an affair. Tess is going down the same road as her mother, though she does not realize it. She has been so angry with Felicity for what she has done to Tess' marriage that she doesn't even consider her actions are just as detrimental to her marriage as Felicity's actions have been. Notice how Connor suddenly seems more attractive to Tess than when she first dated him. Although it seems he cared very deeply for her, she didn't seem as enamored with him. When Cecilia mentions twice that Connor is considered the most eligible bachelor at St. Angela's, even her young daughter is in love with him, Tess seems to take the bait and become more interested in Connor. She begins to remember the good parts of their relationship.

Discussion Question 1

What does it mean that Virginia has known all along it was John-Paul who murdered Janie but didn't say anything?

Discussion Question 2

How is it significant that Tess is taking her marriage down the same road as her mother even though she doesn't realize what is happening?

Discussion Question 3

Why is Rachel so disappointed when she realizes the police will not be able to convict Connor based on the one videotape?

Vocabulary

disconcerting, adamant, infantile, deluded, subversive, mundane, condoning



Chapters 32-36

Summary

In Chapter Thirty-two, Cecilia watches a video of the night the Berlin Wall came down. The video she watches with Esther isn't what she remembered from her own childhood. Esther asks why the people are crying. Cecilia explains it is because they are so happy. When John-Paul asks if she wants a cup of tea, she is almost rude in her refusal.

In Chapter Thirty-three, Connor and Tess move to his bed. They eat reheated pasta. Tess tells Connor about Felicity and Will. Tess admits she doesn't know what will happen between Will and Felicity. Connor admits to Tess that he's been seeing a therapist for several years to help him work through some issues. One of the issues is the fact that he was the last person to have seen Janie alive. He tells Tess he sometimes thinks that Rachel believes he is guilty of Janie's murder. He admits he'd been excited that day because Janie had told him that morning she'd decided he could be her boyfriend. Connor also tells Tess something he'd never told anyone except his therapist. His mother lied to the police about his alibi. Connor was actually at home alone while his mother was out getting drunk. Connor has some suspicion that his mother thought he committed the murder. He tells Tess he knows what their relationship is about, but he won't put it into words. He and Tess stay together for another thirty minutes before she puts on her clothes to go home.

In Chapter Thirty-four, Cecilia tells John-Paul as they are brushing their teeth before bed that Virginia knows John-Paul is guilty. Cecilia insists she didn't tell the woman, but she can tell that Virginia is aware of John-Paul's actions. John-Paul says she must have imagined the connection. Cecilia tells John-Paul that Virginia had recognized the rosary beads as those she had loaned to him. Cecilia says it proves that as his mother's "golden boy" he can get away with anything. John-Paul is trying to convince Cecilia he's still the same person when she suddenly hits her head with her hand and curses. She's forgotten the girls' hats for the next day's Easter parade.

In Chapter Thirty-five, in a flashback from April of 1984, Janie is nervous about talking to John-Paul. She considers briefly that she could have stood him up or called him on the phone; but, neither of these options seemed right to Janie. She doesn't like the idea she might hurt the boy because she suddenly realizes she likes him more than she wants to admit. She feels as if it is some mistake that John-Paul likes her. She tries to make her voice cold when she talks to John-Paul.

In Chapter Thirty-six, Cecilia revels over the fact she is a murderer's wife as she talks and makes plans with the other school mothers before the Easter parade. Cecilia thinks more about her own situation, trying to weigh the good against the bad. She thinks how much John-Paul's confession would hurt her entire family. It would not bring Janie back. On the other hand, Cecilia almost passes out when she thinks about how she would feel if



someone killed one of her daughters and got away with it, even if he turned out to be a good upstanding citizen.

Analysis

Now that Cecilia is aware of the great sin in John-Paul's life, she can't think of anything but his guilt. Little things that didn't bother Cecilia that much before infuriate her now. Cecilia's new knowledge of John-Paul colors all that she thinks about him. Later, she tries to weigh the good and bad that would come from turning him in for the murder of Janie. From her point of view, she has everything to lose if she were to tell the authorities what John-Paul had done. It would hurt her, her parents, her children, and her in-laws. On the other hand, Cecilia is additionally able to see the other side of the coin. If someone were to hurt one of her daughters, she knows she would want to kill that person with her own bare hands. The very thought of someone killing one of her children makes Cecilia nearly pass out.

Notice in the chapter that details Janie meeting John-Paul at the train stop, Janie is already not feeling good. She seems to credit the pain in her chest to emotion. However, the pain that is described seems more than just emotion. Her heart is hammering in her chest and she feels a painful, crushing sensation which is described as if someone is trying to press her flat.

Parallel to John-Paul's mother knowing that her son killed Janie, Connor admits to Tess that he thinks his own mother believes that he killed the girl. Connor tells Tess that his mother lied about his alibi. His mother and he were not together when Janie died. His mother had been out getting drunk with a boyfriend. Her actions of winking at Connor after the police left indicated to him that she didn't really believe him. She also told him she didn't want to know what happened. Connor mentions to Tess that he believes Rachel, as well, believes he is really guilty. Connor has suffered knowing that others haven't believed in his innocence for all these years.

One can only hope that if Connor's mother had not provided him with an alibi and he had been accused of the murder that John-Paul would have stepped forward. By not admitting his guilt, John-Paul might have allowed an innocent person to go to jail. It was only because of a lie, provided by a mother who didn't believe him, that Connor was spared from being accused of Janie's murder .

Discussion Question 1

Compare and contrast the guilt that Connor feels versus the guilt that John-Paul and Cecilia feel.

Discussion Question 2

Why might it be significant if Janie were unwell prior to her meeting with John-Paul?



Discussion Question 3

With the three stories that make up the context of this novel, it is obvious how Cecilia and Rachel's stories fit together. What about Tess' story? How does it fit in within the grand scheme?

Vocabulary

escapade, absolve, implacability, innocuous, furtive, concave, cynically, nonchalant, demented, parody, rakishly



Chapters 37-42

Summary

In Chapter Thirty-seven, Tess feels an ache as she sits watching the Easter parade. She is afraid she might be getting a bladder infection. However, she thinks that it is worth the feeling of vengeance that her affair with Connor has given her. Her mother asks Tess how the evening went. Tess answers it was fine; but, her distraction lets Lucy know that she and Connor had sex. Lucy praises her daughter.

In Chapter Thirty-eight, Samantha chats with Rachel about Connor's good mood. She wonders if he has gotten himself a woman. Rachel is disturbed because the next day is the anniversary of Janie's death. She believes that while Janie is dead because of Connor, he is instead on top of the world and falling in love, emotions Janie can't feel because of him.

In Chapter Thirty-nine, Cecilia leaves the parade early. She tries to sneak past the balcony where Samantha and Rachel are sitting, but she doesn't make it. Samantha asks about the Tupperware she ordered. Cecilia promises to bring it by that afternoon. She tells Rachel she will bring her order as well.

In Chapter Forty, Liam wins second place in the hat contest. Tess thinks about the way she will call Will to let Liam tell him the news. She is beginning to believe her separation from Will is inevitable. She cries when she sees how happy Liam is at his new school, thinking that maybe Will was right about Liam's need to change schools. She starts to cry but she is unsure if she's crying because she's ashamed her husband found someone new or because she has had an affair. Tess feels ashamed because she isn't acting as a selfless mother should. She's even ashamed because she doesn't feel as ashamed as she should.

