

If the Witness Lied Study Guide

If the Witness Lied by Caroline B. Cooney

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Plot Summary

If the Witnessed Lied is a novel by the best-selling author of *The Face on the Milk Carton*, Caroline B. Cooney. The story follows the Fountain children in the aftermath of their mother's death and then their father's death, both within a few years of each other. The two boys, Jack and Tris, live in the Fountain home with their mother's step-sister, Aunt Cheryl. Smithy, the youngest girl, is away at boarding school. Madison, the oldest and the oldest girl lives with her godparents.

As the novel and the story unfolds, the Fountain children reunite. Putting various clues together, they come to the conclusion that their Aunt Cheryl is actually responsible for their father's death and not their baby brother, Tris, who was accused of the murder.

In addition, the Fountain children unite to protect their baby brother, Tris, from being exploited in a docudrama their aunt has agreed to shoot with a director and producer. In this coming of age story, the Fountain children not only uncover the truth and clear their baby brother's name, but they also learn how to be a family once again even in the absence of their parents.



Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary

Jack Fountain is at his high school when his friend Diana Murray tells him that she needs to talk with him. Jack assumes it is about his three-year-old brother, Tristan—Tris for short. Diana tells Jack that his aunt Cheryl is planning on redoing Jack's closet. This sends Jack home to save his dead father's work boots, cell phone, wallet and watch from winding up in the trash. When Jack arrives at the house, he saves his father's belongings and overhears the conversation between his aunt and an unknown man in the living room. The man is talking about putting Tristan on television and about following the "older brother" or Jack. Jack concludes that his aunt has sold Tris to television.

Chapter 1 Analysis

It seems as if Tris and Jack are living with their aunt in Jack's parents' house. His two sisters, Smithy and Madison, apparently live somewhere else. It seems as if Jack's father died in a car accident. It infers that Jack's mother is gone too, but doesn't say she was in the vehicle with her husband when it happened. According to Jack's perception, his aunt Cheryl is trying to get rid of the Fountain children so she can take over his parents' possessions.



Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary

Madison Fountain is at the Emmer's house where she is now living. It is Friday and she has stayed home from school faking an illness. She is thinking about the day before, which was her father's birthday. The Emmer's are Madison's godparents and so they took her in after the incident that took both her parents. Now she feels as if they can't wait for her to leave.

Smithy is a ninth grader at a boarding school she applied to and was accepted at after her parents died. She's planning on spending Thanksgiving and Christmas break with her roommate Kate's family. She's also remembering that yesterday would have been their dad's 41st birthday and that she didn't call any of her siblings yesterday. Smithy is named for her mother's maiden, which was Smith.

While waiting in the car in the shopping mall, Madison thinks she spots her father's jeep. She walks over to it to see if his initials are carved in the dashboard. She remembers again how on dad's birthday last year they all wrote on his cake, but there mother wasn't there to write on it last because she is already dead. She climbs into the stranger's jeep and starts remembering back to the die her father died. As Madison tries to release the brake and realizes how hard it is, she wonders how a two-year-old Tris could have released the break. Madison remembers that they know what happened because there was a witness to the accident, but now she realizes that the witness lied.

Smithy remembers back to the day of her father's accident. She was rummaging in the kitchen drawers for the spare keys to the jeep so that a neighbor can drive it off of their father. As aunt Cheryl runs outside, she's screaming that Tristan killed his own father. Since Smithy left for boarding school, she has only been home once for a week in August the previous year. Just as their mother is a picture in a scrapbook to Tris, so is Smithy. As Kate and Smithy are talking, Smithy realizes that she wants to return home now.

Jack is listening to the TV producer say that they need to capitalize on the anniversaries of the deaths of Laura Fountain and Reed Fountain, their parents. Jack remembers how their mother dies for her children and their father died because of one of the children. Jack also recalls after his mother makes the decision that takes her life that the Fountain family is overrun with media, news cameras and more invading their lives.

Chapter 2 Analysis

Each of the Fountain children is dealing with the loss of their parents by ignoring it. In addition, they are ignoring each other. The only ones that are still in the same house and are together are Tris and Jack. From Madison's thoughts, it seems as if Tristan climbed out of his car seat in the backseat of their dad's jeep. While there father was

outside of the jeep in their driveway, Tristan released the parking brake and the jeep ran over their father. Ironically, both of the Fountain parents are killed, but in separate incidents. It seems as if their deaths are within one or two years of each other.



Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary

Smithy remembers how she and Diana were best friends before her parents died. Smithy is also remembering that she is mad at cancer and that her mother gave her life to have Tristan. Smithy realizes that if she wants her family back that all she has to do is go home.

Jack is listening to the producer tell his aunt that she has to bring the sisters home for the taping. Jack learns that Madison's godparents have been talking to the trust fund trustee about getting Madison out of their house. As Aunt Cheryl and the producer plan to drop in at Tris's daycare, Jack runs out of the house and jumps on his bike and heads toward Tris's daycare.

