

Little Earthquakes Study Guide

Little Earthquakes by Jennifer Weiner

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Plot Summary

Little Earthquakes by Jennifer Weiner was published in 2005 and takes place in the present, where it follows the lives of four young women through their first pregnancies, childbirth and beyond. Three of the women, Becky, Kelly and Ayinde, meet at a pre-natal yoga class; they meet the fourth woman, Lia, in a coffee shop, where Becky recognizes her as the woman who has been watching her. The four women share the spotlight as main characters, although Lia's narration is in the first person while the rest of the women's stories are in the third person.

The novel opens as Lia sits in the park in Philadelphia, watching a pregnant woman (Becky) and reflecting on her recent past in California as an up-and-coming actress. She has recently lost a baby to SIDS and after not being able to come to terms with it, she suddenly leaves her husband, a successful actor, with an "I'm so sorry" note and goes back to Philadelphia to her mother's home. Since she told her husband, Sam, her parents were dead, he has no idea how to find her. She comes home only because she feels she has to get away and has nowhere else to go. She and her mother never got along and she thinks her mother hates her. Lia is suffering from depression and can't seem to get over the SIDS death of her ten-week-old baby. After they become friends, she begins to work in Mas, Becky's restaurant.

Becky, who is overweight, co-manages a restaurant, is married to a doctor and has the mother-in-law from hell. She finds herself in a yoga class with Kelly, whom she thinks looks like a Barbie clone and Ayinde, a model type and former newscaster. After these three become friends, they are together in a coffee shop when Becky recognizes Lia as the woman who's been watching her and they eventually befriend her. Becky is a warm-hearted woman who manages to find the humorous side of almost any situation. She is mad about her husband, who loves her, but he is such a mama's boy he can't say no to his mother Mimi, even when it hurts Becky. Mimi is a childish, selfish woman who makes Becky's life miserable, especially after her daughter, Ava, is born.

Ayinde has quit her job as a newscaster in Texas and married Richard Towne, a star basketball player who was recently traded to the Philadelphia Seventy-Sixers. When she goes into labor a little early, she can't reach her husband, who is away at the first round of the play-offs. When he finally arrives, just before the birth, she thinks she catches a faint whiff of perfume on him. Even though she is beautiful and married to a wealthy and successful athlete who seems to adore her and their new baby boy, she finds motherhood far harder than she'd imagined. She can't seem to find the time to get dressed until late afternoon and eventually obsesses so much over the baby, her husband feels pushed away. He has an affair and their lives are torn apart.

Kelly is an event planner married to an up and coming computer guy. They live in a beautiful but almost empty apartment high-rise that she plans to fill some day with only the very best of everything. No one who meets her would ever guess she is one of eight children from a lower middle class, Catholic working family. Her father is a postman and her mother died of alcoholism. Kelly has her life planned to the last detail. She is going



to have everything perfect. Then her husband loses his job and her world is turned upside down as she goes back to work when her baby is twelve-weeks-old. She struggles with exhaustion while she tries to do it all. Although she needs help, she refuses to let her husband do anything and is furious when he doesn't. He finally leaves her.

Little Earthquakes introduces the readers to these women, from how they met their husbands to what their lives are like after their babies are born. Through the friendship and help of her new friends, Lia learns life is never certain, but things could be much worse. Through opening up to her mother, she learns that she saw her father and mother through eyes that were completely warped. Her mother, whom she thought hated her, had been the stable, loving one and her father, whom she saw as loving and fun, had been unfaithful and absent. She calls her husband and he comes to get her.

Becky eventually becomes the one who is the peacemaker with her mother-in-law. When her husband finally has had enough, she knows she must step in, for her daughter Ava's sake. She wants her to have both grandmothers. She learns that love and understanding go a long way toward any relationship and tries to understand and love her mother-in-law.

Because of a frightening, potentially serious condition found in their son's heart, Ayinde and Richard reconcile. She realizes she loves him enough to want him back and that both she and Julian would be much worse off without him.

Kelly must come to the realization that life is never going to be perfect when she finds it impossible to balance her career and her baby's needs for her. She must give up her luxurious high-rise and move to a smaller place. When she swallows her pride and calls her sisters to confess everything really isn't "great!" they all advise her to call her husband. When she opens up to him, they talk things out and he comes back.

Although it's obvious that "the perfect life" may not be in the cards for any of these women, they learn that love and forgiveness are far more important than perfection.



April Lia

April Lia Summary

In the opening chapter, Lia's first person narrative is introduced. She is sitting in the park, reflecting on how once she would have taken steps to assure she'd be invisible, but now nobody notices her and that's good. She isn't there to be seen, but to watch. She watches a woman stretch as she presses her hands to the small of her back and remembers how she did that. She remembers loving this park as a child when her father brought her here. She thinks how since "it" happened, nothing can make her feel safe and reflects on how she and her husband Sam had just tried to get through the days. He had suggested a movie, three weeks after it happened and she'd gone with him, but she couldn't go in. She told him she had to use the restroom, then slipped out the door, taken a taxi home, packed her clothes and left a note, then boarded a plane for her mother's home in Philadelphia.

As she watches the woman with reddish-gold curls piled on her head bend down to pet a little dog, she reaches into her carry-all, takes out a silver rattle, slips it into the woman's diaper bag and slips away.

April Lia Analysis

Little Earthquakes opens as Lia is sitting in the park, underneath an elm tree, beside an empty fountain, with a series of uneaten sandwiches in her lap and a gigantic, pink flowered diaper bag at her side. The month is April and the bleak, stark setting reflects the bleakness of the woman as she sits there. The reader isn't immediately told why she wants to be invisible, or why she is watching the pregnant woman with the reddish-gold curls, but as the chapter unwinds and the woman thinks back, the author gives glimpses and hints to show that Lia is in great emotional pain because of the loss of her baby. She is sitting in this park because her father brought her here when she was a little girl and she thinks she'll regain that sense of safeness she had back then, but it doesn't happen for her.

The author hints that Lia is someone in the public eye by having her think that once she might have taken steps to assure that she'd be invisible in order to dodge questions that began, "Hey, aren't you ... ?" but now, nobody spares her a second glance. Weiner paints a picture of Lia's unbalanced state by using phrases such as, "Every time I blinked, every time I breathed, I felt the ground beneath me wobble and slide sideways." Thus, she hints at the reason for the title, *Little Earthquakes* and foreshadows the theme of the novel, that life is unsure and often shaky.

The reader will notice that the author doesn't number the chapters or sections in this novel, but presents a chronology, giving each section title a month and each chapter

one of the main character's names. Lia's chapters are written in the first person point of view, while the other chapters are written in the third person.



April Becky

April Becky Summary

As Becky straightens up from petting the dog, the woman with the long blond hair brushes past and Becky's cell phone rings. She looks at the number, swears and replaces the phone. It is her mother-in-law, Mimi, who has gone through five husbands and is in the process of moving from Texas to Philadelphia. She is building a mini-Tara look alike and has been driving Becky crazy with requests to "sneak a peek" at how construction was proceeding. It could also be she wanted Becky to "take a l'il look" at her custom-ordered drapes. She refuses to understand that Becky is very busy and pregnant.

Becky goes to her restaurant, Mas and checks in with her partner, Sarah, who is busy preparing for that evening. As the phone rings again, she's thrilled that it's her doctor husband, who, even after two years of marriage, gives her butterflies. He asks if she's all right and when she assures him she is and asks why, he tells her that his mother paged him and said she couldn't reach her and asks Becky to please humor her. Becky says she can humor her, but doesn't have time to run her errands. He says to just talk to her; she's lonely. Becky thinks his mother is crazy, but doesn't say so.

Becky goes upstairs and changes into her yoga outfit and tells Sarah not to laugh, since she's not into organized exercise. As she looks at herself in the mirror, she thinks it's so unfair. She'd dreamed of pregnancy as the great equalizer, only to find that skinny girls stayed skinny and developed little basketball bellies, whereas she just looked like she'd had too much for lunch. She had lamented that her one and only choice of maternity wear consisted of a manufacturer whose stirrup pants and oversized tunics screamed "time traveler from 1987 and even fatter at the moment."

Becky walks to her new yoga class and hits Reject on her cell phone as it vibrates, vowing to call Mimi right after class. In class, she observes the tiny girl with corn silk hair on her right and the tall, beautiful caramel skinned woman on her left, whom she recognizes as being married to the new Sixers player. She learns cheerleader/Barbie-clone's name is Kelly and the cool, beautiful model-type is Ayinde.

Becky and Kelly chat as they leave the class and find Ayinde outside; her water has broken and she's in the first stages of labor. They offer to take her to the hospital and she reluctantly agrees, asking if they can take her in a back entrance. Becky lends her a sweater to wrap around her waist and a baseball cap to shield her face.

April Becky Analysis

In the second chapter, the author introduces the three other main characters in the book, Becky, Kelly and Ayinde. In each of their chapters, the point of view switches to the third person. These four women are destined to become close friends, but four more



unlikely people to become friends would be hard to find. What brings these women together is their common bond of pregnancy and motherhood and how much harder it is than anyone has ever told them.

As Becky is changing into her yoga outfit she finds a silver baby rattle in her exercise bag and can't imagine where it came from. This foreshadows many such gifts that Lia will leave Becky before they are introduced. It appears to be Lia's pathetic attempt to somehow get rid of the pain she is feeling. Becky is shown to be overweight and wondering if she looks pregnant or just fat. She was hoping pregnancy would be the great equalizer, but learns that skinny girls look like they have a beach ball on the front, while she just looks like she ate too much for lunch, introducing the American obsession of "thin is beautiful."

When Becky sees the beautiful, slender women on either side of her in the yoga class, it doesn't do much for her feelings of tank-ness and she automatically uses her sharp sense of humor as a defense mechanism. The reader will notice that Becky's sense of humor sees her through many hurtful incidences.



April Ayinde

April Ayinde Summary

Ayinde suffers through a resident doctor who keeps glancing at the door expecting Richard Towne to walk in and an excited bed neighbor who is telling someone on the phone whose wife she's in the room with, "Richard Towne of the Sixers! I don't know if she is or not. Mulatto, maybe? Are we allowed to say that anymore?" The resident tells her she's only one centimeter dilated and she should go back home. Ayinde doesn't want to go home, it's too far and she can't imagine laboring there in front of the cook, maid and driver.

Becky talks her into coming home with her. It's close and Andrew is a doctor. The resident tells her to go with her friends. Friends, she thinks and realizes she hasn't had a close friend since second grade. She'd always been different, half black, half white, fitting nowhere. Her parents had told her she had to be brave; she was a pioneer. Her mother, Mbezi, had also warned her about the risks of marrying a man like Richard. Up until now, her love had been enough. She'd met Richard when as a reporter she entered the men's locker room to do an interview. He helped her to get an interview with a rude player. She tried to play hard to get, but he convinced her to go to dinner and she fell in love.

Ayinde goes home with Becky and Kelly goes along. Five hours later, she is rocking back and forth on a giant blue ball trying not to scream as Kelly times a contraction. Edith, Becky's mother, asks if they shouldn't go to the hospital and Becky tells her she's hovering. She goes back down to join Andrew in the basement-kitchen, wringing her hands and Ayinde thinks how lucky Becky is to have a sweet husband who is there and not three thousand miles away.

As she groans through another contraction that makes her feel like iron bands are squeezing ever tighter, her phone rings and Richard is finally calling. She tells him to meet her at the hospital and Becky asks if she should call her mom. Ayinde manages to chuckle and say, she had never called her mother "mom." Her mother wanted to be called Lolo and was happy to be mistaken as Ayinde's sister. When Ayinde had told Lolo she was pregnant, the first thing she'd said was, "I'm too young to be a grandmother."

Kelly, Becky and Andrew help her to the car and drive her to the hospital, where she's gawked at by the nurses. She changes into the paper gown and begs for an epidural. After receiving it, she falls asleep and when she opens her eyes, Richard is there. But as he takes her hand, she thinks she smells a faint whiff of perfume, mixed with the soap and aftershave. Her doctor, her husband and Becky all encourage her to push. "Just one more ... you're almost there, PUSH!" Then she feels a sensation of slipping, of a great release and shocking emptiness and there is her baby. Julian. *Perfume*, her mind whispers. *Be quiet*, she tells it and reaches for her son.



April Ayinde Analysis

In the third chapter, the first of Ayinde's chapters in the novel, she is in the hospital in the first stages of labor. Even though she appears to have it all, beauty, brains, a career in television, a star athlete for a husband and wealth beyond what most people can imagine, the reader is shown that she suffers pain, both physical and emotional, like everyone else. It sends the message that no one is exempt from pain. She longs for her husband who is away at playoffs and must suffer the humiliation of the stares and curiosity of nurses and residents and the rude comments of the roommate on the other side of the curtain who seems to think she can't be heard talking on her cell phone. Even though, or because of, her near-celebrity status and great wealth, she has no friends or family near her and when she's told to go home, she doesn't want to labor in front of the maid, cook and driver. It's Becky, overweight and not particularly wealthy, who takes her home to her little place and gives her the nurturing she needs.

The mother/daughter relationship is explored here, as Ayinde is relieved to see her husband appear at her bedside as the baby is about to be born, but catches a faint whiff of perfume on him. Fear grips her as she hears her mother's voice in her head. She had warned her not to marry him because he's "a player," and is now saying, *He came back to you smelling of some other woman's perfume*. Ayinde is frozen with fear and pride because of her mother's constant warnings that she has to be strong and brave.



May Kelly

May Kelly Summary

Ten days later, Becky and Kelly are in Ayinde's beautiful house, accepting her thanks and Kate Spade diaper bags, which Kelly wished had the name Kate Spade in larger letters. Kelly recites the names, all in one breath, of her eight siblings and tells Ayinde that her husband has been a big Sixers fan ever since he went to Wharton. She is satisfied she's managed to slip that into the conversation.

Kelly wants to stay in the perfect living room forever, or better yet, have one just like it. When Ayinde remarks to Kelly that big families are nice, she must have always have someone to talk to, Kelly nods, although it isn't precisely true. Her siblings thought she was a bossy tattletale, too big for her britches. She remembers the time she had found an old scrapbook and saved pictures in it of beautiful things she loved, like colonial houses and shining new minivans, blue vases full of daffodils and patent-leather tap shoes, a pink Huffy bike and a coat with real rabbit fur on the collar and cuffs. Her mother had told her she should be concerned with the state of her soul, not her bank account. God didn't care about nice things, only good deeds. When Kelly asked why God didn't want people to have nice things, her mother had cut her off, hidden the book and told her to talk to Father Frank on Sunday. She never did.

When Kelly asks if either of them has any brothers or sisters, Ayinde tells her she's an only child. Her mother, who was a model in the 70s, didn't want to risk her figure having any more children. When Ayinde says she must give Julian a bath, they move to leave and she asks if they'd stay and help. Kelly is only too happy to show her how and is pleased to see she has the same blue plastic tub that she, herself, has purchased.

Kelly gets back to her apartment just in time for the once-a-month conference call with her sisters. She tells them everything is "great!" Her apartment is empty except for the well-stocked nursery and their bedroom. She is waiting until they can afford exactly the right things they want. Her sisters ask what she needs for the baby and she tells them nothing, afraid they'll get her the wrong things. She wants to have everything perfect.

After the call she sits in the nursery thinking about how content she is even though she'd met Steve on the rebound. She had just been dumped by a guy after he had met her family at her shabby home in a working class neighborhood, after her mother's funeral. She'd gone straight to a bar and gotten drunk, where she'd met Steve, who had taken her out of the bar and bought her food to-go from MacDonald's because she told him she wouldn't go to his place until he bought her dinner. He listened to her ramblings about the guy who'd dumped her, dried her tears and put her to bed, then slept all night on the couch. Six months later they were engaged and six months after that they were married and living in this beautiful high-rise, which was much more than they could afford, but they couldn't resist it. As she hears Steve's key in the door, she kisses her fingers and taps them on the crib's mattress. Perfect. It's all going to be perfect.



May Kelly Analysis

Kelly is introduced in this fourth chapter. Energetic, pretty, perfect Kelly, who was raised in proud poverty, became the one who always tries to fix everything and must be in control. Underneath it all, however, she longs to be taken care of. She appears to have it all together. She has graduated with honors from a prestigious college, married an up-and-coming Wharton graduate and has her life planned out perfectly. Everything she owns has to be perfect, but it isn't hard to figure out how she has become this way. As a child, the middle child, she yearned for a normal childhood. She wanted her family to talk to each other at the dinner table. She want a clean, orderly house and a mother who wasn't drunk by three in the afternoon. She became the one they relied on, the one who cleaned and straightened, the perky, perfect one. Unfortunately her siblings just think she's bossy and a tattletale.

Now that she's left that behind, she is determined to have it all and the reader sees in this chapter how name brands impress her; wealth is her god. It might just be what these names and that wealth represent: safety, stability and no fear.



May Lia

May Lia Summary

Lia muses about her first flight to Los Angeles, where she sat beside a man with a briefcase full of candy that his daughter had given him and told him about her aspirations, flipping her freshly dyed blond hair over her shoulders. Eleven years later, she'd flown back, paying for two seats to be sure there was no baby beside her. She'd paid cash for the rental car in Philadelphia so Sam couldn't track her through a credit card. As she neared her old neighborhood, she noticed that everything looked faded and smaller. Her old key still worked and she had sat waiting for her mother to come home.

Lia's mother arrived home at exactly 4:15; she'd always come home at just that time. She had looked at Lia, blinked twice and said, "I can defrost another chicken breast for dinner. Do you still eat chicken?" She'd watched her mother preparing chicken and noticed she was getting old; it startled her. She'd wanted to talk, to tell her what had happened, but her throat felt like it was swelling shut. During dinner she'd noticed her mother seeming to have the same trouble. Her mother had finally said, "You're welcome to stay if you like. You're my daughter and you'll always have a place here." Lia had waited for her to touch her, knowing she wouldn't. She had never touched her; her father had given the hugs.

Lia continues to think about that evening. She'd gone to her bedroom, still exactly the way she'd left it with a pink shag carpet, tiny single bed and that Strawberry Shortcake comforter that she'd nagged and begged for when she was eight years old. Her mother had told her she had a perfectly good comforter and she'd get tired of that one, but she'd continued to beg. Her father had given in and given it to her for her birthday. Once he was gone, her mother had made her keep it all through high school, telling her comforters didn't grow on trees.

Lia had laid back on the bed and thought of Sam in California, telling her after he signed the contract for the sitcom, how they could get a house. He'd made her laugh, trying to pronounce the abbreviations exactly the way they were spelled in the classifieds. Three bedrms! Hdwd FI! Bldrs Spcl! Canyon Vu! She imagined him sitting alone eating the frozen pizza he ate when she wasn't around and knew he'd never find her here. She had reinvented herself when she'd moved to Los Angeles with her slimmed-down body, plumped up lips, pared down nose and hair color she changed three times a year. She'd changed her name to Lia Frederick; Frederick after her father and she had removed the S from her first name. She had given boyfriends the biography of the girl she had roomed with at Girl Scout camp. When she had realized Sam would want to meet them, she had killed her family off in an imaginary car wreck.

Lia remembers the time when she was eighteen and had a screaming fit at her mother, who had stared at her impassively, while she screamed and swore. Lia had finally said



she hated her mother and she knew her mother hated her. Her mother's face had looked shocked and desperately sad. When she'd screamed she was going to live with her dad, her mother had said, "Fine, if you think he wants you." That was when she'd kicked a hole in the closet door, pawned her great grandmother's engagement ring and taken off for California.

Lia remembers laying on her Strawberry Shortcake quilt that first night back and being wakened by her mother asking, "Can you tell me what's wrong?" She'd closed her eyes and when her mother reached out to touch her she'd rolled away. When she'd opened her eyes again, it was morning. She'd gotten up, pulled on her L.A. clothes and jumped in the rental car. Now, here she was back in the park where she'd sat with her father, shivering, with an uneaten sandwich in her lap, watching the woman with one hand on her belly, her curls bouncing as she walked.

May Lia Analysis

Lia compares her flight to L.A. eleven years ago with her flight back home. She was eighteen and newly blond when she left Philadelphia, full of hopes and dreams. When she flies back, she buys two seats so there's no chance of flying with a baby and staggers through the airport like a zombie. She pays cash for the rental car, so Sam can't trace the credit card and find her.

The theme, "You can't go home again" is brought out in this chapter as she drives the rental car to her mother's home. She's worried she won't remember the way home, but it feels like the car's driving itself past the familiar mall, the restaurants and urban sprawl until she runs onto streets that feel smaller and dimmer than when she'd left. The siding on the houses and even the asphalt seems faded and the houses seem to have shrunk. Almost anyone who has left the place where they grew up to go back years later has had this familiar sensation.

The author portrays Lia's mother, Helen, as a dull, dried up little woman with a regimented life. This isn't ever stated, but shown by her routine. Lia says she leaves at exactly 7:15 and gets home at 4:15. In the summer, when school was out, she'd continue this regimen, going to the library instead, but keeping the same hours. So the reader is given an insight into her sad, uneventful life, living her life through books in the summer and teaching others in the winter.

Helen has greets her daughter, whom she hasn't seen for eleven years, without emotion or even surprise, but it almost makes one smile to see the first thing she does is offer her food, such a typically maternal gesture. Through the entire chapter, while the reader routes for her to open her arms and embrace her suffering daughter, she can't bring herself to touch her.



