

Luckiest Girl Alive Study Guide

Luckiest Girl Alive by Jessica Knoll

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Plot Summary

NOTE: Page numbers refer to the Kindle edition of the novel published by Simon and Schuster.

In *The Luckiest Girl Alive*, a novel by Jessica Knoll, TifAni “Ani” FaNelli had carefully created a new persona in order to participate in a documentary about her high school. As Ani prepared for the documentary and relived the trauma of her freshman year of high school, she began to realize some parts of her life were not best for her even though they seemed perfect on the surface. This novel tells the story of one woman’s survival of two traumatic events and her struggle to accept herself in the aftermath of those traumas. Themes in the novel include the belief that protection can be found in success, the connection between food and emotions, and the devastating nature of invisible, emotional wounds.

Ani, the novel's main character and narrator, tells about personal experiences at The Bradley School in the fall of her freshman year, the events leading up to her marriage to Luke Harrison, and her participation in a documentary about the school. These intertwining stories are told in the past tense. One chapter details high school experiences, while the next chapter tells about some part of Ani’s adult life. There are a few scattered places in the novel where the tense switches from past to present tense for Ani to give the reader insight into certain aspects of her life from her vantage point after the events described in the novel were finished.

As a new student at the affluent Bradley School, Ani wanted to be part of the popular crowd. When she was invited to a party by Dean, an older boy who was on the soccer team, she thought her dream was coming true. At the party, the boys (Peyton, Liam, and Dean) got her drunk and sexually assaulted her. Still, Ani struggled to be accepted by the in crowd. A teacher heard rumors about the assault against Ani and tried to get her to report the rape. Ani would not do so. Dean was called into the office and asked to tell about what had happened. Dean thought Ani had told on him, and he threw Ani out of the cool group. Ani struck up a friendship with Arthur, a boy who was very intelligent but was also an outcast.

Ani shares her adulthood through details about her engagement and approaching marriage to Luke Harrison, a rich boy from an affluent family. Ani believed that with Luke as her fiancé she would have the courage to participate in a documentary about her time at Bradley. As Ani’s life progressed, she realized that Luke was not the perfect person she once believed him to be. Not only did he not believe Dean had raped Ani, he did not think that Ani needed the healing that participation in the documentary would bring. With the help of her old English teacher (a man who had believed Ani’s story about the rape even when she was still in high school) and her best friend Nell, Ani realized getting married to Luke was not the answer to all of her problems.



In a twist, the reader learns that Ani had been asked to participate in a documentary about a shooting at The Bradley School that left seven dead, including the two shooters. Several others were injured. Since Ani had been friends with Arthur, one of the shooters, detectives suspected she was involved in the shootings. Dean fueled their suspicions by telling them that Arthur had handed Ani a gun during the massacre. Furthermore, Arthur had told her to shoot Dean like they had planned. For the documentary, Dean agreed to admit he had made up his accusations against Ani. He apologized to her. Additionally, in a taped conversation with Ani, Dean admitted that he, Liam, and Peyton had raped her.



Chapter 1

Summary

In Chapter 1, Ani FaNelli shopped for silverware with a man soon to be her husband. She imagined herself stabbing him in the stomach with a knife at which they were looking. After they finished shopping Ani suggested they go to get pizza. Ani angered when Luke, her fiancé, asked her how much they had left to do for the wedding. Ani and Luke had been together for four years. He was involved in sports and moved constantly. Even though he had her moving for a short time after they began dating she soon went back to her habits of sleeping late on Saturday. She admitted to her reader it was easier for her to sleep during the day than at night.

Luke chided Ani by telling her she needed to get three things done each day until their wedding. Ani tried but was unable to reach that goal and instead got more frustrated with herself for procrastinating. She talked to Luke about the progress on the wedding invitations. She was afraid at every step she would do something wrong and reveal that she came from a background where she was not “effortlessly moneyed” (5). She had been learning how to appear that way for five years but realized getting married had many more opportunities for mishaps than everyday life.

Ani criticized Luke for not having gotten her his addresses yet for invitations. She realized how angry she sounded and apologized saying she was just tired. He suggested she got to the doctor and get sleeping medicine. She did not like the idea of sleeping pills. She wanted back the first two years their relationship where Luke had made her feel safe. It was about the time they got engaged that Ani began having trouble sleeping again. Even though Luke realized she had regressed, she believed he was enjoying the challenge of changing her back to the girl he believed she was when they first met. Ani believed that Luke loved her because she was from a background not as privileged as his. She sensed he liked the threat of danger he felt around her but also knew he did not realize how much she could hurt him.

On Monday morning Ani was stuck riding the elevator with Eleanor Tuckerman who talked about contracts with the florists. Eleanor was a woman by whom Ani needed to be liked so she pretended to be interested in what Eleanor was saying. Outside the elevator Clifford, the gay receptionist, complimented Ani on the Size 2 skirt she was wearing but said nothing to Eleanor because he hated her. Eleanor tried to get Ani to betray Clifford but Ani refused to do so saying only that she liked them both.

Ani worked at The Women’s Magazine. She had begun as a sex writer. There were rumors that LoLo, Ani’s boss, would eventually go to the New York Times and take Ani with her. For this reason Ani was devastated when Luke told her that his company was considering sending him to London. He tried to convince her it was a good idea because he reasoned she would want to stop work and have a baby after they had been married a year. In reality the idea of having a baby made Ani tired and sent her



into a spin, a condition she described as being similar to a panic attack. She believed she had escaped death once and was afraid it was only a matter of time before something happened to her. She described herself as a hypochondriac and thought she would worry too much if she ever got pregnant.

She was to meet with a girl in her early twenties who wanted to work at a magazine. She enjoyed getting to flaunt her power over the same type of girl who had tortured her when she was that age. This particular girl, Spencer Hawkins, was an alumni of The Bradley School, the same school that Ani had attended. She took the girl to the newsstand for coffee, wanting to see how she would react to Loretta. Loretta had burns all over her body and an odor so bad many workers complained about her. Loretta kept the newsstand in perfect order and even complimented Ani one day by pointing to a model in a magazine and telling Ani she had thought that was Ani, whom she called her friend. Ani took the girls she talked with to Loretta intentionally to see how they treated her. Their behavior determined how much help she would give them.

Ani approved of the way Spencer treated Loretta but Spencer brought up Ani's past by mentioning she had not at first realized who Ani really was. Ani, who mentioned in her narration that her given name was TifAni FaNelli, said she knew something was wrong with her name on the first day she arrived at The Bradford School. She believed The Bradford School had saved her from some hardships in life but had presented her with others. She sensed she had gotten into Wesleyan because of the essay she wrote about her experiences in school. It was at Wesleyan that she met Nell, her best friend and the woman who suggested she change her name to Ani.

Ani told the girl she would be participating in the documentary. She also made a point to let her see her engagement ring. She believed the ring, an heirloom, was a statement about her husband's rich family. When Ani told Spencer she had to get back to work, the girl mistakenly called her TifAni and giggled. Ani managed to say goodbye. She thought to herself that once the documentary aired the girl would not mistake her name again. She would also know what she had done and why she had done it.

Analysis

In *Luckiest Girl Alive*, TifAni FaNelli is the main character and the narrator. She tells her story from the first person point of view in the past tense. The book starts with TifAni, who has changed her name to Ani, describing what she has done to overcome being born to a relatively poor family. In this first chapter her character appears shallow because she seems to want only to show the people in her past up by demonstrating how famous she is and how she has hooked a rich fiancé.

The author uses heavy foreshadowing to intrigue the reader and let him know that Ani has had a traumatic past. Some examples of this foreshadowing include the fact that Ani can sleep only when other people are awake making noises that are "Banal, everyday reminders that life is so boring that it can't possibly terrorize anyone" (5). Ani tells her reader that she developed a condition that began about 14 years prior to her



engagement to Luke in which things that scared her would put her into a spin, a condition she compared to a panic. She is a hypochondriac and believes she “dodged fate once and it’s only a matter of time” before it catches up with her (14). The author indicates what ever happened to Ani was terrifying and involved tragedy because she gives Spencer a break when she notices the girl’s notice twitching at Loretta’s smell. “You can’t help how your body reacts when confronted with the stench of tragedy” Ani tells her reader (16) .

The author’s use of words and descriptions of Ani’s thoughts also lets the reader know that Ani is no longer as in love with her soon-to-be husband as she once was. One big hint that Ani is frustrated with her husband when she imagines herself stabbing him with a knife in the store where they were picking out their tableware. When she thinks of him as her husband she feels as if the word “laced the corset tighter, crushing organs, sending panic into my throat with the bright beat of a distress signal” (1). Ani notes that the sleeplessness that haunted her before she met Luke has also returned.

Ani’s obsession with her body size as well as how she measures up to those around her seems to be connected with the tragedy through which she suffered. She wants people to think of her as “Slender, elegant, graceful” not the way people usually refer to short girls as petite or small (1) . She has worked hard to learn which clothes she should wear and which she should not in order to present people with the impression that she had always been rich, not just that she got rich when she agreed to marry Luke. She has tried hard to be the kind of woman people would expect Luke Harrison, who came from old money, to have as a wife. She describes her ideal in this way: “I’d worked tirelessly to assemble a worthy rival, a Carolyn to his JFK Jr” (3). The comparison is actually fitting as both JFK and Luke are rich while Carolyn was a fashion publicist while Ani works for a fashion magazine. Note also that Ani even compares herself to the young girl who comes to talk to her about working at a magazine. She tells her reader she is intimidated by Spencer, the girl who also attended The Bailey School.

Ani uses Loretta as a litmus paper to determine if the girls who come to her for help will make fun of the woman who has burns on her body and smells strange. She says of these girls that “I’ve already decided how much help to provide them based on how they treat Loretta” (16). In this particular section Spencer impresses Ani because she is polite and considerate while dealing with Loretta and does not make fun of Loretta even after they are out of earshot.

Ani tells her reader that her reason for changing her name was not because she wanted to hide her past but because she wanted to prove that she had become the person she deserved to be. This name change seems to be significant since Ani tells her reader that “I started to realize there was something wrong with my name on the first day of high school” (19). She felt out of place having a name that ended in a vowel. She describes herself in a simile as a “hillbilly relative who shows up at Thanksgiving and drinks all the expensive whiskey” (19). It is Ani’s best friend, Nell, who suggests that she drop the “Tif” from her name and just go by Ani.



The engagement ring that Luke gave Ani is a significant symbol in the novel. To Ani this ring is a status symbol. It is a sign that she has bagged the man she believes caps off her personality change. At first her desire to marry a rich man seems very shallow. It seems as if she just wants to show off that she is marrying into money because she is embarrassed because she grew up in a relatively poor childhood. She remembers her mother's embarrassment when her credit cards were rejected and is fearful the same will happen to her even though Ani's credit card is financed by Luke.

Discussion Question 1

What impression do you get of Ani from this first chapter of the novel?

Discussion Question 2

Why do you think Ani uses Loretta as a litmus paper for the girls who come to her for help? What does this tell her about the girls?

Discussion Question 3

Discuss the way that the author, Knoll, builds her story and its intrigue through her word choice and imagery.

Vocabulary

defang, inevitably, manic, indignantly, obnoxious, banal, curated, hone, reprieve

Chapter 2

Summary

In Chapter 2, Ani goes back in time to her high school years to describe how her mother talked about how rich and influential the Main Line was during the year between her eighth and ninth grade years in school. Ani had attended an all-girls Catholic school up to that point. It was because she smoked weed with her friend Leah that Ani was sent to The Bradley School, a school on the Main Line. She believed it was on the day she first attended that school that her real education began.

Because Ani had a shape she described as a “Marilyn Monroe body since the fifth grade” (24) and then had the incident with drugs, the parents of her fellow classmates at her Catholic School had decided she was a bad influence. She went from being the most popular of the students to the least popular. Sister John, the principal, learned about what had happened and suggested she go to a different school for high school. Ani’s mother decided to send her to a private Main Line school believing it would show the people at Mt. St. Theresa’s. Ani wanted a chance to start over.

Ani was most excited about her Honors English class. She had bought a pen that wrote in bright green ink, one of the Bradley School’s colors, for note taking. Mr. Larson, a young man whom Ani thought looked kind and understanding, was the teacher for the class. When the bell rang Ani was surprised how quickly everyone else cleared the room and she was left alone with Mr. Larson. Mr. Larson praised her book report and Ani hurried to leave the room, not sure what to say to him.

When she did make it outside the classroom Arthur, a very overweight boy who was also in her class, was standing by a broken desk in the hallway looking for his glasses in his bag. He walked with Ani to lunch and introduced her to his friends Beth, Teddy and Sarah. Beth was called the Shark behind her back because her eyes were set so far apart.

While Ani was waiting in line a girl complimented her on her pants, a pair of orange cargo pants Ani had already decided she did not like. The girl, who appeared to be one who was popular in the school, introduced herself as Hilary. A boy, named Dean, called out to Hilary asking her to get him a package of Swedish fish. Because Hilary’s hands were full Ani grabbed the candy and paid for it before Hilary could do so.

Back at Arthur’s table he told Ani that Hilary was one half of the girls they called the “HOs” an acronym for Hilary and Olivia. Both the HOs were in Ani’s Chemistry class. Ani was impressed when she got to pair up with an attractive boy for an experiment. Liam was new to the school as well. He complimented her by telling her she was too pretty to be the last person in the class picked as a partner. As they listened to the teacher Ani noticed Hilary was looking at her. She smiled at the girl and was pleased when Hilary smiled back and Olivia mouthed to Ani that Liam was hot.



Analysis

Ani does a flash back in time to the point in her life when she first began attending The Bradley School, a private college prep school. She explains the circumstances of her move from her all-girls Catholic school to Bradley as she understood them. She had large breasts for her age which made adults believe she was trouble to start with. Additionally she and her friend Leah got caught trying marijuana. Because she had two strikes against her the principal of her Catholic school suggested she attend a different school. She had been deemed a trouble maker.

Attending The Bradley School influences Ani by teaching her what real richness is like. Notice how Ani's mother influences Ani's opinion of Bradley and the Main Line by calling it "hoity-toity" (23) and telling Ani she is "going to experience how the other half lives by going to high school there" (23). Ani, who still went by the name TifAni at this point in her life, describes her family as being "morbidly middle class." She indicates that her mother had a desire to seem rich even though they could not finance her rich tastes. To make a point of how far she has come in discerning rich from gaudy, Ani says that at that point in her life she thought the pink stucco mansion in which her friend Leah lived looked more expensive and rich than the houses on the Main Line. "Taste, I had yet to learn, was the delicate balance between expensive and unassuming" (26).

The author continues to include hints of foreshadowing and foreboding in this section of the novel. Ani's statement that on her first day she had not learned "who to be afraid of" indicates there is someone or several someones of whom she should be afraid. The reader feels ill at ease even when Ani closes this chapter on a high note because the most popular girls in the school have been friendly to her and a cute boy had flirted with her. Notice also how Ani includes a mention that the girl who was called "The Shark" behind her back because of her strangely placed eyes grows up to marry a man who loves her because of that unusual feature. This mention indicates that just because some people single out a person of whom they make fun, it does not mean that person is doomed to be thought of that way for his entire life. In Beth's case it is the same feature that kids at school made fun of that attracts Beth's husband to her.

This book is full of impressive imagery. Knoll uses personification when she describes the room where the food was served at lunch. It was "a U-shaped room that welcomed students from the old mansion with a deli bar and spat you out into the new atrium, shortly past the bony arms of recovering anorexics reaching into the salad bar for broccoli and fat-free Italian dressing" (32). She not only uses imagery of eating by saying the room "spat you out" but also includes in her description the presence of girls who were recovering anorexics, still dieting and eating little for lunch. This reference refers back to Ani's obsession with her own body and the way she continually compares herself with others. It is from Bradley that she seems to get the idea that skinny equals popular and successful.



An important object mentioned in this section is the pen that writes in bright green ink that Ani is excited to use on her first day of class. This pen first symbolizes Ani's desire to fit into and make friends at her new school. It will later take on a different meaning.

Discussion Question 1

When Ani walks into the cafeteria with Arthur her first day at Bradley she says that she "didn't know who to be afraid of yet" (32). What do you sense that she means by this statement? Do you feel any sense of foreboding in it? Why or why not?,

Discussion Question 2

Discuss the way Ani describes her body and the bodies of other students. Why do you think the author makes Ani so obsessed about body size? Do you think her opinion of herself is justified?

Discussion Question 3

How does Ani's mother influence her opinion of Bradley? What is their relationship like at this point in the novel?

Vocabulary

rave, inferred, devoid, travesties, succumbed, ogre, explicitly, matriculating, fabrication, eschewed, plebeians, oblivious, confluence, brazenly, blanched, androgynous



Chapter 3

Summary

In Chapter 3, Ani returns to her story as an adult. At her exercise class she realized she might lose more weight if she did not gorge on food as soon as she got home. She wanted to look good for the documentary about Bradley in which she was participating. Her goal was to lose fifteen pounds before the documentary and the wedding putting her at 105, a weight she considered acceptable for her height of five feet three inches.

She ran home but was embarrassed by her time. As soon as she arrived she began eating peanut butter even though Luke greeted her with “Hey, babe,” the greeting she had always longed to hear from a man. She spent an hour getting ready for her appointment to meet Nell and Moni to look at bridesmaids dresses. She wanted to impress not only the sales girls at the store but also the tourists on the street and anyone else she might meet.

When she bade Luke goodbye to go shopping she remembered how she had decided she wanted Luke because he had first been attracted to Nell. While Luke and Nell were dating, Ani had studied Nell’s behavior and tried to copy it to impress Luke. It was not until after she graduated college that she actually dated Luke for the first time. They moved in together a year after they started dating.