Madison is still on the Emmer's couch flipping through the TV channels when she sees her church is on one of the local channels. She remembers how when her mother was dying, she recorded a CD for Tris with nursery rhymes and her favorite stories so that her fourth child could hear her voice. Madison gets dressed and packs a bag to go to her old house.

Jack arrives to pick up Tris before his aunt and the producer are. As he is walking out with Tris, the day care director tells Jack that his aunt just called.

As Smithy is contemplating how she can arrange transportation to get home, she sees some yellow school buses idling in the parking lot. She finds out the art class is having a field trip into Boston. Smithy can catch a plane or train home from Boston. She waits for the teachers to disembark and then she boards one of the buses.

Madison pulls onto Chesmore, which is the street where her house is. She locks her car and starts walking toward her house when a TV news van passes her and pulls into her driveway. She assumes something is wrong and starts running toward the house.

Chapter 3 Analysis

The inference is that Laura Fountain was pregnant with Tristan when she contracted cancer. She must have refused chemo and treatment so that she could have the baby, and the cancer eventually killed her. Jack plans on picking Tris up from daycare so that the producer cannot film Tris. Madison is thinking that her Aunt Cheryl is responsible for her father's death, rather than it was an accident. Madison too wants her family back, but she has been dealing with the pain of losing both her parents by running away from the problem rather than facing it.



Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary

The bus is halfway to Boston when Smithy remembers a conversation she has with Nonny, her father's mother. She asked Nonny if her mother was doing the right thing in choosing to have Tris over having chemo. Smithy remembers the picketers surrounding their house accusing her mother of committing suicide. When the bus arrives at the museum, Smithy catches a cab to the train station and buys a ticket home.

The day care director is telling Jack about the docudrama when Jack tells her to have a good weekend and that he and Tris are off to a soccer game. Jack straps Tris in the kiddie seat on the back of his bike and takes the same back roads he took in to escape his aunt and producer. Jack realizes he has to call his sisters, which he hates to do, to make sure they don't participate in the docudrama.

As Madison bolts into the house, she runs right into her aunt and the television producer. She remembers how Cheryl came into their lives to start. She is the adult daughter of her mother's father's second wife. After Laura Fountain died, Cheryl showed up to help and Reed Fountain ends up paying her a salary to help run the house.

Chapter 4 Analysis

One of the reasons Jack stays to take care of Tris is because Jack promised his dying mother that he would. Ironically, Madison has been running away from the media since her mother got sick and chose not to take chemo treatments but to have her baby instead. Now, Madison has walked right into the media circus, unbeknownst to her. Cheryl is a very greedy person that is just taking on the role of "caring" for the Fountain children for the fame and fortune it brings her. In reality, she doesn't care that the sisters are no longer living with her and she is always looking for a reason to get rid of Jack and Tris too.



Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary

Smithy Fountain sends a text message to the headmistress of her school to let her she is going home for good. Smithy wonders if she is marked for bailing on her family just as Tris is marked for killing both of his parents.

As Madison faces the producer and her aunt, she realizes that her aunt has once again called in the media to exploit the situation. Madison walks into the kitchen and then upstairs to her room, realizing that her aunt has changed the house to suit her taste and all traces of Laura Fountain are gone.

Dr. Dresser, the school headmistress, calls Kate into her office. She tells Kate that Smithy ran away home and asks if Kate knew about Smithy's plan. Kate cannot believe that after everything she has done for Smithy that Smithy has betrayed her like this.

Madison calls Tri's day care to speak to the director. Madison encourages the director to not allow the filming, since it is not in the best interest of Tris. Mrs. Griz, the director, tells Madison that Jack picked Tris up today but that she's sure they can work out something that's beneficial to everyone. Madison texts Jack instead of calling him.

Jack texts his aunt that he has Tris and they're going to watch a soccer game. Instead, he and Tris go to the library. When Jack receives the text message from Madison, he thinks Madison is on board with doing the TV show. Jack convinces Tris to come down from the tree house in the children's wing of the library so they can pee on trees in the woods and Jack can call Madison.

As Smithy's train arrives at the station, Cheryl calls her phone.

Chapter 5 Analysis

Ironically, even though Tris's existence is the reason that both of their parents are dead, all of the other Fountain children love Tris dearly. While he is the one thing that has torn them all apart, he might just be the one thing that ends up bringing them back together again. They all seem to have an interest in protecting Tris. While Jack has been doing this in the absence of his sisters, his sisters are now back to help Jack.

Similar to Smithy, Madison too feels guilty for abandoning her family when they needed her most. Cheryl knows that Smithy is on her way home. She calls her to let her know about the television show and try to convince Smithy it's a good idea so that Smithy will be on Cheryl's side.