May Becky

May Becky Summary

Becky lies awake for hours beside her husband, Andrew, then says, "There's this woman in the park who's always staring at me." Half asleep, Andrew reaches for the Roloids and hands them to her. She tells him she's worried about his mother moving near them. He reassures her she'll settle down and they need to be patient.

Becky reflects on how they had met eight years before. She had gone to Hartwick College in New Hampshire, thinking it would be a welcome break from Florida's endless summer, but she didn't fit in. The girls were whippet-thin and blond and drove BMWs Daddy had bought them for graduation. She had gotten a job in Poire and met Sarah, her future partner in Mas. Her mother had given her diet pills and she had dropped twenty pounds. One night Andrew came in with a date for dinner and she had written her name and number on the check. They had dated for six weeks, when while celebrating Sarah's birthday they had gotten tipsy and gone back to his apartment.

Things had heated up, but he put a stop to them and told her she wasn't exactly what he had in mind. She had assumed it was because she was fat and left in a huff, but she had been so miserable without him, her cooking had fallen off. She burnt and undercooked things and her soufflés deflated. Then he had come back and met her outside Poire after work. He had confessed that he loved her and had to tell her something. After a few embarrassed starts, he told her, "It's a sex thing." He'd never been with a girl and could only "get off" a certain way. After much coaxing from her to find out what, Andrew had taken her home and admitted to what he did, which was not at all as bad as what she had imagined. She told him she could help; he was doubtful. After a heavy make-out session and him begging her, "Please, Becky, please; I know it'll work ..." she promised, "Friday, after work," and went home.

She planned a meal fit for a king: fig-jam pizza on crispy flatbread, pink-tender meat seared to a crisp, asparagus, because it was supposed to be an aphrodisiac and something decadent for dessert. She added wines that cost in the triple digits. When he met her at Poire, he was surprised to see her lugging grocery bags and more surprised she planned to cook for him. Back at his apartment she began to fix him a sumptuous meal. She told him to relax when she noticed his tense shoulders and twitching mouth.

She had prepared him a night filled with gustatory and sexual ecstasy and they had moved to Philadelphia two years later when he landed a fellowship at Pennsylvania Hospital. Becky convinced Sarah to go with them and with the help of the money Becky's father had left her, they opened Mas. One night Andrew proposed, first asking her to meet his mother. She'd said yes, slipping the ring on her finger and tried not to think about how even as he was proposing his mother had come first.



Andrew nuzzles her awake the next morning and when she tells him she needs more sleep, he tells her to stay home, but she reminds him she's going to work until she goes into labor. As she reaches for him and they kiss, his cell phone rings and Becky knows who it is. His mother. Becky entertains long, vivid fantasies of Mimi dying of some rare disease that would render her mute before she's whisked off to a land where she can't page, email, phone, or fax her son every fifteen minutes. She tries not to complain because Andrew would look serious and give her his, "She is my mother and she does it out of love," speech.

May Becky Analysis

Becky's anxiety grows as her mother-in-law moves from Texas to Philadelphia. Weiner hints at Andrew's mama's boy tendencies as he defends and explains his mother's actions and pooh-poohs his wife's concerns. She also continues to show Becky's constant awareness of her large size, as Becky tells how she didn't fit in at the New England college she chose, with whippet-thin and oh-so-pretty blond girls. This is a recurrent theme for Becky through *Little Earthquakes*. Jennifer Weiner, being a large woman herself, uses the "heavy girl with a great sense of humor" theme in her previous books with great success.

When she first sees Andrew, he's with a thin girl, but Becky has just lost twenty pounds and fits into a skirt from the Gap. She gives him her number on the back of the dinner check and they hit it off, but after a heavy make out session, he dismisses her. She jumps to the conclusion it's because she's not thin. When he finally confesses to her it's a problem *he* has, she determines to help him. And through two things she does very well, cooking and sex, she makes him fall in love with her. But when he proposes, his first words are, "I'd like you to ... (Becky thinks, 'marry me' but he says) ... meet my mother." Foreshadowing things to come.



June Lia

June Lia Summary

Lia's mother asks her if she's at home to stay. Lia had woken up that morning feeling more off balance than normal. She had been thinking of Sam and how he had won over the homeless woman who hung around their apartment building. He had given her food everyday, saying that if there was going to be a crazy person around the baby, he'd rather it be a benevolent crazy person. After the baby came, the old woman would step back respectfully whenever they'd push the stroller past her.

When her mother asks her what she does all day, Lia searches her voice for criticism, but doesn't find any. She tells her, sleeping, mostly, which isn't entirely untrue. She doesn't tell her about stalking the woman in the park, or leaving the pacifier in the window box of the restaurant, or trying to compose a letter to her husband where she can't get past, "I'm sorry." When Lia's mother asks her what's going on, she simply says, "Something happened," and her mother says she figured that much out. Lia tells her it isn't like she cares and her mother tells her not to start that adolescent nonsense, of course she cares. When she repeats, "I do care," Lia waits for her to touch her or even really look at her, but instead, she reaches into the closet and gets out a blue down coat and tells her it's cold outside.

Lia checks her voicemail and finds twenty-seven new messages. She knows they're from Sam and deletes every one. She remembers when they'd met. It was at a club where they both worked, he as a bartender and she as a car door opener. Her job was to smile big and lean over to reveal her cleavage. "Welcome to Dane!" was her line. He had slipped a coiled paper straw wrapper band around her ring finger after three take-home pregnancy tests said positive, positive and positive. They'd gone to Las Vegas and he'd given her a green garment bag with a wedding dress inside and said, "Let me be your family now."

Lia visits a pawnshop and pawns her engagement ring, then searches the papers for an apartment to rent. Finding what she wants, she walks toward the address, then stops in at an Internet café. She picks up her messages. There's one from Sam for everyday she's been away. She replies, saying she's home and safe, but hits delete and leaves.

Lia goes to check on an apartment with a view of the park where she's been sitting the last weeks. She takes the apartment, paying in cash and giving her mom's number for a reference. She goes into the bedroom, lays her coat on the floor and curls up on it, then dreams the same dream she's had every night since arriving there. She found herself standing in the doorway of Caleb's room. She saw the cream carpet, pale yellow walls and shelf of board books. She walked toward the crib and leaned over, holding her breath, knowing what she'd see, for the dream was always the same. She reached down and pulled back the blankets to find a pile of leaves. When she brushed her hand against them, they all blew away.



June Lia Analysis

Weiner shows more of the same under Helen's same-as-it-ever-was roof. Another white blouse/black slacks combo as Lia's mother gets ready for her job as a fifth grade teacher in what Lia calls the House Where Time Stood Still. The author shows Lia's fear and despair as she imagines telling her mother about the loss of her baby, how her face would crumple and how she'd hold out her arms; or maybe not. Maybe she would just wipe her teeth with her finger and look at her as if she was inventing things. Lia believes her mother hates her. She has grown up with a warped perception of her mother's intentions, as children often do.

As Lia thinks back longingly of her husband Sam, whom she has left behind in California, her mother asks her what she does all day. In typical fashion, she tells her she sleeps, mostly. Lia is obviously suffering from depression due to the loss of her baby and a typical symptom of depression is to sleep, hiding from the problems that overwhelm her. In another symbolic move, she has left a pacifier for Becky in the window box at Mas and in a positive move, she rents an apartment that, symbolically, overlooks the park where she often goes.



June Ayinde

June Ayinde Summary

Ayinde sits on the bed cradling Julian, watching Richard get ready for another trip, saying she wishes he wouldn't go. She knows it's his willingness to do anything his corporate sponsors require, from dining and golfing, to autographing basketballs for their kids, that makes him so valuable. They thought they were giving him vacations, but he took them seriously, researching the names and histories of the men and their families that he'd be meeting.

Ayinde watches him smiling to himself and she feels he must be looking forward to getting away from a squalling baby and a wife who flinches every time he touches her. She thinks about the times in Texas when she hadn't minded him leaving. She would pick up extra time working at the station, or sometimes came back east with him and visited her parents and gone to dinner or the theater with them. She knows all Richard's endorsement chasing isn't necessary, but it's more than the money. Richard needs the security he never had growing up; the certainty there will always be enough money.

When Richard reminds her he doesn't like leaving her all by herself, she thinks how strange it is for him to say that. There is the maid, the cook, the driver, the gardener, the Pilates instructor who comes every Friday morning and the decorator, who has her own key and uses it. There is the business manager who worked in the office space above the garage, the publicist and the bodyguard. There was also a baby nurse who Richard had hired for three weeks and who she had sent away after five days.

Ayinde surprises herself by going to him, clinging to him and begging him to stay. He looks confused. She remembers she had told him in the locker room years before, "I'm not a damsel in distress." She heard Lolo's voice, *Chin up, shoulders back, have some pride!* She apologizes and wishes she wasn't still wearing pajamas that she has spent the whole day in. She tells him she'll be fine and remembers the Christmas when she was eight-years-old and had been accidentally left home alone. She'd spent a happy time curled up in her comforter, making soup and hot chocolate and eating butter cookies. She tells him not to worry and he bends down and tells Julian to take care of his mama. She thinks, *Take care of me.*

June Ayinde Analysis

Richard is getting ready for another trip and Ayinde doesn't want him to go. He looks cheerful as he gets ready and Ayinde assumes he's probably happy to get away from a crying baby and exhausted, bedraggled wife. Ayinde is conflicted. When he asks, "Do you really want me to stay?" she wants to say yes, but feeling she must maintain her pride and dignity, she says no. She remembers how she had told him *I'm not a damsel in distress* when he had tried to help her in that locker room interview back when she



was a reporter. She doesn't want to feel needy or clingy or whiny and remembers when, at eight-years-old, she had been left behind in their apartment when her parents left for Europe over Christmas. She had done just fine, eating soup and drinking hot chocolate. Ayinde wants to maintain that feeling of independence, but inside she thinks, *take care of me*.

Weiner explores this dilemma faced by many women today in *Little Earthquakes*: this feeling women have that they should be able to do it all and have it all, they should be strong and independent, even right after going through the trauma and shock of childbirth. She's starting to bring out the realization that these women are coming to: that childbirth, from pregnancy and delivery, to breastfeeding and infancy, can be much harder than "the experts" tell us.



June Becky

June Becky Summary

Becky and Kelly attend a breast-feeding lecture. When the instructor asks who there has been breast-fed, Becky is surprised that Kelly raises her hand. Kelly says not to be impressed; her mother probably did it because with eight kids they couldn't afford formula. The nurse demonstrates flat and inverted nipples from a larger-than-life model of a breast and demonstrates various positions for breast-feeding.

The two women leave and meet Ayinde at a coffee shop and share stories of how they got pregnant. Kelly says she had to take Clomid and it took them six months of trying, so it threw her schedule off. She had wanted to have her first at twenty-six and her second at twenty-eight. Ayinde can't believe Kelly's already planning number two, since she's just trying to survive Julian. Kelly says she likes to have a plan and her ideal situation would be to have twins, that way you wouldn't have to get pregnant or be pregnant again. They tell her she's crazy, that it's way too much work.

Ayinde says it took them about six months to conceive, although Richard thought he would hit the jackpot right away, since he's used to getting what he wants. She tells them she's lucky, most players have kids all over the place and are always getting hit with paternity suits. Becky tells them that with her and Andrew it was kind of a joke; she got pregnant the first month she went off the pill. She had convinced herself she was never going to get pregnant because of her weight and her long menstrual cycles.

They discuss the problems and irregularities of pregnancies, spotting, amniocentesis, involuntary bed rest, heartburn and swelling. Ayinde tells them her hands and feet swelled up but she wouldn't take off her rings because without them she'd be looked at as just another baby mama without a man. Black girl, no ring, it's an obvious conclusion. Kelly and Becky are knocked into silence and Kelly asks if she really thinks people would think that even though she's ... When her voiced trails off, Ayinde says, "Biracial? Light skinned?" Kelly says she was going to say rich, that she didn't know she was biracial. Ayinde apologizes and explains her father is white and her mother is one quarter Cherokee.

Becky interrupts to tell them a woman in the corner is staring at them and she keeps seeing her everywhere. Kelly says she looks lost and Becky thinks, lost and sad and haunted. The woman raises her head, looks at them and says, "Little boy?" Ayinde answers yes and the woman gets up as if to approach them but suddenly changes her mind and bolts out the door.

June Becky Analysis

Becky and Kelly attend a lecture on breastfeeding. It's interesting to note here how fads and acceptability have influenced how babies are fed and nourished, especially in



America. When the instructor asks for a show of hands of how many were breastfed and Kelly raises her hand, Becky is shocked. Although breastfeeding was beginning to make a comeback when Kelly was born, it wasn't as common or acceptable as it is when these young women are having their babies. When the instructor asks the women how many of their doctors have asked if they'll be breastfeeding, everyone raises their hands, but when she asks them how many doctors have looked at their nipples, one woman raises her hand. Weiner is pointing out here the lack of understanding and practical help that breastfeeding women still face from the medical community. The fact that they must attend a lecture on breastfeeding shows that women haven't passed this natural function down to their daughters in the last decades.

Becky and Kelly meet Ayinde in a coffee shop where they get into a discussion about conception and childbirth. Kelly says she didn't get pregnant right away and it threw her schedule off. She'd wanted to have two children before she was twenty-eight, showing her "ducks in a row" personality again. She also states that she thought it would be easier to have twins, eliminating the need to have two pregnancies. Ayinde, who knows how difficult having one infant is, can't believe she's already planning on another. Once again, Becky ties everything in with her weight. She had been amazed when she had gotten pregnant right away, because many heavy women have a hard time conceiving; and she'd been delighted when the doctor had congratulated her and sent her home without a lecture on her weight. Ayinde admits to having swollen feet and hands, but wouldn't take her rings off because she didn't want people looking at her as just another baby mama without a man.

Weiner does a fine job showing how these women, far different in backgrounds and body types, all have issues, struggles and fears in the universally miraculous yet commonplace world of reproduction.



June Kelly

June Kelly Summary

Kelly sits in her high-rise apartment, headset on, computer screen glowing, her Palm Pilot at the ready and she is talking to the head of Special Programs for the Philadelphia Zoo. She is arranging an event for welcoming Prince Andres-Philippe, head of some small, wealthy European nation, who according to his food demands, sounded to her like a real head case. She makes a note of a compliment in her file for the next person handling a zoo event. After pinning down all the details, she tells them her maternity leave starts that night, for a whole year!

She closes her computer and opens her Palm Pilot. The man from the fabric store is coming to measure their windows tomorrow. It's a start, even though they still can't afford the leather couch or plasma TV. She's startled by a hollow, "Hi," and spills her coffee over her desk and her dog, Lemon. Steve is standing motionless in the middle of the empty living room, his suit seeming bigger on him than when he'd left that morning. He mumbles something she can't hear. "What?" She feels fear creep up her spine. Steve repeats what he said. He's been laid off. She asks how they could have done that; didn't they know she's pregnant? Steve reassures her they'll be all right. She walks to the living room and starts rearranging things, waiting for Steve to tell her he's kidding. He brushes by her on his way to the bedroom and says he's going for a run.

She goes to the kitchen and pulls out chicken breasts, broccoli and chicken broth, puts the chicken in the oven and water on to boil for the broccoli, then goes into the bedroom and curls up on top of his discarded suit and tie on the bed. She thinks of how she had their future arranged and how there was no lemon law to return her husband who had screwed up. When he returns, she tries to strike the right tone of sympathy and wifely concern, but fails.

When they smell something burning, she runs to the kitchen to find the pot boiled dry and memories of her mother's kitchen assail her. She runs to light candles and spray air freshener, her hand shaking. Then, even though it's seven o'clock, she tells him she's going to sleep. She remembers the first time she'd seen their apartment, with its jacuzzi tub and marble countertops, floor to ceiling windows and high ceilings. *We deserve it*, Steve would always say and surprise her with gold bracelets and a trip to Jamaica. They were both working and he was making lots of money, so why not? "Why not?" she whispers, burying her face in her hands.

June Kelly Analysis

Kelly sits at her desk in front of her computer and talks to a client, efficiently and knowledgeably wrapping up the loose ends of a party she had arranged for him. She feels together, confident and happy. She joyfully informs the client she won't be there



because her maternity leave begins that night. She is staying home for an entire year! Kelly has all her ducks in a row and that makes her happy. She lives in a perfect apartment and will stay home in her perfect life and be a perfect mom.

Suddenly Kelly's life is torn apart and her husband walks in, looking half the man he was when he left that morning and croaks out that he's been laid off. Kelly is in shock, but even in her shock, she is arranging things, putting things in order as she touches her cell phone, her Palm Pilot, the stack of bills she was going to pay, symbolizing the worry always first and foremost in her mind, money and bills. Kelly is frightened and not just frightened, almost in a panic, which Weiner emphasizes by having her put water on for broccoli, then forgetting about it and burning it, setting off the shriek of the smoke detector. The burnt smell sets off memories of the smells in her childhood home, smells she relates to poverty and she frantically runs through the house lighting candles and spraying air freshener.



July Ayinde

July Ayinde Summary

The book that would change Julian's life arrives the first week in July. Ayinde's mother had sent it with a note, THOUGHT YOU MIGHT FIND THIS HELPFUL, with two L's at the end. She would have shown it to Richard and they would have laughed, except, he was gone again, golfing and lunching with a client. She's never asked him about the perfume; she doesn't want to be pathetic, chasing after the man who has already married her. *Priscilla Prewitt's Baby Success!* read the cover of the book. The book, written by a self proclaimed expert, promises to teach every mother "to get her baby off to a successful start, ensuring success in preschool and beyond and harmony for the whole family!"

It's eleven o'clock and Ayinde hasn't gotten out of bed yet. Yesterday she hadn't dressed until three. She badly needs a schedule. Priscilla says baby shouldn't breastfeed for more than thirty minutes, but as she tries to ease him off, he stays attached and she hisses, "Ow!" startling him; he starts to howl. Just then her mother calls and says, "You never cried like that by the time you were Julian's age." Ayinde isn't so sure if Lolo could remember anything if the rumors of her drug use were true.

Ayinde tries to keep Julian awake for playtime because the book says so, but he isn't happy with the fuzzy butterfly, blue teddy bear or crinkly insects. Richard says they're sissy stuff. He'd said he'd played with basketballs. One of the things that drew them together was their shared lack of parenting-his due to poverty and a teenage mother on drugs, hers due to extreme wealth and parents who didn't have time for her. So Julian has basketballs, a regulation one signed by the Sixers and a miniature one that Richard keeps tucked in his crib.

Ayinde joins Becky and Kelly on a park bench where they're arguing about the right way to give birth (*like it's going to be up to them*). Kelly is full term and looking less chipper than when Ayinde first met her in yoga class. Becky tells her to be patient; babies know when they want to be born. Becky finally looks pregnant, but people are asking her if she's having twins. Becky wants a natural childbirth, at home, if possible; Kelly wants an epidural right away. They begin to walk, still arguing.

Kelly wants induced, or a C-section; Becky explains that the typical first pregnancy lasts a week to ten days over the due date and a C-section is major surgery. When they ask Ayinde how things are going with Julian, she replies, "Wonderful," knowing that's the only answer people want to hear and thinking how caring for a newborn is infinitely more demanding than she had imagined. He needs her all the time and she's exhausted. When Richard had suggested a baby nurse, she'd said no. She feels the only women entitled to pay someone else to care for their babies are working women. It is her job to care for her baby.



Becky says she'll work three days a week after her baby is born; she loves her restaurant and figures it will give her a good balance. There's a daycare program at the hospital where Andrew is. Kelly says she's going to stay home, but Steve "decided to make a career transition" and is taking paternity leave to stay home with the baby while she goes back to work until he finds something. Ayinde doesn't want to discourage them, but knows how hard and demanding a baby can be. She almost understands how Lolo had been able to hand her over to her nanny, Serena, at six weeks. Instead she tells them they'll both be wonderful mothers.

July Ayinde Analysis

Ayinde's mother sends her a baby book with a note, THOUGHT YOU MIGHT FIND THIS HELPFUL, spelled with two Ls. Ayinde would have shown it to Richard and laughed, but he wasn't there ... again. The author is showing in this passage Ayinde's perception of her mother as having beauty, but no substance. She also shows Richard's absence as a cause of Ayinde's growing vulnerability and fear. Even if she was a lousy mother, Ayinde must be thinking, Lola is trying to help her with Julian by sending me this baby book. So she swallows whole the sometimes over-the-top teaching and begins to devote herself almost slavishly to mothering Julian. Ironically, when Ayinde follows a rule by *Baby Success!* causing Julian to scream and cry, her mother calls just then and criticizes her mothering, telling her the point of the book is to get her baby into a routine so that he won't have a cranky time!

Weiner uses a scene between Becky and Kelly, walking in the park with Ayinde to showcase their personalities. Kelly is *due* and impatient, out of control and hating it. In typical Kelly fashion, she wants them to *do something*, induce birth, or give her a C-section. She hates waiting! Becky informs her about natural mothering, that the baby will come when he's ready; a C-section is major surgery. Becky is finally "showing," which is good news to her, but in typical Becky fashion, she tells them that people keep asking her if she's having twins ... or triplets, once again bringing up the weight issue. The reader should note where they are. Once again the author uses the park as the setting.

Ayinde remembers a memory from her childhood of Lolo telling dinner guests that Ayinde had cried a great deal as a baby. Lolo had told them that if someone had shown up at her front door and promised to give the baby a good home, she'd have handed her over. Now, after almost three months with Julian, she begins to understand how Lolo had felt and how she could have handed her over to her nanny, Serena, at six-weeks-old. Weiner's theme through the novel is that the universal secret of motherhood is never completely understood until it's experienced; that total exhaustion and sleep deprivation is a way of life for months and this is much harder than anyone tells you.