In Chapter Forty-one, Trudy gives Rachel an Easter egg basket as a gift. She tells Rachel she loves to read. Rachel asks her what she plans to do over the break. Trudy says that she loves to guess the identity of the murderer in murder mysteries before she remembers that the killer of Rachel's daughter has never been found.

In Chapter Forty-two, Connor calls while Tess is out shopping with Liam. Liam asks if it is his dad on the phone. When she says no, he loses interest. She then tells Connor she'll come over that night. Meanwhile, Rachel sees Connor as he is talking on the phone to Tess. He looks very happy. When he sees Rachel, the smile disappears from his face. Rachel believes this indicates he is guilty. At her mother's house that evening, Tess' father has sent her a package by courier. It is a compass. He writes a note hoping that it will help Tess when she is feeling lost.

Tess asks her mother why they split up. Her mother will only say that they were two different people. Whenever she'd asked her father he'd always instructed her to ask her



mother. She knows her mother was irritated by her father's dislike of social gatherings. She remembers her mother telling people Tess had inherited her shy nature from her father as if it were something of which she should be ashamed. She asks her mother why she didn't just go places on her own. Her mother is confused by the question. Tess asks for her compass back.

As Cecilia takes Rachel's Tupperware to her, she realizes she is doing so only because she knows that Rachel has a right to hate her and Cecilia can't stand thinking that anyone hates her. Rachel invites her in for tea and Cecilia feels unable to refuse. Over tea, Rachel tells Cecilia that the next day is the anniversary of Janie's death. Rachel tells Cecilia the night she'd come home from the Tupperware party she'd found something she felt proved who killed Janie. Cecilia burns her hand and Rachel calls for her to put it under the tap.

Analysis

Lucy seems to be playing the devil's advocate here as she seems to encourage her daughter to have an affair with Connor. Keep in mind that it was Lucy's affair with another man that seems to have been the breaking point for her marriage. Even though Tess alludes to the idea that she doesn't want Liam to be in the same situation as she was in during her parents' divorce, she is quickly moving down a path that could lead to divorce. A point to consider here is the morality of doing wrong in retaliation for someone wronging you. Tess feels angry and betrayed by her husband and cousin. Does that might it right, though, for her to pursue her own extra-marital affair. As she is doing some soul-searching, even Tess admits she doesn't feel right about her lack of a guilty conscious in the situation.

Meanwhile, Cecilia is feeling enough guilt to make up for Tess' lack of it. She gets Rachel's Tupperware together quickly from stock she already has and even throws in a free piece. At Rachel's house, Cecilia feels bound to do everything the woman asks. Despite her attempt to keep herself under control, Cecilia burns herself with her tea when Rachel mentions she has found new, damning evidence in Janie's murder case.

Discussion Question 1

Do you think Tess really loves Connor; or, is she just using him to get back at Will?

Discussion Question 2

How might Tess look at her own extramarital affair differently if she knew the cause of her parents' divorce?



Discussion Question 3

Why does Cecilia feel so bound to go out of her way to help Rachel? What does this say about Cecilia?

Vocabulary

perverted, malevolent, accolades, deluded, amicable, ostentatious, primal, incandescent, obliterate, equilibrium, platitudes



Chapters 43-48

Summary

In Chapter forty-three, as Tess rides on the back of Connor's bike, she realizes she wants to be there with him, not back home with Will. Meanwhile, Cecilia and John-Paul talk. She starts to tell him what Rachel said about finding new evidence, but he interrupts her. He tells her he will do whatever she wants him to do. Cecilia is angry because John-Paul is making the decision her responsibility. She finally tells him about Rachel and the claim that there is new evidence. John-Paul denies there is any evidence, but says if there is, then the decision may be made for them. When Cecilia asks what will happen if the evidence points to someone else, John-Paul says he would turn himself in.

In Chapter forty-four, Tess and Connor sit at Dee Why Beach drinking hot chocolate. He mentions he's been to see his therapist. Tess wonders if the therapist thinks that she is a bad influence on Connor. She has a sneaking suspicion she's a bad person, probably because of the way she's always refused to get involved. She tells Connor she's using him to keep from thinking about Will. He tells her he already knows that.

In Chapter Forty-five, there is a flashback of John-Paul and Janie's last meeting. John-Paul's face gets red when Janie tells him she can't see him anymore. When John-Paul says he thought she was his girlfriend, Janie giggles nervously. He lunges at her. At first, Janie thinks he's going to kiss her. Instead, he grabs her throat. She remembers him loosening his grip; but, there is something else happening. She remembers the doctor's appointment she missed. Then she panics.

In Chapter Forty-six, at Wattle Valley Park, Jacob demands juice, but his mother doesn't understand him. This frustrates Rachel. Rachel thinks about how Connor probably brought Janie to this park, wanting sex. Her visit to the murder site is particularly uncomfortable this year with Lauren, Rob, and Jacob there. Lauren asks Rob if he wants to say something, bringing Rachel's attention to her son. She realizes he probably hasn't been to the park since Janie was found. She thinks of how little she knows Rob.

When Cecilia wakes up on Good Friday morning, she remembers it is the anniversary of Janie's death. She starts to get up, but John-Paul starts talking to her about things he needs to plan out if he goes to jail. Cecilia realizes if no one else is ever brought to question, she will never disclose what she knows about her husband. She has realized that her goodness has limits.

In Chapter Forty-seven, Liam pesters Tess wanting to know when his father and Felicity are coming for Easter. He brings her phone, thinking she'll call his father. Instead, she has a call from Connor. He invites Tess and Liam to join him to fly a kite. Lucy warns her



daughter to be careful. While they are talking, the doorbell rings. Liam brings Felicity out.

In Chapter Forty-eight, at Lauren's perfect cottage, Rachel remembers how Lauren almost lost control when she discovered the café she planned for them to stop at after their visit to the park is closed. Lauren regains her composure, however, to suggest they go back to her place. Rachel thinks about how many hours are still left in the day. Rob asks her if she dreams about Janie. He tells Rachel that Lauren had thought it would help him to visit the park. Rachel remembers Rob as a baby and tells him he was a beautiful baby, something she'd never mentioned to him before. Lauren brings in the hot cross buns. Rachel is overcome with sadness because Lauren is so alive, while Janie is dead.

Analysis

One big aspect in these these chapters is Cecilia's realization that her goodness has a limit. In the past, Cecilia had thought she had been the one that would tell the truth, stand up for those who were hurting, and dive into the middle of danger to save wounded teenagers at the Berlin Wall. When it comes to a tragedy that affects her own family, Cecilia finds she is not as willing to make things right as she had always thought. She suddenly realizes that doing the right thing, meaning legally and morally, is not the best thing for her family. She must either choose to tell Rachel, giving her closure, or keep the identity of Janie's killer a secret, in order to keep her family intact. Cecilia finally realizes that when it affects her family, the right thing to do is not necessarily the easiest.

It is also in this section of the novel that the anniversary of Janie's death arrives. Cecilia is dealing with Rachel's announcement there is new evidence about the identity of Rachel's killer. John-Paul claims there is no way anyone could know he is the one who killed Janie. No one knew they were friends. No one saw them together. John-Paul is surprised and angry when Cecilia suggests to him that his mother already knows it was he who killed Janie.