While her bridesmaids changed into the dresses they had chosen Ani looked at Spencer’s Instagram. She noticed someone had asked Spencer if she would be attending the Friends of the Five event. Ani wondered what it would be like if she and Luke were to go there. She imagined shocked looks when she entered the room. Later after she had seen the girls in their dresses she got an update about the documentary filming which alerted her that filming had been moved up to Sept. 4. She told Nell she had to stop eating so she could lose the weight she wanted to lose before filming.

At brunch Nell and Ani began talking about Mrs. Harrison, Luke’s mother. Ani had been surprised how accepting Mrs. Harrison had been of her. In fact she went to Mrs. Harrison about the documentary when she was asked to participate in it. Mrs. Harrison had encouraged her to participate and tell the story of what had really happened to her.

Nell told Ani to stop worrying about losing weight for the documentary. Ani thought about how she had met Nell. She had found her stoned at a party in the boys’ dorm in college and had drug her back to her room. Nell had cried for her bag, which Ani could not find. She later learned the bag had contained Nell’s bottle of pills that she used to keep herself from eating and to keep herself up to study. At the bridesmaids’ brunch Nell passed Ani one of those pills. Ani took it and thought about how the documentary was a chance for her to redeem herself.



Analysis

Even as Ani works out to lose weight for the documentary she sabotages her own diet by gorging herself on food. She seems to be gorging as a comfort mechanism. “I probably would have that longer, leaner body, too, if only I wasn’t so desperate to get food into my mouth by the time I get home that sometimes I don’t even take off my coat before I start pillaging the kitchen” (38). Food, particularly the kind of food that Ani says she binges on that is full of carbs is comfort food. It indicates to the reader that she is preparing herself for a very stressful situation or is preparing to face something in her past that she does not really want to face.

More than having before the wedding jitters, Ani seems to be stressed about the documentary about Bradley in which she has been asked to participate. The author continues to give the reader hints about what happened but nothing certain. Ani indicates that she hopes to be able to tell her story, the one she says was never told 14 years ago. She also hopes that “Even if this documentary did nothing to clear my old name, even if no one believed me, the least I could do was take away their ammo: She’s disgusting, nothing but a fat, bitter slam pig” (52). This helps to explain why Ani is trying so hard to lose weight. She hopes to change a prejudice about her made years ago.

When Nell learns that Ani is considering a crash diet in order to lose weight for the documentary Nell discourages Ani from doing so. There are two reasons why her comment is significant. First, Nell really seems to have Ani’s best interests in mind. She is concerned that her friend is putting too much emphasis on proving herself to the people of her past. Even though Nell is pretty, she seems to understand that looks are not where one’s value lies. Nell’s concern is also important because Ani compares her concern with Luke’s lack of concern. Ani tells her reader that “her read on me as sharp and as worrisome as Luke’s is not” (51). Sadly, however, even as Nell asks Ani not to crash diet to lose weight for the documentary, she depends on pills to keep herself slender. Her dependency on the pills is just another form of crash dieting because she is using unnatural means to maintain her body size.

Other things of significance to notice in this section include Ani’s concern about destroying the image she has tried to curate for her exercise instructors. “I wouldn’t want to alter the image the instructors have of me, one carefully crafted to impress and endear: the sweet but slightly standoffish girl” (39). This idea of molding one’s image will continue to be of importance in the novel. Also of importance is the reaction that Ani has to Nell’s bloody fingertips. She cannot bring herself to look at the “the jagged edges of her fingertips, the raw and bloodied flaps of skin, they remind me too much of how easily the seams of the body fall apart” (47). This indicates that the ruin of the human body is somehow connected to what happened to Ani. A hint that a gun was somehow involved in what happened at Bradley is given when Nell suggests she needs to get a gun to protect herself from rapists. Nell apologizes to Ani for her misspeak but Ani references the Five when she indicates Nell does not have to apologize. Remember



that the Bradley documentary in which Ani is participating has been tagged as Friend of Five.

Finally, the author makes an allusion to the Dylan Thomas poem *Night* with the phrase where Ani considers her future aging process. “I couldn’t decide which was worse — going gentle into that mom-jeans-wearing night, or fighting it, Botoxed and hungry, every step of the way” (40). While Thomas’ poem speaks about fighting against growing old and dying Knoll puts a spin on her idea by suggesting that Ani wants to fight against the aging process itself, the process that she believes will make her less attractive.

Discussion Question 1

Since Ani has a wedding coming up, does it seem strange that she is more concerned about looking good for the documentary than looking good for her wedding? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 2

How do Nell’s actions of going out sometimes with no makeup and wearing ratty clothes speak against the idea that women must be pretty all the time? Why does Ani state that this action on Nell’s part is her way of proving “her loyalty resided with her own gender” (42)?

Discussion Question 3

What is your take on what happened at Bradley at this point? How has Knoll’s foreshadowing of what the reader will later learn about Ani helped to bring you to this conclusion? How does her writing technique, giving the reader only a bit of information at a time, encourage intrigue and make you want to keep reading?

Vocabulary

perfunctory, strategized, self-deprecating, intuit, incorporeal, serendipitous, emanating, monocle



Chapter 4

Summary

In Chapter 4, Ani returns to a description of her high school days. She made two major changes in her first days at Bradley. First her mother took her to the mall and bought her an entire new wardrobe. Then she had her hair dyed. Because the expensive stylist did such a bad job Ani and her mother had to get a bottle of color from a drug store to repair it. Ani thought the resulting color was beautiful but noted it lasted about as long as her popularity at Bradley.

Although Hailey and Olivia seemed to warming to Ani, Ani continued to sit with the Shark, Arthur, Teddy and Sarah at lunch. The Shark shared information with Ani that if she played a sport she would be able to get out of PE. Ani decided to join the cross country team, which just happened to be coached by Mr. Larson. Ani believed the running might also help her to loose some weight. She still hoped she would catch Liam as her boyfriend. From the atmosphere at Bradley she sensed it was not considered sluttish to sleep with a boy as long as he was a boyfriend.

By October Ani had gotten her invitation to sit with Hilary and Olivia at their table. It came after Mr. Larson had the track students doing two legged hops up the stairs in the gymnasium. As Ani did her jumps she noticed Dean, Peyton and some other members of the track team watching as her breasts bounced up and down with each jump. Mr. Larson saw what was happening and ran up the stairs blocking Ani from their sight and telling them to move on. Dean said loud enough that Ani could hear him that Mr. Larson had “marked his territory” (60). Mr. Larson grabbed Dean’s arm and said something to him but Ani did not understand what he said. The soccer coach pulled the two apart and the incident was over. Mr. Larson asked Ani, whom he called Tif, if she was okay and then told her girls to go to the weight room. Ani learned Dean got detention for the incident. The following day Olivia asked her to each lunch at the popular table.

Arthur was angry that Ani had joined the popular kids during lunch. He expressed his hate for Dean by saying he “could rip his cock off and choke him with it” (61). Inside the lunchroom Arthur slammed the door letting it hit Ani in the shoulder. When she opened it he grinned nastily at her and admitted he hated everyone. Ani heard her new nickname “Finny” being called across the room by Hilary. She obeyed Hilary’s call. She also obeyed when Hilary told her she needed to go to the Fall Friday Dance. She even lied to Mr. Larson and said she was not feeling well so she could get out of cross country practice the day of the dance to go home and change.

At the dance Ani found the Shark and hung out with her while waiting for Hilary and Olivia. Arthur came and began to berate Ani about the kind of dancing experience she might have since she only went to Catholic school. Since he knew she was looking for Hilary and Olivia, he tormented her by telling her that they were not coming. Because she did not want Arthur to see how upset she was Ani pretended to go to the bathroom.



On the way she ran into Mr. Larson. He asked if she was feeling better and chastised her for skipping practice. While they were talking Hilary saw Ani and called out to her. Mr. Larson warned them if they left school property he would have to call their parents. When Ani begged him he agreed to say he had never seen her.

Outside the girls got into Dave's car which already contained Dave, Liam, Dean, Peyton and Olivia. Dave said they were going to "the Spot" (66). Once they arrived there Dean tried to hand Ani a beer but she would not take it. Even though Dean said she was lame for not taking the beer, he told her he was having a few people over the following weekend while his parents were out of town. He asked her not to tell Hilary or Olivia. Peyton interrupted them by mentioning that they were sitting on the stump where Arthur had given Ben Hunter a blow job. Although there were many questions Ani wanted to ask about what she had just been told, she asked only who Ben was. Dean told her he was a student who had once gone to school at Bradley. Ben had slit his wrists but was still alive. Dean warned Ani to watch out for Arthur before he reminded her not to tell anyone about the coming party. Ani indicates she was stupid for doing what he asked.

At the party Ani drank the beer Dean gave her even though she had not eaten dinner. She played beer pong with the boys. After the beer she drank whiskey and began losing track of what was happening around her. Soon she fell asleep. When she woke up Peyton was giving her oral sex. She fell asleep again and woke up in pain. Liam was above her. When she woke up the next morning, Ani was in bed with Dean. She realized she was wearing only a shirt and asked Dean where her pants were. He laughed and told her that no one knew. She had been walking around without them most of the prior evening. She hoped then that her antics would be talked about just like another amusing drinking incident. At that point she did not realize how much her life had changed that night.

Analysis

Ani's story seems to reach a climax in this chapter. Because she wants to be popular so badly she puts herself in a position where three guys are able to take advantage of her. Peyton performed oral sex on Ani while she was passed out. Later, Ani came to her sense when Liam was having vaginal sex with her only because she felt the pain of her hymen breaking. At some point she remembers the taste of semen as one of the boys ejaculated in her mouth. It is assumed that Dean had sex with her also. Although the boys were able to easily take advantage of Ani because of the drunkenness, it should be noted that what the boys did to her was wrong because they did not have her consent to have any sort of sexual relations with her.

Even though she did not know it at the time, Ani's life had changed that night at Dean's house. She wakes to learn she has been without pants for most of the night. Although she hopes the story of her incident will be told as a humorous escapade she has a feeling that it will not even at the point when she wakes up next to Dean. "Life had shifted drastically while I slept" Ani's older self realizes (74).



When Ani gets the invitation to join the popular students like she has wanted, it changes the dynamic in her friendship with Arthur. Arthur reacts in anger when Ani begins hanging around with Dean and the others. He is angry to the point he physically hurts her when he allows a door to slam against her shoulder. Then, he emotionally hurts her when grins hatefully at her when she came through the door he had hit her with. Arthur tells her “I hate pretty much everyone, you know?” (61). Arthur also describes to her what he would like to do to Dean, rip his penis off and choke him with it, if he had the opportunity. His behavior is strikingly different from the boy who befriended Ani the first day of school and introduced her to his friends. He bullies Ani to the point she is in tears because she is afraid Arthur is right in his claims that Hilary and Olivia encouraged her to come to the fall dance as a trick.

Arthur’s dislike for Dean may stem from an incident that Ani learns about when she goes with Dean and the rest of the crew to a place they call “the Spot.” Peyton volunteers the information that Dean and Ani are sitting in the spot where Arthur gave Ben a blow job. He describes both the boys as being homosexual. Olivia pipes up to tell Ani how “nasty” it was, claiming she had seen it. The boys recall how Ben had slit his wrists and no longer attended the school. They feel no empathy for the boy as they describe how he did not die from his self-inflicted wounds. Remember the way that this group of popular kids talk about Arthur and Ben as their treatment of the two will be significant later on in the novel.

Because of the step jumping exercise he assigned his girls in track practice, Mr. Larson has to step in to distract Dean and the other boys from Ani. Ani has such large breasts that she is putting on quite a show for the boys on the soccer team as she jumps up the steps as Mr. Larson instructed her. He sees and realizes the position he has put her in even though Ani does not seem to understand why he intervened or why he was concerned she might have been upset. Having been a high school boy himself, Mr. Larson recognizes the boys are seeing Ani as a sex object and not as a person. When he senses at the dance that Ani is headed off campus with the same boys during the school dance, he may be afraid that the boys will take advantage of Ani.

Foreshadowing continues to appear in this section of the novel. For instance when Ani talks about her dye job she states that: “I found it fitting that my perfect shade of blond lasted as long as my popularity, really” (54). In this simile she compares the length of her stint as a popular kid to the length of time that her perfect hair color lasted. In another simile the adult Ani compares herself to a lemming, an animal that just follows the crowd and will even follow the crowd to its death, when she responds to the sound of Dean calling her name. “I followed the sound of my new nickname like the nascent little lemming that I’d become” (61). Knoll also continues to use personification as she describes how the “sun was slinking behind the trees” when Ani arrived at Dean’s house (68). This description makes it appear the sun had some sort of premonition something bad was going to happen and slipped away guiltily to keep from witnessing it.



Discussion Question 1

Discuss the changing dynamics of the relationship between Arthur and Ani. Do you think that his anger that she is changing allegiances is disturbing? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 2

Was Ani to blame in what the boys did to her? How do you interpret their actions? Are they the sort of people with whom you would want to be friends? Why do you think Ani was not able to see their real intentions?

Discussion Question 3

Discuss Mr. Larson's role in what happens to Ani. Why do you think the stair jumping incident is so pivotal a point in Ani's rise to popularity?

Vocabulary

ostentatious, atrociously, mortifying, burgeoning, fornication, hypocrites, lenient, menacing, nascent, tirade, contradictions, devoid



Chapter 5

Summary

In Chapter 5, the focus switches back to Ani as an adult. In a group meeting with her boss, Ani and the others are tempted with cookies. Although it was Ani's idea, Eleanor suggested a story about the face of sexual harassment in 2014. Lolo yawned at Eleanor's suggestion for a headline but Ani spoke up with the one she had already come up with for the story. Ani noticed a vein throbbing in Lolo's forehead when she suggested Ani pass her research to Eleanor. In a switch to the present tense, Ani wonders if Lolo is more aware of Eleanor's lack of talent than she lets on.

Eleanor approached Ani later at her desk apologizing for taking her idea. As Eleanor perched on the side of Ani's desk Ani positioned her pen so that it left marks on Eleanor's white pants. After Eleanor walked away Ani checked her voice mail. She had a message from Luke. She remembered how she had been the one to push for them to get engaged after she had gotten a notice from HBO asking if she would participate in a documentary titled Friends of the Five. When Ani returned Luke's call he asked Ani if they could have dinner with his client that night. She thought about refusing because of the diet she was on but changed her mind when she considered how Luke had not only not run away when he met her parents but had told her that he was glad he was the one who got to "save" (80) her from her life with her parents.

Evan, the magazine's gay fashion editor, helped Ani dress for her dinner that night. She chose a floral, backless shirt dress out of the company's fashion closet. Although she knew it irritated Luke, she arrived fashionably late at nearly five minutes after eight. Ani checked out Whitney, the wife of Luke's client, before she noticed her husband. When she was introduced to Andrew, she was shocked when she saw his face and felt a twinge of recognition. It was not until after they were seated that Ani asked the man introduced to her as Andrew if he was Mr. Larson. Whitney laughed and asked if her husband had been Ani's teacher. She realized out loud that Ani had gone to Bradley and that she had been known as TifAni at school. Luke asked Andrew (Mr. Larson) what he had taught and learned he had taught Honors English. Andrew (Mr. Larson) noted that Ani had been his best student, but Ani thought to herself how she knew she had disappointed Andrew (Mr. Larson).

During the dinner, as Ani listened to Whitney talk about their life and children she wondered if that was really the life she wanted. She realized how attractive Andrew had become at the same time she wondered if people like Luke and his parents were really happy in the lives they had chosen. She remembered how they had all voted for Mitt Romney and his pro-life beliefs that might have shut down Planned Parenthood. When Luke said he did not care about the abortion standards Ani had tried to remind him that she might have had a child if it had not been for Planned Parenthood. He had only gotten angry with her. When she had first talked about participating in the documentary



Luke's one concern seemed to be that she would talk about the night she spent at Dean's house.

As the dinner continued, Ani pretended that it had made a difference that her mother had not worked when she was a child. Ani knew that Whitney probably spent three hours in the gym each day and had a nanny but also knew that she should not criticize her belief that she worked hard. Ani also believed their family would have been better off if her mother had worked instead of just expecting a lifestyle they couldn't afford. She also learned during the conversation that Andrew (Mr. Larson) was going to be participating in the documentary as well. Ani and Andrew (Mr. Larson) agreed to get coffee to talk about their roles in the program. When they said goodbye Ani was trembling as she kissed Andrew's (Mr. Larson's) cheek. He moved his hands like he had been electrocuted when he touched her bare skin during their embrace.

Analysis

Apparently, the really bad thing that happened to Ani was not just the rape but something else connected to it. The reader can infer this from Ani's thoughts about the documentary and her memories of the time when she told Luke what had happened to her. First, he will agree to allow her to participate in the documentary only if she agrees not to talk about the rape. From this information the reader can determine that whatever happened was somehow connected with the rape but not closely enough that the story would suffer if Ani left out that information. The reader also learns that Mr. Larson, Ani's English teacher, is somehow involved with this story.

Although it had appeared in the opening chapter of the novel that Ani was shallow in her desire for the "perfect" life, it appears she is not as shallow as she first appeared. In a rare present tense address to her reader Ani states: "I know I shouldn't fall into the old trap that I'm not someone, that I haven't really 'made it,' until I have a ring on my finger. Fucking Lean In and all that. I'm supposed to be better than this, a more confident, independent woman than this. But I'm not. Okay? I'm just not" (80). Because the reader understands that Ani knows how pathetic she appears the reader begins to develop sympathy for her. The reader is even more sympathetic when he learns how cruel Luke is to her about her rape. When she tries to talk to him about the importance of Planned Parenthood and how that institution played a very important role in her life, he is very dismissive of her past. "Now I realize, Luke just wants everyone to get over it already" Ani says of her soon to be husband. It seems that if Luke really loved her he would be more understanding of the pain that point in her life caused her and has continued to cause her (86).

While the reader senses that Ani had a crush on Andrew (Mr. Larson) during high school, it appears that she is still physically attracted to him. This physical attraction steps up a notch when Ani sees him again as an adult. She recognizes by the way that he pulls away from her like he has been electrocuted when they touched that he is also attracted to her.