July Becky

July Becky Summary

Becky receives the good news that the baby is doing well and everything looks good. Then she receives the bad news that due to the size of the head and because she's overdue, her doctor wants to do a C-section. He tells her he wants to schedule her for the next day. She feels like a failure. She calls her mother, then Kelly and Ayinde to tell them the news. She decides to make a reservation at her favorite sushi place. She figures, what's it matter, the baby is practically in nursery school and a few slices of raw tuna won't hurt. That night she rolls over grimacing, her stomach killing her. "Andrew?" He gropes for the antacids and tosses them in her direction. She decides she's finally in labor and calls her doctor's answering service, but gets a call-back from his older, grumpier colleague. He reminds her she's scheduled for a C-section and she tells him she's decided to have the baby naturally since she's in labor. He tells her to go in when her contractions are four minutes apart for over an hour.

When they pick up Becky's mother at the airport, Edith is aghast she's in labor, but not in the hospital. She can't believe she's decided against the scheduled C-section and that she's in labor, walking around, in public. When they go home, she anxiously asks if she plans on having the baby there and Becky assures her, no, it's not time to go to the hospital.

After twelve hours of contractions and two long baths, she calls Dr. Mendlow and he suggests she come in to the hospital, where they discover she's only three centimeters dilated. She's admitted and Andrew offers to call her mother to let her know and asks if he should call his mother, too. Becky tells him to call her mother, but tell her to stay there till they let her know to come and no, to his mom. She doesn't want her there.

As Andrew sleeps, curled on the bed, she rocks and writhes and tries to concentrate on her breathing, thinking this hurts more than Naomi Wolf led her to believe. When Andrew's cell phone rings, she says, "Nooo," knowing instantly who it is. As Andrew tries to shush her she keeps mouthing Nooo, as he tries to talk to his mother. Becky tells him if he loves her he will keep her in the waiting room. He promises to do that. Sarah arrives to help her and begins to rub her back and Andrew goes back to sleep.

Just when she thinks things can't get any worse, she hears Mimi's grating voice, demanding to know why SHE (Sarah) is allowed in when she was told nobody was allowed in. She marches in, kicks the birth ball into the corner, sits in the rocking chair, points the video camera at Becky and tells her she could use a touch of lipstick. As Becky groans and Mimi tells her she doesn't need to be dramatic, Becky says, "MIMIIIIII!" and Andrew steers his mother, protesting, through the door to the waiting room. Becky's contractions continue until the sun comes up, then start to diminish, becoming farther apart. When Dr. Medlow suggests a C-section, Becky jumps at it.



After the C-section, Becky's wheeled into recovery, where she shivers and tries to wiggle her toes, which she can see for the first time in months. She can't and wonders if it is something she should worry about. When Andrew comes in to hold her hand she tells him he should go out where their moms are, unable to shake the picture of Mimi snatching up the baby and screaming, "My grandbaby! MINE!" She waits to feel transformed, like a mother, but she doesn't. The nurse brings in a morphine drip and tells her she can press the button every ten minutes. As they wheel her to her room, she giggles and feels all warm. Andrew is concerned about how much morphine she's had.

Edith comes in and they sniffle about how beautiful the baby is and how well Becky did. Then she and the baby fall asleep. She's awakened by Mimi's "Hahyahh!" Mimi leans over just inches from Ava and says, "Hah, Anna Banana," and Becky thinks OH NO. Mimi has been under the impression they are going to name her Anna, after her own mother and Andrew must not have told her otherwise.

Mimi shows her two friends the miniature pink tank top with HOTTIE spelled in sequins on the front and tries to slip it on the baby as Ava's head flops back precariously. Becky's tries to say, "Hey," but her throat is too dry from the operation. Then Mimi finds a bottle of formula the nurse has left and tries to force in into Ava's mouth. "What are you doing?" Becky blurts out. Words are exchanged as Becky tries to explain she is breastfeeding and Mimi finds out they didn't name the baby Anna. She and her friends leave and Andrew promises to talk to her, but adds, "Becky, she is my mother."

July Becky Analysis

Becky is devastated at the news the doctor wants to perform a C-section. She had wanted to have her baby naturally, being brave for her, now she's facing a sterile operating room, with nothing peaceful or meaningful about it. Once again, the best-laid plans are going awry, a central theme in *Little Earthquakes*; one can plan all one wants to, but when it comes down to it, one can't always count on being in control. Even though she's delighted that her labor starts that night and she is determined as ever to go ahead with natural childbirth, after two days of labor, she's still only three centimeters dilated and her contractions have slowed almost to nothing. All of a sudden a C-section seems like a relief.

Once again Becky's mother-in-law shows up as her obnoxious, self-centered and pushy self. When asked to leave, she shrieks, "What? Why?" The author's portrayal of this woman leads the reader to hate her and take Becky's side as she puts up with unimaginable inconsideration from Mimi at a time when she is least able to bear it. She thinks if her father were around, he'd put a stop to Mimi's nonsense. The author doesn't have her think the words, but the reader sees the implication, "Since her husband can't, or won't."

And even in the afterglow of childbirth, when she expects to feel transformed and rendered differently, she thinks about a birthday party when her aunt had told her to eat something healthy, like an apple, instead of the cake and waits for maternity to wash her

mental slate clean. But nothing doing. She still hates her aunt and she's basically unchanged, only with less sleep and a scar. So she hits her morphine button.



July Kelly

July Kelly Summary

Kelly enters her apartment giving orders to her three sisters and her husband about heating the frozen lasagna and entering "one wet diaper at 10:45" onto the "Oliver Week One" spread sheet on her computer. Steve apologizes for missing out on taking pictures. Her delivery had been awful. She'd torn and lost so much blood she'd needed a transfusion. And instead of being a loving, supportive husband, Steve had passed out and hit his head. They'd both come home with stitches, his to his head and hers from her episiotomy. Kelly thinks, it wasn't as if it was your blood, but tells him it's okay; the nurse got some pictures.

Her sisters raid her closet and ask to borrow things; Kelly nods, knowing she'll probably never see them again and Steve leans against the wall and says he's whipped. Kelly remembers what she's been through and has a hard time being sympathetic, but asks him if he wants coffee and asks a sister to make some. This begins a discussion on how bad coffee is for them.

Oliver starts to cry; Kelly checks her Palm Pilot and determines he's hungry. Steve grabs him out of the crib; his neck wobbles and Kelly bites back a scream and tells him to be careful. The baby seems to have a hard time figuring out what to do. He turns his face away from her and screams. Kelly feels like a failure. She'd had no trouble in the hospital, now twenty minutes home and she has to get help. She only has Steve, who napped during her feedings and her sisters who don't have kids. Besides, she was the one who always helped and advised them. They'd think she was talking backwards if she asked them for help. She asks Steve to call Ayinde, who doesn't answer, then Becky. She fills Becky in, who comes right over and Ayinde calls back and promises to come, too. Between the three of them, they are successful and they practice for an hour until she can do it by herself. "It takes a village to feed my child," Kelly jokes.

After her sisters leave and Steve goes for a nap, the three friends sit down together on the living room floor. Becky asks them if the mark under Ava's arm is a third nipple. They make jokes about a traveling freak show with "The Girl with Three Nipples and Incredible Screaming Mother-in-Law," then Becky asks them if they want to see something else weird. She shows them a lovely bib she found in her diaper bag. Kelly notices it's from Neiman-Marcus. Becky doesn't know where it came from and then tells them that morning someone slipped a silver spoon through her mail slot. It wasn't wrapped and she can't figure out whom it's from.

They make plans to meet the next morning for a walk and after they leave, Kelly lays next to Oliver on the living room floor with her eyes closed thinking about what she'd buy for the living room, everything clean and perfect for Oliver. Steve comes in and tells her if she wants to take a nap, he'll watch the baby. She keeps her eyes closed and concentrates on the high-backed barrel chairs, Turkish rug and antique maple



sideboard. "Kelly?" he asks and she turns on her side, pretending to be asleep. In a minute, he tiptoes out and leaves her and her son alone.

July Kelly Analysis

Kelly returns from the hospital like a whirlwind, all organization and efficiency, giving orders to her sisters and husband about baking the lasagna she had prepared earlier and frozen and entering Oliver's wet diaper and feeding into his spreadsheet. She's just had a baby, her stitches hurt, but she's in control! Weiner gives Kelly another reason to be disappointed in what she sees as her husband's incompetence. He fainted during delivery instead of taking pictures.

Even though Kelly tries to be understanding and supportive, she's thinking, *It wasn't as if it was your blood*. The reader gets a glimpse of her need for comfort and support from him when she thinks about how she has lost so much blood that she needed a transfusion. Oliver had run a fever and spent time in NICU and instead of being supportive and comforting, Steve had passed out at the delivery and hit his head, requiring stitches. She desperately needs help, her sisters are asking to borrow her jewelry, her husband is looking tired and telling her he's whipped and she's feeling guilty because she's not more sympathetic.

The final straw comes when she can't get a screaming Oliver to latch onto her breast. She finally gives in and calls her friends for help. Becky and Ayinde come to the rescue and admire her perfect nursery with a theme. Becky's warm sense of humor comes to the forefront as she says, "Ava's nursery has a theme, laundry." After a successful breastfeeding session, as they sit around talking about mommy stuff, Becky tells them about the silver spoon someone had pushed through her mail slot. The silver spoon being another of Lia's anonymous, symbolic gifts.



July Ayinde

July Ayinde Summary

Richard whispers for Ayinde in the darkness of their bedroom. She shushes him and tells him not to wake Julian. It's two-fifteen and Julian's been asleep for only an hour. Richard asks if she can move over, he's almost falling out of bed. She says no, she's afraid Julian will fall out. Richard asks why he can't sleep in his crib and Ayinde knows there's no really good reason that she can give that Richard will understand. So she just tells him he's happy there. Richard says he isn't happy because he's about to fall out of his own bed. She thinks of Priscilla Prewitt's book, saying that for thousands of years the family bed was the order of the day and it's still what makes the most sense. What's most convenient for the breast-feeding mom?

When Richard says they both slept in cribs and they turned out all right, she reminds him that her mother drank and took diet pills and his mother ... She stops there, knowing she has wandered into a briar patch. His mother hadn't even had a steady boyfriend when he'd been conceived and family legend was that his mother hadn't even known she was pregnant and gave birth to Richard in the hospital parking lot in the backseat of her girlfriend's car. As he reaches for her his fingertips graze her breasts and she says, "Ouch!" No one had told her how painful it could be to breast-feed. Sometimes her breasts feels floppy as a half-filled water balloon, other times they are swollen and painful. Richard apologizes, sounding indignant. He asks if it's supposed to be this hard. When she says, "Breast-feeding?" he says, "No, everything," and gets out of bed, leans down and kisses her forehead and tells her he's going down the hall to sleep. As he leans to kiss Julian, she says sharply, "Don't wake him up!" He tells her not to worry and brushes a finger against the baby's cheek, then shuts the door behind him quietly.

July Ayinde Analysis

This sad and poignant exchange is a foreshadowing of what is to come in Richard and Ayinde's relationship. She has become obsessed about what is best for her baby and because of her lonely childhood, is overcompensating by blindly following a book that tells her baby should be near mommy every second. Richard is beginning to feel pushed out of their lives, both because he must travel and because Ayinde is so involved with the baby, she can't even manage to get dressed. Now, he can't find room in his own bed and Ayinde refuses to move over or put Julian in his own crib. He feels physically and symbolically pushed out of his wife's life.



August Becky

August Becky Summary

As Ava cries at five in the morning, Becky cradles her in one arm and calls Andrew, who's been called to the hospital to tend to the injuries of some teenagers who had thought it would be fun to get liquored up on apricot brandy and drive into a tollbooth. Becky and Andrew try to figure out what's wrong. She's tried singing, rocking, feeding, changing and the bouncy seat. The all-natural colic remedy she has given her hasn't helped much, but it did give her a pleasant scent, reminiscent of a fresh loaf of bread. Becky tells him she'll try taking her outside and Andrew says take the phone.

As she steps outside, she sees the woman from the park and coffee shop with the streaky blond hair and long, blue coat sitting on the step across the street. When she greets her, the woman jumps up and walks away rapidly. Becky calls after her and begins to follow her, closing the gap and saying, "Please slow down!" The woman stops at the word please and stands with her back to Becky, shoulders hunched. The words *Hollywood tragedy* pop into Becky's mind. Becky asks her if she's hungry and the woman stops to consider, but tells her no, then Becky recognizes her from all the late-night movies and entertainment shows she's been watching while Ava has been keeping her up at night. Also, she's a devotee of *People* and *Entertainment Weekly*. Lia Frederick; her married name is Lia Lane.

Lia reaches into the pink diaper bag she carries and bring out a blue-and-white burp cloth that matches the bib Becky had found and gives to her. Then Becky remembers hearing the perky anchorwoman announcing their condolences go out to Sam and Lia Lane whose ten-week-old son died. Lia apologizes and explains she didn't meant to frighten her; she was just taking a walk when she heard the baby cry. She begs Becky to take the cloth. Becky takes her by the hand and says, "Come with me."

As they sit in Becky's kitchen, Becky nurses Ava, who turns out to be hungry after all. She eats contentedly while whapping at the side of Becky's breast, looking like an angry old man who is trying to get his change back from a broken vending machine. Becky burps her, lays her in her basket and makes scrambled eggs and tea for Lia and herself. She asks about her coming back home and Lia tells her she brought the diaper bag full of baby stuff without thinking. That is how she happened to have all the stuff she'd given Becky. She says she just sort of lost her mind and Becky says she understands; it must be the worst thing. Lia explains she left Sam; it wasn't his fault, she just couldn't stay. When Ava starts to fuss, Becky asks Lia to hold her. Lia demurs at first, but Becky encourages her, so she holds her and rocks her and sings, "Bye and bye, bye and bye, the moon is half a lemon pie ... "



August Becky Analysis

Weiner paints a vivid and humorous picture of new motherhood in the opening scene of this chapter. Becky calls her doctor/husband at work and has him listen to Ava's cry to help her figure out what's wrong. They go through the checklist, she's just been fed, she isn't wet, she doesn't want to be sung to, she doesn't want her bouncy seat, etc. Any parent can relate to the description where Ava "paused, silent, with her mouth wide open" and Becky knows what's coming next, "Ava Rae's Nuclear Scream of Death. Patent Pending." Becky thinks she looks like the world's smallest angry old man and can hardly keep from slapping a pore strip on Ava's whiteheads and juicy pustules. It's obvious from her description that the author has been in Becky's position and is writing from experience. As a matter of fact, *Little Earthquakes* was written soon after Jennifer Weiner had her first child.

When Becky decides to take Ava outside (maybe a change of scenery will help), she finds the strange woman in the blue coat sitting on the steps across from her house. As she waves, Lia walks briskly away and Becky follows her down the street. It's interesting to note here that Lia is still wearing the blue down coat her mother gave her to wear in chillier weather, symbolizing her ongoing need to hide in her protective covering.

Becky catches up to her and asks what she was doing in front of her house, then takes her home for breakfast, knowing it's a bizarre thing to do. She finally recognizes her and when Lia pulls a fancy blue-and-white burp cloth out of her pink diaper bag and gives it to her, she knows where all the gifts have come from. Lia literally begs her to take it, saying please, she doesn't need it anymore. Back at Becky's home, Lia opens up and tells her about bringing the diaper bag full of the stuff with her on the plane without even thinking. Lia's first breakthrough comes when she tells Becky her baby's name was Caleb. The second one comes when Becky asks her to hold Ava and even though she protests, with Becky's encouragement, she finally picks her up.



August Kelly

August Kelly Summary

Steve asks Kelly how her doctor's appointment was and she knows, loosely translated, that means, *Can we have sex?* At her appointment when Dr. Mendlow had told her whenever she was ready she could start having intercourse, she had laughed almost uncontrollably, feeling she's never wanted to have sex less in her life and thinking of her shorts-clad, couch-bound husband. The couch. She'd come home from walking Oliver and Lemon one day to find the orange and brown plaid monstrosity squatting in the middle of her living room.

Kelly winced at the sour smell of mildew and eau de old people that wafted out of the cushions. It smelled as if someone had died on top of it and it looked close enough to the couch she'd had in her house growing up to be its evil twin. When she had asked Steve about it, he informed her that the Conovans were throwing it out, so he told them he'd take it. When she'd protested that it was hideous, he'd said, "It's a couch, something to sit on," and that was that.

Dr. Mendlow looked at Kelly as she'd wiped her eyes with the hem of her paper-towel gown and had told her that whatever she wanted to tell her husband, he'd back her up. She could wait until she was ready. She was breastfeeding, facing the biggest physical changes of her life; he knew she was exhausted and sex wasn't high on her list.

That night Kelly knows her reprieve is over as Steve's hand is inching up her thigh. She can tell him no and postpone the inevitable or she can say yes, bite the bullet and hope for a fast conclusion. But as he nuzzles her neck, she starts to doze off and he has to shake her awake. The encounter is unpleasant, bordering on painful and all she can think about are lines from Dr. Seuss books. *Mister Brown can moo, can you? Oh, the wonderful sounds Mr. Brown can do!* At one point he asks her what she wants him to do and instead of some ribald response, she says, "Moo," causing Steve to stop moving and ask, "What?" Then, just as Steve gasps and finishes, Oliver starts to cry. "Argh!" sighs her husband. "Wah!" cries her baby. And Kelly thinks, *I am never going to sleep again, ever* and rolls from under her husband to lift her baby into her arms.

August Kelly Analysis

This chapter shows another insight into the world of pregnancy, childbirth and post delivery that often goes unmentioned. Sex. It is ironic that what makes the babies in the first place can seem so unpleasant and undesirable to women after the baby is born. The physical changes a woman's body goes through during childbirth often makes intercourse uncomfortable and even painful for some time afterwards. The arbitrary six-week reprieve after childbirth, though adequate for some, is a woefully short time for others.



Kelly is contending with more than just the physical facts of life that make intercourse uncomfortable after childbirth. She is also wrestling with feelings of annoyance and even disgust toward her "shorts-clad, house-bound" husband, who doesn't have a job yet. Not only that, but he has brought home a smelly monstrosity of a couch that a neighbor was throwing out. Kelly has to be having feelings of déjà vu, flashbacks of her childhood.



August Ayinde

August Ayinde Summary

Ayinde sits in the office of Paul Davis, news director of ACAU news, watching the tape her agent had sent to every station in the area. She realizes with a sinking feeling she's forgotten her breast pads and hopes she doesn't leak through. He's impressed with her credentials and her resume, tells her she has the look; she's intelligent, warm and smart, but not condescending. Then he tells her she'll never work as an anchor in this market; no one will tune in to see her read the news; they'll tune in to see what kind of woman Richard Towne married; what she's wearing, what her ring looks like and how she's doing her hair. When Ayinde assures him her skills as a reporter speak for themselves and reminds him of her success in Dallas, he agrees and says he's sorry for the position her marriage has put her in, but he doubts any news director in town will tell her differently. Then he hits the eject button and says, "Let me tell you what we're thinking."

Fifteen minutes later she throws the videotape in the back seat of her car, snaps her seatbelt in place and heads home to pick up Julian. *Special correspondent* was what they wanted. Yale and Columbia and ten months in West Virginia, four years as a reporter and two years anchoring in a top twenty-five market and they want her to go to Sixers games and "use your access to give viewers a behind-the-scenes look at the team." They want profiles of the players, coaches and *dancers!* She heads home to pick up Julian, then heads for New York to meet her mother. She calls Richard and tells him it didn't go well and he offers to help any way he can, but she decides maybe this is God's way of telling her she should be a stay-at-home mom.

Two hours later, Ayinde enters a Chelsea studio for the photo shoot with Lolo, carrying the car seat and overstuffed diaper bag. Lolo announces, "This is my daughter, an anchorwoman," and Ayinde tells her not anymore, she's just a mom. She had agreed to this shoot as a favor to Lolo and over Richard's objections. Her mother had practically begged, telling her it was hard to find work at her age and Estee Lauder might consider her if all went well. As her mother emerges from makeup, resplendent and beautiful, she tells her they're ready for her and asks where her nanny is.

Ayinde informs her mother that there is no nanny, just her and holds Julian on her lap during hair and makeup. After the third couture gown fails to fit over her chest, she informs them she's breast-feeding and the wardrobe man helps her slip into a shimmering, pale-gray Vera Wang silk column of a dress. He tells her even though it won't zip a few pins and duct tape and she'll be fine. Her mother is in a strapless, ruched and pleated chiffon of a dozen shades of pink and Ayinde feels as drab as a pigeon. As a pointy-toed assistant hands a naked Julian to her, Ayinde says she's not sure this is a good idea. Lolo tells her not to be such a worrier.



As Ayinde sits, sweating under the lights, the naked baby squirming in her arms, the photographer tells her, "Chin up, no, not quite so high ... tilt your head, nope, other way ... " Her muscles ache and Julian bats at her dangling earrings. She tells them she needs to take a break to feed him and Lolo says one of the girls can give him his bottle. Ayinde reminds her she is breast-feeding and the photographer says they're almost done, eyes this way, try the baby on your other side. Ayinde shifts Julian and he responds by peeing down the front of her gown.