Additionally, Rachel sees some cracks in Lauren's perfect façade in this section of the novel. The relationship between Rachel and Lauren is worth some analysis. Rachel tries to be the perfect mother-in-law. She doesn't want to interfere in Rob and Lauren's relationship or give them any reason to reject her. At the same time, Lauren tries to be just as perfect as Rachel. Lauren tries to connect with Rachel about Janie and her death. She suggests that her family go with Rachel to the park where Janie was killed with the hope that Rob will find some healing. She almost comes to tears when she hears Jacob call Janie by name the first time. Even though Lauren seems to hope she will bond with Rachel over Janie, Rachel is determined not to share Janie with Lauren. In fact, she almost seems angry with Lauren because she is not Janie. She seems angry with Lauren that Lauren is alive, while Janie is dead.



Discussion Question 1

Describe the reactions of different characters (Cecilia, Rachel, Rob, Lauren, for example) to the anniversary of Janie's death.

Discussion Question 2

Why do you think Rachel dislikes Lauren so much? Is it related to the loss of Janie?

Discussion Question 3

How does John-Paul's grief on the day of Janie's death affect Cecilia?

Vocabulary

peripheral, inexplicable, articulated, self-flagellation, emanate, truculent, fallacy, chagrin, churlish, logistics, besotted, primal



Chapters 49-51

Summary

In Chapter Forty-nine, Felicity tells Tess that she is going away. In private, Felicity tells Tess her fling with Will is over. Felicity says she knew it was over for her and Will when Tess left with Liam. While it was a crush for Will, Felicity says she really loved him. She tells Tess when she lost weight, she noticed men beginning to look at her. She liked it and wondered if she could catch Will's attention as well. Tess admits to Felicity that she no longer wants her life as a married woman. She's been sleeping with Connor. Felicity is angry with Tess about how quickly she started an affair while she and Will never even slept together. Felicity tells Tess that Will wants to fix things and that he wants another baby.

In Chapter Fifty, Cecilia's daughters discover there is not butter in the house. They are cross and fuss at their mother. Cecilia tells them they will have porridge for breakfast and then walk to school. She plans for them to stop and pick up butter on the way home.

As she gets ready to leave, Jacob brings Rachel a framed photograph of his father and Janie. Jacob identifies Janie as "Auntie Janie." Lauren tears up hearing Jacob's reference to Janie. She tells Rachel she doesn't know how she gets through that day. Lauren adds she wishes there was something she could do. Then the moment is over. The two women go back to treating each other coolly.

After Felicity leaves, Tess tells her mother she feels like Will is choosing her only because of Liam. Lucy encourages Tess to fix herself up for Will's arrival. On the way into the house, Liam meets them ready to go fly the kite. Tess curses, wondering what time it is.

Rachel gets a phone call just as she gets to the end of Rob and Lauren's street. It is a sergeant from the homicide squad. Rachel thinks it is good news since she is calling on a holiday. However, the woman tells Rachel they won't be questioning Connor again based on the tape. Rachel hangs up and throws the phone into the floorboard. She is crying as she starts her car.

Cecilia and her family walk up behind Connor and his kite on the way to the school. Connor (Mr. Whitby) stops and answers his phone. Polly recognizes him as Mr. Whitby, her physical education teacher. At the same time, Rachel is driving home. She thinks about what she was doing the day of Janie's death, and what the detective said, and screams, beating her hands on the steering wheel. She sees a man with what she believes is a fish balloon. She tries to fix her mind on the distraction. As she gets closer, she sees the man is on the phone, and the fish is a kite.



On the phone, Tess apologizes to Connor for not being able to meet him at the school. She hears the pain in his voice. She wants to be with him, not talking things over with Will. He asks what has happened and assumes they are over when she tells him Will is on his way to Lucy's house.

Polly calls for Mr. Whitby. He doesn't respond; so, she pedals her bike toward him. He steps off the path onto the road. As Polly goes to follow him, both Cecilia and John-Paul call for her to stop.

In Chapter 51, Rachel watches as the man with the kite steps off the curb. He looks up at her, and she realizes it is Connor. She slams her foot on the accelerator. Her car comes from behind the Fitzpatricks. Connor runs from the street. Polly rides her bike in front of the car and is hit by it.

Rachel knows that she has hit a little girl on a bike. She turns off the car and takes her foot off the brake. She felt the car go over a bump. When Rachel sees Cecilia, she realizes it was Polly.

Tess calls Will, angry. He has gotten caught by the accident. He tells Tess a little girl, Liam's age, has been hit by a car. He thinks she is dead.

Analysis

In this section of the novel, the differing points of view converge to the point that perspective switches back and forth quickly between different characters. This is done so that the reader will have an idea of what is happening in the minutes before the accident from each character's point of view. Even Tess' husband, Will, has a role in this climatic scene as he is the one in the taxi who witnesses Polly getting struck by Rachel's car.

This scene is truly the climax of the novel as Rachel decides to take Connor's fate into her own hands. She is upset by her daughter-in-law's attempt to share in her pain. These feelings are compounded when the police investigator does not seem to take the video, showing Janie and Connor together, as serious evidence. Her anger boils over when she sees Connor, alive and free, walking along with his kite.

Discussion Question 1

Discuss Cecilia's idea that nothing bad could happen on a Good Friday.

Discussion Question 2

Why is it ironic that it is on Good Friday that Rachel hits Polly, the same day that Janie was killed?



Discussion Question 3

Discuss the significance of Felicity's reaction to Tess' idea that she has social anxiety.

Vocabulary

oblique, self-deprecating, absolve, strident, infuriating, stodgy, pious, mercurial, cynical, perfunctory, condescension, cordial, jauntily, plait, timbre, stoic, accosted, trajectory



Chapters 52-54

Summary

In Chapter Fifty-two, Cecilia feels the need to be as polite to Dr. Yue as possible. John-Paul seems gruff with the doctor which makes Cecilia afraid he won't work as hard for Polly. Polly has a serious concussion; her spleen has already been removed. The doctor tells them that he must amputate her right arm.

Rachel waits in the hallway outside the intensive care unit. She wonders what she should say to Cecilia and John Paul. She has been told she probably won't be charged. Rob was called to pick her up. Lauren and Rob make Rachel nervous with their hovering. The priest tries to convince Rachel that Polly's injuries are the result of an accident. He makes her feel better only by keeping her updated on Polly's progress.

Rachel had called a cab to take her to the hospital. As Rachel wonders what she should say, Cecilia runs through the doors. She looks around as if she is disoriented. Rachel stands up.

Rachel tells Cecilia how sorry she is. Cecilia struggles to say the right things. Rachel asks how Polly is. Rachel almost falls when Cecilia tells her that Polly's arm will have to be amputated. Rachel tells Cecilia that the accident was her fault because she had pushed the accelerator hoping to hit Connor because he had killed Janie. Cecilia misunderstands, thinking she meant to hit John-Paul. When Rachel explains, Cecilia understands their unwillingness to tell the truth has resulted in her and John-Paul's daughter being hurt. Cecilia feels the need to tell Rachel the truth right then. She tells Rachel Connor did not kill Janie. It was John-Paul who killed her.

In Chapter Fifty-three, Rachel cannot believe what Cecilia is telling her. She wonders how she knew so little about her daughter's life. A voice calls Cecilia. It is John-Paul. Cecilia tells John-Paul she has told Rachel about his guilt. When Rachel sees the regret in John-Paul's eyes, she knows it is true.

They sit there for a few minutes before Cecilia tells them she has to get back to Polly. John-Paul tries to tell Rachel that his family needs him now. Rachel says she won't take him away from his daughter.