As Ani considers the type of life that Whitney lives she thinks to herself she does not want that type of life. “Is this what I’m killing myself for? Is this what I really thought would fulfill me (87)?” Ani wonders as she thinks of having kids and quitting her job. She is very critical of Whitney and her lack of knowledge about the ways of the rich but at the same time wants Whitney to like her. Ani realizes she needs to be on Whitney’s good side if she wants access to her husband. In the same way, Ani does not openly fight against Eleanor when Eleanor steals her story idea. She instead gets her revenge in a passive aggressive manner by making sure Eleanor gets pen marks on her white pants when the woman sits on Ani’s desk to apologize for what she has done.

Since Ani has agreed to participate in the documentary her food cravings have gotten worse. She rewards herself for not giving into them by trying on the clothes in her closet to prove to herself how much weight she has lost. “When I couldn’t sleep, the gnawing in my gut and the memories on an insomniac Tour de France, I would grab a pile of pants from my closet and model them for myself in the bathroom mirror, marveling at the way I could pull on size twos without ever unbuttoning them” (78). The imagery of the “insomniac Tour de France” is great because the reader can bring to mind a picture of bike riders pedaling madly to win this marathon and understand the way Ani’s thoughts must be spinning as well.

Note also in this section that in newspaper and magazine speak “hed” refers to a headline.

When Lolo asks Eleanor about the headline for the article, she has suggested she expected Eleanor to give her a more eye catching headline than what Eleanor came up with. Notice also that Knoll continues to sneak in little tidbits of information that keep the reader intrigued about what might actually have happened to Ani. In this chapter, Ani thinks to herself that she was a disappointment to Andrew (Mr. Larson), her English teacher in school. One wonders if Ani disappointed him academically or some other way.

Discussion Question 1

Discuss the chance meeting between Ani and Andrew (Mr. Larson). Are you surprised by the way they react to one another? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 2

How does your impression of both Ani and Luke change when you learn how Luke reacts when Ani tries to talk about what happened to her?

Discussion Question 3

Discuss the interaction between Eleanor and Ani during the first part of this chapter. Do you think Ani handles this situation properly? Why or why not?

Vocabulary

tenacious, contrite, conciliatory, unassailable, androgynous, emanate, requisite, militant, placating, pedantic, poseurs, conspiratorial, stoicism, inherent, enamored



Chapter 6

Summary

In Chapter 6 Ani returns to her narration of the weekend with Dean when she was in high school. Before they had gotten into Dean's car to go out for breakfast Ani apologized to Liam in the kitchen about winding up in bed with Dean. He told her he did not really care if she had slept with Dean. The tense switches to the present tense as Ani admits she is still haunted by the memory that she apologized to the boy who had raped her and that he had laughed at her.

Back to the story of her weekend with Dean, Ani called her mother from the diner where she ate breakfast with the boys and asked her to come and pick her up. As she waited for her mother Ani began to worry she had gotten a disease or even gotten pregnant from one of the boys. She felt like she needed water even though she was not thirsty a condition that Ani learned later meant a psychological need was not getting met.

When Ani's mother came, Ani was so hateful to her that her mother grounded her. When Ani began to gag, her mother stopped the car and pushed her daughter out insisting that she not vomit in the car. By Monday morning, Ani knew that what had happened could not be glossed over lightly. She knew people were talking about her when she heard them laughing after they saw her. The Shark hugged her and asked if she needed to talk. After English Andrew (Mr. Larson) asked Ani to stay after class. He told her that he had been hearing some things about what had happened over the weekend and that she needed to talk to an adult about them. He asked if she had seen the school nurse. Ani had not seen the nurse, and she did not tell him she planned to go to Planned Parenthood later that day.

In the lunch room, Ani was surprised when Dean called for her to come sit with them. Even though Hilary and Olivia did not speak to her, Dean indicated he wanted her to sit next to him. When she told Dean she was grounded he shouted the information to the room, asking if she was twelve. Ani lied and said it was because her grades were bad. After lunch was over, Ani caught Liam as he was leaving. She asked if he had used a condom and then told him she was going to get the morning after pill. Even though she had not expected his help he told her he would find a way to get them there.

Liam got Dave to take them to the clinic. She saw Arthur's house as they headed out and thought how she had promised him she would visit him to talk after practice. Since Liam was acting concerned she did not feel she needed Arthur's advice as much as she had thought. She did know, however, when the drama of the possible pregnancy was over that Liam would no longer be interested in her.

After the doctor examined Ani, Ani asked her if a sexual encounter counted as rape if she could not remember what had happened. The doctor said only she was not qualified to answer before sending the nurse in to give Ani the pills. In the waiting room,



Liam was not there. She found him sitting on the curb. Because she wanted to remain tied to him in some way she imagined a bomb going off at the clinic with him having to protect her.

Analysis

The reader feels even more sympathy for Ani when he understands how little sympathy Ani got after she was raped. One of the encounters that should stick in the reader's mind is the way the doctor at the Planned Parenthood clinic acts when Ani asks if what happened to her could be defined as rape. Instead of talking to Ani or getting her in touch with someone who could help her the doctor only tells Ani "I'm not qualified to answer that question" (106). Andrew (Mr. Larson) does reach out to Ani and tries to get her to talk to the school nurse, but Ani refuses. She also does not mention that she is planning to go to the clinic after school. Ani does not even tell her mother what happened. Even though Ani was hateful to her mother, her mother may deserve Ani's lack of respect because she seems to like her BMW more than she likes Ani. Ani's mother demonstrates her concern for her car when she insists that Ani not throw up in the car and even pushes her daughter out of the car to keep her from doing so.

Ani shares information in this chapter that demonstrates that even though Dean and his crew are popular, they are not necessarily the most considerate people with whom she could be hanging around. For instance, on the morning after Liam rapes her, she tries to talk to him about what happened. He dismisses her. At that point, Ani did not realize what had happened to her had been rape. However, Liam probably knew what he was doing and that it was wrong. Ani describes that she learned later how Liam had "dragged me into bed, wrestled my pants off my dead weight legs, and plunged inside of me without even bothering to take the rest of my clothes off. He said I woke up and moaned when he did that, and that's how he knew I was okay with it. I lost my virginity to someone who's never seen my breasts" (102-103). Liam also acts as if Ani was being a pest when she asks him about using a condom and suggests she might be pregnant. In Liam's defense, however, he does go with her to Planned Parenthood.

Other more subtle hints that Dean and his crew are not good people include Dean's announcement to the entire cafeteria that Ani had been grounded. He also warns her that if she had told anyone about the party he would cut off his friendship with her. This threat to be friends only under certain circumstances is a form of bullying. Notice also that Ani describes the way that the popular kids do not throw away their trash when they finish lunch. Instead, they leave it for the janitors to pick up after them, a sign of their inconsideration for other people.

The ending of the chapter is interesting because it foreshadows the coming tragedy at Ani's school. At this point in time, Planned Parenthood clinics were being bombed. For this reason, Dave (the boy who drove Liam and Ani to the clinic) refused to wait at the clinic for Ani to be done. Since Ani knows that all possibility of a relationship with Liam will end after they leave the clinic, she wishes a bomb would explode, causing Liam to



have to protect her. Her ending comment that she learned at Bradley that a person only screams after he is safe is both chilling and foreboding.

Discussion Question 1

Discuss the way the ending of this chapter affects the tone of the novel.

Discussion Question 2

Do you think that Liam knows what he did to Ani was rape? Is this why he blows her off when she tries to talk to him?

Discussion Question 3

Consider the way that Dean welcomes Ani back to the lunch table but Hilary and Olivia will not speak to her. How do you interpret their reaction to her?

Vocabulary

blatantly, assimilate, pertinent, extenuating, autonomy, angst, espoused, futility



Chapter 7

Summary

Chapter 7 reverts to Ani's adult life. Ani considers what would happen if there was a shark attack when Luke was swimming in the ocean behind his parents house. She knew she would not be able to stand the smell of a body pulled apart, a smell she could still remember, and would not be able to save him if he was attacked. She thought it would be even worse if he were only injured in an attack. She believed she could not live with him if he was less than perfect and bore any reminder of the way that life could be destructive.

Ani had first realized Luke's faults when they visited some of Luke's college friends and she learned how he treated the one named Chris Bailey, who is referred to in the book by his last name. Bailey had been invited for drinks only, not dinner. When Bailey was around, Luke bossed him continually. Ani recognized the inequality in the exchange between Luke and Bailey. Bailey seemed to be desperate to fit in while Luke got meaner to him as the evening progressed. Ani was shocked by his behavior and wondered if she even really knew him.

At the end of the night Luke demanded Bailey drive them to their hotel even though Bailey was drunk. Ani made a scene when she refused to get in the car. Luke was angry with her even though she tried to make him see how his behavior hurt her. He apologized after he was sober but it was at that point that Ani has started to feel again as if she was not safe, not even with Luke.

Even though Ani had tried to keep her mother from attending the tasting for their reception foods at the Harrisons' home, Luke had offered to pay for her plane ticket. After one tasting session Ani had wanted to lie down with the others but Luke insisted that she go with him for a run. She was tired and knew it was because she was over exercising but thought her weight loss was worth it. When she got a cramp Luke smacked her on the butt and told her she could make it because she was a survivor. She was offended at the way he threw the phrase at her and told him she was going back to the house. He was angry because he felt she was treating him badly. Ani realized at that point she was the one who would be responsible for keeping Luke happy and suffered a spin, her version of a panic attack.

Hallsy, Luke's cousin, visited the Harrisons that evening and brought pot laced brownies with her. Ani had learned her lesson about the brownies when she had first eaten them. She'd had a bad dream and woken up screaming with a charley horse in her leg. Luke had refused to do anything to help her and acted as if she was making a fuss over nothing. During the evening with Hallsy Ani told Luke she was going to have only one brownie. It made her brain feel like "warm wet soil, ripe for a seed to plant" (120). Ani could not help but react when Hallsy asked her to promise she would not be seated with the Yateses at the wedding. Hallsy explained she had offended that family because she



had sent them flowers consoling them because she had heard their son had come out as being gay. It was only later that Hallsy learned the son was not gay. Luke and everyone else laughed. Ani stopped the laughter when she stood and told Hallsy she would not seat her with the Yateses but would instead seat her with the “flabby singleton table with the rest of your kind” (122).

When Luke confronted Ani about what she had said, he could not understand why she was upset by Hallsy’s story. Again, Luke did not understand and got angry with Ani when she tried to explain to him that Hallsy upset her because she assumed that being gay was like a horrible disease that required condolences. He was so angry with her that he slept in the guesthouse that night. Ani did not sleep at all that night. Luke did not speak to her when he first came back into the house the next morning. Ani got into the shower with him and apologized even though it was hard to do.

Analysis

Ani’s determination to keep her relationship with Luke solid shows when she apologizes to him, even though she feels she has nothing for which she should apologize. Ani has been through an experience that has changed her but she senses that Luke does not take seriously how badly the experience hurt her. He cannot understand why she is upset by the way he treated Bailey and instead tries to make the situation about himself, showing his own selfishness. He acts similarly when Ani tells him she does not feel well enough to finish their run after a tasting session for reception food. It is at this point that Ani realizes she will always have to be the bigger person in the relationship. She will have to be the one to apologize and the one to smooth things over even when Luke is the one being selfish and inconsiderate. She is willing to submit herself to apologizing to Luke again because she believes it is important for the image she wants to present of herself on the documentary that she be Luke’s finance.

Ani’s visualization of a shark attack and her fear of Luke being injured demonstrates Ani’s need for perfection to prove to her that life’s tragedies cannot hurt everyone. She describes to her reader that what drew her to Luke in the beginning was his beauty and perfection. She felt safe with him because she believed he could not be touched by tragedy. When she thinks about the possibility that Luke could be hurt, just like other people have been hurt, Ani cannot face the possibility of staying with him. “I couldn’t imagine anything worse than spending every day of my life with a physical reminder of the terrible things life can do, of the ever-present reality that no one is safe” (109).

Ani has been either the recipient of bullying or witnessed bullying of others at some point in her life. The reader can infer this because Ani judges people by the way they treat others. For instance, in Chapter 1, Ani judges the young girls who spoke to her about careers in writing based on the way they treat Loretta, a burn victim who emits a bad smell. In Chapter 7, Ani is furious with Luke because of the way he treats his friend Chris Bailey. Ani sees in their relationship that Bailey, as Luke and the others call him, desperately wants to be friends with Luke and the others. However, Luke only uses Bailey as his own personal servant. Ani goes so far as to wonder if Luke were the kind



of person in high school who might have taken advantage of a naive drunk girl, like Dean and the others did to her.

Knoll continues to give the reader hints of what really happened at Bradley that has caused Ani to be so caught up with perfection. This sentence from the novel: “I smell it still, even though fourteen years have gone by” about the smell of a body that has been pulled apart foreshadows that Ani witnessed some great tragedy where a person or persons were ripped limb from limb (109).

Luke’s comment to Ani that she should be able to continue running because she is a survivor angers Ani because she believes Luke is belittling the things she has experienced and lived through. Additionally, she does not see herself as a survivor. She believes there is a finality to the word survivor that she has not yet reached. “The word dismisses something I cannot, will not, dismiss” (115). It is as if Luke wants her to bury her past and pretend it never existed instead of facing and dealing with it.

Even grown people bully one another, an act that angers Ani especially when the bullying is done in a way that appears to be thoughtless. Hallsy tells the story of sending a condolence bouquet to a friend when she heard rumors the friend’s son had come out as a homosexual. In reality, the boy is not gay. All of the other family members believe it is a cute mishap on Hallsy’s part. Luke feels Ani is overreacting when she makes a stinging remark to Hallsy. He does not understand when Ani tries to point out to him that homosexuality is not a disease that requires condolences.

Discussion Question 1

What is your take on Luke’s personality at this point in the novel? Do you think he is really a good catch for Ani? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 2

Discuss the relationship between Ani and her mother. Why do they rub each other the wrong way?

Discussion Question 3

What is your impression of Ani’s statement to Hallsy? Do you think Ani was justified in what she said to the woman? Why or why not?

Vocabulary

carnage, ambivalent, reciprocate, audacity, blatant



Chapter 8

Summary

In Chapter 8, Ani returns to the narration of her high school experiences. She was allowed to continue eating with the popular kids because of Dean and Hilary. Ani was willing to do anything it took to remain friends with Hilary, including rewriting Hilary's paper for English so that Hilary would get a good grade. Ani worked hard to get back into Olivia's good graces as well. She was happy and believed she was making progress when Hilary invited her to a sleepover at Olivia's house.

As Ani is describing the house in which Olivia and her parents lived, she also mentions that Olivia's father was abusive to Olivia. Olivia often had bruises as proof of her father's temper. Ani was nervous about the evening because Olivia was still treating her coolly, even though Ani had relinquished Liam to her. In Olivia's room, the girls ate candy which they chased with vodka and diet Coke. After they were all woozy, Olivia called Dean. When she heard Dean, Liam, Miles, and Dave were coming Ani went to the bathroom and put on makeup. When she returned, the boys were there. They had brought malt liquor beer, beer with a high alcohol content. Ani drank without asking any questions. After awhile, Olivia suggested they should go outside and smoke. Dean passed around a joint. Liam went inside to the bathroom, and soon Ani noticed she and Dean were alone outside. Even though Ani wanted to go inside because she was cold, Dean insisted she stay with him.

Dean kissed Ani, and she tried to play along. When he began fiddling with her pants, she suggested they go inside. However, he recognized her ruse and pulled on the button of her pants causing her to fall backward onto her wrist. She cried out in pain and Dean slapped her, telling her to be quiet. Because of the slap Ani began screaming. Dean did not stop. He was pulling down her pants when they heard Olivia's father yelling and Olivia telling them to leave and not come back. Instead of running toward Dave's Navigator, Ani ran the other direction, hiding from the boys.

Ani's idea was to try to get to Arthur's house. She was still drunk on vodka and did not realize that her wrist was so swollen. She searched for the Main Line but was unable to find her way. She finally stopped at a gas station to ask for directions. The man at the counter was concerned when he saw the state Ani was in and thought he should call the police. Ani begged for him not to call them and asked him for directions to Montgomery Avenue. As she waited for the man to show her a map, she heard Andrew (Mr. Larson) call her name. He insisted that she get in his car. When she began telling him what happened, she could not stop.

Andrew (Mr. Larson) tried to take Ani to a hospital but she got so upset he just took her to his apartment. After he got her calmed down, Andrew (Mr. Larson) told Ani they needed to talk about what they were going to do next. He shared with her that there had been similar reports about Dean before now. He told Ani she was not at fault in what



happened. Ani switches to the present tense to note he is the only person who learned about what had happened who ever told her that. The novel switches back to the past tense as Ani describes how she slept in Andrew's (Mr. Larson's) bed that night until she woke up screaming. Andrew (Mr. Larson) woke her up. She experienced the first sign of a panic attack, which she called a spin, and begged Andrew (Mr. Larson) to stay with her. She did not sleep any more that night but stayed awake listening to the sound of his breathing.

In the morning, Andrew (Mr. Larson) encouraged Ani to let him take her home. He said he would help explain to her parents what had happened. While he was gone to the pharmacy for a bandage for her wrist, Ani called her parents. Her mother said Dean had called and left a message for her to call him. Ani took the number and returned Dean's call. Dean apologized and seemed desperate for Ani to accept his apology. She knew she was the one with the power to make it appear nothing had happened. When Andrew (Mr. Larson) returned home, Ani insisted on taking the train home and explained to him that her parents would not understand even if he tried to help explain things.

At the end of the chapter, Ani switches to the present tense as she tells her reader that she wonders if not turning Dean in for the rape somehow set everything that would happen later in motion.