Later, as Ayinde and Lolo have a late lunch at La Goulue, Lolo asks why Ayinde doesn't have some help with the baby. Ayinde explains she just wants to raise him herself, like in the book she gave her. She tells her mother the book says that she should breast feed until he is three and leaving him with a nanny is tantamount to child abuse and Lolo looks puzzled. She can't believe it says that. Ayinde has to bite back hysterical laughter and thinks, Trust Lolo to not even have skimmed the back cover of the book that had become Ayinde's scripture. Lolo tells her she needs some time for herself once in a while and not to take it so seriously. "It's diapers and strollers, not rocket science!" Ayinde tells her mother she just wants to do it right and Lolo tells her just do the best you can, as she feeds her a forkful of chicken because her hands are full with Julian nursing.

August Ayinde Analysis

As much as Ayinde claims to want to stay at home and be with Julian all the time, as much as she repeats to herself and the world the words of *Baby Success*, *You are now the proud owner of the best job title there is!* she finds herself in the office of the news director of WCAU, interviewing for a job. She's been trained for that job for years and she feels qualified, sure of herself in that position. The director, however, tells her even though she is very good, because of her marriage, no one will tune in to see her read the news. They'll only want to know how she's dressed, or what her ring looks like. She's furious as she leaves, but tells herself maybe this is God's way of telling her she was supposed to stay home. It's interesting how she makes the common assumption that because a thing doesn't happen the way she'd hoped, somehow it's God's way of telling her she should do something else, absolving herself of any responsibility to continue in that direction.

Later, when her mother announces her to the assemblage as an anchorwoman, she tells her "Not anymore," and the words don't sound any better out loud than they had in her head. After a tough photo shoot where she's embarrassed she can't fit into the dresses because she's breastfeeding and has to explain she doesn't have a bottle to give the girls who want to care for him, she and Lolo eat lunch at an upscale New York City restaurant. Here the reader gets a glimpse of Ayinde's feeling for and relationship with her less-than-present mother and begins to understand her need to be there for her son. Lolo can't understand why she doesn't get a nanny and Ayinde is in the difficult position of trying to explain her reasons without sounding judgmental of her own mother's mothering (or lack thereof) techniques. At the end of the chapter there's an amusing, yet touching scene, where Ayinde's mother is forking chicken into her

daughter's mouth (something she never did for her when she was little) because Ayinde has both hands full breastfeeding Julian.



September Becky

September Becky Summary

After finally getting Ava back to sleep after her six a.m. feeding, Becky answers the phone to the dreaded, "Hahyahhh." Apparently seven a.m. was an acceptable time for a phone call in Mimiverse. She pokes a sleeping Andrew with the phone and listens with apprehension to his end of the conversation. When he hangs up, she asks him, "What?" and he doesn't want to answer. Mimi is coming to stay for a while; her air conditioning is out of order. They argue. Becky asks him if he has ever told his mother no. He doesn't answer. Just what she thought. He goes to the hospital and after Ava is fed, bathed and dressed, Becky answers the doorbell to see her mother-in-law on the doorstep with four pieces of matching Vuitton luggage, trunk included, lined up on the sidewalk behind her.

Mimi snatches a startled Ava from Becky's arms and heads down the hallway, leaving Becky to drag her luggage up the stairs. Mimi smells coffee and asks for decaf, requests something to nibble on and rejects white and whole-wheat bread and cantaloupe, then offers to keep an ear out for the baby so Becky can run to the market. "Just leave me with a bottle." When Becky reminds her she is breast-feeding, her eyes widen. "Still?" Becky tries to explain why it's the best thing for her and Mimi waves her away, saying it's all a fad, then whispers she heard it can cause problems like *obesity*.

Becky stands under the shower saying she's going to kill her. When she comes back downstairs, Mimi informs her she had almost the whole blueberry muffin top. Becky tells her she can't have solid food yet and once again, Mimi tells her they're always changing their minds. She returns from the market to hear Mimi telling Ava she has to do her crunches to look good for the boys. She throws her into the air in a way that Becky knows will induce spit-up, but she thinks at least she'll get rid of the muffin, then Mimi slaps Ava's thumb out of her mouth.

Becky takes her and nurses again and just as they're both nearly asleep, they hear, "Are you nursing?" Ava jerks and starts to cry. Becky informs Mimi they're going to take a nap and calls Andrew, who doesn't answer, so she has him paged. He calls back but Becky's not quite fast enough; Mimi answers first. Ten minutes later she screeches up the stairs for Becky and wakes the baby. Becky vents her frustrations to Andrew.

Becky finds Mimi leaning over Ava, her nose six inches from the baby's face and wants to scream for her to get away, but controls herself. When Mimi tells her she always wanted a girl but had two miscarriages and was told she couldn't have anymore, Becky's heart melts ... until Mimi says that Ava's lashes are pale and wonders how she'd look with mascara. Becky gives Mimi wine and the remote control, then goes for a walk with Ava, knowing she won't have company. She decides to see if Lia is home; Lia will help her keep things in perspective. As Lia comes out, she asks her if she'd like to meet her friends and Lia agrees.



Half an hour later they're all in Kelly's apartment, listening to her deal efficiently with a client about missing candles. She explains she's just doing a favor for her boss. As Kelly does crunches with Oliver, hefting him over her head, Steve comes in and asks if he can get them lunch. Becky thinks Kelly is lucky to have him around and tells her so. She sees something flit across her face, but it's gone again immediately. Kelly tells them his job search is going just fine and Becky asks if she can stay there the rest of her life.

Kelly asks if Mimi is that bad and Becky clears her throat and tells them Mimi wore a white wedding gown to their wedding and shows pictures to prove it. When Becky asks how someone turns out like that Lia offers that she thinks it's because they've been hurt. Andrew calls and asks why she's not home, his mother wants to spend time with her granddaughter. She gets ready to leave and reminds Kelly she's supposed to fax something to the candle man. Kelly claps her hand over her mouth and runs for the computer and Becky says, "No rest for the wicked," and wheels her daughter out the door.

September Becky Analysis

The obnoxious Mimi is at it again as she calls at seven in the morning, just as Becky gets Ava back to sleep after a six o'clock feeding. Just as the reader thinks it can't get any worse for Becky with this woman, it's revealed that under the guise of her air conditioning being broken, Mimi is coming to stay for an indeterminate length of time! She'll also be sleeping in their bedroom! Once more, Andrew starts to tell Becky, "She is ... " Becky finishes with, "I know, your mother." Becky tries to reason with him that they don't have the room, why doesn't she stay in a hotel, it isn't even hot out anymore, etc., all to no avail. Becky finally asks him if he has ever told her no and when he stares into his cup, she feels her heart sink. She knew it. Mimi demanded and threw fits and kindhearted Andrew is powerless in the face of her tantrums.

Weiner masterfully paints Mimi as the worst possible kind of mother-in-law, demanding, insulting, critical, selfish and totally ignoring Becky's wishes about childcare. She is truly the mother-in-law from hell and the reader wants to send her back there. Once again, a breastfeeding mother has to explain that she doesn't have a bottle to feed her baby and contend with the doubts of ignorant people. Finally, to keep from killing Mimi, she gives her some wine, the TV remote and goes for a walk, stopping for Lia and ending up in Kelly's apartment. Kelly is edging back into work, talking to a client on the phone as they arrive, but denies it, saying her boss had an emergency and she's just helping out.

Becky tells them the story of her wedding. Mimi wore a white wedding dress to her and Andrew's wedding. When they don't believe her, she shows them a picture. The symbolism and foreshadowing in Mimi's action isn't at all hard to figure out. She obviously has resented Becky from the beginning and wants to keep Andrew for herself, pretending that she is married to him. As if to prove the point that "mommy" always comes first, her cell phone rings and Andrew is telling her he got a call from "mommy" wondering why Becky's been gone so long; she wants to see her grandbaby.



September Lia

September Lia Summary

Even though "get a job" is on her list of things to do, Lia turns Becky down when she offers her a job at Mas. She doesn't know anything about cooking. Becky tells her it's not rocket science. They stop into a coffee shop and Becky nurses Ava, under cover of a giant pashmina. Becky talks Lia into taking the job.

Lia starts at Mas the next afternoon, peeling potatoes until her fingers are numb, with Becky asking over and over, "Are you okay, do you need a break?" But it is the first time since she'd left L.A. that her mind is truly quiet. On her first day off, she checks her list. Everything is checked off except for "get help." She needs to know how long it will hurt and when she will stop waking in pain, stop seeing Caleb's face every time she closes her eyes? But three minutes into the Parents Together meeting at Pennsylvania Hospital she has a feeling it won't turn out well. The first woman to speak had lost her eleven-year-old son to leukemia four years before, but Merrill sounds as brokenhearted as if she'd just received the news. She complains about the Wish Foundation people jerking them around, not wanting to grant her son's wish because he wanted to meet a porn star, whom he knew from music videos. Lia suddenly hates her. At least she'd gotten to know her son, she had him for eleven years. Lia had gotten dirty diapers, endless laundry and a shrieking bundle of bad temper. She runs from the room, as the world seems to slip sideways and ends up outside, leaning against the brick building, sucking in air.

Lia walks to Mas and comes upon Becky, Kelly and Ayinde sitting around a table. She has forgotten it was Monday and Mas is closed. She tries to leave, but Becky pulls her in, hands her a plate and some wine and explains it's girls' night out, no babies. Lia tells them about the grief group and how it's not going to work. She explains it's not the same thing for her; she hadn't even wanted to get pregnant. She and Sam weren't even engaged; it was an accident. The timing was terrible.

After years of acting lessons and paying her dues, she was finally getting small parts and getting recognized. Sam had been delighted. He'd said it wasn't a life sentence, they had money; they loved each other. She hadn't counted on how hard it would be. The books said babies slept eighteen hours a day. Caleb ate every half hour and took ten-minute catnaps. She spent all day in the same underwear and T-shirt she'd slept in. She'd had a dream about checking into a hotel with room service and just reading a book, all alone. She'd felt like she was never going to have any time to herself again. Sam had worked long hours and she had no help. One night Caleb woke up and screamed nonstop. They took turns walking him, rocking him, feeding him and burping him; nothing worked. Caleb screamed like a banshee, then stopped screaming and passed out on their bed. They all slept together until eight o'clock the next morning, when he awoke as if nothing had happened.



She told them of how that morning, she'd asked Sam to fold the laundry and he'd shaved and gone for a quick run. She'd seethed, wanting desperately to go for a quick anything. After he returned she'd reminded him about the laundry and he'd gone upstairs while she nursed Caleb and yelled down a blow-by-blow of his laundry folding like he should be congratulated for folding it. He'd left after his shower, telling her to get some rest and take a nap; like she could rest when Caleb never slept. When she'd gone upstairs, she'd found the laundry folded, but on the bed, with Sam's wet towel on top.

The others nod knowingly. She had pulled on some sweats and as Caleb started crying again and decided to take him for a walk in the stroller. She'd met Tracy, a neighbor and acquaintance who did hair and makeup for a game show. Tracy had offered to take Caleb, telling her she'd raised three of her own and she'd be happy to hold a baby for a little while. Lia had programmed hers and Sam's cell number into Tracy's phone, given her the pediatrician's number, hauled over wipes and ointment and spare outfits and his Gymini until Tracy laughed and ordered her to go. She'd driven her convertible to her hair salon and had a manicure and pedicure. She had not had a sixth sense about something being wrong. There was an earthquake and the girl painting her nails had said, "Feel that? Little earthquake; I hardly feel them anymore." She hadn't felt anything and the second sign was when she got back, the security gate was open and police cars were in front of the building. She only started hurrying when she saw blue uniforms in front of Tracy's door and heard Tracy shrieking. They told her Caleb was dead and she remembered thinking, *He can't be dead; he's not even a person yet. If I'd been a better mother. If I'd wanted him more ...* They wouldn't let her hold him.

"I remember how long his nails were," she tells her friends. They wipe their eyes and tell her how sorry they are. "And I came home and then I came here." Later, she walks down Walnut Street and stops into an Internet café, walks to a computer and writes, *I'm here*, then adds *I'm home*.

September Lia Analysis

As Lia walks home with Becky, she asks her if she is supposed to go home, to which Becky replies, she is, just as soon as she has some coffee and nurse the baby for half an hour or so. This is an obvious display of her reluctance to return to her home. When Becky offers Lia a job, even though she needs one, she refuses, saying she can't cook. Once again Becky's persistence wins out; after which she burps the baby, spends ten minutes in the bathroom changing her, then heads very slowly, Lia observes, home.

Lia decides to do the last thing on her list: get help. She heads for a Parents Together grief group, tucking her hair under her baseball cap, signifying her continued need for a form of protection and disguise. The author shows the reader Lia's anguish vividly in the paragraph where she asks herself questions such as: How long would this hurt? When will Caleb not be the first thing I think of in the morning and the last thing at night? When will I stop seeing his face every time I close my eyes? This is so much more effective than telling the reader: Lia is very sad.



Things don't go well when Lia attends the group, as a woman who lost her eleven-year-old son four years ago complains about the Wish Foundation not granting her son's wish. Lia feels hatred for the woman, thinking, at least she got to know him, she had birthday parties, skinned knees and soccer games. I got sleepless nights, dirty diaper and baskets of laundry; a shrieking bundle of bad temper who'd never even smiled. This is an obvious indication of what constitutes Lia's inability to come to grips with her baby's death. Her guilt. She feels guilt over what she sees as her resentment toward a baby who took all her time and energy. She never got a chance to reap the reward of that investment. Besides that, she confides to Becky, Kelly and Ayinde, she didn't even want him in the first place. Guilt is what is at the heart of her grief.



October Kelly

October Kelly Summary

Kelly comes back from her job interview thinking that if she hears once more how lucky she is, she'll kill someone, probably her husband. In the dim light of the apartment she sees Steve sitting on the floor with the computer, exactly where she'd left him earlier; the apartment is a mess. She had hoped he would be indignant when she'd mentioned her going back to work so soon. She had hoped he would redouble his efforts to find a job. Instead he had called her bluff and told her fine, whatever made her *happy*. The word pained her almost as *lucky* did.

Kelly's old boss, Elizabeth, with her stiletto heels, matching purse and shiny black bob, made it clear she had to be able to depend on her. No baby emergencies. Elizabeth had never had children. When she tells Steve they'll have to hire someone to take care of Oliver, he says, "What, I'm not good enough?" Kelly tells him he needs to devote his time to his job search and thinks, I didn't marry Mr. Mom. She starts to pick up the mess in the apartment and remembers Elizabeth agreeing to let her work from home as long as she got her work done. Trouble was, she couldn't work from home because Steve was using her office and high speed Internet for job searches. She'd have to work from a coffee shop.

As she picks up a crying Oliver, her phone rings and it's her grandmother, telling her how lucky she is to have Steve home on paternity leave to help her with the baby. Paternity leave. The words were starting to taste like rotten meat in her mouth, but the lying feels familiar. When she was a girl, she'd forged her mother's signature on Terry's report cards and told the coach or teachers who called that her mother wasn't well, she couldn't bring the Gatorade and orange wedges she'd committed to for Terry's soccer games. Her siblings had treated the house as a way station, like something unpleasant they wanted to escape; she had tried to make something of it, sweeping the floors and fluffing the pillows and washing the dinner dishes. The others had grabbed food from the fridge and their school uniforms from the dryer and left. Kelly would pull the old Afghan over their mother, passed out on the couch from her Tab and bourbon and straighten up the living room. She'd turned *passed out* into *sick* or *sleeping*; now she's turning *laid off* into *paternity leave*.

Kelly knows she's starting to sound like a nagging mother: *Did you send out any resumes? Who did you call? Did you visit the website I told you about?* Now Steve sounds like a sullen teenager. *Yes. No. Fine. Okay.* She checks the fridge and asks him if Chinese is okay. They can't afford it, but the thought of defrosting another wholesome meal she'd frozen when Steve was still working is more than she could bear. They eat in silence, she clears and puts things away, refusing Steve's offer to help, feeds and changes Oliver, then walks him up and down the hallway until he falls asleep.



Kelly goes to the office to leave her colleagues a cheery e-mail about how she was back sooner than expected, when TEACH FOR AMERICA flickers onto the screen. She feels lightheaded and flicks through the other windows Steve has left open. BE A TEACHING ASSISTANT IN PHILADELPHIA'S PUBLIC SCHOOLS and a page giving information about a one-year teaching certificate. She wonders if he's seriously thinking about relocating to some slum, with wife and baby in tow. She thinks of the near poverty stricken teachers in her catholic high school. *He couldn't be thinking of becoming a teacher!*

After she goes to bed, Steve climbs in and reaches for her. He can't be serious. Then she realizes he's reaching for her hand, asking if they can talk about it. He tells her she doesn't have to get a job and she asks him if he's gotten one. He tells her no, but they have savings. She says she doesn't want them to sit around spending money they're supposed to invest. He says he wants to find a job he likes. He wasn't happy in a big company. She tells him, "Whoever said work is supposed to make you happy? That's why they call it a job. I didn't grow up dreaming of organizing parties for old guys in suits, but it gets the bills paid." Kelly can't sleep and creeps back into the office to stare at the pictures in her Favorites folder, the Cubist bar stools and the Donghia bed, until Oliver's cries summon her to the nursery.

October Kelly Analysis

In this chapter on Kelly the reader gets more of an insight into why Kelly is the way she is. She was always the responsible one when she was young. She took care of her siblings and even her mother, passed out drunk on the couch. She wrote the excuses, cleaned the house and tried to pretend everything was great and she's still doing it. She goes back to work, hoping to shame Steve into getting a job. It doesn't work. Then she refuses Steve's pathetic attempts to help her. Not realizing he needs to be taught, because he doesn't have a clue, she gets angry when he doesn't do things and even though she's exhausted, she does it all. Kelly continues to hold in her fears, her anger and her resentment. Steve wants to dip into their investment savings, telling her she doesn't have to go back to work, but she refuses, out of fear. Kelly is the poster child for fear; everything she does now is motivated by it.

When she accidentally discovers some Web sites indicating Steve's intention to look for teaching work, she panics. The only teachers she knew were nearly poverty stricken from her catholic school days, who wore thick plastic glasses and polyester ties and carried plastic-wrapped sandwiches in their briefcases. After she goes to bed, she can't sleep and creeps out of bed to her computer where she stares at the things stored in her Favorites that she wants to buy, planned to buy and now fears she'll never have.



October Becky

October Becky Summary

Becky prays for the strength not to murder her mother-in-law, as Mimi changes Ava into her fourth outfit of the day. She removes a pink onesie that reads GRANDMA'S LITTLE ANGEL and a pair of ripped jeans with a chain dangling from one of the pockets. Slut-wear, Becky thinks. Mimi asks again, as she does every day, "Do you think her hair will come in soon?" Becky answers I don't know and thinks, I don't care. Mimi tells Ava soon she'll have hair and she'll be so beautiful all the boys will want her number.

Becky thinks it's unbelievable, unendurable and unacceptable; after twenty-three days, Mimi shows no signs of leaving and Andrew shows no willingness to make her. Becky is sure she's ignoring every one of her requests and orders regarding Ava's care, like not giving her people food or formula and letting her watch TV. Mimi holds Ava up to show off a yellow sundress and a yellow bow affixed to her head, with cornstarch paste! Mimi tells Ava that now no one will think she's a little boy and informs Becky she's ready for a "little nibble." Becky calls out possibilities. *Cashews?* Too fatty. *Cheese and Crackers?* Wheat allergy. *An apple?* Is it organic? Can you cut it up? And peel it? And maybe a little cheese after all, with those cashews and a little wine.

After preparing Mimi's snack and getting Ava down for a nap, Becky starts preparing dinner. When Ava starts crying, Mimi says she'll get her, but yells, "Ewww, Stinky," so Becky sighs and goes to change her. When the phone rings, Mimi grabs it up, but says, "Oh, it's for you," and hands it to Becky like it was a smelly fish. Becky's mom asks why Mimi is still there and Becky bites back the words she longs to say. *Come get me! I'm living with a crazy lady!* Instead she tells her everything's fine and she'll call her later. When Andrew arrives home, Mimi elbows her out of the way and swoops in for a kiss and Becky thinks of the three X-rated DVDs she bought online and hid in her cookbooks. They have lamb for dinner, which Mimi says they never had when Andrew was at home because it seemed like it was what you got when you couldn't afford steak.

Becky cleans up and spends time with Ava giving her a bath, putting her in her pajamas and singing her to sleep. Becky clomps down the hall in her heels, making no attempt to be quiet and calls out, "Sleep well!" as she disappears behind their bedroom door. Becky gets the DVDs and shows them to Andrew, who's wrestling with the pullout couch. He's delighted and after waiting to hear Mimi's snores, it's playtime for them.

The next morning Mimi grabs up Ava as she starts to cry and heads upstairs to the living room, saying they can watch the video she brought. As they hear the DVD player power up, Andrew and Becky jump up and slam into each other, knocking Becky over. Andrew steps over her and races for the stairs, but he's too late. They hear the sleazy background music and then Mimi's scream. As Mimi sputters, "I raised you better than this," and "I have never been so disgusted in my life!" Becky bends over double with laughter, tears streaming down her face. When Mimi tells Andrew he should be



ashamed, Becky decides this woman is never going to make her husband feel guilty about sex again. She squares her shoulders and says, "Actually, it's mine." Mimi huffs off to their bedroom, slamming the door and Andrew tells her she's really something, in an amazing way and picks up his briefcase and heads out the door.