In Chapter Fifty-four, Tess comments to Will that she can't believe he thought they would just all live together as they hide Easter eggs for Will in Lucy's backyard. She tells him she knows he's only there for Liam. Will tells Tess she and Liam are his family and all he cares about. Tess is cutting, telling him that if they were all he cared about he wouldn't have fallen in love with Felicity. At her mother's suggestion, she doesn't tell him about Connor. She finally confronts Will with the fact she was happy with their marriage. Will admits to her that he had felt bad about himself ever since he realized he was middle-aged.



Tess shares her new knowledge that she has social anxiety. She explains how freeing it seemed to be when Felicity told her to deal with it in a dismissive way. Will, however, doesn't want to dismiss it. Tess admits she doesn't want to dismiss something his bad feelings about himself. Tess suggests they give their relationship until Christmas to see if he misses Felicity.

Analysis

Although at some point Cecilia's admission to Rachel that it was John-Paul who killed Janie was inevitable, it almost seems anti-climactic when the truth comes out. Rachel is already feeling bad because she caused Polly to be hurt. So, she doesn't have the quick, angry reaction that was expected of her. She seems so shocked by what has happened and the unexpected identity of Janie's murderer that she is unable to even fully comprehend the information at first. Although she'd harbored so much anger in her heart toward Janie's killer for so long, she tells John-Paul that she will not take him away from his daughter.

Meanwhile, Tess and Will find some common ground and agree to give their relationship another chance. Will tries to convince Tess the fling with Felicity had nothing to do with her. It was all about him. He explains the insecure feelings that he had about becoming middle-aged. He says that he needed to know he was still attractive to women other than his wife. Interesting in this section is that Tess' mother warns her not to tell Will about her affair with Connor. This seems to be the one and only thing that Tess' mother has done to help right the relationship between Will and Tess. Everything else she has said, including encouraging Tess' affair with Will, has been directed at breaking down the relationship. It could be that Tess' mother has finally realized she doesn't necessarily want her daughter to go down the same path she did in her marriage.

Discussion Question 1

Why do you think Lucy suggests to Tess not to tell Will about Connor?

Discussion Question 2

How is Will's reaction to Tess' belief that she has social anxiety different from Felicity's?

Discussion Question 3

How is Cecilia's admission to Rachel that it was John-Paul who killed Janie almost anti-climactic?

Vocabulary

plethora, brusque, obsequiously, culpability, barbaric, duress, gesticulated, contrition, monotone, surreal, mundane, linear



Chapters 55-Epilogue

Summary

In Chapter Fifty-five, Polly's surgery is over. Cecilia cries thinking of the life her daughter will face. She wonders if the child is strong enough. John-Paul says she is, but he asks Cecilia why she told. Cecilia explains that it was because Rachel was trying to hit Connor because she thought he was the one who killed Janie. John-Paul realizes if he had confessed, this might not have happened. He crouches in the corner of the room. Cecilia's mind is at work. She knows she'll have to give up the parents and friends club as well as Tupperware in order to give all of her daughters the attention they need. She tells John-Paul to get up, Polly needs him. He argues he won't be there because Rachel will tell what he did. Cecilia doubts Rachel will tell as they have already paid.

In Chapter Fifty-six, Rachel considers if she should alert the police about John-Paul's confession. She picks up the phone. She pushes one button and hears an answer. It is Lauren. Rachel asks if she can spend the night with them.

In Chapter Fifty-seven, Tess wakes to the sound of rain on Easter morning. She thinks about the way the problems in their relationship have forced them to open up to one another about deeper things about themselves. She wonders if her parents would have been able to keep their relationship together if they had really tried. She presses against Will and they make love.

In Chapter Fifty-eight, Jacob wakes Rachel, surprised she is there. He curls up in bed with her. She thinks about Cecilia and John-Paul. She has decided she will ask John-Paul to come to the house and describe Janie's last minutes. At that point, she would decide what needed to be done, what price needed to be paid.

She knows that she must retire from the school. She feels it is time to sell her house and get away from the memories and the pain. She wonders about Janie's feelings about Connor. Rachel decides to get a passport and visit her family in America. She hears Janie's voice telling her to go back to sleep.

In Chapter Fifty-nine, it is on the same day Checkpoint Charlie is removed from the Berlin Wall that Cecilia meets John-Paul. In the present, in the hospital, Polly wakes, calling for Cecilia. She briefly wonders how John-Paul is doing with the other girls, but then she feels a surge of hate as she remembers it is his fault that they are all in this situation. She realizes, however, she is in some ways responsible, as she did not tell what she knew. She knows they will stay together. There is still love there. To distract herself, Cecilia thinks about Polly's upcoming birthday. When Polly does wake, Cecilia shows her the Easter egg that Mr. Whitby left for her. Polly tries to reach for it with her right hand. She looks confused. Cecilia takes her left hand and begins her journey as the mother of an amputee.



In the Epilogue, past secrets are shared and possible futures detailed. Ed Crowley was taking tennis lessons the day Janie was killed because he was jealous of the way Toby, who was a better player than he, looked at his wife. Polly would have been a star tennis player had she not lost her arm. Connor did hear Polly calling him the day of the accident, but he ignored her. He only wanted to get home. Tess will have another baby, but she will not be sure of the identity of the baby's father as she had forgotten to take her birth control pills with Connor. John-Paul will never know that if Janie had gone to the doctor the day of her death as she was supposed to, he would have diagnosed her with Marfan syndrome. A full autopsy would have revealed that Janie died of an aortic aneurysm, not strangulation. If she had been any other girl, Janie would have survived John-Paul's attack. If she had gone to the doctor, Janie would have married Connor, but she would have divorced him shortly thereafter. She would have gotten reacquainted with John-Paul by walking into the housewarming party just a few minutes before Cecilia.

Analysis

Significant parts of this section of the novel include Rachel's act of reaching out to her son and daughter-in-law instead of hiding alone in her pain. Cecilia additionally steels herself and John-Paul, knowing the child will need them both to deal with her new handicap.

Also significant is the Epilogue of the novel in which the reader learns that if Janie had gone to her doctor's appointment with her mother as planned, the futures of many of the characters in the novel would have been completely different. Not only would Janie have lived, John-Paul would never have lived his life worried that he had killed the girl. Instead of believing himself to be Janie's killer, he might have been Janie's husband. The confirmation that it was a medical condition and not John-Paul that killed Janie underscores the waste caused by John-Paul's guilt and Rachel's anger.

Discussion Question 1

How does Rachel reach out to her son and daughter-in-law? How do you think their relationship might change?

Discussion Question 2

If you were Rachel, do you feel you'd be able to condemn John-Paul to jail after you'd so seriously injured his child? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 3

How does Polly's injury help Cecilia to take charge of her life again? What might have happened to the family had Rachel hit Connor instead?

Vocabulary

anomaly, horrendous, trite, adamantly, absolution, keen



Characters

Cecilia Fitzpatrick

Cecilia Fitzpatrick is one of the central characters in the novel “The Husband’s Secret.” She is the one who opens the “Pandora’s box” which seems to release evil in her life. Before she reads the letter written to her by her husband in the case of his death, Cecilia is the highly efficient mother of three daughters. She is president of the Friends and Parents organization at her children’s school and additionally sells Tupperware. She describes herself as a fixer. When she encounters a problem in her life, or in others’ lives, she wants to find a way to fix the problem. She considers herself a good person. During her daughter’s obsession with the Berlin Wall, Cecilia believes she would have been the one to stand up and help the boy who was shot when he tried to cross the wall instead of watching him bleed to death.