Chapter 6

Chapter 6 Summary

Cheryl announces to Madison that Smithy is on her way home. Mrs. Griz calls to tell Cheryl about the phone conversation she had with Madison and that Jack picked up Tris. Cheryl realizes she has a text from Jack but assures Mrs. Griz that the day care is still going to be on television. Madison leaves the house but the associate director, a woman with bad hair, follows her.

Diana is in class thinking about what Cheryl is up to when her cell phone rings. It has the name Reed Fountain on the caller ID, but when Diana answers, it is Cheryl calling from the house phone. Cheryl is looking for Jack and Tris, but Diana can tell that Cheryl is "performing" for someone. When she hangs up with Cheryl, Diana calls and leaves Jack a message to warn him that Cheryl is looking for him and that she is up to something.

Madison calls Jack on his cell phone as Tris is running for the jungle gym. Madison tells him about the television show and that Smithy is coming home to film it. Madison tells him she came home because she should have gathered them all to celebrate their dad's birthday. She also tells Jack about the jeep like their father's in the mall parking lot and how Tris couldn't have taken the brake off like the sole witness, Cheryl said he did. Jack tells Madison to meet them at the playground.

Madison makes it to her car and manages to hide from the news van and Angus as he leaves in his BMW. Madison calls Mrs. Emmer to tell her that Jack called and he needs her to come home for the weekend. As Madison arrives at the playground, she realizes that every time Tris is available to the media it is because Cheryl put Tris in front of the camera.

Cheryl sends Angus to pick up Smithy from the train station. Smithy thinks that Angus is a friend of her aunt's. As Angus drives Smithy, he tells Smithy about the television program and how he's already talked to Madison and Jack about it, making it sound as if Madison and Smithy are already on board to do the program.

Chapter 6 Analysis

While Madison and Smithy have both dreamed of reuniting and putting their family back together, neither thought it would happen in front of the TV cameras they've been avoiding since their mom got cancer. Jack and Madison will become allies in order to protect Tris. Madison and Jack realizing that Cheryl lied about the way their father died foreshadow the kids investigating the matter and proving that Cheryl had something to do with their dad's death so that she could take over their house and other assets. For the first time since her dad died, Smithy is running home instead of running away from home. She is running toward her family instead of trying to forget that she has any

family members left in this world. It foreshadows that the TV will push the Fountain children close together again instead of dividing them.



Chapter 7

Chapter 7 Summary

Madison arrives at the playground and Jack tells Tris who Madison is. As they walk back to the library so Tris's clothes can dry and he can show Madison how he can climb the tree, Madison and Jack talk about how if Cheryl is behind their father's death then it's a murder, not an accident.

Sitting in Angus's car in the McDonald's drive-through, Smithy starts to question what she's doing with this total stranger. As she gets out of the BMW to go inside the McDonald's to use the bathroom, she notices the TV van behind them in line. She walks in the McDonald's and turns her coat inside out. She uses a group of high school students as camouflage to leave the McDonald's without Angus noticing her.

Jack and Madison discuss the reason Cheryl might have to kill their father. When Tris goes into Jack's backpack for his fire truck, Madison realizes that Jack has their father's cell phone. their father used his cell phone for everything and was always trading up for the next model.

Chapter 7 Analysis

Jack and Madison are starting to put the pieces to the puzzle together and the puzzle implicates their aunt Cheryl as a murderer. Smithy starts to realize that Angus's TV show is not about the healing of the Fountain children, but instead is about showcasing Tris as a murderer of both of his parents. With their father's cell, it foreshadows that Jack and Madison will find information on the phone that helps them determine why their aunt killed their father and set up their little brother to take the fall.



Chapter 8

Chapter 8 Summary

As Smithy walks toward the high school with the other students, she realizes that she is running away again. Kate calls Smithy on her cell phone and as soon as Smithy picks up she starts apologizing to Kate. While Kate's intention was to yell and scream at Smithy, when he hears the despair in Smithy's voice, all Kate can do is say she loves her. Smithy asks Kate to pray for Tris and when they hang up, Kate goes into the school chapel to pray.

Diana is in chemistry class, which Jack is absent from. Diana knows that if Jack has Tris and is skipping school then something big is happening. Diana also knows that Jack must have Tris at the library since it is drizzling outside. Diana thinks back to when Smithy and she are still best friends and they find out that Laura is pregnant, and then that she has liver cancer.

Smithy realizes she has to return to Angus's car. On the walk back, she texts her brother and sister about the television program and to see which side each of them is on.

Madison calls Tris' old day care, the one that wouldn't take him back after he killed their father. The director of the day care exclaims that they would love to have Tris back and how sad they were when Cheryl Rand said Tris wouldn't be returning.

As Angus drives Smithy home, there is a small black tape recorder in his backseat recording their entire conversation.