Becky takes Ava for a very long walk and when she comes home, the phone rings. It's Ayinde, crying, asking Becky to come over. Becky asks if Julian's all right and Ayinde tells her he's fine, but please come and don't listen to the radio. Becky changes Ava, grabs the car seat, checks her purse and grabs her keys. It isn't until she's half way to Gladwyne she realizes she hadn't told her mother-in-law goodbye.

October Becky Analysis

The purpose of this chapter is to continue to show the unbelievable depths that Mimi will go to in her unrelenting self-absorption. She has not only moved in and taken over their only bedroom and Ava's wardrobe (dressing her in slutwear), she expects to be waited on hand and foot. This chapter also continues to showcase Becky's sense of humor, shown not only in her thoughts and muttered comments, but in her reaction to Mimi's shock and outrage when she finds the X-rated video in their DVD player. Andrew is cowed into stammering apologies; Becky steps forward and takes full responsibility to protect him.

Then the scene changes abruptly from one of humor and light-heartedness to a serious tone as Becky gets a tearful call from Ayinde, asking her to come over and to not listen to the radio on the way, building suspense and causing the reader to want to turn the page to find out what's going on.



October Ayinde

October Ayinde Summary

The day Ayinde's world cracks open is like any other day. She would have expected a sign, but this day starts better than most. She awakes with Julian in their vast, Richard-less bed. Clara brings her breakfast on a tray. She thinks the staff is wondering about her and is sure the other players' wives must be. At the team barbecue in July they'd all asked her if she'd found a nanny yet. They all had full time help and spent their days shopping, working out and being eternally available to their husbands. She'd kept quiet and quoted from *Baby Success!* to herself: *All the meaning you could want is there in your arms. You have a job ... your job is Mother ... there is no job as important.* The old Ayinde would have dismissed that as reactionary and antifeminist rhetoric, but post-baby Ayinde, haunted by memories of the halfhearted parenting she'd received and determined to raise her baby perfectly (with no job prospects on the horizon), had swallowed it whole. Richard comes through, kisses her gently and tells her his schedule. He'll be at a high school basketball clinic at Temple all day, then holed up with his manager and publicist after dinner.

She takes Julian for a walk in the stroller, comes back and manages to shower and dress, loads him into the car and meets Kelly for lunch while the babies ignore each other. Kelly says the job is fine and they're still looking for a nanny. When Kelly sniffs and grimaces at Oliver's bottom she asks to borrow a diaper, saying she should have checked before she left home; Steve always uses everything up and never replaces it. Ayinde gives Kelly her organic, recycled-cotton wipes and cloth diapers ("best for the environments and for Dumpling's soft bottom," says Priscilla Prewitt) and feels smug. *My job is Mother*, she whispers as she drives home. Even though it's boring and tedious, even though she finds herself counting the minutes until Julian's next nap, she's just fine.

She gets home to find six cars in the driveway, parked hastily; four strange ones and two she recognizes, Richard's Town Car and the Audi with the license plate that reads COACH. She goes into the house to see Richard's business manager, a man in khakis carrying a FedEx envelope and a woman in a navy suit. Richard is sitting in the dining room and when he raises his eyes to her, there's such an expression of anguish she stumbles backwards, nearly falling. He says he has to tell her something, his eyes bloodshot. Ayinde thinks he must be sick.

Richard walks over to her and tells her something happened in Phoenix ... there was a girl. Ayinde feels her body go cold. *Perfume*. Then she hears Lolo's voice. *Told you so*. Richard tells her the girl is pregnant. When she asks if he's the father, the woman, Christine Crossley, who is a crisis communication manager, says, "That's for the courts to decide." They tell her the woman's made allegation, she's gone to the press, the tabloids; they've scheduled a press conference and they must work on her statement.



Ayinde knows there's only one statement she can make. "Out," she says. As they try to explain to her the gravity of the situation, Richard's livelihood, his future, she says, "OUT!" and they all move, fast, until Richard, Ayinde and the baby are alone. She asks him how he could have done this. He says he's sorry, he swears it's the only time, she says he swore to love and honor and be true. He reminds her she kicked him out of his own bed and she's aghast that he could blame this on her. She tells him to get out and he leaves the room. She calls her friends and tells them to meet her at the guesthouse and to please not listen to the radio on the way.

Ayinde waits as Kelly pulls up in the driveway. Lia gets out of the passenger side and takes Julian, who Ayinde realizes for the first time is crying. How long has he been crying? They wait as Becky pulls up and they go to the guesthouse where she tells them Richard has fathered another woman's baby. Then she collapses with grief and Becky puts her arms around her. After they finally accept it as true, Becky asks if he's done this before. *Perfume*. Ayinde says she doesn't know. She thinks of *Baby Success!* and says she can't leave him, not with the baby, she won't. She knew she'd be trotted out to stand by her man. She'd be laughed at, be a punch line. "Maybe you should talk to Richard," Becky tells her. Ayinde feels her body moving; she goes to the house, up to the guest room door and turns the knob. Richard is lying in bed in the dark. She opens her mouth, but finds she has nothing to say.

October Ayinde Analysis

This emotionally charged chapter shows Ayinde discovering her husband's infidelity. She becomes cold with outrage and numb with shock. The author sets up the discovery with Ayinde waking up with Julian in the Richard-less bed and remembers a barbeque in July where the player's wives had asked her if she'd gotten a nanny yet. She thought of how they traveled with and supported their husbands, then remembered the words of *Baby Success!*: "All the meaning and purpose you could ever need is in that little bundle in your arms. Your job is mother." The author allows the reader to come to her own conclusion as to whether Ayinde has contributed to this unfortunate situation, but it would seem she is sending the message that the curse, causeless, shall not come.

Ayinde, devastated, hurt and furious, throws Richard's entourage out and turns immediately to her new circle of friends to comfort and sustain her. When she nearly collapses with the grief, it's Becky who puts her arms around her and encourages her to go talk to Richard. Even though she tries, for she is determined to stay for Julian's sake, when she walks into the room and sees him stretched out on the bed, she can find nothing to say. What will it take to mend this huge tear in their relationship? Can it be saved?



November Lia

November Lia Summary

Lia meets Becky, Kelly and Ayinde at the mommies and babies music class, wondering if Ayinde had to endure the stares or sympathetic comments from the other mothers as she herself had when Caleb had died. As they walk back, Lia tries not to feel out of place without a stroller. *One of these things is not like the other ...* They haul the strollers into Becky's hallway, where scents of sage, cornbread and pumpkin pie waft out. Becky informs them she's not having Thanksgiving dinner, Mimi is. She called and invited them over for Thanksgiving dinner, then asked them to bring ... Thanksgiving dinner. At least she's moved out. They sit the babies on the floor and Becky hauls out several yarmulkes, asking if they'd like to play a game, trying to throw them on the babies' heads. Lia hands one to Kelly, thinking she looks tired and fragile, but that she was the most cheerful person she'd ever met.

Ayinde tells them they've been booked on 60 Minutes, where she'll be expected to hold hands and make goo-goo eyes. She reads them her statement, "I ask for the public to respect our privacy and our son's privacy as my husband and I work through this very difficult time." Kelly says, "Oh, Ayinde." Lia thinks about how wonderful Sam had been to her during and after her pregnancy. After Ayinde talks about what she's wearing, a gray suit, which says she's serious and pink shirt, which says she has a heart, Becky says, "You could borrow my I'M WITH STUPID T-shirt."

Ayinde tells them it's worse that she's white. Now they have to contend with the "pissed-off sistas" throwing condoms at him and says she wishes she'd thought of that when it would have made a difference. She walks over and throws a yarmulke at Julian. It hits his shoulder and falls off. "Five points," she says. Kelly's eyes widen. Becky tells her actually they're playing for cash. First one to a hundred points gets ten bucks. Kelly tosses hers reluctantly where it lands on Oliver's head and tips forward where, she yells, "it's getting drooly." Becky assures her she has five hundred more, thanks to Mimi over-ordering. Becky tells them Ava pulled off Mimi's hairpiece at lunch, which surprises them all, even Becky didn't know she wears one. Ayinde says at least she calls and baby-sits. They know her mother had only made one trip to see Julian, with a gift-wrapped tricycle. Ayinde thinks Lolo's happy about Richard's unfaithfulness because with them in the news, it's gotten her work. She sighs and says she wishes she could stay there.

Kelly says she wants to stay, too and finally admits to them her husband got laid off in June. Ayinde asks if they're all right and Kelly tells them they are now that she's gone back to work. She says she feels bad about leaving Oliver with Steve because she knows they're not doing anything educational, just lying around watching sports center and Steve isn't even looking for anything anymore. He's doing nothing ... nothing. Then she jumps to her feet to go. Lia chases after her and asks her if she could stay with Oliver, expecting her to say no, everything's fine, but to her surprise, she says, "Could you?" and thanks her profusely.



Ayinde delivers a truckload of guesthouse furniture to Lia's apartment, telling her she'll be doing her a favor to take it. Becky discovers they have no wild mushrooms in the cooler at Mas, which she had promised twenty-five hungry businessmen, along with Chilean sea bass. Lia glances toward the dining room where Sarah is tripping around in high-heeled boots, keeping their glasses full and says she could give them extra arepas.

The phone rings and Becky discovers Andrew has been called to do an emergency operation and the daycare center closes at nine. Lia volunteers to pick her up and take her home. Becky makes the arrangements and Lia picks up a sleeping Ava, takes her home, feeds her with the bottle full of breast milk, sporting a skull and crossbones (for Mimi's benefit), burps her, rocks her and puts her down for the night. She wonders what Caleb would have been like at her age. She breaths in her scent and feels peaceful. As she goes downstairs her mind does the math. It is ten there and seven in L.A. She could call Sam, but what would she say? That she held two babies and nothing went wrong? That she missed him every minute? She looks into the mirror and thinks she looks like her mother. Then she wonders how she'd look with brown hair again. It might look good, like coming home.

November Lia Analysis

Lia meets with Becky, Kelly and Ayinde after the mommies and babies music class and notices Ayinde's smile doesn't reach her eyes. She wonders if the other mothers stared since Richard's miniscandal and she remembers that feeling, the effort seeming to rise off the other mothers like heat off the pavement and the platitudes she thinks Ayinde must be enduring. As they walk together down the pavement, however, Lia is able to stroll along quite normally, even though she thinks about how she is different; one of these things is not like the other. Three mothers, three babies, yet she is able to walk along with them and no one is uncomfortable with the other. The author shows this as an indication of Lia's slow but steady improvement.

The reader is given another peek into the mothers' personalities. Kelly has the high-priced Bugaboo stroller. Ayinde has effortlessly trumped her with a Silver Cross pram her mother got in London and Becky has Ava strapped into a secondhand Snap 'n Go. It's obvious that Kelly tries very hard to show success and money, Ayinde doesn't even have to try and Becky could care less.

When the conversation turns to Richard's scandal, Ayinde reads them her statement for 60 minutes and the author shows Lia thinking about Sam and how wonderful he'd been to her in her pregnancy and afterwards. He did not look at other women, even though he was surrounded by beauty. She appears to be taking baby steps in her realization that even though she thought her world had ended, others have problems that are just as heartbreaking. She takes more steps toward recovery when she offers to watch Oliver for Kelly, then later picks up Ava at daycare, feeds her and puts her to bed and nothing bad has happened.



December Kelly

December Kelly Summary

Kelly lies in bed, tense fists balled, hoping Steve will awaken first. She thought of how stupid she'd been after Oliver was born not to let Steve help in the morning, now Oliver won't have anyone but her first thing. She loves Oliver, would die for him, but finds him a little boring. After fifteen minutes play or reading, she itches for her keyboard or Palm Pilot, even to curl up with Metropolitan Home. Steve comes up behind her with his sour morning breath and scratchy stubble and offers to do it so she can rest. "We're fine," is her reply. What's wrong with her? She's irritated when he wants to help and irritated when he doesn't. She sits down to feed Oliver and afterward lies beside him, dreaming about how her life would have been different if she'd married anyone else but Steve. Lemon nuzzles her awake and she splashes cold water on her face, puts her hair in a pony tail and grabs his leash.

Tucking Oliver in the stroller she takes them for a walk, remembering how well behaved Lemon had been pre-baby. Now he's relegated to second-class, non-verbal creature and he doesn't like it. He barks and wakes Oliver who begins to cry. Then he sits down in the middle of the sidewalk and refuses to budge. "Lemon, COME!" Kelly yanks his leash hoping no one is watching. She goes to the Promised Land, ties Lemon to a parking meter and hears, "Triple espresso," as she approaches the counter. She returns to the apartment, dumps food and water in Lemon's bowls and checks her emails while guzzling her coffee. Only halfway through her messages, Oliver stirs. She calls Steve who pops through the bedroom door, still in his underwear. She asks him to take Oliver and burp him, knowing he'll give him a few whacks and say he didn't need to burp. She sits down to the breast pump, praying it will work and she can pump enough milk.

After fifteen minutes, only three ounces come out; formula again. She lunges for the door as the doorbell rings, knowing it's Lia and thinking it's better than Santa Claus and Ed McMahon rolled into one. As Steve disappears into the bedroom, still in his underwear, she thinks she should have married Lia. Lia knew how to burp a baby, she knew instinctively a wet diaper could feel dry and would never pull the trick that Steve did, pretending it was dry when it was visibly soaked. Lia would never plop in front of the TV and watch SportsCenter. They could cook low-fat meals and take Oliver to the zoo and Please Touch museum. No sex, of course, but she didn't think she'd miss it much. She gives Lia the rundown, packs up her laptop and other necessities and goes back to the coffee shop. She fires up her old laptop and slugs down steaming espresso, while answering her cell phone and taking notes and feeling like the Wizard of Oz, a fraud behind the coffee shop's green awning, working while her husband stays at home and watches soap operas.

Kelly goes home at five to find Lia playing with Oliver and no Steve. Wondering where he is, she slips into her black velvet skirt and heels. She calls his cell phone and finds he's stuck in traffic. Lia has to go to Mas, so she must take Oliver with her to the party



function. Dolores, the hostess who is giving a holiday party for her sorority alums, isn't happy to see Oliver. Kelly must immediately run to the lavatory and lay Oliver on the floor to change his smelly diaper. She goes back to the party to find her boss's assistant nervously pacing, due to a mix-up they have no napkins.

Kelly hands her money and tells her to go buy paper napkins at the Seven-Eleven, while the hostess looks at her as if she has maggots coming from her mouth. She goes to the kitchen and has a cheese straw realizing she's had nothing but espresso all day. When Steve gets there she shoves Oliver and the diaper bag at him and orders him to "Just go!" After that, everything is under control and after the party, she catches a cab and settles into the backseat where her cell phone rings. Her boss has gotten a disturbing phone call from Dolores, the hostess was unhappy and wanted her money back. Kelly bites back an explanation, says she's sorry and tells her to send Dolores her money. Kelly apologizes again and cries the sixteen blocks home.

December Kelly Analysis

Kelly is realizing how difficult it is to work and take care of her home and baby. Although she regrets not letting Steve help more right from the beginning, she's still trying to maintain control and still turning down Steve's offers to help. Weiner points out, more than once in *Little Earthquakes*, the mothers' realization that although they love their babies and would die for them, they find them a little boring after awhile and yearn for other stimulation. Kelly has just been through much of what these women have experienced and her take on their situation is uniquely on target.

When Steve gets stuck in traffic and Kelly has to take Oliver with her on a job to an event she's working on, the reader must sympathize with her, enduring the rigid hostess and crying on the way home and losing the night's pay after being castigated by her boss.



December Becky

December Becky Summary

A package arrives in Mimi's scrawl, marked A. RABINOWITZ. Becky opens it and isn't sure what she's seeing. It is a Christmas stocking, made of red and green satin with Ava's name embroidered at the top. Becky reminds Andrew that they're Jewish. He tells her Mimi does Christmas and now that she's in town, she wants to do it with them. Becky turns the box over and groans as a BABY'S FIRST CHRISTMAS bib falls out. Andrew explains Mimi figures just because they're Jewish is no reason to be deprived of Christmas. Becky points out they don't believe in Jesus and that's a pretty good reason. He says he doesn't want to fight about it.

Becky says they need to discuss this with her because they have tickets to visit her mother, remember? Andrew says he'll tell her; it's no big deal. The next morning a pine tree is delivered to their house, prepaid. Becky tells the man to leave it at the curb. Then the telephone rings. It's Mimi, asking if they got the tree. Becky explains they're not Christian and Mimi says she knows that. Becky tells her they're not going to celebrate Christmas and Mimi's voice goes cold. She bleats at her that she has made plans, what about the ham, she already invited her relatives; it's bad enough Becky couldn't even name her daughter Anna, a beautiful name, her mother's name. She calls Becky a Grinch and tells her she has to have Christmas.

Becky replies she doesn't have to do anything, except be black and die. She asks Mimi who gave her the right to tell them what to do. She doesn't call her up and tell her what holidays to celebrate and who she's bringing to her house and what to cook. Mimi says this is all her MOTHER'S doing. She gets everything and Mimi gets nothing! Becky tells her she can celebrate Christmas if she wants to, but what she and Andrew do in their house is up to them. Mimi tells her if she insists on going to visit her mother, she'll never set foot in her house again, then hangs up on her. Becky tells Ava her grandmother is insane and that they're going to call Daddy and get this straightened out.

Becky tells Andrew the whole story and he asks if they can change the tickets. Becky explains when a child has a tantrum you don't give him what he wants; you walk away and tell him to calm down. Andrew says it would be easier if ... Becky finishes with, "we gave her what she wants," and explains it never works, doesn't he see that? He says, "Becky ..." and she knows the next words will be ... *she is my mother*. She thinks Andrew is a Mama's boy and Mimi's wishes will always come first. Becky's just along for the ride.

Andrew asks if they can leave the day after Christmas. It's not that big a deal. Becky says, "No." She isn't going to scream or pull a Mimi, but she isn't going to change her mind. It isn't the day, it's the principle. They have to take a stand, or they'll live the rest of their lives with Mimi running the show. He tells her it's not like that and she thinks of all the examples she could give him that Mimi has manipulated them, from the blueberry



muffin to the wedding dress she'd worn to their wedding and the song she'd sung. Instead she says, "Think about Ava. This teaches her who screams the loudest gets what she wants." He says Mimi's not young and he's all she has. Becky says she gets that but she's his wife, Ava's his daughter and they should come first. He says he'll talk to Mimi; it'll be okay.

When Andrew gets home his face is ashen and his eyes are red. Becky knows it didn't go well. Andrew says Mimi's disappointed; Becky says no one ever died of disappointment. Andrew says she was crying; Becky says she'll get over it. Andrew buries his face in his hands and Becky puts her arms around him and says they'll have a wonderful time on vacation and by the time they get back Mimi will have forgotten all about it. Andrew says, "I hope you're right."

December Becky Analysis

Weiner turns up the heat for poor Becky in this chapter as Mimi finally goes too far. First she sends Ava a Christmas stocking and bib, prompting Becky to remind Andrew they're Jewish and since they don't believe in Jesus, that's a pretty good reason not to celebrate Christmas. Andrew, once again tries to explain and defend his mother, but promises to talk to her. Then, Mimi orders a Christmas tree and has it delivered to their house, which Becky refuses. The reader is treated to an unbelievable tantrum by Mimi when Becky tries to patiently explain they have plans to visit her mother over Christmas and won't be able to celebrate it with her. Even when Becky tells Andrew that Mimi called her a Grinch and hung up on her, he wants to give in and change the day so she can have her way. The man is truly terrified of his mother's tantrums. Becky is firm. Andrew is unconvinced that everything will be all right and by the time they come back from Florida, she'll have forgotten all about it and so is the reader.



December Ayinde

December Ayinde Summary

Ayinde takes Julian to the doctor for a checkup and apologizes that they missed his six-month checkup. She says that they've been busy, wondering if it were possible the doctor hadn't heard what was going on. Dr. Melendez checks him over and listens to his heart, then slips the bell to another spot on his chest and frowns, then listens again for a long time. When Ayinde asks if everything's all right the doctor asks her if anyone has mentioned to her that Julian has a heart murmur. Ayinde asks how bad that is as her heart bangs in her chest and the doctor tells her lots of times it's no big deal, sometimes they heal themselves, but she'd like a cardiologist to take a listen. She gives her the name and number to call. She tells Ayinde if she notices him having trouble breathing or starts turning blue, take him to the nearest emergency room, but the chances of that happening are slim; if something was going to go wrong it would have happened by now.

Ayinde calls Becky and asks if Andrew knows a pediatric cardiologist; Julian has a heart murmur. Becky tells her not to panic, lots of babies have them, but Ayinde says Dr. Myerson might not have an appointment until next week and Richard's traveling and she can't wait that long. Becky says she'll see if Andrew can call in a favor. Ayinde calls Richard's cell phone and Christina Crossley, who'd commandeered the family's cell phones, answers. Ayinde asks to speak to Richard and she asks her what's wrong. Ayinde tells her she needs to speak to Richard right now and she goes to find him. When he comes on, she tells him she needs him to come home, that there's something wrong with the baby.

Andrew pulls strings and gets an appointment first thing in the morning the next day. Dr. Myerson checks the baby meticulously. He tells them Julian has a ventricular septal defect, a hole between the right and left sides of his heart. The doctor shows them on a model of a baby's heart. Richard reaches for Ayinde's hand and for the first time since the afternoon of Miss Phoenix, she lets him take it. When Ayinde asks why this has happened the doctor explains they're never sure. Sometimes it's due to poor prenatal care, but in her case it was just one of those things. He says it could clear up on its own and that he'd like to do some diagnostic procedures; then leaves them alone. Ayinde says she wants to call her friends. She thinks of Lia and sobs against Richard's chest. He holds her and pleads with her to let him take care of her and Julian and that everything will be all right. Richard asks her to let him call her friends and she is amazed he even knows their names. He gives her a paper cup of water and leaves to make the calls, while she gently puts Julian's clothes back on him.