Analysis

It is important for a rape victim to hear that what happened to them is not their fault. In her narration of her story Ani tells her reader that Andrew (Mr. Larson) is the only person who ever told Ani that she was not at fault for what Dean had done to her. One of the emotional scars that Ani bears even in her adulthood is caused by other people's refusal to believe that what happened to Ani was rape. Not even Luke will admit how truly traumatic that period in Ani's life was for her. Andrew's (Mr. Larson's) act of telling Ani that she was not at fault explains why she becomes so fascinated with him when they meet again over dinner. She is about to dredge up her past by participating in a documentary and wants to be near someone who believes her story.

Although Dean might have been one of the ones who physically raped Ani, he was not the only one at fault in her attack. In this section Hilary and Olivia seem to have picked up on Ani's desperation to be part of their group and know she will do whatever it takes to please them. Even though Ani has her doubts about Olivia's party she goes anyway because she's so honored by the invitation. It appears that the kids had already planned to set Dean up with Ani when they all left that couple alone outside. Even though they believed their actions were harmless fun, they were all accomplices in helping Dean try to rape Ani again. Ani especially holds Olivia responsible for what happened to her. The reader still does not know what exactly happened to Olivia or everything that Olivia did to her but Ani indicates: "Not even what she did to me, not even what happened to her later, was enough to quench my bloodlust" (128). This statement foreshadows that what ever happened to Olivia was not bad enough to quell Ani's anger about the way Olivia had treated her.



The difference between natural beauty and forced beauty is discussed in this section of the novel. For instance Ani is still at the point where she believes she is not attractive without makeup. When she learns the boys are coming to Olivia's party, she gives in to the urge to put on makeup even though none of the other girls are primping. "Mom had been catching my chin in her hand and applying 'a little color' to my lips since I was eleven, because preening was celebrated, never mocked, at Mt. St. Theresa's" (125). Ani struggles with the idea of natural beauty when she describes Olivia with her puffed up hair and nose covered with blackheads. She does not sound pretty at all even though the boys, especially Liam, appear to adore her. Ani says it is only years after she left high school that Nell taught her to tone down what she refers to as Ani's "beer commercial potential" (126). It was through Nell that Ani learned that "Actively striving for the traditional markers of beauty and status — the blond hair perfectly styled, the tan skin perfectly even, the brazen logo stamped all over your bag — why, it's downright shameful" (126).

Discussion Question 1

Discuss Andrew's (Mr. Larson's) decision to allow Ani to go home alone and not tell her parents about what Dean did to her. Do you think this was the best decision he could have made? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 2

Should Ani have been more suspicious of Olivia's intentions after the way Olivia was treating her at school? What about her alcohol intake? Might Ani have been more careful in that regard considering what happened to her last time she drank too much?

Discussion Question 3

Although Olivia is one of the most popular girls at The Bradley School and apparently one of the most influential girls, she also appears to be one of the meanest girls. What is Olivia's role in Ani's story? Do you think she is really as unattractive as Ani describes her to be? Why or why not?

Vocabulary

quarantined, buxom, milieu, amalgam, solidified, guttural, flaccid



Chapter 9

Summary

In Chapter 9 Ani returns to her adulthood where she fantasized that Andrew (Mr. Larson) would leave his wife and children for her when he learned she did not want to marry Luke. Even as she fantasized, Ani knew Andrew's (Mr. Larson's) appeal was in the fact that he had supported her and believed her story in high school. When she suggested to her mother she was having second thoughts about the wedding, her mother warned her not to mess up her opportunity with Luke.

Ani did arrange to meet Andrew (Mr. Larson) for drinks. In the bar Andrew (Mr. Larson) tells Ani he had always known she would grow up to be someone with a purpose. When she cut herself down, she felt Andrew's (Mr. Larson's) frustration like a slap. The talk turned to the documentary, and Ani admitted to Andrew (Mr. Larson) that she was worried about it because she did not know for what angle the editors were edging. Ani told Andrew (Mr. Larson) there was not much inside her that made her feel better about telling her story. Andrew (Mr. Larson) indicated how upset he was by that news. As she noticed the way he dealt with her both when she showed how devastated she still was by what had happened and when she tried to be a trooper, she realized that he liked her better as a broken person.

Later in the conversation Ani shared with Andrew (Mr. Larson) that Luke was not happy with the idea she was taking part in the documentary. Andrew (Mr. Larson) soothed Ani by telling her that she would probably always hurt about what had happened to her. It was different from Luke's opinion that she should not care what people thought about her.

Ani was irritated when Andrew's (Mr. Larson's) phone rang, and he admitted he was meeting his wife for dinner after his drink with Ani. Before he could leave, Ani apologized to him for backing out on him in the headmaster's office at Bradley. She admitted to him that she had thought she could go to school the Monday after Olivia's party and that everything would be fine. She also told Andrew (Mr. Larson) how angry she was with herself for letting Dean get away with what he had done to her.

Ani's narration moves back to the Monday after Olivia's party when Andrew had told Headmaster Mah that Dean as well as Liam had been involved in another incident. Instead of being able to go to homeroom, Ani was sent to the headmaster's office. Headmaster Mah seemed relieved that Ani refused to report her assault. She knew he had noticed the cut and bruise of her face but ignored it. In the hallway she had asked Andrew (Mr. Larson) to just forget about what she had said about Dean.

Back in Ani's adult life Andrew (Mr. Larson) told Ani she needed to not worry about what she did in high school and concentrate on how she had made something of herself by honest means. His comment and Ani's response indicates Dean did not create his



image honestly. Before he left for dinner with his wife, Ani suggested they have lunch some time. Andrew (Mr. Larson) agreed. When he told Ani he was proud of her she indicates a crack in her “windshield” (153) became a little deeper.

At home that evening Luke asked Ani if she had gotten what she wanted from her meeting with Andrew (Mr. Larson). He also told her he would be glad when the documentary was over and things could return to normal. Ani knew the normal he was referring to was a point when she used to flirt with a lesbian waitress at a bar. They always had sex afterward and he always told her how much he loved her. At the end of the chapter Ani comments that she is a “different kind” (156) of trophy wife.

Analysis

Ani introduces a significant symbol, the windshield, as a way to describe how she protects herself. This “windshield” is first mentioned on Page 147 when Ani uses this protective feature of a car to describe the facade, or false front, she has created for herself. Because Andrew (Mr. Larson) has such a keen sensitivity of her feelings, she tells her reader that his ability to understand her is like a spider web thin crack in a windshield. He is the weak spot that she believes will eventually cause her facade to completely fall apart. Later in their conversation Ani, whom Andrew (Mr. Larson) insists on calling Tif, indicates that when her former teacher tells her he is proud of her the “windshield cracked a little deeper” (153).

Another analogy that Ani uses to describe her talk with Andrew (Mr. Larson) compares a hint of disappointment by Andrew (Mr. Larson) to Dean’s slap. She indicates that the emotional pain she feels when Andrew (Mr. Larson) chides her for cutting herself down is like the physical pain she felt when Dean slapped her. She also compares the feeling she gets when he comforts her by telling her that she is okay for continuing to feel the hurt from her past to the feeling of him putting a Band-Aid over the cut on her cheek when she was in high school. In her description of the day in high school when she was supposed to tell Headmaster Mah what happened to her she compares Andrew’s (Mr. Larson’s) disappointment in her to cheap cologne that “filled up the hallway” making it hard for her to get away (152) .

Although Headmaster Mah probably realizes that something did happen to Ani, he is quick to dismiss his suspicions because she told him nothing happened. Had he been a responsible adult Mah should have pushed Ani harder to get her story instead of seeming to be relieved that Ani would not report what had happened to her. He has gotten complaints about Dean before but does not want to have to deal with punishing the boy or drawing attention to a sexual assault by one of his students. He is ultimately saying that he would rather Ani suffer the emotional scars of her assault than have to deal with the report of a rape. Ani notes while she is in the headmaster’s office she knows the man can see the cut and bruise on her face. It is obvious something happened to her. “Headmaster Mah noticed it and did a poor job of pretending not to” Ani notes as she makes her point that the school leader just did not want to deal with a rape accusation (152).



Discussion Question 1

What do you think Ani means when she tells her reader she is a different kind of trophy wife?

Discussion Question 2

Discuss the use of names in this novel. TifAni has worked hard to put together the person she is as Ani. How does it affect her when her old teacher calls her Tif, the nickname he used when she was still a girl who was taken advantage of and bullied? What does it signify that Ani wants to call Mr. Larson by his first name, Andrew?

Discussion Question 3

Why would the headmaster of Ani's school want to cover up a rape accusation? Why do you think he is so relieved that Ani decides not to report what happened?

Vocabulary

melodramatic, vindictive, contrite, facade, purports, sadistic, perennial



Chapter 10

Summary

In Chapter 10, Ani returns to her narration of the fall out after Olivia's party. She decided she had to get to Olivia and get back in her good graces. She found her alone at the lunch table. Olivia had a bruise near her mouth. Olivia gave Ani an eerie smile and said she was fine. Dean slammed his tray on the table and accused Ani of breaking their deal. He said he had been called into the headmaster's office. He would only be allowed to play in the next soccer game if nothing else happened in the meantime. Ani insisted she had not gone to the headmaster willingly but had been called to the office. She suggested he and Andrew (Mr. Larson) had assumed something had happened. Dean did not believe Ani and told her to leave their table.

After cross country practice that day Ani showered in the locker room because her mother was coming to take her shopping for clothes. When she got out of the shower she was surprised to find Olivia and Hilary there. They told her they were looking for her and asked what she was doing later. Ani told them she would put off shopping with her mother but Olivia and Hilary insisted they could meet up later. Ani was angry with herself believing she had scared them off. While Ani was waiting for her mother Arthur sat down next to her. He asked if she was okay. She said she was but then was embarrassed when Arthur told her that people thought she had ruined Olivia's party because she was jealous that Liam and Olivia were dating.

The next morning Ani was excited as she rode to school. She was wearing a new pea coat and believed from the encounter the day before that Hilary and Olivia still wanted to be friends. At school a crowd had formed at the entrance. It parted as she walked up. When she reached the cause of the commotion she discovered the running shorts she had worn the day before were tacked to the bulletin board along with a note daring students to "SNIFF A SKANK (AT YOUR OWN RISK . . . SHE STANKS!)" (162). Ani went straight to the bathroom remembering how her period had started as she was running. She imagined the smell of menstrual blood and sweat did stink. Two girls came into the bathroom discussing whether or not Ani had deserved what had been done to her. After hearing their conversation she left school. Ani was on the way to the train station when she heard Arthur calling her.

At his house, Arthur fixed Ani lasagna and gave her back her running shorts. He promised after they got done eating that he would show her something that would make her feel even better. In his basement he showed her an old yearbook with a note from Dean. Ani realized from the tone of the note that Arthur and Dean had once been friends. Arthur explained that when Dean got his growth spurt he had turned into an asshole. Exploring deeper in the basement Ani heard Arthur's "giddy little laugh" then saw him turn to her, aiming a rifle at her (168) . Ani jumped and fell backward. Arthur told her to calm down as the gun was not loaded . He said the gun was a gift from his father, an attempt to make a man out of his son.



Ani's story jumps forward from the beginning of fall to November. Mr. Larson had left the school with no explanation of why he was gone. The substitute coach paid so little attention to the cross country team that Ani was able to go to Arthur's house every day during practice with the woman caring. Ani had been caught for skipping school. She suspected that officials knew something had happened that day that had "violated the Bradley code of moral excellence" (170) but did not seem to know exactly what had happened.

Ani often joined Arthur in the attic room he had taken over as his bedroom. One of the few possessions he had taken with him was a picture of him and his father together. The frame of the picture was covered with seashells. Once Ani had made fun of the picture frame and Arthur had told her that his mother had made it for him. They spent their time smoking weed and writing on the pictures of the HOs and Hairy Legs in Arthur's yearbook. After they were tired of that they went downstairs to eat. It was at this time that Ani realized how comforting food could be. All of her clothes were soon too tight.

One day Arthur told Ani about Ben Hunter. Ani pretended like she had not heard about Ben from Olivia and the others as Arthur told her that Dean had tried to make Ben kill himself by torturing and abusing the boy for years. Arthur said the final straw came when Dean and some other older boys had come to a graduation party for the eighth graders. They convinced Ben to go into the woods with them where the other boys held Ben down so that Dean could have a bowel movement on the boy's chest. No one saw Ben for several hours before he was found in the bathroom of a drug store where he had bought a razor and slit his wrists. Arthur suggested they add degrading marks to Dean's picture in the yearbook in honor of Ben. They had also written comments near pictures of the other students who had been mean to them as a way of blowing off their frustration.

In English class the students had moved on from literature to study grammar. Ani believed that Mrs. Hurst who had been hired in Mr. Larson's absence wanted to cause trouble for Ani because she had heard stories about the girl from her daughter who was a senior at Bradley and was also a gossip. When Mrs. Hurst caught Ani and Arthur passing notes one day she called Ani to the board. She suggested Ani copy the example of an appositive phrase that she was going to give her onto the board. The phrase Mrs. Hurst instructed her to write began TifAni, a cheap mall rat, but the teacher got no further because Arthur jumped from his seat and called her a "dumb bitch" (180). The teacher called for Bob Friedman, the teacher across the hall, to take Arthur to the principal's office. Ani noted that the teacher stopped bothering her after that.

Ani went to Arthur's house after school but got no answer. He was not at school the next day either and Ani assumed he had been suspended. It was the Shark who told her that Arthur had been expelled. Shark told Ani that Arthur had already been in trouble once for stomping on a fish in Biology class because Dean and other students had dared him to do so. That afternoon when Ani went to Arthur's house he let her inside.



During their conversation, Ani commented to Arthur that perhaps it would have been Dean who would have been expelled instead of Arthur if she had spoken up about the assault. Arthur exploded at Ani telling her that she should have reported Dean. He made fun of her telling her that she had never been liked by the popular group but that she was “just such a stupid cunt” and that she was blind to her position (184). Angered and embarrassed, Ani accused Arthur of “walking around with a three-year-old boner” for Dean (185). It was after Arthur told Ani she should have her breasts reduced because no one who ever did anything good had breasts the size of hers that she grabbed the picture of him and his father and ran with it. When she finally stopped and looked at the picture, she felt bad about taking it even though she thought since it was gone Arthur might get over his dad’s abandonment of him. She put the frame in a place it would be protected. Later she learned Arthur had been enrolled in a public high school. She indicates he was not destined to be among students going to Ivy League colleges.

Analysis

In this section of the novel the reader understands what Ani meant in Chapter 8 when she said “I sometimes wonder if this was the decision (not to report Dean) that set everything into motion” (141). After reading this chapter of the novel, the reader can better understand what Ani meant by this though the complete devastation associated with this string of events has not yet completely played out. Arthur gets angry with Ani for not turning Dean in for assaulting her. He seems to believe that if Ani had stood up for herself he would not have had to have stood up to the teacher and gotten expelled for speaking his mind. This prompts a fight between Arthur and Ani with Ani leaving the house with a prized photo belonging to Arthur.

The picture of Arthur and his father is a significant symbol in the novel. Arthur’s mother had framed a picture of Arthur and his father for her son. It is one of his most prized possessions, shown by the fact that it is one of the few things that he took with him to the attic room he moved into in his house. When Arthur hurts Ani by calling her names and making fun of her for letting Dean and his group abuse her, she retaliates by taking this photo. While another person might have destroyed this picture in anger Ani takes care to put it where it would not get damaged. This shows that even though she is angry with Arthur, she still cares about his feelings and shows respect for the things that are important to him.

Arthur confirms to Ani the rumors that Ben tried to commit suicide because of Dean. Arthur shares with Ani that Dean and his friends had tormented Ben for years but Ben had finally snapped and turned his anger inward when Dean’s friends held Ben down so that Dean could have a bowel movement on Ben’s chest. In fact, Arthur tells Ani that he and Dean had once been good friends. Since that time Arthur himself had been on the receiving end of Dean’s bullying. He had been suspended from school for stomping on a fish in Biology class because Dean dared him to do so. The reader can assume this was an act on Arthur’s part to get back into Dean’s good graces. Even though Arthur makes fun of Ani for trying so hard to fit in with Dean and his group, he is guilty of doing the same.



Perhaps, it is because Ani knew that Arthur was gay that she later got so angry with Hallsy when that woman suggested homosexuality was a disease and required condolences. Despite how badly Arthur had hurt her, he also was the one who had been the first person at Bradley who had been friendly to her. Ani cannot forget his friendship even though she does wonder when Arthur first lashes out at her if she were just a stray he had picked up because he felt pity for her.

Ani begins to learn about the differences between people with new money and people with old money. Ani recognizes that even though Arthur and his mother live in a house that is becoming run down that they come from old money. She credits Arthur with a knowledge of the proper ways to do things, like passing the salt and pepper shakers together, that Dean does not know. Ani also points out to her reader that Arthur's family has a legacy that can take him places even though they are no longer rich. This legacy comes to Arthur through his mother's side of the family. Ani compares Arthur's behavior and knowledge to that of Dean whose family is rich with new money. Ani at first believes it is the difference in their types of richness that makes Arthur despise Dean. She realizes this is partially true since the Barton family paid for a new cafeteria for the school, which makes it unlikely that Dean will ever be punished for any sort of bad behavior.

After she sees Olivia and Hilary in the locker room Ani grasps onto false hope that the two still want to be friends with her. There is plenty of proof they are no longer interested in being Ani's friend. First, Arthur tells Ani the rumor circulating is that Ani caused trouble at Olivia's party because she was jealous that Liam was dating Olivia. Second, neither of the girls speaks up for her when Dean orders her away from their lunch table. Third, when Ani first tried to talk to Olivia about what had happened between them Ani said the girl gave her a smile that was "so detached from human emotion that I still sometimes start awake in the middle of the night, haunted by the memory" (158). Even though Ani fights against the knowledge, she probably realizes at that point she is out of the popular group. When she sees the bruise on Olivia's face, probably given to her by her abusive father, Ani realizes she is looking at her own funeral. Looking back on the incident Ani knows she was selfish for thinking about what the bruise meant in terms of her friendship with Olivia instead of the fear and pain Olivia lived in because of her father's temper.