When Cecilia reads the letter her husband wrote to her, she discovers a part of her personality she never realized existed. She is aware of how deeply Rachel is hurt because of her daughter’s murder and the lack of a conviction in the crime. Instead of being able to sacrifice her own happiness and her family’s security, she keeps the secret to herself, symbolically sacrificing what is best for Rachel. Cecilia struggles with a need to harmonize her belief that John-Paul is a good husband and father with the idea that he killed someone. Additionally, she struggles with her self-given title as a fixer with her inability to fix the situation she faces. She can either “fix” things for Rachel by telling her that it was John-Paul who killed Rachel; or, she can keep her family from falling apart by keeping John-Paul’s secret.

Cecilia’s life is turned on its head when Polly, her youngest child, is injured when she is hit by a car. Ironically, it is Rachel who hits Polly. Cecilia and John Paul feel that it is because neither of them even told Rachel the identity of Janie’s murderer that Polly was injured. The day after Polly is hurt, Cecilia admits to Rachel that it was John-Paul who killed Janie. She hopes Rachel will not turn John-Paul in as Rachel was responsible for hurting Polly. At the conclusion of the novel, Cecilia is bracing herself to meet the challenge of being the mother of an amputee.

John-Paul Fitzpatrick

John-Paul Fitzpatrick is the character who could best be described as the villain in this novel. He is the husband of Cecilia and the father of Isabel, Esther, and Polly. He believes that he is responsible for the death of Janie. As a seventeen-year-old, John-Paul had believed he and Janie were boyfriend and girlfriend. Janie, however, decided to choose Connor as her boyfriend instead of John-Paul. When she tells John-Paul, she laughs because she is nervous. John-Paul believes she’s laughing at him and chokes her. He believes he’s stopped himself in time; but, the girl is already dead. He is not



aware she died from a dissection of the aorta. A complete autopsy is never done, so it is never revealed that Janie had an underlying medical condition that caused her death.

John-Paul never tells anyone about his believed role in Janie's death until his wife reads the letter he wrote. Up until that point he had lived with his guilt. He punished himself by cutting anything he enjoyed out of his life. He had even tried to kill himself once. Additionally, he sentenced himself to community service in an attempt to make up for his crime.

It is when Rachel hits and injures Polly with her car that John-Paul realizes the full extent of having never admitted to his sin. Cecilia tells Rachel it was John-Paul who killed Janie. Rachel admits to Cecilia she was trying to hit Connor because she believed he killed Janie. Instead, it is Polly who bears the brunt of her father's sins. John-Paul feels terrible guilt for what has happened to Polly, believing it is his fault.

Tess Curtis

Tess is Will's wife and Liam's mother. During the course of the novel, she has a brief affair with Connor Whitby, an old high school boyfriend. Tess, her husband, and her cousin Felicity work at their own marketing firm. Although she describes herself as being shy, Tess has been the marketing director for the company. She is in charge of meeting with clients and giving proposals. She enjoys her job; but, she wishes she didn't spend so much time being sick with worry about dealing with people. After completing a survey in a magazine, Tess decides she actually has social anxiety.

Tess' mother believes that it is Felicity's fault that Tess is shy. She tells her daughter that Felicity made Tess shy because Felicity was overpowering and never allowed her to have any other friends. Tess admits she and Felicity have always been best friends. Tess has protected Felicity and her weight problem just as Felicity has cared for Tess through her parents' divorce.

Tess feels completely betrayed when her husband and cousin tell her they've fallen in love with one another. Tess moves quickly, taking her son to stay with her mother who has broken her ankle. In retaliation, Tess has an affair with Connor Whitby, an old boyfriend from high school. Tess struggles with her own guilt when she learns that her husband and Felicity never slept together. To deal with her own guilt, she overwhelms Will with blame for the initial "Pandora's box" he opened when he told Tess that he and Felicity were in love with one another.

Rachel Crowley

Rachel Crowley is the mother of Janie Crowley. Janie was believed to have been murdered when she was still a teenager. She is the wife of Ed Crowley who had a massive stroke several years earlier. Rachel believes he died of a broken heart. She somehow believes that she continues to live as some sort of punishment to herself



because she was seven minutes late to pick Janie up on the day Janie was murdered. She was late because she had been flirting with a potential employer.

Rachel had come back to life to a certain degree when her son and his wife had a baby, her only grandchild. Rachel has just had disturbing news that her son and his wife plan to move to America, taking the baby with them. Rachel is in a new depression because of this surprise information. Additionally, she has become more and more determined that Connor was responsible for Janie's death, even though he had an alibi the night of her murder. She has found a video of Janie and Connor together that she believes is proof that Connor had reason to kill Janie.

Rachel decides to take matters into her own hands when she sees Connor walking home with his fish kite. Instead of hitting Connor, however, she hits Polly with her car causing the girl to lose her arm. In the hospital Cecilia tells Rachel it was John-Paul who killed Janie. Rachel decides not to turn John-Paul in, believing that he and his family have already suffered enough for the crime.

Janie Crowley

Janie Crowley is Ed and Rachel Crowley's daughter. She died in 1984. Because she had fingermarks on her neck, it is believed that the girl was strangled. Her parents were unaware that Janie actually had a disease called Marfan syndrome. Because of this disease, Janie suffered an aortic dissection at the same time that John-Paul choked her. Although he had lived with the belief he had killed Janie, John-Paul was actually not responsible for Janie's death at all. If Janie's family had asked for a full autopsy done on their daughter, they would have known the real cause of her death.

Back in 1984, Janie had decided to become sexually active. She had gone through a sort of interview process to find the boy to whom she wanted to lose her virginity. She has decided that Connor is the man, not John-Paul whom she had also been dating. On the last day of her life, Janie spends some time with Connor, then goes to meet John-Paul to tell him she has decided not to be his girlfriend. When Janie tells John-Paul she isn't interested in him, he grabs her throat. He believes he has killed her and leaves her lying in the park covered with a school blazer with a set of rosary beads in her hand.

Connor Whitby

Connor Whitby was the last person who saw Janie alive in 1984. For this reason, Rachel believes that Connor is responsible for Janie's murder. Years after Janie's murder, Connor gets a job as a physical education teacher at the same school where Rachel works part time. When Tess visits the school to enroll Liam, she becomes reacquainted with Connor. The two have an affair. On the day that Polly is injured, Connor had called Tess hoping that she and Liam could meet him at the school to fly a kite. Tess turns down the invitation because her husband has come to town. Connor is on his way home with the kite when both Rachel and Polly spot him. Polly is trying to get Connor's attention because she has a crush on her teacher. Connor ignores the



child because he wants to get home. Connor spends much time after the accident dealing with his guilt for not acknowledging Polly on the day of her accident.

Rob Crowley

Rob Crowley is Rachel's son and Janie's brother. He is also the father of Jacob. He works as a real estate agent, a job that doesn't surprise Rachel as he was always trying to make things right with his fake smiles and cheery lies for his parents after Janie died. Rachel believes that Janie's death should have made her appreciate Rob more; but, it did not. Although his mother hasn't really addressed Rob's feelings about his sister's murder, Rob struggles with his own demons from Janie's murder. He has nightmares about Janie and is very emotional the day he goes with his mother to the park where Janie's body was found. Rob is caught between his parents' grief as they all try to deal with their loss. Rob shows his love for his sister by showing Jacob pictures of Janie and teaching him to call her Auntie Janie.