Becky enters Ayinde's kitchen with two plastic bags, dinner. Kelly follows, her hair lank and dark circles under her eyes. Lia is last with her chestnut mane that falls in waves past her shoulders. Ayinde thinks that's how she must have looked in her life before. Ayinde explains that the electrocardiogram and X-rays were inconclusive and they're



doing a transesophageal echocardiogram in the morning; it's an outpatient procedure but done under general anesthesia. Ayinde thinks it's poetic. Julian had a hole in his heart and she feels like someone has torn a hole in hers. Becky passes around the food, but Ayinde can't eat and begins to weep, "What if something happens, what if he stops breathing?" Lia reaches for her hand and sits quietly and lets her cry.

Richard sits with Julian in the hospital waiting room, rocking him and telling him he's going to go to sleep for awhile so they can see what's wrong with his ticker and when he wakes up, he'll be fine. If they have to fix him up, he'll be just fine. They love him so much, he doesn't have to play basketball or do anything, just get through this alright. Ayinde sees that Richard's crying and asks to take Julian, but Richard asks if he can carry him for a little bit. She tells him okay and reaches for his hand.

Ayinde walks the halls nonstop, waiting for it to be over. Sometimes Richard walks with her, sometimes when he sits down Becky, Kelly and Lia take their turns. Ayinde prays her one word prayer: *please, please, please, please, please*. She wonders what she'll do if she loses her baby. Will she end up like Lia, running like a kicked dog? This is her home now; her friends were here. *Please, please, please*. She hears Richard before she sees him and looks up to see him running toward her. He says, "Baby," and he's beaming. "It's okay, there's a hole, but a small one; it'll close up on its own." She is in his arms, holding on tight. He holds her steady and they walk back to her friends, waiting and tell them it's going to be all right.

December Ayinde Analysis

When Ayinde takes Julian in for his check-up and six-month shot (late because of all that has been going on in their lives), the doctor discovers that Julian has a heart murmur. Dr. Melendez tells her she wants him to see a cardiologist. Ayinde is terrified and feels dizzy. She calls Becky immediately and asks her if Andrew knows any pediatric cardiologists and explains to her that Julian has a heart murmur. Becky reassures her that lots of babies have them, but Ayinde says she can't wait until the cardiologist that Dr. Melendez gave her has an opening and Richard's traveling. Then she calls Richard's cell phone.

Christina Crossley, the crisis manager, answers and when Ayinde says she needs to speak with Richard, Christina asks her if something is wrong. When Christina repeats she needs to speak to Richard, she goes to find him. When Richard comes on the line, Ayinde chokes out there's something wrong with the baby and she needs him to come home.

The author begins to build suspense in this chapter, using the incident of baby Julian's heart murmur. The reader wants to read on to find out what happens next. Will baby Julian be all right? How serious is the heart murmur?

Andrew is able to get an appointment the next morning for Julian and Ayinde and Richard take him together. The doctor says he wants to do some diagnostic tests and



Ayinde wants to call her friends. The author is able to give Richard a chance to show his love for Ayinde as he comforts her, brings her water and offers to make the calls for her. Ayinde is amazed he remembers their names. Later, as Richard is shown rocking Julian and telling him how much he loves him, Ayinde catches a glimpse and sees he is crying. Suspense builds as they have to wait while Julian goes in for tests, but Richard is the one who runs to Ayinde's side to tell her Julian is fine and the hole will close up on its own. Weiner uses this near tragedy as the vehicle that will bring Ayinde and Richard back together.



January Lia

January Lia Summary

Lia is waiting on an elderly couple, the woman is acting like Evil Granny, when she looks over the crowd and spots someone who causes her to run to the kitchen, gasping for breath. She takes a drink of water and leans against the counter; Becky asks her if she's seen a ghost. Lia tells her something like that. She straitens up, tucks her white shirt back into her black treader pants and peeks through the door. It is Merrill from Parents Together, the one who'd gone on about the Make-a-Wish people failing to provide her dying son's wish to visit a porn star. She is with her husband and a little boy. Lia goes back out to Grumpy Grandma and her husband and waits on them, keeping an eye on Merrill. At Parents Together Merrill had been dressed in jeans and a sweatshirt; tonight she is all dressed up, her hair shiny, mouth painted and eyes lined.

She sees Merrill and her son and husband push through the door and she runs back to the kitchen to ask Becky to cover for her, warns her about the miserable people at table seven and follows Merrill onto the street, yelling her name. She introduces herself and when Merrill's husband says they'll be late for the movies, she tells him to go ahead, she and Lia are going to get a cup of coffee. Lia asks her if that's her little boy, did she have him "after" and how she could do it. Merrill explains she thought she never would, but her husband had been so good and kind and showed her how much he loved her, how she'd never have to doubt his love.

Lia remembers Sam-a straw wrapper slipped on her finger, a wedding dress lying on a hotel bed. *Let me be your family now.* Merrill told her how at first she wasn't ready, she was afraid if she had another baby she'd be holding her breath the whole time, dragging him to the doctor every time he sneezed. But she'd decided she had a good husband and she had to make a choice. People say happiness is a choice. Hope is a choice, too. She apologizes for scaring Lia away from the group and she would have said all that if she had just stayed. Lia tells her she just wasn't ready then. She remembers her job and jumps up, getting Merrill's number first. She goes back to Mas, takes care of Grumpy Grandma's dinner and when Becky asks if she's okay, she tells her she's okay, but she's going outside for just a minute to make a call.

January Lia Analysis

When Lia spots Merrill with her husband and a little boy while she's working in Mas, she follows her outside to the sidewalk and yells her name. This is a big step for Lia, who has spent the last several months running away from people and things. There is a brief mention of Lia's wish that she had her mother's blue coat. This coat has become a symbol of safety for Lia. As the two talk over coffee, Merrill tells Lia the little boy is hers and he was born after she lost her oldest son to Leukemia. Lia hadn't stayed long enough at the meeting to find that out.



This news gives Lia some hope. The reader notices another little crack in the shell Lia has built around herself. Merrill talks about how kind and patient her husband was with her and Lia is again reminded of her Sam, who had been the heart of love and kindness to her always. At the end of the chapter, when Lia goes back to Mas and tells Becky she has to make a phone call, suspense builds some more as the reader has to know who it is she's calling.



January Kelly

January Kelly Summary

Kelly sits against the wall at the Wee Ones Music Class feeling tired and conflicted, but mostly tired. She watches Steve bounce Oliver on his knee and wave his maraca to the beat as they sing the "Welcome" song. He whispers that if she has to get going, The Big O and he will be fine. She says, no, she'll stay. She knows other fathers sometimes bring their babies. Andrew had brought Ava and even Richard had brought Julian once. But they have jobs to return to, not job searches. Or so-called job searches. She looks at the AA posters on the walls and wonders where the group is for overextended mothers married to men without jobs. She thinks about the credit card bill for eleven hundred dollars he'd handed her the night before. When she'd asked for what, he'd shrugged and said, "Dinner, clothes, my mom's birthday. He'd spent three hundred dollars on a gift that will probably gather dust on her étagère. Kelly had felt sick as she wrote the check. What would happen if they ran through their savings and they couldn't pay their health insurance and one of them got sick? Bill collectors, used cars, hand-me-downs. No way.

At home, Kelly changes Oliver's diaper, kisses his cheek and looks longingly at the bed. Just for a minute. The next thing she feels is Steve shaking her awake, telling her, "Telephone." When she realizes it's five o'clock she's frantic, thinking of all the things she hasn't done. She hasn't even checked her Inbox. Elizabeth is probably furious. When she takes the phone she discovers it's a reporter, Amy, from *Power* magazine, wanting to do a spread on her-successful women in the workplace.

Kelly almost laughs, but thinks, if she can pull this off, it can help her work her way back into Elizabeth's good graces. Amy wants to meet for lunch. Kelly begins to scribble in Oliver's baby book that hadn't been updated in months, hair, manicure, new suit (?), new shoes and thinks her beautiful calfskin briefcase must be in the closet somewhere. Then Amy tells her they'll want photos of her at home with her baby and her mind races at all the cleaning and picking up that needs done. What can she tell her about the lack of furniture? When Amy mentions her husband, Kelly says he travels a lot as a consultant for Internet start-ups. They decide on that Friday and Kelly hangs up.

Kelly goes into the kitchen and asks Steve to put on some pants, scraps her hair into a pony tail and gets Lemon's leash to go for a walk. Steve takes Oliver's tray off his high chair and carries it to the sink and Kelly's heart stops as she sees Oliver lean forward. She screams for Steve, but neither is fast enough and he hits the floor with a thud. Kelly calls the doctor and is told if he's screaming like that and there's no blood, he's probably fine; she should just keep an eye on him. Steve continues apologizing as she nurses him and she asks again why he wasn't strapped in.

Steve says, again, "I forgot!" The dam breaks and the poison she's been holding back for months comes pouring out. "Just like you forgot your deadline. Just like you forget to



run the dishwasher. Just like you forget to put on your pants unless I remind you." She grabs Lemon's leash, shrugging off Steve's suggestion that he can walk him, puts a howling Oliver in his stroller and hurries them into the elevator and onto the street. Steve catches up halfway down the block carrying the diaper bag with a fresh bottle and begs her to let him walk with them. Kelly knows she'll have to make something up about the missed conference call she'd scheduled. Steve asks her to let him help, but she shakes her head as they turn for home.

January Kelly Analysis

This chapter opens in the babies' music class with Steve offering to help and Kelly once more turning him down and Kelly comparing him to other husbands in her mind with him coming up short, again. It seems he can't do anything right. Kelly thinks about the enormous credit card bill he'd handed her, piling on more financial debt and worry for her.

She lays down for "just a few minutes" and Steve lets her sleep, probably because he sees how much she needs it, but she's upset when she sees how late it is and thinks of how much she has to do. Once again, the author shows him wanting to help and Kelly's impatience with him and refusal to allow it. When a reporter asks to do a story on her for *Power* magazine about "having it all," women who manage to succeed in the workplace, Kelly agrees, thus setting herself up for more stress. She's going to have to get a new suit, a manicure, her hair done, etc. Then when the reporter says she wants to talk to her in her home, she really panics. The reader can't help but wonder how much more this young woman can take before she snaps.

Later, when Steve allows Oliver to fall out of his high chair because he forgot to strap him in, the author gives Kelly yet another reason to be angry at him and this time the dam breaks. She sneers at him and yells at him, then takes Oliver and Lemon for a walk. Steve follows begging her to let him help her. The reader sees him as a good guy, truly confused and perplexed about why his wife keeps pushing him away and knows it's only a matter of time before this situation between them has to come to a head.



January Lia

January Lia Summary

Lia meets her mother at Mas on Sunday afternoon. Her mother seems nervous and says she looks well. Then Helen takes a deep breath and tells her she's been talking to Lia's husband. Lia is shocked, but asks what he said and her mother tells her initially he was surprised to know Helen is alive. He wants to know if Lia's coming back, but her mother says she told him she didn't know. Lia had arranged this meeting and planned everything she was going to say and her mother has turned the tables on her. Lia is surprised she knows she's married. Her mother tells her she hasn't exactly been invisible.

Lia asks if she knew about Caleb and her mother whispers that she didn't know his name. Lia brings out a picture they'd taken in the nursery where he was born. Her mother starts to shake all over, then sob. Lia is shocked and gives her napkins. Her mother chokes out, "I wish I knew what I'd done to make you hate me so much." Lia says, "You hated me first." Her mother asks if that's really what she thinks. Lia shrugs and feels uncertain. She'd told her self that and continued to believe it. She'd invited her here to forgive her, but what if she'd been wrong? What if she's as much to blame? Her mother says, "When you were a baby I changed you, fed you, held you and sang you to sleep, but when your father came through the door, your face would light up. I loved you so much, but you only smiled for him." Lia thinks, oh no. She doesn't want to remember herself in the rocking chair, rocking while Caleb shrieked, walking up and down the hallway, back and forth, as he screamed hour after hour and Sam coming home, taking him for five minutes and Caleb not screaming at all.

Her mother tells her she forgave her father a lot because Lia loved him so much. When Lia asks what she forgave him for, she tells her it's water under the bridge. Lia thinks back to the memories of the zoo and the flower show, the restaurant lunches and ice cream cones in the park. How she came home sometimes and he'd be there; they'd sneak out of the house to matinees and eat fast food and he'd say, "Don't tell your mother," giving her a twenty-dollar bill. She'd never thought to ask why he was home all the time. Sometimes there would be a woman there and her father would introduce her as a friend from work. They were always young and pretty. Had she known? She asks her mother why she stayed and she tells her if she'd divorced him she knew Lia would never see him again. One of his girlfriends gave him an ultimatum and he'd ended up leaving. Lia remembers sending the only wedding invitation she had to his last known address. Three weeks later, she'd gotten a note written on an old legal pad.

Congratulations. And now that you are a "big success" in Hollywood, maybe you can spare something for your Old Man. She'd tucked it away without telling anyone.

Lia asks about the Strawberry Shortcake quilt that she'd begged for and her father finally bought, but her mother would never let her have a new one. Helen says it was the only thing he ever bought and she wanted her to keep it to remember her dad. All



the other toys and gifts had been bought by her mother and given to her by her dad because her mother wanted him to be a better father. She wanted her to have everything she ever wanted, but most of all a better father.

Lia asks about all the high school plays she never went to. Her mother tells her she never wanted her there, that her exact works were she'd kill herself if she saw her face in the audience, but Helen was there. Her mother shows her a flyer from the first comedy troupe Lia had joined. She'd gotten it off eBay. She'd had subscriptions to *TV Guide*, *People* and every tabloid, just to keep tabs on her career. She had pictures of her, including one in her wedding dress. She tells her she saw everything she'd done, but that Lia had missed Helen's TV debut on Jeopardy! She'd won three nights in a row and earned sixteen thousand dollar-enough to get the roof fixed.

Lia's eyes fill with tears as she remembers how Sam had flipped to Jeopardy! on their honeymoon and she had told him she'd been subjected to that show five nights a week for eighteen years and she'd never watch it again. Lia tells her mom that she's so sorry and her mom tells her she knows and she's sorry, too. *It is a start*, Lia thinks, as she reaches out and takes her mother's hand.

January Lia Analysis

In this touching chapter, the reader finds out who it was Lia called on her cell phone that night at Mas. Lia thinks she has called her mother to meet her so she can forgive her and let her know it, but Helen turns the tables when she tells her she's been talking to her husband, Sam. She goes on to let her know the truth about many of the incidences in her life when Lia thought her mother was the "bad guy," and it turns out everything she ever did was out of love and to protect her. Lia's father, whom she'd always thought of as her knight in shining armor, had been unfaithful and unreliable and her mother had protected Lia from that knowledge, to her own hurt.

Weiner skillfully lays out a common mistake made by so many. She shows a woman who hated her mother and who thought her mother hated her, all because of her childish perspective. When Lia learns the truth, it frees her. The author is showing here the need for communication. Because these two hadn't communicated, they almost lost each other forever.



January Becky

January Becky Summary

Becky wakes up sick. Food poisoning, an occupational hazard, she thinks and rues eating the oysters. When Andrew walks in with Ava, she tells him and he brings her ginger ale and saltines. She says she hadn't had a cracker since she was ... and her voice trails off. No. Andrew tells her not to get ahead of herself, but looks pleased and asks Ava if she wants a little brother or sister. Fifteen minutes later he comes back with a bag from the drugstore. "No," she mutters, but after the test, No becomes a bright blue Yes.

Becky asks how she's going to do this, she can hardly handle one baby, now she's going to have two, fifteen months apart. Andrew is nonplussed and tells her she's a wonderful mother. She says she's not and tells him she yelled at Ava once. She was pushing her up the street and she screamed for eight blocks and wouldn't quit. She'd yelled at her, "What to you want me to do?" and people were totally staring. She says she'll never be able to work and she loves her work, it's like being paroled from Ava, even though she loves her. She should ask Sarah if she wants to buy her out.

Andrew tells her not to be silly; it's not a life sentence, there are things they can do. She tells him this is it, no more; he's getting snipped. She feels sad and disloyal. She'd been so happy when they'd found out about Ava. Now she just feels confused. She'd wanted years just with Andrew and Ava, now Ava has to be a big sister at fifteen months. Now they'd be four. She'll be exhausted. Andrew says they can hire a nanny or cleaning ladies twice a week; they're lucky when you think about it. Lucky. Becky mouthed the word and knew it was true. If there's one thing she's learned, it is any bit of good fortune had to be counted as lucky and there is always someone worse off than you.

January Becky Analysis

In a humorous development, the reader discovers in this chapter that Becky is pregnant. It seems there is no lack of interesting and humorous developments in this character's life. At first she thinks it's food poisoning and when Andrew buys a pregnancy test kit, she's firmly in denial until the test confirms it's a bright blue YES. In this interesting plot twist, the author keeps interest alive for Becky and also gives her another reason for the decision she makes in a later chapter.

When she questions her ability to handle two babies, when she's having a hard enough time with one, Andrew can't believe she says that and tells her she's a wonderful mother. She says she's a terrible mother and that once she yelled at Ava, in public, even. This is such a common feeling among mothers. The fact that they aren't as good at mothering as everyone else they know, or that they lost their temper and yelled. Weiner brings this out in Becky to point out that this is a normal and natural part of



mothering and that almost all mothers go through it. Becky is also learning from her friends that she should be grateful for any good thing that happens and there is always someone worse off than you.



January Kelly

January Kelly Summary

Kelly answers the doorbell at ten o'clock Friday morning to Amy and the photographer. She leads them into the living room that she'd gotten up at six to clean. She's dressed in a suit she'd snuck home from the dry cleaners. She offers them coffee from her sparkling kitchen and cookies arranged on the perfect tray that Becky had done that morning. She carries it into the living room, admiring the freshly mopped floor, the pear-scented air from the candles lit the night before, the cashmere throw that Ayinde had lent her draped over the Ghetto Couch and the antique lace table cloth thrown over cardboard boxes that passed for a coffee table.

Kelly recites her biography, listing her siblings' names, talking about the good things: her entrepreneurial foray into raising and selling gerbils, planning her own birthday parties and those of her siblings, leaving out the reason was her mother was too drunk to do it. As Oliver babbles, da da da, she leans in and smiles at him, hearing the camera click and tells him, Dada's on a business trip. She lifts him into the air; there is an ominous gurgling sound and pinkish vomit from the Infants' Tylenol, slipped to him forty-five minutes previously. It comes pouring out, soaking her suit and puddling the floor. She excuses herself and runs down the hall to change him and finds all his clothes in the washing machine, wet. Steve hadn't finished the laundry as promised. She shoves him into a navy blue sleeper and races to find herself something to wear, while calling the doctor to report Oliver's vomiting, but hangs up when they begin to question why she gave it to him. She squeezes into a too tight skirt; finds a sweater Doreen had given her for Christmas shoved up on a dusty shelf. Lavender, low cut, fuzzy angora, but at least it's clean.

Kelly rushes back out to feed them more lies, that she'd gone back to work at sixteen weeks, her manager had let her ease into things, that she worked from home and was lucky to have relatives watch Oliver and now a friend baby sits (at least that was true). She was lucky compared with most women who were happy to get six weeks off after having a baby and had to put them in daycare. She was lucky to have benefits and friends who, in a pinch, could watch Oliver if an emergency came up. Her heart pounds as she fields questions. If faking Having It All was this hard, actually doing it must be impossible. She's asked if her life is what she imagined it would be when she was in college. She thinks about what she'd envisioned and everything that had happened and admits it's much harder.

The photographer suddenly asks if he can stick his jacket in the closet, the one Kelly had stuffed six months' worth of clutter into and before she can stop him, he opens the door and her life avalanches down onto the freshly vacuumed floor. Kelly tells him no problem and tries to push things back in, but the harder she shoves, the more things fall out. She gives up and decides it's small potatoes compared with what her friends have been through. Then Steve walks in, long sleeved T-shirt, stubble, hair curling over his



collar, carrying a load of discount diapers. He soon figures out what she's done, stalks down the hall and begins to pack a suitcase. Kelly follows him, they fight and she finally tells him she made a mistake with him. She walks out of the bedroom to the perfect nursery, picks up her perfect baby and walks to the perfect living room to Amy and David. They're sitting on the couch with their faces so carefully bland she can't tell and doesn't care whether they've heard everything or nothing at all.

January Kelly Analysis

Weiner turns up the heat for Kelly in this chapter as she finally bites off more than she can chew with this interview. She's determined to pull this off and get back in her boss's good graces, but everything goes wrong. It would be funny if it weren't so sad. The reader watches helplessly as Kelly best laid plans unravel, little by little. By the time her whole life tumbles out of the closet, she has had it. She comes clean and confesses that it's so much harder than she'd every thought. When Steve comes home and realizes her deception, it's the final straw for him, too. The author uses this as a catalyst for them to get into a real fight and say the things they've both held in for so long and to get Steve out of Kelly's life.