While Jack and Madison are waiting for Tris to bring his truck to them so they can drive to McDonald's for lunch, they start looking through the pictures on their father's cell phone. Instead of seeing the pictures from their night out at dinner the day before their father dies, they see five pictures taken by Tris as he stands in the passenger seat of the Jeep. Each of the five pictures reveal the sequence of events on the date and time their father died. Each picture reveals that it's Cheryl releasing the parking brake in the Jeep.

Chapter 8 Analysis

It's ironic that Smithy asks Kate to pray for Tris. Ever since Smithy's mother died, she doesn't believe in God because she doesn't believe that a true God would take a mother that they all needed away from the Fountain family. It seems as if Madison and Smithy took the brunt of their peers' judgment about their mother choosing to have the baby over chemotherapy. This could be the reason why it was harder on them and they chose to run away from the problem rather than facing it after their father died.



Cheryl changing Tris's day care is another piece of evidence that she is up to something. In addition, Cheryl lied to the rest of the Fountain children, saying the day care did not want a child that murdered both of his parents.

Angus's has an ulterior motive in picking Smithy up from the train station and asking her a million questions. He intends on recording the conversation so he can use the information Smithy provides as part of his docudrama.

With the pictures on their father's phone, Jack and Madison have the proof they need to open a new investigation into their father's death. It might be enough to prove Tris's innocence so that he won't have to live with the mark of a murderer on his head for the rest of his life.



Chapter 9

Chapter 9 Summary

As Angus takes the exit to Smithy's house, Smithy notices the television van exits too. When they pull up in the driveway, Smithy tells the TV producer that if he films her that she will tell everyone that Angus groped her and tried to get to do filthy things.

Jack realizes that the police never found these photos because he took his dad's cell phone out of the vehicle. Madison receives Smithy's text message and they learn that Smithy is not on board with doing the television show.

As Smithy walks to the front door, Cheryl comes out to make a big show of welcoming Smithy home. Smithy tells her aunt that the camera crew is not coming in and locks Cheryl out of the house. As Smithy looks at the house, she can see that nothing of her mom remains. Madison calls and Smithy cries to her over the phone.

On the bike ride to Dunkin Donuts, Jack stops at the drug store to develop the evidence pictures from his father's phone. Jack also realizes that there might be additional evidence on his dad's laptop or in his briefcase.

Madison tells Smithy to leave out of the back door of the house. she tells Smithy to cut through the woods and Madison will pick her up on Kensington Street.

Cheryl calls Jack's cell phone and Jack can tell that she is surrounded by the TV crew. She offers to pick Jack and Tristan up. Jack tells her to meet them at Valley High School in 30 minutes. He takes Tris into Dunkin Donuts and calls Diana back. As Madison and Smithy drive to Dunkin Donuts to meet Tris and Jack, Jack asks Diana to go to his house and get his dad's laptop and briefcase for him. Jack tells Diana about what they found and Diana urges him to call the police, but Jack refuses and hangs up.

Diana is in the house trying to get into the attic. Halfway to Valley, Cheryl calls the school office to find out information about the soccer game.

Chapter 9 Analysis

The Fountain children are learning that their intuition about their aunt has been right all along and that she is up to something and she is evil. One by one, they are also learning that they can be a family, even without parents.

Cheryl starts to doubt what Jack is telling her. It might be her sense of guilt because she has been hiding a terrible secret from the Fountain children. she suspects they are on to her now, which is why she calls the school office to find out information about the soccer game.



Chapter 10

Chapter 10 Summary

Smithy and Madison arrive at the Dunkin Donuts to meet with Jack and Tris. Back at the Fountain house, Diana has located the laptop and briefcase that Jack hid in the attic. As Diana is climbing down the stairs, she drops the laptop on the cement floor and the garage door opens because Cheryl is home. Jack and Tris bike down to the beach parking lot while Smithy and Madison drive Madison's car. They all huddle into the car and Tris falls asleep between his two sisters. They discuss why Cheryl would kill their father and how to expose her. Smithy asks to see the pictures. Cheryl parks in the driveway, walks into the garage, shuts the garage door and confronts Diana on what she is doing in the house.

Chapter 10 Analysis

The Fountain children are coming together to find out what really happened to their father. Madison and Smithy are learning how to face up to the fact that both of their parents are gone, but that both of their parents still live on in all of them, and especially in Tris. If Cheryl really is guilty of Reed Fountains' murder, Diana is now alone and face-to-face with a murderer, which means Diana could be Cheryl's next casualty. Since the Fountain children are talking about returning to the house, they should be able to stop Cheryl from harming Diana.