Felicity

Felicity is Tess' cousin. The two have been inseparable since they were born. Tess believes that it was Felicity who kept her from being alone while Tess' mother tells her she always thought Felicity kept Tess shy. For most of her life, Felicity has been obese. Recently, however, Felicity has gone on a diet and lost a good deal of weight. After her weight loss, Felicity is highly attractive. It is just before Easter that Will and Felicity admit to Tess that they have fallen in love with one another. Felicity claims to feel awful about the way things have happened and continues to stress that she and Will have not had sex. Felicity seems to want to continue to be best friends with Tess, even though she stole Tess' husband. Felicity takes an overseas trip to get away from Will and try to reverse their situation.

Lucy O'Leary

Lucy O'Leary is Tess' mother and Felicity's aunt. She has broken her ankle, giving Tess a good reason to pay an extended visit to Sydney when she learns her husband and her cousin have fallen in love with each other. Lucy is highly protective of her daughter. In a way, Lucy is responsible for Polly's accident as it is she who makes the appointment for Tess and Liam to visit the school before Easter. If Lucy had not made this appointment before Easter, Tess and Connor might not have meet up with one another again. Connor would not have gone to the school on Easter hoping to fly his kite with Tess and Liam. In turn, Rachel would not have tried to hit Connor with her car, striking Polly instead.



Ed Crowley

Ed Crowley is Rachel Crowley's husband and Janie Crowley's father. He is not part of the present action of the novel as he is dead. Ed dies of a massive stroke not long after Janie's death. Rachel is angry with her husband for dying and leaving her alone to deal with the pain. Even when Ed was still alive, Rachel got no comfort from Ed. He had continuously asked why Rachel was in Wattle Valley Park, a question Rachel could not answer. Ed never told his wife that on the day of Janie's death, he was taking part in an intensive tennis workshop in hopes of beating Toby Murphy at the game.

Polly Fitzpatrick

Polly Fitzpatrick is the youngest daughter of John-Paul and Cecilia Fitzpatrick. She is described as being beautiful with black hair and a perfect complexion. Polly has a crush on Connor who is her physical education teacher at school. It is because Polly has seen Connor that she rides her bicycle into the road in front of Rachel's car, hoping to catch his attention. Although Polly survives the accident, her right arm is severely injured and must be amputated. John-Paul believes Polly's injury is the result of his action of killing Janie and keeping his crime a secret for so many years.

Isabel Fitzpatrick

Isabel Fitzpatrick is the oldest daughter of John-Paul and Cecilia Fitzpatrick. It is around the time of her birth that John-Paul writes his letter to Cecilia admitting that he was the one who killed Janie. Polly tells her mother one day that she has noticed her father looking at Isabel strangely, a statement that makes Cecilia concerned that John-Paul might be abusing the girl. It turns out, however, that John-Paul has been looking at the girl strangely because Isabel has begun to remind him of Janie, the girl he believes he killed.

Lauren Crowley

Lauren Crowley is Rob Crowley's wife and Rachel Crowley's daughter-in-law. Although she showers her mother-in-law with thoughtful gifts and actions, Rachel cannot bring herself to accept her daughter-in-law. Lauren has a career and often likes to pamper herself, making Rachel feel as if Lauren doesn't care for Jacob as much as she does. It is not until after Polly's injury that Rachel realizes how delicate life is and begins to try to begin a relationship with her daughter-in-law.

Will Curtis

Will Curtis is Tess' husband and Liam's father. Will comes to Sydney where Tess has gone to stay with her mother to try to make things right. He never knows about Tess'



affair with Connor. He admits to Tess that the breakup is not her fault. He tells her that he had been feeling bad about himself after his barber showed him his bald spot. He says he felt flattered that Felicity liked him. Then, when Tess left with their son Liam, he realized that his wife and child were the only ones who really mattered to him.

Liam Curtis

Liam Curtis is Tess and Will Curtis' son. He is excited to go and live with his grandmother. After going to school with a boy who bullied him, Liam seems happy to be at a school where there is no Marcus. Tess tries to keep Liam from knowing there is anything bad going on between her and Liam's father. She does not want him to have to go through his parents' divorce as she did when she was little.

Sergeant Rodney Bellach

Sergeant Rodney Bellach was the police investigator who originally investigated Janie's murder. He once told Rachel that he believed Connor, who was the last one to see Janie, had "lies in his eyes." Even after Bellach retired from his position, he continued to stay in touch with Rachel.

Jacob Crowley

Jacob Crowley is the son of Rob and Lauren Crowley. He is Rachel's only grandson. Rachel becomes deeply upset and goes into a depression when she learns that Rob and Lauren plan to take Jacob and live in America for two years.

Dr. Yue

Dr. Yue is the doctor who takes care of Polly in the Intensive Care Unit at Westmead Children's Hospital. He is the one who tells Cecilia and John-Paul that Polly's right arm must be amputated.

Esther Fitzpatrick

Esther is Cecilia and John-Paul's middle daughter. It is she who is obsessed with the Berlin Wall. Cecilia believes Esther may have a touch of autism. Esther also has a slight lisp.



Symbols and Symbolism

Marfan Syndrome

Although it was undiagnosed, Janie suffered with Marfan syndrome. This disease caused her to suffer an aortic dissection which led to her death. The cause of death was not strangulation.

Berlin Wall

The Berlin Wall is one of the symbols that recurs in the novel. Esther, Cecilia, and John-Paul's daughter have begun a fascination with the Berlin Wall, a symbol of division.

John-Paul's Letter

Cecilia finds this letter when she is in the attic looking for her piece of the Berlin Wall. John-Paul asks her not to read it, Eventually, she does read it when she realizes how badly he wants to keep her from finding out what it says. It turns out John-Paul confessed to a murder in the letter.

Piece of the Berlin Wall

Cecilia buys this piece of concrete that is supposed to be a piece of the Berlin Wall when she is a college student. She gives the piece to Esther when the child develops an interest in the Berlin Wall.

TWF Advertising

TWF Advertising is the company that Tess, Will, and Felicity started together.

Macaroons

It is when Rachel tries the macaroons that Lauren gave her that she is reminded of Janie and how much she would have loved the treat.

The Biggest Loser

"The Biggest Loser" is a television show that is included in parts of all of the different story lines. It is one of the aspects that is used to tie the stories together.



Videotape of Janie

Rachel finds a videotape of Janie with Connor and believes that she has found new evidence that proves that Connor was the one who killed her daughter.

Rosary Beads

A set of rosary beads is found in Janie's hand after her death. Cecilia realizes that John-Paul's mother has known all along that her son was responsible for Janie's death because she recognized the beads as she had given them to him.

A Compass

Tess' father gives her a compass, a gift with which he offers his hope that she will find the right direction to take her life.

Butter

Because the family has no butter for their hot cross buns, the Fitzpatrick family walks to the store on Easter. This is how they happen to be near the area where Rachel sees Connor walking.

A Fish Shaped Kite

Connor takes this kite to the school on the day of Polly's accident. He plans for Tess and Liam to join him. Instead, he attracts Polly's attention, causing her to run in front of Rachel's car.



Settings

Intensive Care at Westmead Children's Hospital

Polly is cared for in the Intensive Care unit at Westmead Children's Hospital after she is hit by Rachel's car.

The Attic

The attic of the Fitzpatrick house is where Cecilia goes to search for her piece of the Berlin Wall to give to Esther. In the attic she accidentally knocks over some of John-Paul's boxes and finds the letter he has written to her.

Sydney

Sydney is the city in which the main action of the novel takes place. It is in this town that Cecilia and her family as well as Rachel, Connor, and Lucy live.

Australia

Australia is the country in which this book is set.

St. Angela's School

St. Angela's School is the school where Tess and Lucy take Liam to register just before Easter. It is the same school that Cecilia's daughters attend. Many activities, like the Easter parade, take place at St. Angela's.