February Lia

February Lia Summary

Lia tells Sam she'll meet him at the airport. She wants to give him a gesture, a sign; she wants to be there when he arrives in Philadelphia. She goes to the luggage claim, yearning for the good old days before 9/11 when you could meet someone you love at the gate. She sees a couple with twins in a stroller and a newborn in a backpack. She notices the mother's dark circles under her eyes, her hair pulled back haphazardly in a ponytail and how she walks like her bones ache. When the mother sees her staring, she smiles and tells her to have a nice trip; the woman says she'll try.

She feels a tap on her shoulder and at the sound of his voice, her blood and skin feel warmer. She takes in his broad shoulders; he's taller than she remembers. She gets weak kneed when he lifts a lock of her hair and studies it. He remarks on the change and she's embarrassed to tell him it's closer to her natural color and remembers all the other things she'd told him that weren't true. She apologizes and he says he'll get over it; there are too many blonds in Hollywood already. He tells her he's rented a car. That the studio is paying for the whole trip because he agreed to stop by the affiliate and say hello. He's staying at the Rittenhouse Hotel and she says it's right down the street from her apartment, wondering what he must be feeling, thinking he must be so angry at her. Her heart broke for him, for all of them.

The two of them get in the car and she can only say, "Do you still love me?" He replies, "Oh, Lia," and she's in his arms. He tells her he'll always love her and her new hair is pretty hot. He teases her and says she disappears for nine months, crooks her little finger and has him come running and asks her if that's a radical version of playing hard to get. She slides into his lap and kisses him and he slides the smoked glass panel up between them and the driver. He begins to fumble at her jacket, her sweater and scarf and says, "All these clothes; the East Coast boys must have a terrible time," and she whispers, "No East Coast boys, only you." As they begin to make love, they hear the driver's voice over the intercom. They're there. Sam gasps, "Just keep driving. Go ... somewhere!" At the last moment, when he can find his breath, Sam whispers, "Is it safe?" and Lia thinks of all the things she could say, how nothing is safe, how there are hidden traps, how your marriage could fall apart, your husband could lose his job, your baby could get sick, or die. That the world could look sane, but underneath, it's all fault lines and earthquakes waiting to happen. Instead she just whispers, "yes" into his ear.

February Lia Analysis

The author is beginning to wind things up in this happy chapter as Lia and Sam reunite. Lia insists on meeting Sam at the airport; she wants to make a gesture, give him a sign. The author shows here that Lia is still in love and wanting to reach out to Sam. At first, Lia is apprehensive, wondering how Sam really feels about her, thinking he has to be



very angry. When she finally gets the courage to ask him if he still loves her, the floodgates open and they hold each other. Even though they are in the back of a car, with the driver only feet away, their passion overcomes them and they make love. Weiner uses humor here, as in other places in the novel to diffuse highly tense situations.

In the last paragraph of this chapter Weiner has Lia think how nothing is ever safe and underneath it's all fault lines and earthquakes waiting to happen. This is the main theme of the novel and probably the central paragraph of the book. The title *Little Earthquakes* is a play on words and has a double meaning. First *Little Earthquakes* is a description of the babies and how they can rock your world. Second, the term is used, as in this paragraph, to indicate how life is uncertain and rocky; just when you think you have it figured out, something happens to change everything.



February Ayinde

February Ayinde Summary

Three weeks after Ayinde and Richard bring Julian home from the hospital Clara tells Ayinde she has a visitor and makes a sign that she's pregnant. Ayinde finds Tiffany on her front porch shivering in the cold wind, with no coat on. She hands Julian to Clara, telling her to take him away. She tells Tiffany Richard isn't there and the girl says she knows, she has come to see her, Ayinde and says the name carefully as if she's practiced it. She had looked in Richard's cell phone the night they were together and found his home number and gotten his address, looking it up on Mapquest. Ayinde tells her she's clever; her parents must be so proud. Tiffany replies that they're not, they're ashamed of her and so is she. She tells her she's sorry and ashamed.

Ayinde invites her in, hardly believing what she's doing. Tiffany tells her she's sorry for her troubles, she read that her baby was sick. She tells Ayinde that she wants her to know her husband is a good man; when she'd asked if Richard wanted to see her again, he'd said, "No, I love my wife." She apologizes for talking to reporters and says that it was a mistake. Ayinde can hardly believe that she feels sympathy for her, but she knows she and her baby won't have an easy time. Not black, not white and with a single mother. Tiffany says she's decided to go back to school. Then she says she'd like her baby to know his father and half brother and asks if it would be all right if she called her sometime.

Ayinde closes her eyes and thinks it's too much to ask and remembers her parents telling her how lucky she was when she was a little girl and how she should always carry a dollar to give to those who asked and how she should box up her leftovers from a restaurant and leave it near a subway station for those who would need what she could spare. She was lucky ... but could she be brave? Tiffany says, "I'm sorry," when the silence stretches out too long. She says she shouldn't have come, but she's scared and her mother won't talk to her.

Ayinde hears Julian babbling upstairs and thinks about when she'd asked Dr. Myerson if he could live with a hole in his heart, he'd said, "You'd be surprised what people can live with." Ayinde tells her she wouldn't be comfortable with her coming there and Tiffany says she understands, that she'd feel the same. Then Ayinde tells her to give her her phone number and she'd call her and to take care of herself and her baby. Once the girl is gone, Ayinde walks slowly up the stairs and takes Julian, rocks him and kisses him and tells him he's going to have a half-brother or half-sister. *Lucky*. She guessed it might be true.



February Ayinde Analysis

When Ayinde finds the woman who is pregnant with Richard's baby on her front porch, shivering in the cold, she does something that even she doesn't understand. She talks to her and then invites her in, but first she hands Julian off to the housekeeper to take away. This is a natural act, wanting to get her baby away from a presence that she considers to be a threat. As Tiffany tells her story and is truly contrite and apologetic, Ayinde begins to soften and finds she is sympathetic to her. Weiner wisely puts this scene in here to give Ayinde some closure with this painful situation. She needs to face this woman and find forgiveness in her heart, or she can't successfully go on with her life and marriage. She remembers back to when she was a child and her parents had taught her she was a lucky little girl to live so well and how she had to be kind and helpful to those less fortunate. Ayinde takes Tiffany's phone number and promises to call her, giving her hope and the gift of forgiveness. She thinks maybe she is *lucky*. This is a word used many times throughout the book. The author points out many times how the main characters see themselves as lucky, or not.



February Becky

February Becky Summary

Becky comes home from work to find Andrew staring glumly at a handwritten letter from Mimi, saying she never wants to see them again. She has to suppress the urge to break into a buck and wing and belt out, "Happy Days Are Here Again." He hands her the letter and tells her to read it. She reads that Mimi has been hurt by the actions of "you and your wife," that she can't imagine what she's done to make him feel this way, that he's treated her with a shameful lack of respect and that she's always tried to do what's best for him, even sacrificing her own wishes to give him everything he wanted and needed. Becky can't figure out what she could possibly mean. From everything she'd seen, there'd been little sacrificing and a whole lot of, "I deserve respect" with a guilt trip for dessert. She reads on that Andrew's behavior is disgraceful and he's a disappointment as a son. Becky says that's ridiculous, Andrew has been a wonderful, generous son who has put up with more than any man she knew would. He tells her to read the rest. Phrases like "disowning you ... lawyers ... pushed me away ... made a mockery of Christmas" jump out at her. Then the final paragraph: *You have turned me away in favor of your wife and her family who come from nothing and have no idea how to behave in decent company. Oy.*

Andrew says, "Maybe we should just let her go. She's awful to me, to you and probably to Ava." He grabs the letter and shoves it back into the envelope and says, "Fine, disown us, we're better off without her." Becky thinks this is what she's wished for, dreamed of, prayed about ... so why does it feel like a hollow victory? She tells Andrew they need to think about this, that she is Ava's grandmother and the new baby's grandmother. Andrew gawks at her and asks her if she's been taken over by the pod people. She tells him to call Mimi; they have to work this out.

They go to Mimi's teeny-tiny Tara of a home and things don't go well. Mimi rakes them over the coals and gets up to march out of the room, so Becky asks her to come back for the sake of her granddaughter. Becky had planned on sitting quietly and letting Andrew do the talking, but she takes a deep, cleansing yoga breath and forces herself to see Mimi as a baby, standing in her crib, crying with no one coming to help her. The vision gets clearer: the soaked diaper and wet pajamas, the tears on the baby's face, the indignant cries; crying and crying and nobody coming to help. "I'm sorry," she says softly. Becky remembers things she'd heard from Andrew. Mimi's father had been successful in business but there'd been a scandal and jail time. Her mother had been strange. Lia had said all those months ago, "She's the way she is because she got hurt." So once again, Becky says, "I'm sorry. I'm sorry if I overreacted about Christmas. I can see how much it meant to you." She tells her even though she's not comfortable with a tree in her own home, they'll have Christmas next year with her. Mimi has more room and two ovens.



Mimi looks small, old and confused as she says she's already missed her granddaughter's first Christmas. Becky tells her they'll have it next year and just because she visits her mother doesn't mean they don't love her. She tells her Ava is lucky to have a grandmother like her who loves her so much. Mimi raises a thin hand to her face and seems surprised to see moisture there, as if she'd started leaking. She jumps up and says she has to fix her face and Becky calls out, "Happy New Year!" Not wanting to press her luck, she then tugs Andrew out the door.

Andrew looks like a man who's had a reprieve from a firing squad. Becky explains she really does feel sorry for her and when she thinks of her friends and what they have been through, they had it pretty good. They'll tell Mimi what she needs to know about them and the children and wait awhile before they tell her about "the niblet." Andrew tells her she's incredible and he loves her more than ever. He thanks her and when she asks him if they'll be good parents, he says, "I think we already are."

February Becky Analysis

Things come to a head in this chapter for Becky and Andrew where Mimi is concerned. When Andrew reads his mother's note, he finally has had enough. It's the last paragraph that does it for him where his mother describes Becky and her family as coming from nothing and not knowing how to behave in decent company. Oddly enough, it's when he finally gets fed up enough to write her out of his life, that Becky begins to see that might not be an entirely great idea. Following one of the main themes of the book, forgiveness, Becky talks Andrew into going to talk things out with Mimi.

The author shows Mimi at her vindictive worst and the reader begins to wonder how anyone could ever love or forgive this horrid woman. It's only when Becky allows herself to see Mimi as the needy, unloved child that she really is and pictures her as a frightened, crying infant that no one came to help or comfort that she begins to understand and forgive her. Mimi's parents had died when she was a teenager, right before she embarked on her series of marriages, giving a clear indication of her need for someone to take care of her. When Becky apologizes for not spending Christmas with her and tells her Ava is lucky to have her for a grandmother, Mimi's tough shell cracks and she begins to "leak." Becky shows her maturity by swallowing her "right," to be right for the importance of family unity. She wins the undying love and gratitude of her husband in the process.



February Kelly

February Kelly Summary

Kelly tears open the envelope containing *Power* magazine and sees a picture of herself on the cover in the horrible lavender sweater, knee deep in her closet debris, with the caption, *Having It All? Why a Working Girl Can't Win*. She reads the bold quotation, "THIS IS SO MUCH HARDER THAN I EVER THOUGHT IT WOULD BE." She looks up at the cabinet where she keeps the Scotch and vodka and thinks a glass topped off with the Percocets left over from her C-section and it wouldn't hurt so bad. She's determined not to go down that road, however and beginning to understand how her mother could have. She continues to read how as a magna cum laude graduate with a promising career and married to a Wharton whiz kid she should have had it all, but baby made trouble.

Kelly tells Oliver he did not, that the media lies. She goes on to read about herself as a "tiny, peppy blond" and that her coworkers describe her as "distracted, ditzzy and absent-minded." Ouch. The article ends with the caveat that if Kelly, with her smarts, savvy and Ivy League degree can't successfully integrate a career and family thirty some years after the so called revolution, the workplace isn't likely to be a kinder, gentler place for women who will follow. Kelly doesn't care for the women who'll follow in her footsteps. She is too tired. She feels those women should worry about their husbands losing their jobs.

Kelly knows she can't stay at her job, not after what they've said about her. She'll have to move to a smaller place and find another, full-time job if she's going to be Oliver's sole support. She's so tired she can't even move out of the rocker and gropes for her phone to call her sister. She calls Mary and tells her something is wrong and Mary gets the rest of her sisters on for a conference call. She admits Steve lost his job, back before she even had Oliver. Now he's left her. They gasp and call him a loser and want to kill him, but Kelly tells them he's not a loser, that he wasn't cut out for a big company. He wanted to be a teacher and she hadn't wanted that and he'd tried to help her and she hadn't let him. She thought only she could do it right ... and she thought she had it all figured out.

Her sister Mary tells her she always did think that, but doesn't sound judgmental. Mary asks if she needs money, or a place to stay. They tell her to call Steve, tell him she's sorry; Terry says, "You have to let people be who they want, even if it's not what you want them to be." They tell her they're there for her if she needs them and that life is not a perfect happily-ever-after; that only happens in fairy tales. Kelly says she has to try and they agree.

Kelly meets with Steve at the coffee shop, amazed at how much she's missed him and tells him she has to show him something. Steve had met Kelly's family only once before their wedding, on her graduation day. They'd all gone to a Japanese restaurant and



she'd coached them all on how to dress and what to say. When asked what he did, her father replied, "I work for the government," just as she'd coached him.

As they drive down the turnpike, Kelly tells Steve her father delivers the mail. She parks in front of the dingy Cape Cod where she grew up. She tells him she was never a girl scout because they couldn't afford the uniform and when they were invited to birthday parties they brought something from the dollar store wrapped in the comics, so eventually they made excuses and stopped going. Every Christmas ladies would bring a basket with a turkey and toys they'd asked for with tags from Santa. When they figured out who the gifts were really from, they stopped asking because accepting charity was worse than being poor. Kelly had promised herself when she had a baby she'd do everything to make him safe and give him everything he needed. He would never feel like he was growing up in a house that was like a leaky boat where the bottom could just fall out.

Steve reaches for her and promises her that he will take care of her. He hadn't realized why she was so frantic. He tells her the layoff threw him for a loop. He wanted to be at home with Oliver because his father was never around. If Kelly had just told him how frightened she was and why, he'd have started to work again, if that's what it took to keep her. She leans into him, letting him support her, letting herself be held.

February Kelly Analysis

Kelly is brought low in this chapter, the final one titled with her namesake, as she reads about her life in *Power* magazine. She sees herself through the eyes of the reporter and realizes she's being portrayed as distracted and ditzy, absentminded and hard to reach by her co-workers and overextended and frazzled by the reporter. But she's too tired to even care. As she sits in her perfect nursery, she knows it's all a joke. She can't keep working at her job after what she has discovered they think of her.

Kelly knows she's going to have to move to a cheaper apartment and find another job. She can't even find the strength to get up to start making a list, so she reaches for the phone at her side and calls her sister, who gets the other sisters on the line. For once, they are not laughing at her. She discovers all she had to do was ask for their help and they are there for her. When she confesses the truth about Steve, they are shocked, call him a loser and want to kill him, but she finds herself speaking the truth. Steve wasn't cut out to work for a big company and he had wanted to help her but she wouldn't let him; she thought she had it all figured out. They offer her help and Mary tells her to call him.

When Kelly meets with Steve, she finally takes him to the house she was raised in and confesses her fear of poverty to him and he takes her in his arms and promises to take care of her. Steve also confesses to her that because his father was never around for him, he had wanted to use the time off to spend with Oliver and become the father he never had. The author brings out the importance of communication as Kelly asks herself

how much of her fear she had really communicated. She wonders, what she had actually said and what had remained only in her thoughts?



March Lia

March Lia Summary

Lia sits in the park with her mother's blue suitcase and the lunch Sarah had packed. Becky, Kelly and Ayinde are gathered around her. Sam had flown back to California two weeks before to furnish the house he'd picked out; she has stayed behind to pack, close up the apartment and say goodbye. Kelly says they'll miss her; does she really have to go? Lia says it's where Sam is and her work, if she ever works again and she wants to be able to visit Caleb's grave.

Becky informs them she's pregnant. Kelly exclaims, "You had sex, didn't you?" and Becky says she can't get anything by her. When they ask what Mimi said, she admits they haven't told her. The truce is still holding, although she's bitten her tongue so many times it's a wonder it's still attached, but she has to do it if she wants her marriage to work. They glance at Kelly and she says she thinks she and Steve are going to be okay. They had a picture in their heads of how it was going to be. Ayinde adds, "Didn't we all." They've moved into a smaller place and Kelly's going to go to interior design school. She doesn't care about perfect anymore, just good enough.

Lia reaches out to squeeze Oliver's thighs and notices they're not chubby anymore; he's growing up, becoming a little boy. Ava has six teeth and hair. Julian is tall and watchful with a serious look. They ask Lia if she's coming back in July for Oliver's and Ava's birthdays and in the fall for Becky's and she promises she will. Then she sees Sam and her mother walking toward her arm in arm. She tells her friends they saved her life and Becky says they all saved each other. Lia holds them all in her arms and sings, "goodbye, goodbye mommies." Becky wipes away tears and tells her to cut it out with that song. She continues to sing "goodbye, goodbye" and Julian opens and closes his fist, saying, "Bye, bye, bye." They all exclaim on his first word and ask Ayinde if she's brought her *Baby Success!* to write it down. She replies, "No, it's at home, I ... never mind." Lia says to Sam, "Come on before I lose it and takes his arm."

Lia's on the plane with Sam and falls asleep, where she begins to have the dream, the one she's been having since going home to Philadelphia. She's standing in her son's nursery. Her feet are bare as she walks across the carpet and she can feel the soft California night breeze on her cheek. Only this time, she hears a noise coming from the crib, nonsense syllables, baby words. She walks toward the crib, expecting it to be empty, but when she bends over it, Caleb is there as he would have been at this age, pink and nourished and sturdy. She lifts him out and he fits in her arms, familiar, like Ava or Oliver or Julian, but not like them. Like his own, her own thing. She is inside and outside the dream; in the nursery and in the plane, feeling Sam's hand on her knee. "Caleb," she says. She feels her husband turn his body toward her, his hand warm. In her dream, her baby opens his eyes and smiles.



March Lia Analysis

The author wraps up the novel in this final chapter as she brings Lia and her three friends, Becky, Kelly and Ayinde back to the park to say a tearful but joy filled goodbye. They bring each other updates on their lives and make Lia promise to come back for birthdays. Lia sees the babies growing and changing and Becky remarks that they all have changed.

As Lia and Sam are flying home she has the dream again, only it's more like a daydream, because she is in the dream, but also aware of being with Sam, feeling his warm hand on her knee. This time the dream doesn't end with her finding Caleb gone from the crib, but she finds a bigger, healthier version of him there and he fits beautifully in her arms. He opens his eyes and smiles. This is symbolic of her improved mental state and also a promise of things to come. It is a rewarding and satisfying ending to this novel about *Little Earthquakes*.



Characters

Lia (Lisa Urick) Frederick Lane

Lia, or Lisa (her real name), has long blond hair that isn't her natural color. Her natural color is brown, or rather chestnut. She's a beautiful woman with wide-set eyes, a full, pink mouth, high cheekbones and a heart-shaped face with a pointy chin. She's now in her early thirties, but left Philadelphia at barely eighteen and went to California to become an actress. Now she's come back home to Philadelphia after the devastating loss of her ten-week-old infant son, Caleb. She is married to Sam, an up-and-coming actor, whom she left suddenly and without warning.

Lia is mentally fragile and begins to "stalk" (her own word) a pregnant woman who she sees walking through the park where she has come to sit. She is wearing her mother's blue down coat, knowing at one time she would have tried to become invisible, but now nobody stares or cares. She thinks she will never be any good to anyone again and that she'll never get over the death of her baby and become normal. She meets Becky, who introduces her to her two other new friends and begins a slow journey toward normalcy again.

Rebecca (Becky) Mara Rothstein-Rabinowitz

In her early thirties, Becky has reddish gold curls and is overweight. Even when she's pregnant she doesn't feel like she shows, but just looks like she had too much for lunch. She is the chef and co-owner/co-manager of a restaurant called Mas in Rittenhouse Square in Philadelphia. Becky grew up in Florida and attended college in Hartwick, New Hampshire, which she considered a bad choice, but a lucky one since that's where she met her husband while she was working in a restaurant there.

After they got married, Becky and Andrew moved to Philadelphia, where Andrew had his residency. After she gets pregnant, she attends yoga classes for pregnant women, where she meets two of the women who will become her close friends, even though at first glance they would be the last people who she would have thought she'd befriend. She delivers a baby girl, Ava and even though she loves her dearly, finds she misses being at her restaurant. She has the mother-in-law from hell, while juggling an infant and going back to work at her restaurant three days a week.

Ayinde Towne

Ayinde's maiden name is Walker. Tall, caramel skinned and beautiful, she's half black, half white, with cheekbones that could cut butter and eyes that look topaz in candlelight. Although she looks like a swimsuit mode, Ayinde is a former news reporter for a CBS news affiliate, KTVT, in Fort Worth, Texas. She's married to Richard Towne, a Seventy-Sixers superstar from Texas. She grew up in New York City, but had gone to Miss



Porter's in Connecticut for high school, then Yale for college and spent summers abroad. She was raised in luxury and reminded constantly by her parents how lucky she was to have so much and that she must be brave. Her mother was a famous black model in the seventies, her father a successful businessman.