Chapter 11

Chapter 11 Summary

Diana thinks fast and uses speed dial to tell her mom she's at Jack's house. Diana runs through the house with Cheryl chasing after her and the cameraman shooting it all. Diana makes it to her car and calls Jack to tell him she got his dad's stuff but that Cheryl caught him. Diana meets the Fountains at the beach and hands the briefcase and the laptop to Jack. Jack, Madison and Tris go to sit in Diana's care, leaving Diana alone with her former best friend, Smithy. Smithy apologizes to Diana, but Diana tells Smithy she hurt her. Jack tells them to yell at each other later because now they have to figure out what to do. Madison realizes that Cheryl talked to children out of living with their grandparents because she needed the children around in order to capitalize on their father's death. After Diana sees the pictures, she tells them they have to call the police. Smithy mentions that their fathers were best friends and that Diana's father might know something about Cheryl. When Diana calls her father, he says that Cheryl wanted to marry Reed before the accident. He also says that after the accident, Cheryl took the kids to a doctor and psychiatrist that said it would be best for them to live in the same house. Diana knows this is a lie and that the doctor and the psychiatrist came a lot later and not right after their father's death.

After calling the house and no one picks up, the Fountain children decide it's safe for them to get in the house. They prepare to confront Cheryl. Diana goes in the house first to look around and make sure Cheryl is not there. Then the Fountain children soon follow her inside the house.

Chapter 11 Analysis

When Diana calls her mom, she lets someone besides Jack know where she is. More importantly, it sends a message to Cheryl that someone knows where Diana is so that Cheryl won't hurt her. Diana's father lays the groundwork for why Cheryl would want Reed Fountain dead because he was looking for a new housekeeper while Cheryl was trying to land him as a husband. Cheryl needed to keep the kids around after Reed's death so that she could keep the house and money.

The fact that Jack has his father's briefcase and laptop, but hasn't had time to loom in either yet foreshadows that further evidence is in one of these places.



Chapter 12

Chapter 12 Summary

While the kids hide out in the kitchen, Tris has a mental breakdown, hits his head, and starts screaming. Diana takes him upstairs for a bath. When Smithy and Madison say that Tris should be okay with them, Jack snaps that they left, which caused Tris not to be okay with them. Madison decides the grownup they can trust is their Reverend. When she calls him, he is excited to hear from her and says the youth group kids never called her because her aunt said she wanted a fresh start. When she tells the reverend this isn't true, Madison hangs up on him. Then she notices the rage building up in Jack and she realizes why it's important to call the police in these situations so that people don't take matters into their own hands.

The Fountain children haul the large flat-screen TV down to the basement and Madison calls and cancels their cable service. Then, they start cleaning out the closet and drawers of Cheryl's clothes. They find Laura Fountain's jewelry box. The children take the box down to the kitchen. Jack spreads the print photographs of Cheryl's hand and she is wearing the same ring in their mother's jewelry box. The next photo, however, shows the ring is missing. This causes the children to theorize that Cheryl threw the ring under the Jeep in order to get Reed out of it and to pull up the parking brake to allow the Jeep to run him over. Diana wraps Tris up in a towel and tries to log into Cheryl's computer to find evidence, but Diana cannot guess the bank account password to see if Cheryl has been stealing money from the Fountains.

Chapter 12 Analysis

Smithy and Madison are jealous of the relationships that Tris has with Diana. The fact is that Diana is like a surrogate sister to both Tris and Jack because their real sisters were gone. Madison discovers yet another one of Cheryl's attempts to keep the Fountain children from the truth—that she killed their father for the house and the money. The ring Cheryl is wearing in the photographs is Laura's engagement ring. The kids hear the key unlock the front door and Cheryl walk in.



Chapter 13

Chapter 13 Summary

Tris tells Diana the passwords are on the back of the computer and Diana finds a piece of paper taped there. When she enters in the series of letters and numbers that look assigned, she is able to log into Cheryl's bank account online. Diana finds four bank accounts. One is the household account. One is Cheryl's personal checking account, a savings account and a money market account. It seems as if Cheryl is transferring money meant for the household to her own personal account and she has large sums of money in her savings and money market account too.

The children confront Cheryl with the pictures and their theory but she denies it. They all hear the printer printing something upstairs, so they all chase Cheryl up the stairs. Diana uses her cell phone to shoot video of Cheryl trying to attack Diana while she's holding Tris. Diana has emailed the information she found in Cheryl's computer to the trustee and emailed the video to her mother as proof of Cheryl's attack. Diana shows the video to all of them and the doorbell rings. Cheryl says it's Angus, the director.

Chapter 13 Analysis

In addition to the pictures, the Fountain children now have proof that Cheryl has been stealing money from them as well. Diana sending the proof to the trustee to evaluate should start an investigation into the matter.



Chapter 14

Chapter 14 Summary

When Cheryl flings open the front door, it's not Angus, but Nonny and Poppy. They say that the headmistress and Kate both called them to say that something was wrong and that they should get on a plane. They called Mr. Wade, the trustee, on their way from the airport and he received the pictures the children sent him and is at the police station showing them to the police. They all hear the garage door going up and realize Cheryl is trying to get away. Poppy says she can't go anywhere because he parked the rental car right up against the garage door.