Wattle Valley Park

Wattle Valley Park is the place where Janie was killed.

1984

1984 is the year of Janie's murder.



Themes and Motifs

Pandora's Box

One of the main themes of the novel is that of the fabled Pandora's box, the idea that one event or action can set in motion a string of bad, unavoidable repercussions. Although it appears the letter that Cecilia finds written by her husband is the original "Pandora's box" there are several other circumstances in the novel that seem to lead up to the tragic ending.

The letter appears to be the main "box" that sets into motion the evil in Cecilia's life. Before she read the letter, she had no idea her husband had ever committed a crime, much less that he thought he had committed murder. His confession turns everything Cecilia thought about herself, her life, and her family upside down. Although it was John-Paul who believes he committed a murder, Cecilia feels responsible for the knowledge once she learns what has happened. In a way she is responsible for what happens to Polly. If she had told Rachel it was John-Paul who murdered Janie, Rachel would never have tried to take matters into her own hands.

For Rachel, there are actually two events that seem to take her life off course. First, she learns that her young grandson, who has been the center of her life since the death of her husband and daughter, will be taken away from her. The idea that she will lose Jacob makes Rachel remember how little joy her life had before he was born. Rachel is already feeling the loss of Jacob when she finds the videotape of Janie. Rachel latches onto this video as a sign she will finally do something productive to help Janie. It is the perceived loss of Jacob as well as her prolonged grief about her daughter's death that makes Rachel want to take matters into her own hands, as she attempts to hit Connor with her car.

Knowledge of her husband and cousin's affair is the event that seems to throw Tess' life off kilter. Before this point, Tess felt her life was going well. She decides to get away from Will and Felicity. She and her young son go to live with her mother. Things are set into motion a little quicker than Tess had expected when her mother sets up an appointment for Liam to start school before Easter. This gives Tess the opportunity to meet Connor, her old boyfriend. It is Connor's plan that he, Tess, and Liam can have fun together flying a kite that causes Connor to happen to be walking near the school at the same time Rachel is on her way home the morning of the anniversary of Janie's death.

Berlin Wall

The Berlin Wall is an interesting symbol of separation and suffering in the novel. The original reference to the wall indicates all the trouble that follows Cecilia in the novel might never have taken place if it hadn't been for the Berlin Wall. After this original reference, there are a variety of references to the wall and important dates in its



existence. These dates all represent important events in the lives of the characters of the novel. For instance, it is on the same day in June of 1987 that Ronald Reagan is asking that the Wall be destroyed that Tess' parents talk about their separation. Tess' mother has had an affair with another man, putting a wall between the couple. Instead of choosing to tear down the wall and reconcile, they leave the wall intact.

Later in the novel, it is learned that Cecilia and John-Paul meet on the same day that Checkpoint Charlie was destroyed. In 1961, when the Germans are told the government has no intention of building a wall, Rachel and Ed get engaged. In 1977 when a group of teenagers are killed as they protest the Wall, Mary and Lucy are both pregnant. They cry when they hear the reports and wonder what the relationship of their babies will be like.

Other references to walls in lives occur throughout the novel. For instance, Rachel refers to her life as feeling like it was divided by a giant wall. This wall was put in place on April 6, 1984, the day of Janie's death. The actions of this day similarly represent an enormous wall in Cecilia's life. Cecilia indicates that the knowledge that John-Paul killed Janie was like a huge wall that couldn't be crossed.

Guilt/Forgiveness

Guilt and forgiveness are important themes in this novel as characters struggle with feelings of guilt and forgiveness of themselves and others. Rachel is one of the main characters who struggles to forgive. The person with whom she seems most unforgiving of is herself. Even thirty years after Janie's death, Rachel still holds herself responsible for her daughter's death. Rachel doesn't know that Janie had forgotten about the doctor's appointment the day of her death. She knows only that she was seven minutes late in picking her daughter up because she'd been flirting with a man other than her husband. She thinks if she had been on time, things might have gone differently.

Rachel grabs onto the idea that it was Connor, the boy who last saw Janie alive, who killed her. She refuses to approach Connor and ask him about their last afternoon together. She harbors this determination that Connor killed Janie to the point that she tries to run over him with her car because she feels he has gotten away with a crime. Rachel's rash action does not hurt Connor, Instead, young Polly Fitzpatrick is injured. Rachel now knows what it feels like to unintentionally hurt another person's child. She sees that she has the same capability to injure unintentionally. Additionally, she learns that she has misjudged Connor all along as it was John-Paul who believes he was responsible for Janie's death, not Connor. Rachel cannot bring herself to tell Connor the way she blamed him for Janie's death for so many years. In the end, she holds John-Paul and his family's fate in her hands as she will decide if she should turn him in and let the law punish him for the murder or if John-Paul has suffered enough.

Cecilia struggles with her need to forgive John-Paul. She has learned that her husband might have been responsible for a terrible crime. This does not fit the image she has created of John-Paul for herself. She had believed John-Paul was engaging in



community service because he liked to serve his community, not because he was punishing himself. She suddenly realizes the reasons behind his depression, his suicide attempt, and his bouts of crying in the shower. When Cecilia learns about John-Paul's misdeeds, she learns about a part of herself she had never wanted to acknowledge. She has realized that her willingness to help others and do the right thing has limits. It is not until her own child is hurt that she realizes she owes it to Rachel to tell her the truth.

Similarly, Tess has issues she needs to work out and people she needs to forgive. The people whom she has harbored a lack of forgiveness for the longest are her parents. She is angry with them for divorcing, even though she doesn't know the reason why they divorced. She is determined when she first learns about Will and Felicity's affair that she will not subject Liam to a divorce. She does not know it was an affair on her mother's part that caused the divorce. She heads down the same path when she has an affair with Connor. She is able, however, to forgive Will and Felicity to the point that she can repair her marriage.

Finally, Connor is the unfortunate scapegoat in this story. For all of his life, Rachel has believed he was the one who killed Janie. He believes his own mother even thinks he might have been responsible for hurting Janie. He has been in therapy for years to help him deal with his guilt and hurt following Janie's death. Connor is even more disturbed when he believes he is the cause of Polly's injury. He blames himself because he did not stop for the girl when she called him. The novel indicates Connor is in therapy for years to help him deal with his guilt.

Styles

Point of View

This story is told from the third person point of view. For the most part, the story is told from the viewpoint of four different characters. These are Cecilia, Tess, Rachel, and Janie. The stories of these four women are well defined and separate from one another when they are introduced in the first chapters. As the book continues, the characters and their stories begin to merge until the climax in Chapters Fifty and Fifty-one. At that point, the lives of all four women cross in one moment when Rachel sees Connor and decides to take matters into her own hands. This meeting of lives is demonstrated by the converging points of view. There is almost an omniscient feeling to these chapters.

Both exposition and dialogue are important in this story. The interaction between characters and the way the life of one person affects the life of another are the foundation of the novel. Dialogue between characters is important to indicate the way one character's life affects the other. Exposition is also an important part of the novel. It is during these sections of exposition that background information, such as that about Janie's death, is given.

Language and Meaning

The most significant way this writer uses words and language in this novel is the way she chooses certain words and phrases to tie aspects of the novel together. Although Cecilia, Tess, and Rachel's stories seem completely unrelated at the beginning of the novel, these stories are all tied together with references to the television program "The Biggest Loser." The phrase "You get nothing for nothing" from the television show resounds in several places in the novel. Other often repeated phrases include references to the Berlin Wall. The problems that these women face seem to take the form of allegories associated with the Berlin Wall.