One thing that Olivia and Arthur have in common is that they have both come from backgrounds that are not ideal. Arthur's father walked out on him and his mother when Arthur was young. It is obvious that Arthur still feels hurt because his father left him. Olivia's home life is perhaps worse even than Arthur's. She is the least favorite of her parents' two children. Because she is so slender and eats nothing but Swedish fish it appears she has an eating disorder. Additionally her father takes out his anger on her. Her act of bullying students at school may result from the abuse that she suffers at the hands of her father.



Discussion Question 1

In terms of bullying, is Mrs. Hurst being a bully when she makes Ani write a degrading phrase about herself on the board? Why or why not? Why do you think none of the students told what Mrs. Hurst had done to incite Arthur?

Discussion Question 2

Is Arthur justified in his anger with Ani? Do you think Dean would have been expelled from school if Ani had told what had happened to her?

Discussion Question 3

Discuss the way that Arthur helps Ani to develop her obsession with food as a form of comfort. How does this affect her as an adult?

Vocabulary

roiled, proliferated, milled, primeval, exhumed, lithe, incoherent, integral, inherently, acquiesced, primal



Chapters 11 and 12

Summary

In Chapter 11, during a dinner with Nell, Ani's friend commented on how thin Ani was getting. She added she was glad she was never getting married. When the waiter wished Ani a chilly congratulations on her upcoming wedding Nell noticed Ani was upset. She confessed to Nell she was not sure if she wanted to get married. When Nell asked Ani how she would feel if she called the wedding off, Ani said she would be sad because she loved Luke but in reality she loved the power she felt the engagement ring gave her. Ani complained she had invited Nell to eat with her because she wanted to feel better about her situation, not worse. Nell perkily lied to Ani about what a great guy Luke was, leaving an air of tension between them.

Meanwhile, Ani was feeling better about herself because the size six wedding dress the salesgirl had ordered for her had been much too big. She was also getting the feeling that the documentary team was planing on telling the real story because Bradley officials would not let them tape inside the school building. She borrowed an outfit from the fashion closet at her work to take with her for the filming. Luke was not going with her. He had been contacted at the last moment by a friend who was coming in from India to visit. Ani knew Luke was relieved he was not having to go. In response to Luke's pleasure he did not have to go to the filming Ani had emailed Andrew (Mr. Larson) and asked him if they could get lunch together. The day of the filming in the studio, Aaron, the director, instructed Ani how to answer the questions he would be asking her. One of the questions he asked Ani was to state the age she would have been on Nov. 12, 2001.

In Chapter 12 Ani tells her story of what happened Nov. 12, 2001. She had gone back through the lunch line to get a package of Swedish fish. Dean was in line close to her and she was studying the back of his head when he suddenly went sideways in the air. Even though the cafeteria was filling with smoke, Ani wondered why Dean had jumped. Teddy pulled her up from the floor and into the old part of the cafeteria. Because of the smoke they could not get out of the cafeteria so they went upstairs to the Brenner Baulkin Room. Ani could not remember hearing the sound of the fire alarm going off. She was told Hilary had called for her mother in a whimpering girl's voice. One of her feet had been blown off. Olivia lay next to her, dead. The Shark, Peyton, Liam, and Ansilee Chase were hiding under the table in the Brenner Baulkin Room.

A boy holding a gun came into the room and looked under the table. Ani did not recognize him. Ansilee ran from under the table and the boy followed her, shooting her. The boy looked under the table again. The Shark pleaded with him calling him Ben. When Ben saw Peyton he shot Peyton in the face even as Peyton begged him not to shoot. After he shot Peyton Ben left the room. Smoke was filling the room from the cafeteria. Ani and the others knew the only way out of the room was to follow Ben.



Liam cursed Ben calling him a “Fucking faggot!” as they tried to determine if they should stay where they were or try to seek safety from the fire. Ani yelled at him to quit degrading Ben. She told him Ben was shooting because he had been degraded and bullied. As they were arguing they heard a chair fall and realized Peyton was still alive. The Shark and Ani held his hands and tried to comfort him. When Peyton began to choke on his blood Ani put his head in her lap. He was still breathing when Teddy told them they had to go because the smoke was getting so bad. They tried to pick Peyton up and move him but he was too heavy for them.

Before they left the room, Teddy found each of them a steak knife in the buffet for protection. Ani was agonized they had to leave Peyton. They moved as a group into the stairway. Teddy suggested they go upstairs. As soon as he made the suggestion a bullet killed him. Knowing the bullet had come from above them Ani ran down the stairs. She, the Shark and Liam ran out of the stairway into the language wing of the school. Liam went into a classroom believing he could hide there. Aaron, like others who heard her story asked Ani why she did not follow Liam. She said it was because she knew they would be cornered in the room because Ben was so close behind them.

She and the Shark ran to the new addition of the school that had been saved from the fire because of the sprinkler system. They reached the spot in the cafeteria where the popular kids had once sat when Ani saw Arthur. He was holding his father’s gun. The Shark began to cry when she saw Arthur. He told her to leave. She apologized to Ani before she ran from the building. Arthur called for Ani to come to him. When she asked why he raised the gun and shot at the ceiling. Both Ani and Dean, who was slumped over a cash register, screamed. Arthur handed Ani the gun asking her if she wanted to be the one to kill Dean. Ani reached for the gun but Arthur pulled it back, saying he had changed his mind. He aimed the gun at Dean and shot him in the groin. Ani stabbed Arthur with the steak knife managing at first only a shallow stab below his shoulder blade. As Arthur lunged at her, she stabbed him in the neck and then in the chest. Ani notes she ended her story at this point for Aaron but had thought to herself at that time that the people had to forgive her now since she had killed Arthur.

Analysis

It is at this point more than halfway through the novel that the reader finally learns what the documentary is all about. Ani not only suffered through a rape while she was in high school she also was a survivor of a school shooting. Mystery still remains as to why Ani believes she has to prove herself to the people who will be watching the documentary. The reader could understand if Ani were trying to defend herself because of rape allegations but apparently not that many people know about the rape.

At first glance it appears the Ben and Arthur have planned a massacre because of the bullying they both suffered at the hands of the students who were shot. Notice that most of the students killed were the popular kids. Remember Arthur’s comment to Ani in Chapter 4 “Well, I could rip his cock off and choke him (Dean) with it” (61). Arthur makes good on this threat when he shoots Dean in the groin.



Luke continues to be dismissive of the trauma Ani suffered during this part of her life as he decides not to go with her to the filming choosing instead to visit with friends. Although it had once appeared that Ani was shallow and concerned only about appearances, it appears that she has more substance than Luke. The reader learns how Ani was compassionate to the people who were shot, even when many of those people were the ones who raped and bullied her. Olivia is the only victim that Ani has ever said decisively that she could not forgive for what she had done to Ani. She even tries to help Peyton and cradles his head in her lap as he struggles to breathe.

There are several interactions in this section of the novel that foreshadow coming events. In Chapter 11, Ani notes that one of the women on the documentary team “had a bouquet of frizzy curls framing her narrow face, the cheekbones probably more pronounced in adulthood, the way Olivia’s might have been” (198). This mention of how Olivia might have been indicates that Olivia never had the opportunity to grow up into adulthood. During the shooting Ani notices that Liam looks at her at one point as if he is afraid of her. It is at the point she begs him to stop calling Ben names. “That’s why he’s doing it!” (206) Ani tried to tell Liam. It was at that point that Liam looked at Ani “like he was afraid of me. I didn’t understand how important that was at the time” (206). Could Liam have thought that Ani was in some way involved in the shooting? Did he think she really knew the reason that Ben was shooting and had not just guessed it was because boys like Liam had called him dirty names for so long? One fact that Ani has in her favor is that she probably would not have warned Liam to stop calling Ben names if she had been in on the shooting.

Notice that Liam also makes a comment to Teddy similar to the one he made to Ani through his look of fear. “Liam laughed viciously. ‘He won’t hurt you either! That’s why you’re willing to leave’” (206). Liam apparently assumes that even Teddy is involved in the shootings because he assumes that Teddy wants to leave the room in which they are hiding, which is filling with smoke, because Teddy knows he will be safe from the shooter. Liam’s assumption that Ben would not hurt Teddy is proven wrong when Teddy is shot as they are deciding if they should go upstairs or downstairs.

Ani continues to find comfort in her ability to lose weight. It is a matter of control for her. She has control over what she eats and when she eats it. While Nell’s pills help her stay skinny Ani comments that they only thing that works for her is “pure, hard discipline” (189). Ani seems proud that she has the discipline it takes to lose weight like she wants to. The more weight she loses the better Ani feels about herself.

Discussion Question 1

Discuss the interaction between Arthur and Ani in the cafeteria. How does your opinion of Ani change when she kills Arthur?



Discussion Question 2

What is your opinion of Luke's blasé attitude toward Ani's participation in the documentary? Should he be more supportive of Ani? Do you think he really understands what she went through?

Discussion Question 3

Why is it significant that Ani depends on will power to lose weight?

Vocabulary

tenure, belligerent, pillaged, palpable, epiphany, excommunication, curate, putrid, compromise, ravaged



Chapter 13

Summary

In Chapter 13, Ani intentionally stiffened when Aaron, the director of the documentary, touched her arm in an attempt to be comforting. Before she left he asked her a favor which is not specified in her story at this point. When she asked Aaron if his proposition was a trick he seemed genuinely hurt. He promised her it was not a trick and that he would not trick her. Ani decided Aaron might not be malicious after all.

On the way to the hotel Ani pulled into a gas station parking lot when she heard her cell phone buzz. She sent Andrew (Mr. Larson) an email asking if he would meet her at a restaurant called Peace A Pizza. When she still had not gotten a return email by the time she got to her hotel she found a phone book and called the Larsons hoping Andrew (Mr. Larson) was staying with his parents. She was able to get Andrew (Mr. Larson) on the phone though his father thought she was a prank caller at first. They agreed to meet at the restaurant.

Because it was so crowded in the restaurant they took their pizza outside. An artichoke fell off Andrew's (Mr. Larson's) piece and hit the ground making a sound that reminded Ani of Ansilee. She had to stop eating. Leaning back on her hands she tried to explain to Andrew (Mr. Larson) how much she wanted people to believe her side of the story. She said she still got hate mail from people who were loyal to Dean. Even though Andrew (Mr. Larson) suggested she tell them what Dean did to her, Ani said both her mother and Luke discouraged her from talking about the rape. She added she also was not sure how to accuse Liam, who was dead at 15, of rape. She felt like his parents had already been through enough. On a whim she asked Andrew (Mr. Larson) if he wanted to drive past Bradley.

When they arrived at the school, Andrew (Mr. Larson) suggested they break inside. They found that the door to the athletic center was unlocked. Inside the gymnasium Ani drug the sole of her high heeled shoe across the maple floor. Andrew watched her and then did the same. As they looked through the window of the door into the computer lab Andrew (Mr. Larson) voiced his question about what the students had said about him after he left. He told Ani the Barton family had made it so he had to leave after he accused Dean of assaulting Ani. Inside another classroom Ani told Andrew (Mr. Larson) that she had really liked Arthur. He had a way of reading people she could never understand and he was funny. Despite his good qualities she admitted to Andrew (Mr. Larson) she did not feel bad for killing him.

When Ani told Andrew (Mr. Larson) she thought she was capable only of having strong feeling about things that affected her she used the way she was able to kill her friend but was not able to admit she was marrying the wrong man as an example. Andrew (Mr. Larson) asked why she did not tell Luke she felt they were wrong for each other and she explained the way she thought she would not be able to be hurt if she were Ani



Harrison. As Andrew (Mr. Larson) hugged Ani she thought about all the people who would be hurt if she and Andrew (Mr. Larson) were to decide to have a relationship.

In Andrew's (Mr. Larson's) old classroom he admitted to Ani that there was a viciousness at Bradley that he had never experienced in a high school before. Deciding to be honest with Ani, Andrew (Mr. Larson) told her that he had intentionally set up a dinner with her and Luke because he had wanted to meet her again as an adult. At that moment the room was lit up with yellow light. A security car pulled up at the school and the driver got out. As the officer walked into the school and began calling out Andrew (Mr. Larson) and Ani crawled under a desk together. Ani felt one of her spins begin. She could not feel her heart beating. She wondered if the security officer was really an officer or if he were just pretending to be one. She noticed Andrew (Mr. Larson) was trying not to laugh. Even though she heard the security guard leave the school she was determined he had come back into the building and was waiting for them to come out believing they were safe. When he was finally able to coax Ani out from under the desk she was not playing the part of the victim. He propped her up against himself until she stopped shaking, and then they were kissing.

Analysis

Just because a person does not have obvious wounds, it does not mean they are not a victim. Ani survived the school shooting, having been a victim as much as the ones who were killed and injured. She is actually more of a victim because she was raped by Dean, Liam, and Peyton. However, she never reported those rapes. While the community mourns the loss of these young people, Ani suffers with the knowledge that they are not the innocent victims some others believe they are. Those who were killed had bullied not only Ben and Arthur but also Ani. Even though Ani believes she deserves the chance to tell others what Dean did to her, she does not want Liam's family to go through any more pain than what they have already suffered.

Now that the reader knows what Ani lived through he can more easily understand her strange behavior. When she hears the sound the artichoke makes as it falls off Andrew's (Mr. Larson's) piece of pizza, she is reminded of the sound Ansilee's body made as it hit the floor. She shares with her reader she is often not able to eat red food because it reminds her of blood. When she and Andrew (Mr. Larson) hide under the desk from the Bradley security officer Ani has a flashback to the day of the shooting. She has what she describes as one of her "spins" where she cannot feel her heart beating and believes she has stopped breathing. She also assumes the worst of the situation. Even though Andrew (Mr. Larson) sees it for what it is, a security guard coming to check the building, Ani wonders if the guard is not a shooter dressed up as a guard intending to shoot them. When the guard walks away and Andrew (Mr. Larson) believes the coast is clear Ani is determined that the man has snuck back around and is waiting for them to show themselves so he can shoot them.

Ani learns that even Andrew (Mr. Larson) is a victim of the Barton family's bullying. "Those Bartons, they play dirty" (227) Andrew (Mr. Larson) said when he and Ani



discussed his sudden departure from Bradley. Ani understands that he was forced to leave his teaching position because he had brought what the school considered a false accusation against Dean when Ani would not report what happened. The officials at the school wanted to stay in the Bartons' good graces because they had donated the money to have the new cafeteria built. One can assume the Bartons probably insisted that Andrew (Mr. Larson) be fired for accusing Dean of hurting Ani. Remember this is not the first time that Dean and Andrew (Mr. Larson) had a run in. After catching Dean ogling Ani's breasts Andrew (Mr. Larson) gave Dean a detention. The Bartons already are probably unhappy with Andrew (Mr. Larson) for getting their son into trouble. The fear of losing the Bartons' financial support is probably why the headmaster pretended to ignore the cut and bruise on Ani's cheek when she was in his office.

Notice also in this section the chemistry between Andrew (Mr. Larson) and Ani. Ani suspects that Andrew (Mr. Larson) liked her in high school but could not speak his affection because of the age difference between them. He admits to Ani that he pushed Luke for the dinner because he wanted to see what she was like as an adult. Ani is attracted to her former teacher because he does take what happened to her seriously and tries to comfort her when she shows how broken she still is.

Discussion Question 1

Compare and contrast the way Luke and Andrew (Mr. Larson) react to Ani's memories of Bradley.

Discussion Question 2

Why do you think that Ani reacts so strongly when she and Andrew (Mr. Larson) crawl under the desk to avoid the security guard at Bradley?

Discussion Question 3

Discuss Ani's change in opinion of Aaron, the director for the documentary. How do you perceive him? Do you think he is a friend or foe to Ani and her cause?

Vocabulary

proposition, facetious, berated, posturing, nonchalance, ricocheting, feral, contrite



Chapter 14

Summary

In Chapter 14, at the hospital Ani put her clothes in an evidence bag and put on a hospital gown to await her examination. Although Ani thought she should have been crying she considered that she was not because she was probably in shock. She was calm until the cop tried to open her hospital gown for the examination and then she fought the cop off like she would have fought Dean off.

Ani was given a sedative that she did not wake up from until the following morning. She thought it was still the evening before until her mother told her differently. She began to cry. Her mother went for a doctor and returned with Anita Perkins, a forensic psychologist. Anita told Ani that Ansilee, Olivia, Theodore, Liam, Peyton, Ben and Arthur were all dead, and that Dean had a serious injury and might not walk again. Anita asked Ani if they could talk about Arthur. Ani felt comfortable with Anita and began talking about her fight with Arthur and then reports in her narrative that she told Anita “everything” (246).

When Ani was dismissed from the hospital and allowed to go home her mother wanted her to rest in her room and not watch television but television was the only thing Ani thought would calm her. Ani’s mom made her promise not to watch the news but Ani did anyway. She learned Arthur and Ben had set pipe bombs near the table where the popular students sat but that only one had detonated. She was horrified when she learned some students had lost limbs. Her mother told her Hilary had lost a foot. Ani’s father took the remote control to the television but left Ani with a pile of women’s magazines. It was while reading these magazines that Ani got the desire to move away to the city where people were glamorous like those in the magazines.

Detectives Dixon and Vencino visited Ani at home to talk about Ani’s relationship with Dean. When she did not answer their question at first why she was mad at Dean her mother, who had been in the kitchen fixing coffee, asked what was happening. In the next scene Ani and her mother were at the Ardmore police station talking to Dan, the lawyer Ani’s parents hired. Ani told him the entire story. He referred to what Dean and the other boys did to her as rapes, the first time she realized the other things that happened to her could be considered rapes as well. It was not until Dan was asking Ani about the gun that she realized it was believed she was involved in the shootings.