The reverend comes in the house, saying he was worried when Madison hung up on him. Diana's mother, Mrs. Murray rushes in the house and corners Cheryl asking her what this is—holding up her cell phone with the video Diana sent her on it. Poppy, the reverend and Mrs. Murray corner Cheryl and force her to call Angus to cancel the TV show. Cheryl does and then the reverend escorts Cheryl out of the house to wait for the police to arrive. The Fountain children are going to live with their grandparents and they all realize now that home is where their family is.

Chapter 14 Analysis

Once Nonny and Poppy show up, the Fountain children realize that they now have adults on their side to help them get rid of Cheryl. Jack especially starts to realize that it's time to turn over the adult responsibilities to the adults so that all of them can be kids again.



Characters

Jack Fountain

Jack Fountain is the oldest male child in the Fountain family. He is the second born child after Madison. Jack is the one who stays living in the house with Aunt Cheryl after Reed Fountain dies. Jack is the primary caretaker of Tris.

Before his parents died, Jack was on the football team and a popular kid in school. Since his parents both died, Tris has had to give up extracurricular activities. His sole focus now is taking care of Tris and making sure that Tris is kept off of the TV cameras.

Jack is now friends with his sister, Smithy's, former best friend, Diana. Jack turns to Diana for help to obtain the items of Reed Fountain's that Jack has hidden in the attic of the Fountain house. Jack is good-looking and resembles Reed Fountain.

Madison Fountain

Madison Fountain is the oldest of the Fountain children. She is now senior in high school. After her father died, Madison moved in with her godparents. Madison is the one that approaches Jack about how she doesn't think that Tris could have been the one that lifted the brake on their father's Jeep, which is what killed their father.

While Madison dealt with her parent's deaths by leaving the Fountain household, she realize that she wants to return home. When Madison and Jack reconnect, they work together to dig up the evidence they need to prove that Tris is innocent and that their Aunt Cheryl is guilty.

Smithy Fountain

Smithy Fountain is the third of the Fountain children. Smithy was best friends with Diana before her parents died. When Reed Fountain dies, Smithy works the family trustee to apply for boarding school. At the same time that Madison decides she want to be home with her family, Smithy too realizes that she wants to be home with her family too.

Smithy plots to catch a bus from her boarding school in to Boston. When she arrives there, she catches a train to her hometown.

Tris Fountain

Tris Fountain is the youngest of the Fountain children. He is about to celebrate his third birthday as the novel unfolds. It's Tris who is in the Jeep and who supposedly pulled up the parking brake on their father's Jeep, which is what killed Reed Fountain.



It's Tris that ends up proving the case against Aunt Cheryl. Tris was standing in the front seat of the Jeep playing with Reed Fountain's cell phone when the accident occurs. Tris unknowingly captures Cheryl pulling up the parking brake on the date and time of the accident. When Jack finds these pictures in their father's old cell phone, he, Madison, Smithy and Diana know they have the proof that they need against Cheryl.

Diana Murray

Diana Murray is Smithy's old best friend. She lives two houses down from the Fountains. When Smithy goes off to boarding school and Madison moves in with her godparents, Diana becomes Tris's babysitter.

Diana also becomes best friends with Jack Fountain. While Jack doesn't know it, Diana also has a crush on him. It's Diana making a phone call to her father, Reed's best friend, that helps break the case wide open. Diana confirms with her father that Cheryl wanted Reed to marry her right before he died, so he was uncomfortable with Cheryl living in and helping around the house.

Aunt Cheryl

Aunt Cheryl is the step-sister of the Fountain children's mother. she comes to live with the Fountains after Laura Fountain, their mother, dies. Reed Fountain ends up hiring Cheryl and putting her on salary. When she tries to get Reed to marry her, however, Reed starts to look for a housekeeper or nanny so he can ask Cheryl to leave.

Cheryl is the only witness to Reed's accident. She's the one that says Tris pulled up the parking brake and the Jeep rolled over and killed Reed. It's Cheryl, however, that pulled up the brake on the Jeep and killed Reed. After Reed's death, Cheryl lied and did everything she could to gain control of the trust money for the Fountain children. She took over the Fountain house and is proven to have been stealing money from the trust.

Laura Fountain

Laura Fountain is the mother of the Fountain children. When she is pregnant with Tris, she finds out she has cancer. She reuses cancer treatment in order to save her baby. This captures the attention of the local news media and puts the Fountain family in the middle of a hot debate. Shortly after giving birth to Tris, Laura is ready to start her chemo treatments, but her health spirals downward and she dies.

Reed Fountain

Reed Fountain is the father of the Fountain children. he loves to carve his initials in things. This includes carving his initials in his desk, in the dashboard of his Jeep, on his laptop and cell phone. After his wife dies of cancer, Reed tries to manage running the



household and the kids by himself. It proves to be overwhelming, so when Cheryl shows up to help, Reed puts her on a salary and enlists her help. It's Reed that is run over by his Jeep when Cheryl pulls up the parking brake so that it rolls over the top of him.