Structure

This novel is divided into fifty-nine chapters. There is a prologue that gives a brief blurb about Pandora, the woman who supposedly released evil into the world by opening a jar given to her to keep. An epilogue ties the story together with a series of things that might have come to pass had Janie not gone to see John-Paul in person the night of her death.

The story is told in what might be described as a modified linear structure. The novel begins detailing the actions of three women — Cecilia, Rachel, and Tess — on a Monday morning prior to Good Friday. The text takes the reader through the course of the week to Good Friday, the day on which the book reaches its climax with all characters in the proper place for disaster.



Throughout the book, however, there are flashbacks to the last day of Janie's life. Chapter Six is the first chapter that goes back to the morning of the last day of Janie's life. Flashbacks are also included signifying significant events in the main characters lives. Interestingly, all of these flashbacks are in some way tied to the Berlin Wall. For example, on the day that Cecilia meets John-Paul the Berlin Wall is being demolished in Germany.



Quotes

One thing: How exactly was she meant to have found this letter if he had died? She might never have found it!

-- Cecilia (chapter 1 paragraph 115)

Importance: This is one of the first questions that come to Cecilia's mind when she finds the letter that John-Paul wrote to her. She considers if John-Paul had died, she would never have known there was a letter for her to read or where to find it.

Oh, yes, her husband was hopeless, and lost things and ran late, but he took care of his wife and daughters, in that old-fashioned, responsible, I-am-the-man-and-this-is-my-job way. Bridget was right: Cecilia ruled her world, but she'd always known that if there was a crisis — a crazed gunman, a flood, a fire — John-Paul would be the one to save their lives.

-- Cecilia (chapter 1 paragraph 128)

Importance: Cecilia describes her husband as being disorganized; but, she believes that he is capable of dealing with any major emergency that life might throw their way.

That took a lot of confidence, to steal your cousin's husband.

-- Tess (chapter 2 paragraph 25)

Importance: Tess thought that once her cousin, Felicity, lost weight she would gain confidence. Tess did not expect this confidence to cause her to take her husband.

She had no idea that her life was so flimsily constructed, like a house of cards, and that Rob and Lauren could march in here on a Monday night and cheerfully help themselves to the one card that mattered.

-- Rachel (chapter 3 paragraph 25)

Importance: Rachel realizes when Rob and Lauren tell her that they are going to America and taking Jacob with them that it has been Jacob who has brought her back to life. She suddenly realizes that losing Jacob will make her world fall apart again.

There's something that Whitby boy isn't telling us,' Sergeant Rodney Bellach had said all those years ago, when he had a head full of startlingly curly black hair. 'That kid has got lies in his eyes.

-- Sergeant Rodney Bellach (chapter 8 paragraph 45)

Importance: Rachel takes this comment by a police sergeant who worked Janie's death as proof that he believes that Connor was somehow involved in Janie's death.

You're not going to live happily ever after with him,' said Tess. 'You know that, don't you? Because I'm prepared to wait this out. I will wait for you to finish with him.' She took a deep, shaky breath. 'Have your revolting little affair and then give my husband



back.

-- Tess (chapter 13 paragraph 43)

Importance: When Tess first learns that her husband and cousin have fallen in love with each other, she tells Felicity that her relationship with Will will not be permanent. Tess tells Felicity that she wants her husband back.

They said it was a massive stroke, but Ed and her parents had died of broken hearts. Only Rachel's heart had stubbornly refused to do the right thing and kept on beating. (chapter 14 paragraph 57)

Importance: From this quote it seems that Rachel is almost angry with herself for continuing to live even after Janie and her husband died.

He must want that letter very badly if he was prepared to go up there.

-- Cecilia (chapter 15 paragraph 52)

Importance: Since John-Paul has such a severe case of claustrophobia, Cecilia is surprised to hear him rummaging around in their tiny attic. It is at this point she realizes the letter that he wrote to her must contain some information he really doesn't want her to have.

She'd been lacking in so much confidence when she was a teenager, worrying all the time about what people thought of her and how they might hurt her, without even considering the impact she might have on their feelings.

-- Tess (chapter 18 paragraph 6)

Importance: Tess suddenly realizes as an adult that her actions have an impact on the feelings of those around her. As a teen, she'd been so wrapped up in trying to keep others from hurting her she'd never considered the things she said and did might hurt others.

He'd strangled Janie Crowley. He'd actually put his hands around her thin girlish neck and squeezed. Didn't that make him evil? Yes. The answer had to be yes.

-- Cecilia (chapter 19 paragraph 37)

Importance: When Cecilia reads John-Paul's confession that he killed Janie, she realized there was a part of her husband that was evil.

I don't need to tell you this, do I? You're a mother. You'd do anything for your children, just like I'd do anything for mine.

-- Virginia (chapter 28 paragraph 37)

Importance: After a visit by Virginia, John-Paul's mother, Cecilia realizes that her mother-in-law has been aware all along that her son killed Janie. She feels that Virginia is threatening her to keep quiet about what she knows about Janie's death.



But no matter how badly it hurt, she didn't want to be home in Melbourne, baking and watching television and doing invoices. She wanted to be right here, soaring along on this bike, her heart thumping, letting her know she was alive.

-- Tess (chapter 43 paragraph 7)

Importance: Although Tess knows her relationship with Connor is wrong, she enjoys the relationship because it lets her know that she is still alive.

And now you're saying I get to make the decision. It's nothing to do with you anymore. Now it's my responsibility whether Rachel gets closure or not!

-- Cecilia (chapter 43 paragraph 30)

Importance: When Cecilia and John-Paul talk about the letter, Cecilia tells him she does not appreciate him putting the knowledge of his crime in her hands. She feels as if this makes her responsible for either turning her husband in to the law or helping him to cover up the secret.

But Rachel felt like she owed it to Janie to turn up each year with her posy of flowers, to apologize for not being there, to be there now, to imagine her last few moments, to honor the last place she'd been alive, the last place where she'd breathed.

-- Rachel (chapter 46 paragraph 16)

Importance: Although Rachel realizes her yearly visit doesn't really mean anything, she continues to make the trip each year as it helps her to feel better.

This was my fault,' he mumbled into his hand. 'I made this happen. Oh God, Cecilia. I should have confessed. I should have told Rachel Crowley.

-- John-Paul (chapter 55 paragraph 16)

Importance: When Polly is badly injured when she is hit by a car, John-Paul is determined that the accident is his fault because he killed Janie and never told anyone.

You could try as hard as you could to imagine someone else's tragedy — drowning in icy waters, living in a city split by a wall — but nothing truly hurts until it happens to you.

-- Cecilia (chapter 55 paragraph 20)

Importance: Through the entire novel Cecilia has wondered how a person can handle dealing with a tragedy in their lives. It is not until her own child is injured that Cecilia realizes there is no way to know how much something will really hurt until she has personal experience with tragedy.

John-Paul will never know that it was an aortic aneurysm that killed Janie, not traumatic asphyxiation, and that if the forensic pathologist who did Janie's autopsy hadn't been suffering from a debilitating flu that day, he would not have been so willing to acquiesce to the Crowley family's request for a limited autopsy if possible. (Epilogue paragraph 7)

Importance: Turning the basis of the book on its head, the reader learns in the Epilogue

that John-Paul was not responsible for Janie's death at all. Instead, Janie has a disease that caused her aorta to tear resulting in her death at the exact time that John-Paul wrapped his hands around her neck.