When she was allowed to go outside to see her parents, Ani told them the detectives thought she was involved in the shootings. She then had to tell her story again on record for the detectives. She questioned the detectives about the future of Bradley and told them she wanted everything to go back to normal. Vencino told Ani that everything about her life would go back to normal since the people who had caused her so much grief were gone. He even went so far as to call her “The luckiest girl alive” (264).



When Ani got out of the shower the next day her mother was on the phone. Ani suspected Dan had called to tell her about the rapes so she listened on the extension in her room. Even though Ani's mother blamed her daughter for the rapes she seemed to feel it was preposterous to think Ani had helped to plan the shootings. Dan told her the police had no evidence but that they were looking into Ani's actions.

Ani's mother yelled at her, and then gave her the silent treatment. A few days later Ani and her lawyer were called to come back to the police station. They were shown copies of the pages of the Bradley yearbook with the comments she and Arthur had made about the popular kids on the pages that bore their pictures. The detectives also had copies of notes that she and Arthur had passed back and forth during class. In one of them Arthur offered to kill Dean and the others for her. Ani had written back jokingly asking when he planned to commit the crime. She did not know how to make the detectives understand that she and Arthur were just joking around.

During the interview Ani shared with the detectives that she had believed Arthur wanted to hurt her when she met up with him the day of the shooting. The detectives let her know that Dean had told them Arthur had offered the gun to Ani to let her shoot Dean and that Ani had reached for the gun. Ani agreed that she did reach for the gun but had intended to use it to shoot Arthur. When Dixon accused Ani of being a liar Ani decided it was in her best interest to begin lying as well.

Ani's mother insisted she go to Liam's funeral even though Ani said she did not want to go to the funeral of the boy who raped her. Those who knew who Ani was refused to sit near her and her mother at the service. On the way home another member of the soccer team ran Ani and her mother off the road with his car.

Even though it was discouraged Ani decided to go back to school at Bradley. There was never enough evidence found against her to charge her with any crime but she had already been found guilty by public opinion. Dean had told his lawyers that Arthur had given the gun to Ani telling her to shoot him like they had agreed. Despite his injuries Dean wrote a bestselling book and became a motivational speaker. It was during a school trip to New York City that Ani saw a woman talking on her cell phone demanding that samples be sent. Ani admired the woman believing that no one could hurt her. She made up her mind at that point to work as hard as she needed to in order to become that woman whom no one could hurt.

Analysis

The aftermath of the shooting is perhaps more traumatic for Ani than the actual experience of the tragedy. As if Dean had not already caused enough trouble for Ani he accuses her of helping Arthur to plan the shootings. "The most damning claim came from Dean, who insisted Arthur handed me the gun and told me to kill him 'just like we'd planned'" (286). Because Dean had been paralyzed by Arthur's shot Ani knew that people would believe him out of pity before they would believe her since she received no physical injuries during the attack.



Because of Dean's accusation the different ways in which Ani and Arthur blew off steam from the treatment they received from the popular kids is used as evidence against Ani. There are few children who have not filled their school yearbooks with graffiti particularly in respect to people they did not like. In Arthur and Ani's case they have covered the photos of Olivia, Hilary and Dean in particular with degrading marks and phrases. In a series of notes they joked about killing Dean. Ani had taken none of this seriously and had not believed that Arthur was serious about any of his threats either. When the detectives got their hands on the yearbook and notes, however, they took what they found very seriously, a message to those trying to deal with bullies that they should watch what they say, even in moments of anger.

As Ani presents it the case seems to be very skewed in Dean's direction by the detectives and psychologist. While they are interrogating Ani even Detectives Vencino and Dixon seem to take Dean's side in the case. They cannot seem to see any reason why Dean would lie about his statement. "You've been lying to us from the moment we met you" (276) Detective Dixon tells Ani when she counters their account of her act of reaching for the gun when Arthur offered to hand it to her. She tells him that she had intended to shoot Arthur, not Dean. Ani is sharp enough to realize that Dixon lied to her when he put on his "friendly mask" (276) and fooled her into trying to defend herself.

The title of the novel takes on new meaning as the words "Take her in, folks! Right here in our midst! The luckiest girl alive" (264) come out of Detective Vencino's mouth. The detective probably used a sarcastic and hateful tone to deem Ani lucky. He believes that since the shooting has worked out in her favor, with her still alive and those who hurt her gone, she is pleased with what has happened. In reality Ani is far from being the luckiest girl alive. She has been raped, she has survived a school shooting, and is now being accused of having some role in that school shooting.

It is at this point in Ani's life that she decides she wants to do whatever it takes to be a rich and powerful person. One of the first things that initiates this desire in Ani is the magazines her father brings her to read after he hides the television remote control from her. "In their world, everything was fabulous" (254) Ani says of these magazines. Just as she took refuge in the magazines as she tried to recover from the trauma of what had happened to her, she later took refuge in being the type of person she believed these magazines portrayed. A second experience that makes Ani want to become powerful is her chance meeting of a female executive during a field trip to New York. Ani believed this woman could not be hurt because she was so powerful and influential. She wanted that same kind of protection for herself.

Even during this stressful point in her life Ani receives very little sympathy or support from her parents. While she is in the hospital after the shooting Ani gets the feeling that her mother needs Ani to comfort her instead of the other way around. Ani's father yells at her on the way home from the hospital and then complains about Ani leaving the light in the hallway turned on because she was scared to be in the dark. When the car in which Ani and her mother were driving home from Liam's memorial service is run off the road by a carload of students Ani's mother asks if Ani is okay but then does not give her daughter a chance to say that she is not okay or make any kind of response. To make



matters worse for Ani when her mother learns about the rapes she is angry with Ani and blames her for what happened. She does not understand Ani's reasons for not wanting to go to Liam's memorial service. "He died a horrible death, and while he may have made some mistakes in his life he was just a child" (277) Ani's mother told her when Ani refused at first to go to Liam's funeral. She forced Ani to go by threatening not to pay for her to go back to Bradley if she did not attend the funeral.

It is surprising that even after everything that happened to Ani at Bradley she still wanted to return to school there. Some of this desire to stay at Bradley had to do with Ani's desire to be a fabulous professional woman. She believed that an education at Bradley would be what would get her to her goal. Ani also admits that she was comfortable at Bradley despite the bad memories. "Maligned as I was at Bradley, I found comfort in knowing where I stood, that I could just go to class and eat lunch with the Shark and go home to study, focus on chiseling my tunnel out of there" (p. 285). Since Ani has already made a bad reputation for herself first at her Catholic school and now at Bradley she finds comfort in the fact that she has already hit rock bottom there.

Discussion Question 1

Does it surprise you that Anita gives a bad report of Ani's emotional state after the shooting? How do you think a person who survived a school shooting should behave?

Discussion Question 2

Why do you think Ani decides to start lying after she realizes she is the only one involved in her case who is telling the truth? Why is her decision to lie significant?

Discussion Question 3

Do you understand why the detectives might think Ani was involved in the shooting? Is there any evidence to indicate that she was not involved in it?

Vocabulary

nostalgic, candid, corroborate, formidable, lurid, preposterous, plausible, amicable, insidiously, eschewed, hermaphrodite, demented, condone, peripheral, injectables, callously, reconcile, maligned, pristine, wanderlust



Chapter 15

Summary

In Chapter 15, Ani knocked on Mrs. Finnerman's door with the camera crew behind her. After the two women had sat down on the couch Aaron suggested they go through a photo album together. Mrs. Finnerman showed Ani a picture of Arthur with a dog. She described how Arthur had loved the dog in a way that she did not think was compatible with his diagnosis as a psychopath. Through analysis the detectives decided it was Arthur who had planned and put into motion the attacks at the school. As Ani sat with Mrs. Finnerman she said she remembered Arthur being the first person who was kind to her at Bradley and that he had stood up for her when others were turning on him. Even though Ani hoped Arthur had felt real emotions for her, Anita had told her he probably did not. She said he had scored off the charts on tests to determine psychopathy and that he was probably manipulating her.

Police reports said that Arthur and Ben had kidded each other about killing their classmates all through middle school but it was not until Ben tried to kill himself that Arthur knew his friend was ready to hear his plan. Because Ben was depressed and suicidal he agreed to participate. Additionally, Ben was not homosexual so the rumor that Olivia started about Ben and Arthur having a relationship only made Ben more angry. Arthur promised Ben he could be the one to kill Olivia. Arthur was just angry with everyone who was not as intelligent as he was. In her report Anita indicated that Arthur had found a new "cheerleader, someone whose pain and anger padded the void of violence" (296). Ani knew she was that person and wondered if Arthur had planned to ask her to participate in his ambush if she had not made him so mad the last time they saw each other.

When Ani mentioned that she had the photo of Arthur and his father with the seashells Mrs. Finnerman asked for the photo back. She mentioned that she had been looking for it. At this point Mrs. Finnerman grabbed her head and began crying in pain. A member of the camera crew found her migraine medication. Mrs. Finnerman apologized to them saying that it was just too hard to talk to them. As they left Mrs. Finnerman's house Aaron told Ani that he believed Arthur's mother was the one person in the whole affair for whom he felt most sorry. Ani said she knew she would never make a good victim. She had also told Andrew (Mr. Larson) that the night before when they had gone back to his parents' house. They shared a drink and then laid down on his childhood bed together. Ani was surprised when she went to sleep with her former teacher laying next to her.

After meeting with Mrs. Finnerman, Ani had called her mother and canceled their dinner plans at Yangming. She invited Arthur (Mr. Larson) to take advantage of the reservations instead. Unfortunately Ani's mother and aunt were also at the restaurant. Ani pretended she had to use the restroom and went instead to find Arthur (Mr. Larson) who had slipped out the door. She met him in the parking lot and told him what had



happened. He responded that maybe it was for the best. She asked him if they could just go somewhere after dinner and talk but he admitted he did not just want to talk with her. Ani grew angry telling him that she had just needed a friend and not someone else to tell her what she should do. He challenged her to do what was best for her and break up with Luke. She made excuses, telling him that having Luke might be the best her life would ever get. She walked off after she said her mother was probably wondering where she was and thought about how she did not deserve Andrew.

Back in the restaurant Ani's mother told her to she needed to pull herself together after Ani snapped at both her mother and her Aunt Lindy. Ani's mother told Ani she was close to losing Luke because she had been behaving so strangely. She warned Ani to begin acting like her old self if she wanted to marry Luke. Ani knew her mother had won so she was kind the rest of the evening. Andrew was still in the parking lot when she left. She pretended not to notice him there.

The following morning Ani met Dean at the park that had been built on the land that had once been known as the Spot. When Ani began talking about what Dean had done to her at his house and also at Olivia's house Dean asked the cameramen to stop taping. As she looked at Aaron she realized he had no idea what it was that Ani thought Dean was apologizing for. After the cameras were turned off Dean asked if he and Ani could speak in private.

He told her that he planned to apologize for the wrongful accusations that he made against her by saying she was working with Ben and Arthur in the shooting. He said he was confused at the time and the police only made it worse. Dean said he had also been angry and that Ani was someone on which he could take out his anger. He said he had not apologized sooner because Ani had come through the shooting okay.

Dean said he would apologize in private to Ani for what had happened at his house. When she asked her told her it had not been planned even though there was some competition to see who would get the new girl. He did not even know about what Liam had done until the next day. Ani made him admit that the three boys had raped her.

As a present tense aside Ani indicates to her reader she does not feel like she let Dean get away with anything for not apologizing to her publicly for the rape. She felt this way because she had often thought if she had gotten her hands on Arthur's gun she would have shot Dean first and Arthur second.

Analysis

Ani makes a startling admission in this section of the novel. "I may wonder what I would have said if Arthur came to me and asked me to be a part of his plan, but I don't wonder as much about what would have happened had Arthur actually turned the gun over to me" (318). Ani tells her reader that if Arthur had actually given her the gun she might have shot Dean in the crotch before turning the gun on Arthur. This perhaps explains



why Ani has managed not to feel as much anger toward Dean and perhaps even why she agreed to meet with him.

Of course Aaron is also surprised by the things of which Ani accuses Dean once they begin talking. Dean had wanted to make a public apology to Ani because he was writing a book about forgiveness. The apology for telling officers that Ani was involved in the shooting would further his cause. Apologizing to Ani for raping her was not in his best interests so he had decided to gloss that over. Being the intelligent person that she is Ani made Dean apologize to her in “private” for the rapes knowing his voice was being recorded by the video cameras.

Ani faces a situation in her love life to which there is no good answer. She is attracted to Andrew (Mr. Larson) and he is attracted to her. She needs him as a friend who supports her and believes her story. When he tells her that he wants to do more than just talk to her she gets angry with him. She gets angrier when he confronts her with the idea that Luke is not the best match for her and that she needs to break off her relationship with him. Ani’s anger turns to fear when he mother warns he just a few minutes later that she is close to losing Luke because of her attitude.

Arthur’s mother is a victim that has been largely ignored until this point in the novel. Because it was her son who attacked students at the school she feels a certain amount of guilt she did not recognize her son’s intentions. At the same time she must feel guilty for all the lives that her son cut short. Additionally she is also left wondering if her son was really the monster that police psychologists made him out to be.

Ani’s emerald ring is a significant symbol again in this section of the novel. When Dean sees it and recognizes that Ani is getting married it is a sign to him that Ani’s life has turned out okay. Regardless of what he and the other boys did to Ani and what she witnessed during the school shooting Ani survived with no physical wounds. Dean still harbors anger because he was paralyzed in the attack even though he has used his disability to make money. “There’s nothing else to it but that. Anger. And resentment. That you came out okay,” Dean tells Ani as he describes why he lied about her role in the shootings fourteen years ago.

It is with Dean’s admission that he retaliated on Ani because she appeared not to have been hurt in the shooting makes her realize that by putting on a facade of perfection she has only furthered people’s beliefs she was not hurt by what she witnessed. “All these people so sure I’d come out okay, and I only have myself to blame, for putting on the greatest show on earth” (314) Ani thinks to herself when Dean tells her she looks like she came out of the shooting okay.

Discussion Question 1

If you were Ani would you want others to know that Dean had raped you? Would you want to deal with the public backlash from that admission?



Discussion Question 2

Do you agree with Aaron that Ani is a tragic hero? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 3

Do you think it is best that Ani and Andrew (Mr. Larson) broke off their affair? In what ways would an affair had hurt both of them?

Vocabulary

converged, forbade, broached, blithe, detonation, rambunctious, coiffed, disparity, vindication, callously, procreation, diabolical

Chapters 16 and 17

Summary

In Chapter 16, as soon as Ani got home Luke told her the job he had been offered in London had come through. Ani realized she had an opportunity in which she had leverage over Luke and said she'd talk to Lolo. She then breached her favor. The production company wanted to film their wedding for the documentary. They would provide them with a free profession wedding video if they were allowed to do it.

Ani's tears began to flow when she told Luke how good the weekend had been for her. When she mentioned talking to Dean, Luke became angry. When Ani told Luke they did not talk about the rape he stopped cold. She realized at that point that Luke did not really think what had happened to her was rape. Ani changed the subject by telling him that Dean had changed his story and realized she did not have anything to do with the shootings. She walked over to the bookshelves and began looking through the folder where she kept the mementoes from Bradley. She was unable to find the picture of Arthur. Luke consoled her telling her it would turn up.

After getting her hair done for the rehearsal dinner Ani and Nell hurried to Ani's apartment where Ani quickly cleaned the food out of the fridge. When she grabbed a trash bag from under the sink she lodged free a green object that fell onto the floor and spun.

Ani's story fast forwards to the rehearsal dinner where Garrett, Luke's brother, was talking about Ani describing her as kooky but sweet. When Garrett talked about how Ani needed someone to calm her down when she started to "spin...out of control" (328) Ani was aware that Luke had made fun of her with his brother. Ani excused herself to go to the bathroom. Once she was in the bathroom she dug the seashell out of her purse. When Nell finally came to check on her Ani told Nell what she wanted to do. Nell said there would be a "shit show" (331).

As they headed away from Nantucket on the ferry Nell brought Ani a beer. Ani thought about the look on Luke's face when he saw the green seashell she was holding. When Ani pushed him he told her that when his friend was in town the weekend Ani was gone for the taping he had brought cocaine with him. The friend needed a picture on which to line out the cocaine. Luke said he threw the picture and frame away because it broke when someone knocked it over. Ani noticed that Luke managed to make himself sound like a victim even as he apologized to her. She told him she wanted to call off the wedding.

In Chapter 17, there was much arguing after Ani made her announcement. Mrs. Harrison seemed both angry and understanding. Ani's mother was furious. When Nell and Ani finally got to their hotel it was too late for room service but Nell pulled some



strings and got food for Ani. After she finished eating she slept, thanks to one of Nell's pills.

Later, Ani took the job at Glow magazine because it meant more money. Lolo indicated she still planned to have Ani work with her if she ever made it to the New York Times. Moving to the present tense Ani tells her reader she misses her engagement ring and the security she thought it gave her but also enjoys knowing there is a possibility she might meet a man who could understand and love her for who she is.

Back in the past tense Ani tells her reader she also had to redo her introduction for the documentary. As she introduced herself as TifAni FaNelli she remembered how Aaron had called her to let her know they had gotten Dean's admission that he raped her on tape. Aaron warned Ani there would be backlash if they decided to report the rape, but she commented that there should be backlash because Dean had done a terrible thing to her. Aaron started to correct Ani but changed his mind and agreed with her.

Analysis

The green seashell is an important symbol in this section of the novel. When Ani finds it she knows something happened to the photo and that Luke is probably responsible. It is this shell that finally clues Ani to the fact that Luke does not really love her and accept her like she deserves to be loved and accepted. It is the discovery of this shell that really wakes Ani up to the idea that Luke is not the best person for her. He may be good looking and rich but he is also thoughtless and selfish.