Ayinde rarely saw her parents when she was growing up and was raised mostly by her nanny. After her baby, Julian, is born, her mother gives her a book on raising babies and she begins to follow the advice in the book to the letter, to the detriment of her relationship with her husband. After her husband feels he has been ousted from his own bed, he has an affair that results in another woman getting pregnant with his baby. Ayinde is devastated and must find a way to deal with this heartbreak.

Kelly Marie O'Hara Day

Tiny and "Barbie-like," Kelly has cornsilk-fine blond hair. She's a twenty-six year old event planner who comes across as a perky cheerleader type. She grew up in New Jersey as an Irish Catholic, one of eight children to an alcoholic mother and a father who alternated between being furious and bewildered at how all his children got there. Her brothers and sisters called her Pollyanna and Kelly the Cruise Director because of her efforts to keep the leaden ball of conversation afloat around the dinner table. She tried to be the mother they never really had, from bathing her baby brothers and sisters to signing permission slips for them as they got older.

Kelly has dreamed of having nice things since she was a little girl, even though her mother told her that God doesn't care about nice things; He cares about good deeds and she should be concerned with the state of her soul, not the state of her bank account. She is now determined to have it all. She attended an ivy league college and married a Wharton graduate, got a job as an event planner and lives in a high-rise apartment that is empty except for bedroom and nursery furniture. What she does have is perfect, especially in the nursery. She has decided to wait until she can purchase just the right furniture for their luxury high-rise. When her husband loses his job right before she has the baby and she must go back to work soon after, her world start to tumble around her perfect life.

Sarah Trujillo

Sarah is Becky's partner in their restaurant, Mas and her best friend. Sarah has eyes the color of bittersweet chocolate, glossy black hair and a dancer's body, although she hasn't laced up her pointe shoes since she was seventeen and had blown out both knees. When she puts on red lipstick and snake-hips through the crowd at Mas, complimentary empanadas in her hands and high-heeled sandals on her feet, grumbles vanish and watch-glancing ceases.



Mimi Breslow Levy Rabinowitz Anderson Klein

Mimi is Becky's mother-in-law. She's been married five times; the fifth marriage, to a real estate magnate in Dallas, hadn't worked out, either. She's moved from Texas to be closer to her son and is making Becky's life a living hell. She's in the process of building a pillared, gabled mini-mansion with a veranda and looks like Scarlett O'Hara's abode, if Tara had gotten shrunk in the wash.

Andrew Rabinowitz

Andrew is Becky's husband. He's a handsome doctor with close-cropped curls, wide-set eyes and broad shoulders. He's a great guy who is deeply in love with Becky; he's also a mama's boy who can't or won't stand up to his overbearing, demanding mother, even for his wife's sake.

Edith Rothstein

Becky's mother is a trim woman with a carefully styled cap of reddish-blond hair. Becky says that ever since she got pregnant, her mother talks only to her belly, her field of vision stops at Becky's neck.

Richard Towne

Ayinde's husband is a six feet nine-and-a-half inch pro basketball player for the Philadelphia Seventy-Sixers. He has chestnut skin, dark eyes and hair and bulging biceps.

Lolo Mbezi

Born Lolly Morgan, Lolo is a former '70s supermodel, one of the first ones of color and Ayinde's mother. She's beautiful and still obsessed about her figure. When Ayinde told her she was pregnant, the first thing she said was, "I'm too young to be a grandmother."

Sam Lane

Sam is Lia's husband, a good-looking actor whom Lia had met when they both worked at Dane, a trendy restaurant in L.A. He worked there at the time as a bartender. He has since gotten more and more famous as an actor.



Paula O'Hara

Paula is Kelly's mother. She had eight children, a very hectic and unhappy life and got in the habit of mixing gin with her Tab in the early afternoon. She was drunk and numbed every night. She died while Kelly was still a teenager.

Steven Day

Steven is Kelly's husband. He likes to wear suits, even when they were in college. Pale blue eyes, thin, red lips, carefully combed brown hair that was already thinning a little and a prominent Adam's apple make up his appearance. Steven is head of e-business for one of the country's largest pharmaceutical companies. He loses his job while Kelly is pregnant and doesn't seem to be in a hurry to find a new one. He tries to help her with their baby, but Kelly seldom lets him.

Helen Urick

Helen is Lia's (Lisa) mother. Small and slender with fading reddish-gold hair and a long, sharp nose, she is a fifth grade schoolteacher who has lived the same life ever since Lia can remember. She wears white cotton/polyester blend blouses and black slacks and leaves the house at precisely 7:15 each morning and returns home at precisely 4:15 each afternoon, exactly one half hour after school is over. Her favorite show is Jeopardy! and she wins sixteen thousand dollars on a three-day stint there. She spends years following Lia's acting career and collects every picture and magazine that she appears in.

Doctor Mendlow

Doctor Mendlow is Ayinde's and Becky's obstetrician. He delivers their babies.

Teresa

Teresa is the yoga instructor in whose class Becky, Kelly and Ayinde meet. She has exquisitely defined deltoids and biceps and her voice is low and lulling.

Merrill

Merrill is a fortyish woman in the Parents Together grief group that Lia attends. She has frizzy, shoulder length brown hair, horn-rimmed glasses too big for her face and a wedding ring too big for her finger. She lost her eleven-year-old son to leukemia four years previously and still sounds as brokenhearted as if it had happened yesterday.



Christina Crossley

Christina is Richards's crisis communication manager. She wears navy blue suits and fields Richard's cell phone calls. Ayinde meets her when she discovers Richard has gotten a twenty-year-old blond spirit dancer in Phoenix pregnant.

Dr. Melendez

Dr. Melendez is the pediatrician who Ayinde takes Julian to. She discovers a heart murmur in the baby.

Dr. Myerson

In his fifties, Dr. Meyerson is balding, with a high, scratchy voice, dandyish glossy black wing tips and short stubby fingers. He is the pediatric cardiologist that examines Ayinde and Richard's baby after a heart murmur is discovered.



Objects/Places

The Park

The Park in Philadelphia is where Lia first sits, watching Becky stroll through. This park figures largely in the lives of the four friends, as they take walks here together, later pushing their babies in strollers and sitting on park benches, talking together of their struggles and problems. It's a place where they agree to meet and is also where they have their tearful goodbye as Lia goes back to California.

A silver rattle

After Lia's baby dies and she comes back to Philadelphia, she sees Becky in the park and slips the rattle into her diaper bag. Becky is mystified as to where it came from.

Mas

Mas is the trendy, upscale restaurant co-owned and managed by Becky Rothstein-Rabinowitz and Sarah Trujillo. Located on Rittenhouse Square in Philadelphia, it's small but successful. The friends meet there sometimes to talk. After Becky gets to know Lia, she offers her a job there.

Poire

Poire is the restaurant in Hartwick, New Hampshire, where Becky gets a job while attending college. There she meets Sarah, her future partner in Mas and most importantly, Andrew, her future husband.

Dane

Dane is the club in L.A. where Lia met Sam. Her job was to open car doors and lean over enough to reveal cleavage and say, "Welcome to Dane!" He was a bartender.

The Blue Coat

This blue down coat, belonging to Lia's mother, plays a prominent part in Lia's life when she runs back home to her mother's home in Philadelphia. Helen gives her the coat to wear in the springtime and she continues to wear it through July. She feels safe in the coat, which is also what makes her noticeable to Becky.



Pitocin

Pitocin is a drug sometimes given to pregnant women who are ready to deliver. It starts or helps speed up their contractions.

La Goulue

La Goulue is the chic restaurant in New York City where Ayinde and Lolo go for lunch after a failed and embarrassing photo shoot.

Pashmina

This comes from the Persian word for "wool." In fact, pashm refers to the underfur of several Tibetan animals, particularly goats. The wool is often used for making shawls. Typically, a pashmina usually is comprised of a mix of cashmere and silk resulting in a very strong yet supple, lightweight, luxurious wrap. Becky uses a pashmina in public to cover up her breastfeeding.

Yarmulke

In Orthodox and Conservative Judaism, a Yarmulke is a skullcap worn by men as a sign of reverence while praying to God or talking about him. Mimi ordered 500 Yarmulkes for Becky and Andrew's wedding. Becky and her friends play a game tossing them on the babies' heads.



Themes

Motherhood/Childbirth

From pregnancy and childbirth, through the first year, Jennifer Weiner paints a vivid and true-to-life picture of what this exhausting, wild, frightening and wonderful time is really like. The reader will learn the truth about pregnancy and that it's very different, yet very much the same for every woman. Some women who are thin, gain very little of their own weight and end up looking almost the same but with a beach ball front. Others, who are heavy already, just look like they're fatter than ever. Some feel fine through the whole pregnancy, some are sick for just a short time, while others throw up or are exhausted the entire time.

Weiner tells the story of Becky, who wants everything done the natural way, but ends up having a C-section she didn't want and feels like a failure. She goes back to work three days a week at her restaurant because she loves her work and has a good day care program at the hospital where her husband is a doctor. Then there's Kelly, who expects to take a year off her job to stay home and raise her baby, but because her husband loses his job, she must go back to work after twelve weeks and ends up as a walking zombie from exhaustion. Ayinde, who uses a radical baby book as her bible and remembers wanting a mother who was never there for her, ends up driving her husband out of their bed because she can't ever bear to be parted from her baby.

Each of these woman's stories is typical of what most women experience in some way. Weiner has taken a fiction novel and given women everywhere something to relate to.

Uncertainty of Life/Luck

In *Little Earthquakes*, Jennifer Weiner brings this theme out again and again. The very title is a reflection of the theme. Although *Little Earthquakes* may also be thought to refer to the babies in the novel, there are two or three particular times when Weiner shows specifically where she gets the idea for the title and shows this theme.

One place near the beginning of the novel, Lia recalls how she felt after the death of her baby, Caleb. Sam takes her to the movies and she abruptly remembers going there when she was pregnant. She can't move. Then suddenly, "I could feel my knees and neck wobbling, as if they'd been packed full of grease and ball bearings. I set one hand against the wall to steady myself so I wouldn't start to slide sideways." Then she thinks about a quote from a woman interviewed after an earthquake and remembers how she says, "It's still going on." When Lia is telling her new friends the story of what happened the day Caleb died, she says she was getting a manicure when the girl, says, "You feel that? Little Earthquake. They happen all the time." She told them that was the first time and she didn't see it.



Close to the end, when Lia and Sam reunite, she thinks about how she could tell Sam nothing is safe, there are accidents, your marriage could fall apart, your child could die. She could say the on the surface it may appear to be sane, but underneath there are fault lines and earthquakes waiting to happen.

The work lucky is used several times through the novel, from Ayinde's parents reminding her how lucky she is, to Kelly thinking if anyone else tells her how lucky she is to have her husband home to help with the baby, she'll kill them, probably her husband. When Becky discovers she is pregnant, again and the two babies will only be fifteen months apart, she laments that she'll have to sell her portion of the restaurant and how can she ever manage two babies? Andrew reminds her that this is just temporary; that they'll manage and that they are lucky, after all

The Importance of Forgiveness/Communication

In *Little Earthquakes*, the four main characters have ample opportunity to forgive and/or seek forgiveness and they all learn the importance of communication.

Lia must learn to forgive herself for her guilt over her baby's death. Her grief is all-consuming and seems never ending until she begins to communicate it to her new friends. Through communicating it, she comes to the realization that she has been consumed with guilt because Caleb's conception was an accident. She hadn't wanted to become pregnant; the timing was all wrong. Then, after he is born, he proves to be a difficult baby, crying all the time and inconsolable, so she never even has a chance to enjoy him. She also learns to forgive her mother, who, it turns out, is not the sinner but the sinned upon. So Lia must ask for her forgiveness as well.

Becky is the one who shines brightly in this novel as the overweight girl who has had to overlook hurtful comments about her weight her whole life. But most of all, she has to continually bite her tongue at her mother-in-law's unreasonable, childish demands of both Andrew and Becky. It is only when Becky pictures Mimi as a frightened, abandoned baby, crying incessantly for the attention she never had that she is able to swallow all of her insults. She asks Mimi for her forgiveness for what Becky considered to be a very small thing. But through this act of contrition, she salvages their relationship and earns her husband's undying love and admiration.

Ayinde must come to terms with her husband's infidelity at a time when she is just trying to be the best mother she can be. She felt abandoned as a child by her jet-setting parents and wants to be sure her baby never feels that way, so she goes overboard to be a perfect parent and forgets she has a husband who needs her, too. Although she stays with Richard because of Julian, she doesn't know the depths of his love and sorrow for what he's done until they find out about Julian's heart murmur and have to face tests to find out if he'll be all right. She realizes how she needs him there with her. Then she must face and forgive the other woman and finds she is braver than she thought she could be.



Kelly learns that communication is key to any relationship. During all the months when her husband is without a job, she thinks she is letting him know how she feels about it. She has a fear of poverty, is ashamed of her poor childhood with too many kids and never enough money and of the shame she faced. Her refusal to allow him to cash in any of their stocks to help while he's out of work leads to her need to go back to work. She's exhausted, yet continues to refuse her husband's help. After they split up and she realizes she can't continue this lifestyle alone, she takes him to her childhood home and admits all that she fears. When he says she should have told him, she says she did, then realizes she hadn't actually told him, she'd just thought many of those things.



Style

Point of View

Little Earthquakes is written in two different points of view. The opening chapter is written in a first person point of view, meaning the reader is seeing, hearing and feeling everything through the narrator's eyes. Lia is the narrator here and the reader feels her pain as she describes how she felt after the death of her baby. She writes in the first person, I, and with each of her successive chapters this is the way the story is told, in the first person point of view.

The rest of the novel is told in the third person point of view, with viewpoints from Becky, Ayinde and Kelly. These four protagonists share the spotlight equally and take turns having a leading role in the novel, each one's story being told in turn. Weiner jumps from one person to another as she unravels the story of each character by turn.

Because of Jennifer Weiner's background it is easy to see how she gets into the head of Becky, the overweight young lady of divorced parents, who maintains her sense of humor. Weiner herself is a large woman and the child of divorced parents who has a wonderful sense of humor.

Setting

Little Earthquakes takes place in the present and is set mainly in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The first chapter opens with Lia sitting in the park in April shivering in her mother's blue down coat. The park will become a central meeting place for the four friends. They often arrange to meet in the park. They spend a lot of time there, taking walks, pushing the strollers, or sitting on the park benches talking.

Another central location where the friends spend time together is Mas, Becky's restaurant. This is where Lia runs to, after her upsetting venture with Parents Together, forgetting it's closed, She finds Becky, Kelly and Ayinde eating together. She ends up getting a job there and this is also where she once again sees the woman from Parents Together who will help her have hope again.

The rest of the novel is set between the homes of Becky (small bright, homey and comfortable, Kelly-(a spacious high rise apartment, void of anything but perfect bedroom and nursery furniture) and Ayinde (a home in Gladwyne and a spacious mansion with all the best of everything).

Language and Meaning

Little Earthquakes takes place in Philadelphia and is written originally in English.



The language in this novel is one mainly of young women in their childbearing years. The reader sees words such as pitocin, C-section, natural childbirth, flat or inverted nipples, latch on, let-down, stretch marks, push, breast-feeding, spotting, bed rest, showing, centimeters dilated, birthing ball and contractions.

Since Becky owns a restaurant, the language is one of food, also. The reader is treated to terms such as: Garlic and white-bean puree with truffle oil, empanadas, spiced almonds, jicama, roasted corn salad, spice-rubbed brisket, cilantro and lime, corn fritters, osso bucco, herb roasted chicken, ru-gelach, hand-rolled hamantaschen, quiche, soufflés, napoleons, éclairs, daubes, ragouts and baklava.

When Becky decides to help Andrew with a problem he has making love, she figures she'll cook him an irresistible meal first. They dine on fig pizza-fig jam on flatbread with drifts of cheese and thin slices of prosciutto-as an appetizer, mashed potatoes with heavy cream, asparagus and thin veal slices. She lures him with mandarin oranges, which she spills provocatively down between her breasts for him to lap up, like a pig digging for truffles.

Structure

Little Earthquakes is divided into parts and chapters, but in an unusual way. The parts are months of the year. The book opens in the month of April and ends in the month of March, nearly one year later. As the novel opens in April Lia is seen sitting on the park bench waiting for Becky to come by. Lia thinks back at her life as an actress in California and remembers how she felt when her baby died, like nothing could make her feel safe. Becky is introduced next and the reader learns about troubles with her mother-in-law and that she owns a restaurant in partnership with Sarah.

Becky meets Ayinde and Kelly at the yoga class she attends and Becky and Kelly take Ayinde to the hospital when they discover her in early labor. In the next chapter, entitled Ayinde, Becky takes Ayinde home to continue labor and Kelly goes along, meeting husband Andrew, a doctor. When they take her back to the hospital, Richard is introduced and Julian is born. In the May division Kelly, Lia and Becky each have a chapter. The months continue as book sections, with each main character taking their turns as chapters within them.

In the last part of the book, March, only Lia has a chapter. This is the farewell chapter when the four friends meet in the park to say a tearful goodbye and Lia flies home with Sam and has the final dream about Caleb, that ends up happily, instead of tragically.

Quotes

"It's not a purse, really. What I have now is a gigantic, pink, floral-printed Vera Bradley bag big enough to hold a human head. If this bag were a person, it would be somebody's dowdy, gray-haired great-aunt. Smelling of mothballs and butterscotch candies and insisting on pinching your cheeks."

"I could feel my knees and neck wobbling, as if they'd been packed full of grease and ball bearings. I set one hand against the wall to steady myself so I wouldn't start to slide sideways. I remembered reading somewhere about how a news crew had interviewed someone caught in the '94 Northridge earthquake. *How long did it go on?* The bland, tan newsman asked. The woman who'd lost her home and her husband had looked at him with haunted eyes and said, *It's still happening.*"

"'Julian,' she said. *Perfume*, her mind whispered. *Be quiet*, she told it and she stretched out her arms and reached for her son."

"She blinked at me twice. Other than that her face didn't change. It was like I stopped over every week to sit in her living room with the shades pulled and the lights off. 'So,' she said. 'I can defrost another chicken breast for dinner. Do you still eat chicken?'"

"'Relax,' she told him. Andrew looked more like a man with a dentist appointment than someone gearing up for a night of gustatory and sexual ecstasy."

"We deserve it. You deserve it, Steve would say, making dinner reservations at the priciest place in town, surprising her with a gold bracelet, an iPod, a trip to Jamaica. 'Why not' she'd think. She was making good money and Steve's salary, after bonuses, was so big it surprised them both, so why not? 'Why not?' she whispered, burying her face in her hands."

"When she'd been in a room down the hall with Ayinde, a small secret part of her had believed that she'd be stronger than her friend, that no matter how bad the pain she wouldn't scam or writhe or call on Jesus. Well, the joke was on her. Here she sat, screaming and writhing like a pro. And the only reason she hadn't called on Jesus yet was on account of being Jewish. And Becky was sure that in another hours of so, given the intensity of her contractions, all bets would be off and she'd be taking whatever divine intervention she could get."

"The baby drew in a breath and paused, silent, with her mouth wide open. Becky knew what was coming next-Ave Rae's Nuclear Scream of Death. Patent Pending."

"Kelly winced at the sour smell of mildew and eau de old people that wafted out of the cushions. The [couch] smelled as if someone had died on top of it. And then stayed awhile. And it looked ... God, she thought and swallowed hard. It looked close enough to the couch she'd had in her house growing up to be its evil twin."



"You feel that?" the girl painting my nails had asked and I shook my head. 'Little Earthquake,' she told me and bent her head back over my feet. 'They happen all the time. I hardly even feel them anymore.'"

"When I had Caleb, there was this little park I used to go to, a few other mothers I'd developed a nodding acquaintance with. The one time I'd been back to the park afterward, I could feel the effort coming off of them like heat rising off the pavement in July as they tried not to stare and murmured the same handful of platitudes I just bet Ayinde was currently enduring: *We're so sorry* and *What a shame* and *Time heals all wounds*."

"I made a mistake,' she said again. 'Please go.' She wiped her eyes again and walked out to the perfect living room and the perfect nursery where her perfect baby waited, back into the life that looked almost exactly the way she'd picture it and felt nothing like how she'd imagined."

"I could have told him nothing was safe and that no matter how careful you were and how hard you tried, there were and are still accidents, hidden traps and snares. You could get killed on an airplane or crossing the street. Your marriage could fall apart when you weren't looking; your baby could get sick or die. I could have said that nothing is safe, that the surface of the world is pretty and sane, but underneath it's all fault lines and earthquakes waiting to happen."

"[Julian's] heart would eventually heal, the doctors had told them. Ayinde hadn't believed it. *You can live all right with a hole in your heart?* Dr. Myerson had given her a wry shrug. *You'd be surprised at what people can live with,* he said."

"You have to let people be who they want,' Terry said. 'Even if it's not what you want them to be.'"

"Kelly scooped Oliver into her arms and planted a kiss on the top of his head. 'I don't care about perfect anymore. I just want good enough.'"



Topics for Discussion

Why did Lia run away from Sam, even though she still loves him?

Why would Lia keep her past a secret from Sam?

In the opening pages, Lia sits on a park bench watching for Becky to stroll by. She doesn't know Becky. Why do you suppose she's watching for her?

What is the reason for Lia anonymously giving Becky the baby things, such as the silver spoon, the rattle and the bib?

Explain why Kelly couldn't reveal her true feelings of fear to Steven.

Why would Ayinde refuse to get help with her baby, when she could easily afford it?

Becky's mother-in-law was selfish and demanding. Why didn't Becky just tell her off and refuse to have her around?

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