Angus

Angus is the docudrama director. He wants to film the Fountain children as they go through therapy and talk about the loss of both of their parents. He wants to film Tris at his day care and portray the three-year-old child as the reason for both of his parents dying. In an attempt to extort information from Smithy, Angus picks Smithy up from the train station while he has a recorder in his back seat. The film crew follows behind them in a van filming.

Kate

Kate is Smithy's roommate at boarding school. It is Kate's family that Smithy typically spends holidays with so that Smithy can avoid facing her own family situation. When Smithy runs away from boarding school, Kate feels betrayed by her roommate. Kate is very religious, so she attends church every Sunday. Kate ends up calling Smithy's grandparents to alert them of the fact that Smithy is afraid for Tris and that their Aunt Cheryl is up to something.



Objects/Places

Reed's Jeep

Reed Fountain drove a bright yellow Jeep. He would put Tris's car seat in the back and drive Tris around to day care, picking up and dropping off the other Fountain children. As Reed loved to do, he also carved his initials in the dashboard of the Jeep. The same Jeep is what killed Reed, when someone, who everyone believes is Tris, pulled up the parking brake and Jeep rolled over the top of Reed Fountain.

Reed Fountain's Cell Phone

Reed Fountain loved to upgrade his cell phone constantly to the latest model. Along with using the phone to make calls, Reed also loved to take pictures with his cell phone. Jack keeps his father's cell phone after Reed dies. It's on the cell phone that the Fountain children find the pictures taken by Tris during the time of their father's death. The pictures they find prove that Tris did not pull up the parking brake on the Jeep, but instead it was Cheryl who murdered their father.

Jack's Bike

Jack Fountain's bicycle is his primary form of transportation. Jack has Tris's bike seat installed on the back of his bike so that Jack can pick Tris up from day care and transport him around. It's Jack's bike that is the primary form of transportation as Jack tries to protect Tris from being filmed by the docudrama crew.

Library

The library is where Jack takes Tris to hide out from the camera crew. Since it's a rainy day, he allows Tris to play in the children's department tree house while Jack waits for Madison to meet them.

Dunkin Donuts

Tris and Jack go to Dunkin Donuts while waiting for Madison to pick up Smithy from the Fountain house. It's where all of the Fountain children reunite for the first time since all of them returned from their temporary homes.



Diana's Cell Phone

Diana uses her cell phone to video tape the assault Cheryl launches on her while she's holding Tris. Diana emails the video to her mother and the trustee of the Fountain's trust to prove what Cheryl is really like.

Cheryl's Bank Statements

Diana pulls up Cheryl's bank statements online and emails them to the Fountain's trustee. The bank statements prove that Cheryl has been stealing money from the Fountain children for her own gain. The trustee takes these statements, along with the pictures from Reed Fountain's cell phone to the police to prove what Cheryl has done.

Madison's Celica

Madison's first car is a Celica. Her godparents, along with money from her family trust, helps Madison to buy her first car. The Celica represents a sense of independence and freedom to Madison. It also enables Madison to return home, pick up Smithy and drive around town to meet up with Jack while they format a plan to remove their aunt from their house and their lives.

Laura Fountain's Jewelry Box

When the children are removing Cheryl's belongings from their parents' bedroom, they find the jewelry box that was there mother's when she was a girl. When they open the jewelry box, the little ballerina inside springs up and starts twirling and playing her song. Inside of the jewelry box, they find their mother's engagement ring.

Attic

Jack moves all of his parents' belongings that his aunt tries to throw away into the attic. The attic is like a storage place for all of the things that Jack wants to hold on to about his parents. It's the attic that Diana goes into for Jack to retrieve Reed Fountain's laptop and briefcase. As Diana is coming out of the attic, Cheryl catches her with the items.



Themes

Good versus Evil

The primary plot throughout the entire novel is that of good versus evil. Biblical symbolism can be found throughout the book. Each of the characters experiences an inner struggle with good versus evil.

Jack struggles with the good and evil of protecting Tris from the spying eyes of the news and television cameras that want to portray Tris as a killer. He also struggles with having to sacrifice his own wants and needs as a typical teenage boy to become the father figure and protector Tris needs. Madison struggles with the good and evil of leaving her family behind and trying to start her life over. Smithy has a similar struggle. All of the Fountain children and Diana contend with the evilness Cheryl has brought into their lives, which ultimately caused the death of Reed Fountain.

Coming of Age

One of the primary themes that run throughout the novel is growing up and coming of age, even against adversity such as losing both parents to death. Jack struggles with the fact that his coming of age includes having to grow up faster than his peers because he has become the primary caretaker of his youngest brother, Tris, in the absence of their parents. All of the Fountain children, except Tris who is too young to understand, have to face adult problems, such as death, when they still children.

Smithy also experiences what it is like to be on her own because she away attending boarding school. She gets to see hide from normal family life during the school year and only has to face the fact that she doesn't have a "normal" family during vacations from school.