When Aaron talks to Ani about the ending of the documentary he tells her that she is "really are emerging as this sort of tragic hero" (321). In many ways Ani does fit the definition of the literary tragic hero. She has a tragic flaw in that she wanted to be popular and was willing to do anything it took to be popular. This set her up to be taken advantage of by Dean and the other boys. Even after she was abused she continued to try to be part of the popular group because that label meant so much to her. Despite her desire to be part of the popular group Ani is kicked out the group because of the accusations Andrew (Mr. Larson) made against Dean. At this point Ani becomes an outcast. The public's opinion of her drops even lower when Dean accuses Ani of being part of Ben and Arthur's plan for the school shooting.

Unlike most tragic heroes, however, Ani pulls herself back up to the top. She fights against the reputation that she was unfairly given and even finds the strength in herself to think about pursuing a rape charge against Dean. Although Aaron, the producer of the documentary thought that Ani's happily ever after would be best defined by taping her wedding for broadcast with the documentary Ani is actually doing better for herself by dumping Luke. It is her happily ever after to finally be able to accept herself and what happened to her, and be able to admit that she was treated unfairly.



Discussion Question 1

Do you agree with Aaron's description of Ani as a tragic hero? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 2

What is the tone as the novel ends? Why is it significant that the author have Ani's story end with her introducing herself as TifAni FaNelli?

Discussion Question 3

Ani describes Mrs. Harrison as being both sympathetic and angry when Ani broke off the engagement. It is understood why she was angry. Why do you think she might have been sympathetic?

Vocabulary

rarity, ricocheting, absolve, prestige, magnanimous



Characters

TifAni "Ani" FaNelli

TifAni FaNelli is the main character and narrator of this novel. She appears at two different ages in her life. Her life as a fourteen-year-old high school student going by the name of TifAni is described as well as her perfectly planned life as Ani FaNelli, soon to be Ani Harrison.

Ani has put together what she believes is the perfect life to present to the people who will be watching a documentary she will be participating in about The Bradley School. She has a prestigious job as an editor at The Women's Magazine. She is engaged to a rich man from an affluent family and is starving herself to lose weight so she will be thin for the camera. As time for the documentary gets closer, Ani becomes more and more irked by how Luke, her fiancé, gives her no support for deciding to participate in the documentary.

The documentary will focus on a school shooting at Bradley when Ani was still a freshman. Ani managed to escape the school without being injured, but she saw much of the carnage as students she knew were shot and killed. Because Ani was friends with Arthur, one of the boys who planned the shooting, it was suspected Ani might have had some role in it as well. To make matters worse Dean, a boy who was paralyzed by a bullet, told police officers that Arthur had handed Ani the gun and told her to shoot Dean like they had planned.

During the filming of the documentary, Ani gets a chance to tell her side of the story of what happened during the shooting. She is surprised when Dean requests to meet with her and apologize. It is not until they are face to face that Ani realizes that Dean wants to apologize for lying about her part in the shooting, not for raping her. Ani does get Dean to admit he raped her, an admission that is recorded by the camera crew.

At the conclusion of the novel, Ani breaks off her engagement with Luke after she discovers that he allowed his friend to use the picture of Andrew and his father to cut his cocaine on and the picture was destroyed. This discovery is the final straw for Ani as she had come to realize that Luke was childish and would not support her decisions. She realizes she could do better for herself.

Dean Barton

Dean Barton is a junior at Bradley. He is a member of the group of popular boys that Ani refers to as the Hairy Legs. Dean takes a liking to Ani and calls her by the nickname "Finny." Dean is a member of the soccer team. He is a member of the Barton family. This family donated money to Bradley to have a new cafeteria built.



Dean becomes interested in Ani after he watches her jumping up steps as instructed by her coach during cross country practice. Dean appears to have been intrigued by Ani's big breasts. He is given detention for smarting off to Andrew (Mr. Larson) when the teacher intervenes in Dean's ogling.

Dean invites Ani to a party at his parents house when they are out of town one weekend. He instructs her not to tell Hilary or Olivia she will be attending the party. After Ani has had a good deal of alcohol and is incoherent, Dean rapes her by forcing her to give him oral sex. Dean tries to rape Ani again at a party at Olivia's house. He demands that Ani leave the popular group after Andrew (Mr. Larson) has Dean called into the office because the teacher reported that Dean had assaulted Ani.

Dean is one of Arthur's targets in his attack at Bradley. Dean is first injured by the pipe bomb that exploded and then later is shot in the groin by Arthur. When he is interrogated by detectives, Dean tells them that Arthur had handed Ani the gun and told her to shoot Dean like they had planned.

It is fourteen years later when Ani and Dean return to Bradley for their parts in the documentary that Dean apologizes to Ani for telling the detectives she was part of Arthur and Ben's plan. Ani also confronts Dean about being raped and gets him to admit that he and the others raped her.

Luke Harrison

Luke Harrison is Ani's fiancé. Luke comes from a wealthy family. Ani is attracted to Luke because she believes he is so perfect that nothing bad can happen to him or to her while she is with him. It is when Ani witnesses Luke bullying one of his friends that she realizes he is not as perfect as she once thought. She wonders if he is the sort of person who might even have taken advantage of a drunk girl in high school or college.

Luke belittles Ani by not taking her seriously. Not only does he not take her career seriously, he does not take seriously how deeply she has been hurt by her past. He believes that she should get over the pain of her past. He cannot understand why she is not able to put what happened to her behind her. At one point Ani realizes that Luke does not even think what happened to her was rape.

When Ani realized that Luke had given the picture that she had stolen from Arthur to his friend to use to line out his cocaine and that it had been broken Ani was furious. He had destroyed something that was important to her and had not even had the courtesy to tell her. She also realized during a toast being made to the couple at their rehearsal dinner that Luke had made fun of her and the odd fears she had as a result of her rape and the school shooting she had survived that Luke did not respect her. It was at this point she called off her engagement to him.



Nell

Nell is Ani's best friend. They met in college when Ani helped Nell out of the boys' dorm after she passed out there after a party. Ani had tried to copy Nell's behavior and style because Nell and Luke were dating. Ani describes Nell as being beautiful but having enough self confidence that she is willing to go out even in ratty clothes. Ani describes Nell as being "the most beautiful WASP whose stinger pierced everyone but me" (20).

Nell is angry with Ani for continuing to stay with Luke even after she realizes that he is not the right man for her. She is additionally frustrated with Ani for the crash diet she goes on before her wedding. Nell criticizes her friend's drastic weight loss and begs her to eat. When Ani makes up her mind to break off her engagement with Luke, it is Nell who supports her decision and helps her through the break up.

Andrew aka Mr. Larson

Andrew (Mr. Larson) is the English teacher who helped Ani the most during her high school years. He is referred to most often as Andrew when Ani meets him after she has become a success in the world's terms. While she was in high school Ani referred to her teacher as Mr. Larson. Mr. Larson happened to find Ani at a gas station when she was asking directions to Arthur's house. Once she started telling Mr. Larson what happened, she could not stop until she had told him everything. Mr. Larson encourages Ani to tell the headmaster what Dean did to her but Ani refuses to do so.

When they meet again as adults, Ani and Andrew (Mr. Larson) are attracted one another and almost engage in an affair. Ani fantasizes about Andrew because he supported her and believed in her while she was in high school, before she made something of herself. He has been the only one to tell Ani that she did nothing to deserve the way she was treated by Liam, Dean, and Peyton. Andrew also seems infatuated by Ani and the success that she has made of herself.

Arthur Finnerman

Arthur Finnerman is one of the boys who planned and carried out the shooting at The Bradley School. Ani killed Arthur with a knife when she came face-to-face with him during the massacre. Arthur is highly intelligent but also tests off the charts on the scale as a psychopath. Ani, who had believed she and Arthur were friends, struggles with the idea that Arthur was only cleverly manipulating her. She wants to believe he actually felt some friendship for her.

Even though Arthur is bullied by the popular students because he is gay, the police do not believe the bullying is what set him off. They believe he had been planning his attack for some time and had been waiting for a time when Ben, another student who had been bullied by the same students, was in a mindset to help him with his plan.



Olivia Kaplan

Although Ani's description of Olivia Kaplan does not portray her as being very attractive, Olivia is one of the popular students at school. She is described as having fluffy hair and a nose covered with blackheads. Liam, the boy Ani likes, winds up dating Olivia. Olivia is killed by Ben during the school shooting. Arthur had promised Ben that he could have Olivia because Olivia had started a rumor about Ben being a homosexual.

Olivia and Hilary appear to be the ring leaders of the popular girls. Olivia seems more hateful and cruel than Hilary. She comes from a background of violence. Her father is prone to violence and often takes his anger out on Olivia. It is also rumored that Olivia's parents prefer Olivia's sister. Because she feels insignificant Olivia has an eating disorder. She is very thin and eats only candy.

Ben Hunter

Ben Hunter is a boy who was picked on by the popular students since he was in middle school. The bullying came to a culmination when a group of boys held Ben down so Dean could have a bowel movement on Ben's chest during an eighth grade graduation party. Ben slit his wrists in an attempt to kill himself and is hospitalized. Because Ben is still suicidal Arthur is able to talk Ben into participating in his plan to kill the Bradley students who had tormented him. After his rampage at the school Ben shoots and kills himself.

Peyton Powell

Peyton Powell is a junior at The Bradley School. He is also a member of the soccer team with Dean. During Dean's party Ani wakes from her drunken stupor and sees Peyton giving her oral sex. During the shooting, Ben shoots Peyton in the face. Peyton is alive but the students are unable to save him because the fire from the cafeteria is spreading to the Brenner Baulkin Room. They try to pick Peyton up and take him with them but they are unable to carry him. Ani is haunted by the thought that she and the others left Peyton in the burning room when he was still alive. It is determined by the coroner's report that Peyton died of smoke inhalation.

Mrs. Kathleen Finnerman

Kathleen Finnerman is Arthur's mother. She was abandoned by Arthur's father, who was no good and would not work, when Arthur was still a young child. Even before she was abandoned by her husband Mrs. Finnerman had gotten a job at Bradley because she knew the opportunities it would allow Arthur.

Mrs. Finnerman talks to Ani about Arthur as part of the documentary. Even though psychologists determined that Arthur was a psychopath, Mrs. Finnerman did not believe



her son was devoid of emotions, like the doctors said he was. She bases her decision on the fact that when his pet dog died Arthur cried.

Mrs. Hurst

Mrs. Hurst is the substitute teacher who took Arthur (Mr. Larson's) place when he disappeared from the school. Ani suspects the teacher had learned about Ani's reputation from her daughter, also a student at Bradley, who was a malicious gossip. When Mrs. Hurst caught Arthur and Ani passing notes, she had Ani come to the board and write an example of an appositive phrase as Mrs. Hurst dictated it. The teacher instructed Ani to write on the board: TifAni, a cheap mall rat. When Arthur cursed the teacher for making Ani write a derogatory phrase about herself on the board, Arthur was expelled.

Antia Perkins

Anita Perkins is the forensic psychologist who consults with the Philadelphia police force on the shooting at Bradley. She talks to Ani while Ani is still in the hospital the day after the tragedy. Ani trusts Anita and tells her everything that had happened. After finishing her investigation, Anita determines Ani might have been involved in the shootings because she does not seem emotional and upset enough over the deaths and injuries suffered by her classmates. Anita also believes Ani is happy about returning to school since the students who had given her so much grief are gone.

Hilary

Hilary is one of the two most popular girls at Bradley. Together she and Olivia make up the pair who are called the HOs. On Ani's first day of school Hilary approaches her in a way that indicates she wants to be friends with Ani. Even after Olivia and the others have discarded Ani, Hilary seems noncommittal. When Arthur and Ben's homemade bomb exploded in the cafeteria one of Hilary's feet was blown off. Ani tried to contact Hilary after the attack at the school, but her letter was returned to her unopened.

Spencer Hawkins

Spencer Hawkins is the girl from The Bradley School who talks to Ani about a writing job. Even though Ani likes the fact the girl is not mean to Loretta, Ani begins to dislike Spencer because she does not seem to be willing to do whatever it takes to make her dream of becoming a writer come true. Spencer really irritates Ani when she asks her about what happened at Bradley and then calls Ani by her full name, TifAni, and then laughs like she made a joke.



Liam Ross

Liam Ross is a boy who is new to The Bradley School the same year that Ani begins going to the school. Ani has a huge crush on Liam and believes he likes her as well. At Dean's party Liam rapes Ani while she is unconscious. Afterward, Ani requests Liam go to Planned Parenthood with her to get the morning after pill. Liam is shot by Ben when he ducked into a classroom while the group of students he and Ani were with were trying to escape.

Dina FaNelli

Dina FaNelli is Ani's mother. She is vain and tries to instill her vanity onto her daughter. Dina does not work and overspends in order to try to live the life she thinks she deserves. She blames Ani for putting herself in a position where she was raped. Dina is overjoyed by Ani's engagement to Luke. She believes this engagement means her daughter is successful. Dina is outraged by her daughter when she breaks off her engagement to Luke.

Bobby FaNelli

Bobby FaNelli is Ani's father. He is a distant father who spends a good deal of time at work. The only positive thing that Ani remembers about her father is that he got her a stack of women's magazines when she was stuck at home after the shooting. The magazines helped Ani to realize that she wanted to live the kind of life that the people who were in the magazine lived.

Beth aka The Shark

Beth, who is called the Shark behind her back, earned her nickname because her eyes are set so far apart they appear to be on different sides of her head, like a shark's eyes. Beth is one of the few people who is kind to Ani from the beginning of her time at the Bradley School and continues to be friends with Ani after the shooting. Beth survives the shooting because Arthur allows her to leave the school without hurting her.

Aaron

Aaron is the man who is the director for the documentary about the school shooting at Bradley. Ani at first thinks that Aaron is insincere. She later realizes that he is sympathetic to her. As he learns more about her story, Aaron gains more and more respect for Ani and what she suffered at Dean's hands. After Ani gets Dean to admit to raping her, Aaron agrees to let her use the audio footage to accuse Dean of the rape.



Detectives Dixon and Vencino

Detectives Dixon and Vencino are the two detectives who spend the most time interrogating Ani about the shooting. They seem to be trying their best to link Ani to the shooting. Ani learns later that Dean had told the detectives that Arthur had handed Ani the gun and told her to shoot Dean like they had talked about. The detectives treat Ani in a derogatory way and even go so far as to accuse her of lying to them.

Loretta

Loretta is the woman who works at the news stand at Ani's office. She suffers with burns over most of her body and always smells bad. Ani always introduces the girls who come to see her about writing advice to Loretta. She decides how much help she will give them based on how well they treat Loretta.

Hallsy

Hallsy is Luke's cousin. She angers Ani by telling a story about a friend to whom she had sent a bouquet of flowers as comfort because the friend's son had come out as a homosexual. Ani is upset by the woman's disrespect for people who are different from her.

Theodore "Teddy"

Theodore "Teddy" is one of the outcasts at The Bradley School. He is in the same portion of the cafeteria as Ani when Ben and Arthur begin their massacre. Teddy is shot and killed by Ben when the group of students tried to leave the Brenner Baulkin Room and escape through a stairwell.

Chris Bailey

Chris Bailey is a friend of Luke. When Ani meets Bailey she notices that Luke spends the evening bullying his friend. She wonders if Luke was always that mean to Bailey. She also wonders if Luke was a bully in high school and if he would have thought it was okay to take advantage of a drunk girl.

Bob Friedman

Bob Friedman was the teacher in the classroom next door to Mrs. Hurst's room. Mrs. Hurst called for Bob's help when Arthur faced off against her. Even though he had to have seen what Mrs. Hurst had Ani write on the board, he said nothing to Mrs. Hurst. He only escorted Arthur out of the room as he was asked.



Eleanor Tuckerman

Eleanor Tuckerman is one of Ani's superiors at the magazine where she works. Even though Eleanor pretends to be a know it all, she really has very little talent. She often steals story ideas from Ani.

Ansilee Chase

Ansilee Chase is a senior at The Bradley School when she is shot by Ben. She was the first person that Ben shot when he found the group of students, including Ani, hiding under the table in the Brenner Baulkin Room.

Daniel "Dan" Rosenberg

Daniel "Dan" Rosenberg is the lawyer that Ani's father hired to represent Ani. He told Ani that she needed to tell her parents about the way Dean and the other boys assaulted her. Since Ani did not want to tell her parents herself, Dan told Ani's mother for her.

Penelope "LoLo" Vincent

Penelope "LoLo" Vincent is Ani's boss at the magazine. It is rumored that she has been promised a spot at the New York Times and that she plans to take Ani with her.



Symbols and Symbolism

Emerald Engagement Ring

This emerald engagement ring that Luke gave Ani symbolizes the perfection she believes she has achieved in her life. The ring was Luke's grandmother's ring, a family heirloom. Ani felt that in order for her to participate in the documentary about a shooting at her high school she had to have that ring on her finger. It is a symbol that she had checked all the boxes in her life proving that she had her dream job as well as a finance who was loaded.

Bright Green Pen

This pen that wrote in bright green ink is at first a symbol of Ani's attempt to show her support for Bradley, her new school. Later, when detectives find the ink from her pen in her handwriting in Arthur's yearbook, they think that Ani is involved in helping to plan the shooting at Bradley.

The Windshield

The windshield is an object that Ani uses to symbolize the facade she wears to cover her real feelings. She says that Andrew's (Mr. Larson's) direct line to her feelings is a spider crack, symbolic of a flaw, in this facade. It is when Andrew (Mr. Larson) admits to Ani that he wants to do more than just talk to her that this facade crumbles.

Olivia's Bruise

When Ani first sees a bruise near Olivia's mouth when she tries to talk to the girl after the ruined party at Olivia's house, Ani believes this bruise is representative of her funeral. The funeral that Ani envisions is the end of her inclusion with the popular crowd at school.

Ani's Running Shorts

Hilary and Olivia steal these shorts from Ani after cross country practice to embarrass Ani. They represent not only the things about herself that Ani wishes she could keep hidden, like the smell of her sweat and menstrual blood, but also the length to which the popular kids will go to embarrass her.