Family

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

Style

Point of View

The novel is written in the third-person point of view, from the perspective of author. The novel swings back and forth between the present and the past. The present represents the time after the deaths of Laura and Reed Fountain. The past represents the time leading up to their deaths.

The point of view of this novel is intimate, allowing a reader to connect closely with each of the characters. The book written in this manner allows the reader to get inside the head, thoughts and inner struggles that each of the characters are experiencing as it pertains to the plot. The reader cares what happens to the Fountain children. The point of view also allows the author to inject her own opinions into the narration and to expand on the events taking place around the other characters and the occurrences taking place.

Setting

The novel is set primarily at the Fountain home and in the hometown of the Fountain family during the 21st century. The novel covers the one to three years after the deaths of the Fountain children's mother and father. The main characters are involved in the aftermath of the deaths and in proving that their new guardian is the murderer of their father.

The setting of this novel works well with the plot. At first, the reader is not aware how each of the parents dies. However, as events unfold, the deaths are a constant part of the plot, the lives of the characters, and even the outcome of the novel.

Language and Meaning

The language of this novel is relatively simple and easy to read. The language is from the 21st century, which is when the novel is set. The language is descriptive enough that it helps to explain the situations and is detailed enough for the reader to truly understand.

Structure

The novel is divided into 14 chapters. The length of each chapter ranges from two pages to 20 pages long. The chapters tell the story primarily in exposition and some dialogue. The narrator injects her own voice and thoughts throughout the book, providing her opinions and feelings of the events unfolding in the novel.

The novel contains one main plot and several subplots. The main plot is the struggle of human beings in choosing between good and evil. One subplot is the coming of age of each of the characters. Another subplot is the relationships that form in family.



Quotes

"So much tragedy and emotion" (Chapter 1, p. 12).

"You're in my scrapbook" (Chap. 2, p. 25).

"Your aunt just called" (Chapter 3, p. 42).

"I'll help Daddy" (Chapter 4, p. 57).

"Thanks, Mrs. Griz. I knew Tris could depend on you" (Chapter 5, p. 71).

"Smithy, I want to do a documentary on the brave and beautiful Fountain children. Madison was just over the house a few minutes ago, discussing it, and your aunt Cheryl id on her way to pick up Jack. It'll be a portrait of courage and determination" (Chapter 6, p. 94).

"Maybe Dad decided to fire her" (Chapter 7, p. 104).

"Cheryl's fingers. The red is her thumbnail" (Chapter 8, p. 127).

"No! Diana, do not call the police! We are trying to keep Tris off the news, not on the news. Promise me" (Chapter 9, p. 147).

"We need a way to scare Cheryl into leaving of her own accord. Suppose we go back to the house and hide out upstairs until the TV crew leaves. Then we confront Cheryl. We show her the photographs. We make it clear that she has to leave" (Chapter 10, p. 162).

"Well, I don't think he was mad, but he was uncomfortable. She began hinting that she wanted to marry him. He was looking around for a replacement nanny or housekeeper, but he hadn't taken action yet" (Chapter 11, p. 172).

"So literally, one minute Cheryl is wearing this ring, the next minute she's not" (Chapter 12, p. 193).

"Not yet, Cheryl. I filmed you" (Chapter 13, p. 204).

"Trust us. We'll handle it. Tris will be all right" (Chapter 14, p. 208).

Topics for Discussion

Who is the true Aunt Cheryl? Why has she chosen to tell the police and the Fountain children that Tris is responsible for the death of their father? Do you believe Cheryl planned the murder of Reed Fountain or it was the spur of the moment decision? What do you think happens to Cheryl after the trustee takes the proof to the police?

Discuss the relationship between Jack and Tris. Are they brothers or something else? Does Jack believe that Tris is innocent of killing their father? Why does Jack feel the need to protect Tris? How does Jack feel about Tris? How does Tris feel about Jack? How do Jack's feelings change after seeing their aunt is responsible for Reed's death? What does he do about it? What happens to Jack?

Who is Madison Fountain? Why does she choose to live with her godparents after her dad dies instead of living in her family home? Why do you think Madison tries to move back home? What role does Madison play in proving Cheryl is the real murderer of Reed Fountain?

Why does Smithy Fountain enroll in boarding school? What makes Smithy realize that she wants to go home? Why do you think that Smithy runs away without talking to Kate first?

Discuss the deaths of Reed and Laura Fountain. What impact do the deaths have on the characters of the novel? How does it motivate them and how does it derail their lives?

What do you think happens to the Fountain children after they move in with their grandparents? Do you think they ever tell Tris that his mother died in order to save his own life? How do you think Tris processes this information?

Do you think the police arrest Cheryl? Are the pictures and bank statements enough proof to prove she's the murderer and to clear Tris's name? Do you think that Cheryl makes an arrangement to have a documentary done about her own life?