A Rifle

This rifle represents an attempt made by Arthur's father to interest his gay son in a masculine sport. Arthur later uses this rifle when he and Ben attack students at the Bradley School. Dean is one of the students shot by Arthur using this rifle.

Bradley Middle School Yearbook

This yearbook and the comments that Arthur and Ani wrote in it about other students represent their frustration and anger with the way they are being treated by the popular kids at school. After the school shooting, the yearbook is taken as evidence and the things Arthur and Ani had written are used as evidence that they had a vendetta against the students who were killed.

Swedish Fish

Swedish fish, a type of candy, is a symbol of Olivia. Olivia lives on a diet that consists mainly of this candy. Ani eats the candy because Olivia does. When the attack on the Bradley School begins, Ani is waiting in line at the lunchroom cash register to pay for a package of Swedish fish.

Picture of Arthur and His Father

This picture is Arthur's most prized possession. It shows a time when he and his father were happy together. Arthur's mother made the frame for her son out of colored seashells and presented it to him as a gift. When Ani retaliates against Arthur when he lashes out at her after he is expelled, she steals this picture. Even though she is angry with Arthur she puts the picture in a place where it will be protected. During her interview with Mrs. Finnerman 14 years later Mrs. Finnerman asks for the photo back. Ani looks for it and realizes that Luke has destroyed it.

A Green Seashell

This green seashell is a symbol of the picture of Arthur and his father that Ani is unable to find when she looks for it to return it to Arthur's mother. Later Ani finds a seashell from the frame in the cabinet under the sink when she is looking for a box of garbage bags. She shows the shell to Luke the night before their wedding and demands to know what he had done with the picture. It is the discovery of this shell that marks the ending of Ani's affection for Luke.



Settings

The Bradley School

The Bradley School is a private college prep school located in Bryn Mawr, PA in the highbrow Main Line. Ani's parents sent her to this school after the principal at her all-girls Catholic school suggested they find Ani another option for her high school years. It is at this school that two former students, Arthur and Ben, kill five students and injure others when they set off homemade pipe bombs and go on a shooting rampage inside the school. Part of the cafeteria is destroyed by fire during the rampage. Despite all of the tragedies, the school reopened. Ani finishes her high school career at Bradley.

The Spot

The spot is a place near the campus of Bradley that students from that school went to drink and party. It is to this spot that Dave took Ani, the HOs (Hilary and Olivia), and the Hairy Legs (Ani's name for the popular guys) the night of the Fall Friday Dance. The popular crowd told Ani it was at that spot that Arthur had given Ben a blow job. It is serendipitous that when Dean asks to apologize to Ani during the documentary that they meet at the spot, which has since then been made into a park, to film their part of the show.

Dean's House

Dean invites Ani to a party at his house and requests that she not tell the other girls about the get together. While she is there the boys get her drunk on both beer and whiskey. When she passes out Liam, Peyton, and Dean all take advantage of her.

Planned Parenthood in St. Davids

To Ani's surprise, Liam tells her that he will find a way to get her to Planned Parenthood so she can get the morning after pill. It is at this clinic that Ani asks the doctor if sex is considered rape if the woman cannot remember what happened. The doctor does not do anything to get Ani help. The doctor tells her that she is not qualified to answer Ani's question.

Headmaster Mah's Office

After Andrew (Mr. Larson) realizes that Ani has been raped, he asks her to tell Headmaster Mah what had happened. Once she is in the headmaster's office, however, Ani backs out on her promise to Andrew (Mr. Larson) and tells him nothing happened to her.



Peace A Pizza

The restaurant Peace A Pizza is a place that serves as the local hangout when Ani was in high school at Bradley. The first time Ani and Andrew meet together alone 14 years after the shootings, they meet at this pizza restaurant.

Radnor Hotel

The Radnor Hotel is the place where Ani stays because she does not want to stay with her parents while she is in town for the filming of the documentary.

Ardmore Police Station

It is at the Ardmore Police Station while talking to Dan, the lawyer her parents hired, that Ani first realizes the police believe she is in some way involved with the shootings at Bradley School.

Quaker Meetinghouse

Liam's memorial service is held at a Quaker meetinghouse. Ani and her mother attend this service, but other students from Bradley are hateful to them and refuse to sit close to them. While they are driving home from the service a car full of Bradley students runs Ani and her mother off the road.

Yangming

It is at the restaurant Yangming that Andrew (Mr. Larson) and Ani attempt to have dinner the night after Ani's interview for the documentary. Unfortunately for Ani, her mother and aunt are also eating at the restaurant. Because she is afraid of what her mother might tell Luke, she does not eat with Andrew (Mr. Larson). Instead, they meet in the parking lot where they have an argument about Luke.



Themes and Motifs

Food Obsessions

Many characters in this novel deal with their emotional pain through food obsessions. Examples of characters who have food obsessions include Ani, Arthur, Nell, and Olivia. Their obsessions include overeating, binge eating, crash dieting, and anorexia.

Ani has a relationship with food that changes as her story progresses. It is Arthur who introduces Ani to food as a source of emotional comfort. After Olivia and Hilary steal Ani's running shorts and put them on display at the school, Arthur takes Ani to his house where he feeds her. "Once the acid-flavored anxiety of what would become of me dissolved to reveal what had become of me, the hot new girl already washed up seven weeks into the semester, food had never tasted so good" (173).

This connection between food and comfort haunts Ani when she tries to slim down for her appearance on the documentary. Even though Ani works out and runs, she realizes she is not losing weight because she is eating so much food to fill the emotional void she feels. As she gets more stressed about the documentary Ani's food cravings get stronger. In order to prove to herself that she can accomplish anything she puts her mind to Ani puts herself on a severe diet in order to lose weight quickly. She indicates the only way she is able to lose weight is through sheer determination but she believes it is only by being thin that she can look like a successful person.

It is indicated after Ani breaks off her engagement with Luke that she does not punish herself with severe dieting any more. As she waits for Luke to come and talk to her the night she called off their engagement Ani is wearing a size zero dress. She notes in her narration: "I'd never be thin enough to wear it again" (330). This admission seems to indicate that not only did Ani free herself of Luke that night she also freed herself of her obsession with thinness.

As it has already been discussed, Arthur used food as a way to comfort himself emotionally. Arthur ate too much at every meal. He also went on eating binges with Ani. They would clear out the cabinets in Arthur's house as they ate compulsively.

Nell and Olivia both have eating disorders that cause them to eat too little. Olivia probably suffers with anorexia. She eats so little that Ani describes her as being ballerina thin. In fact Ani indicates that Olivia will eat only a type of candy called Swedish fish. She even has a ritual she follows when she eats the fish. Nell also does not appear to eat enough to maintain a healthy body weight. Ani credits Nell's lack of interest in eating to the blue pills that Nell takes. These stimulants not only curb Nell's interest in food but also make her more active.



Belief Success/Perfection can Protect from Tragedy

After her traumatic teen years, Ani seeks perfection and success believing these qualities will protect her from further danger. As Ani prepares for her appearance on the documentary about Bradley, she thinks she can participate only if she has met her guidelines for perfection. One of these goals Ani believes she needs to meet involves having a rich fiancé. Ani has the ring from Luke Harrison, but she is realizing he is not as perfect as she thought. It was while she was still a teen that Ani decided she needed to become a success and decided to do whatever it took to meet her goal.

In order to present the perfect picture of success, Ani believes she needs to have a good job. Furthermore, she needs to live in New York, be shockingly thin, and have a good-looking rich fiancé. Ani has checked all of the boxes when she gets an engagement ring, a four carat emerald heirloom, from Luke who comes from a rich affluent family. She already lived in a New York apartment and worked as an editor at the prestigious Women's Magazine. She struggles against her food obsessions with dieting and exercise to lose weight believing she should weigh only 105 pounds. Ani thinks that by being able to portray herself as a perfect whole she will impress and awe the people that were so cruel to her years ago.

Ani's not only needs to feel that she is perfect in order to feel she is protected from tragedy, but she also needs the people with whom she associates to be perfect as well. When she first meets Luke, Ani believes that he is perfect enough and that he will keep danger away from her. As she gets to know Luke better, however, Ani learns he is not as perfect as she once believed. She is upset when she witnesses Luke bully one of his old friends from college. In another scenario Ani thinks that if Luke were to be injured or dismembered in a way that destroyed his perfect looks, she would not be able to stay with him. She loved Luke because he made her feel protected when she first met him. As she got to know him better she felt less and less safe and secure around him.

Ani's belief that she could protect herself from danger by becoming a success developed when she was still in high school. The women's magazines that Ani's father brought her to read after the shooting at her school were one of the things that helped form Ani's decision that success equaled protection. She decided she wanted to live like the models in the magazines did because they appeared so confident and appeared to have fabulous lives. It is when she sees a professional woman during a field trip to New York that Ani's decision to do whatever it took to become the type of person that others revered because of her power is cemented. Ani decides that if she has the sort of power that woman has nothing and no one will be able to hurt her.

Effects of Bullying

This novel sends a serious message both about people who are bullied and people who bully. Bullying has a serious lasting effect on the people who are abused and can backfire on the bullies. While modern schools of thought focus on teen bullies, people of all ages can be bullies.



Even though Ani indicates that the police determined that bullying was not the main cause of the massacre at her school, bullying did play a role in the deaths of the students. While Arthur might have been a psychopath who only wanted to hurt people he was able to manipulate Ben because Ben had been bullied. Arthur planned his attack to focus on the popular kids, the ones who had pushed Ben to his suicide attempt.

Ani was also bullied by the popular kids in school. Even though she did not retaliate in the way that Ben and Arthur did she still harbored wounds because of the bullying. She grew up with the need to be perfect and successful to make herself feel she was safe from danger. Similarly, Olivia is bullied by her violent father. He hits her and makes her feel belittled. Olivia not only reacts to this bullying by being a bully herself but also by turning her anger on herself and hurting herself by not eating enough.

While teens can be vicious bullies, adults can also be bullies. The detectives who interrogated both Ani and Dean were bullies. They were hateful and derogatory to Ani when they accused her of lying to them and being happy that the kids who had made her life miserable were dead. In a similar way they bullied Dean into telling them that Ani was working with Ben and Arthur to kill students at Bradley. "Those cops, they came at me so sure you had done it" (314).

Although Ani did not realize it at the time she set herself up for suspicion by the police when she participated in Arthur's game of defacing the picture of the popular kids in his middle school year book. Even though she believed she and Arthur were only blowing off steam when they wrote degrading things about the popular kids, the detectives who saw what they had written took the information seriously and used it against Ani after the shootings.

The Reality of Emotional Wounds

People suffering with emotional wounds, like Ani, often do not receive the support they need to heal from their injuries. Because there is no physical sign of emotional injuries people often forget these injuries exist. Emotional injuries also do not provoke the sympathy that physical injuries do.

Because Ani's wounds are emotional some people, like Luke, believe that her pain is not real. From the beginning Luke is dismissive of the trauma that Ani went through as a teen. He does not believe she was really raped and believes she should just be able to get over the trauma of witnessing the shooting. In reality Ani still hurts from the open wound left both by her sexual assaults and her witnessing of the shooting.

After the shooting at Bradley School the anger of many people is focused on Ani because she was not physically injured during the shooting. When she meets with Dean for the documentary even he makes the comment that she does not seem to have any lasting hurt, like he does. The shooting left Dean paralyzed. "He was simply making the most obvious observation. My casual, expensive clothes, my hair trimmed to \$150 ends.



‘You look pretty okay.’” Dean tells Ani as he looks at how perfect and pulled together she appears to be.

Bullying is an activity that most often leaves its victims with emotional wounds instead of physical wounds. Ben, for instance, suffered serious emotional damage because of the bullying he lived through. Arthur also suffered emotional wounds after his father abandoned him and his mother.

Power of Identities/Names

Ani answers to a variety of names during the course of her story. As a college student she changes her name believing it reflects the person she wants to be. When she reconnects with her high school English teacher he begins calling her by her high school nickname, a reversal that bothers her. In the meantime, she fights with the desire to call her former teacher by his first name instead of his professional title.

Early in the novel Ani makes it clear to her reader why she changed her name. “Changing my name had nothing to do with hiding my past, and everything to do with becoming the person no one ever thought I deserved to be: Ani Harrison” (20). After the reader learns all that happened to Ani in high school he can understand why she would want to give herself a new name since it was TifAni FaNelli who was accused of a terrible crime of which she had no part. TifAni’s name bothered her from the beginning of her time at Bradley School. Her name was different from those of all the other students because her last name ended in a vowel, unheard of for students at Bradley.

When she was in high school Ani was referred to by a variety of nicknames. Dean, for instance, called her “Finny.” Ani said that when she heard her nickname she came as called like the “nascent little lemming that I’d become” (61). At high school others called Ani “Tif.” Note that Andrew (Mr. Larson) is one of the main characters who called TifAni by this nickname. Even when they meet later when Ani is an adult he continues to call her Tif. It seems to bother Ani that Mr. Larson cannot bring himself to call her by her new name, it is as if he is caught up in the person she was in high school and cannot accept the person she has become is really her.

Meanwhile, even while Ani picks on Andrew (Mr. Larson) for not feeling comfortable about calling her Ani, Ani wonders what she should call her former teacher. As a teacher and coach he was always Mr. Larson. Now that Ani is also an adult she toys with the idea she should call him by his first name. Calling a person by their first name instead of their title is a much more personal way of relating to them. Ani wonders if she should symbolically open the door to a more personal relationship with Andrew (Mr. Larson).



Styles

Point of View

Luckiest Girl Alive is told by 28-year-old TifAni “Ani” FaNelli. She tells her story in the first person point of view. She tells the stories of her high school experiences and of her preparation for a documentary about a shooting at her school in the past tense because both parts of her life are finished. In this instance, Ani’s viewpoint is unique because she is the only one who can tell her story. She is the only one who knows the things she knows about what led up to the school shooting.

Ani tells her entire story. The filming of the documentary is the first chance she has to tell her story. She hopes to redeem herself and prove to those who have blamed her for the shooting that she had nothing to do with it. She was as much a victim as those killed and injured. While she tells the majority of her story to her reader, she shares one part of the story, that of the school shooting, with the documentary staff.

Language and Meaning

The most significant aspect of the language in this novel is Knoll’s use of simile and metaphor. Her comparisons often draw parallels between the things that Ani sees and experiences and aspects of beauty. For instance, when Ani is in Mrs. Finnerman’s house she describes the strings on that lady’s harp as being “peeled back like split ends in need of deep conditioner” (291).

Ani also discusses with her reader the language used by the rich people with whom she associates beginning in high school. For instance, Ani is surprised by the names of the students she encounters at The Bradley School. She says of one boy, for instance that there was “some guy named Tanner, which I was surprised to learn was not just a goal I set for my skin that summer but also a name” (28).

A word used by Ani often to describe the homes in the area where she grew up is the word “McMansion.” She even refers to her own home as a “McMansion.” This term brings to mind a quickly and cheaply built large house, somewhat like the food served at the fast food restaurant McDonalds.

The pronunciation of Ani’s name is a big deal to her. “Whitney was doing that thing I hate, pronouncing my name ‘Annie’ instead of ‘Ah-nee’ (87). The pronunciation of her name is as important to Ani as her new persona. Ani is also frustrated when Whitney asks why Ani and Luke are having their wedding in Nantucket. Although Ani does not say her thoughts out loud she thinks about the significance of the verbiage associated with Nantucket. “Go to South Dakota and tell some sad smug housewife you grew up on the Main Line, and she doesn’t know she’s supposed to be impressed. Tell her you summer on Nantucket — be sure to verb it like that — and she knows who the fuck she’s dealing with” (87-88).

Structure

This book is told in the past tense. Two stories are told almost simultaneously as Ani switches back and forth between telling the story of her freshman year of high school and her engagement to Luke and the documentary. Chapter 1 is dedicated to Ani as an adult while Chapter 2 is dedicated to her high school years. The remaining chapters of the novel switch back and forth similarly. Ani's story of her engagement to Luke and the upcoming wedding and filming for the documentary as well as her experiences in high school are told on linear time lines.



Quotes

Luke's good-naturedness was like the bug spray we applied at his parents' summer home in Nantucket, so powerful it warded off the dread, that feeling, an alarmingly calm omnipresence, that something bad was about to happen."

-- Narrator (Chapter 1)

Importance: In her description of her panic and need for security Ani says that she was originally attracted to Luke because he at first kept the fear she felt about life at bay.

Bradley was like an abusive foster mother — she saved me from the system but only so she could have her twisted, meth-fueled way with me."

-- Narrator (Chapter 1)

Importance: Even though Ani credits her time at The Bradley School with keeping her from adopting a life style like her mother's, Ani believes that the things she learned at the school led her to a life that is tormented and twisted in its own way.

Changing my name had nothing to do with hiding my past, and everything to do with becoming the person no one ever thought I deserved to be: Ani Harrison."

-- Narrator (Chapter 1)

Importance: This sentence sums up the goals Ani has for herself. She wants to prove to all those who believe she had a role in the killings at The Bradley School that she is innocent. In fact, she is a victim herself even though her wounds are not visible ones.

I found out later that Dean got detention for what he said to Mr. Larson. The next day, Hilary asked me to eat lunch with her. Somehow, these events were connected. I didn't know what that connection was, and I was too impatient to claim my rightful spot at their table to care."

-- Narrator (Chapter 4)

Importance: Ani desperately wants to be a member of the popular group of kids at school. When she is finally asked to sit at the lunch table with the popular group she does not ask any questions but somehow recognizes that her invitation is connected to an incident between Andrew (Mr. Larson) and Dean.

\$22.40. That's how much it cost to chauffeur me from school to Dean's house in Ardmore. That's how much I paid to lose my dignity."

-- Narrator (Chapter 4)

Importance: Ani pays \$22.40 for a cab driver to take her to Dean's house for a party he had asked her to attend but told her not to tell Olivia or Hailey about. Ani describes that amount of money as what she paid to lose her dignity because she was raped at the party.



There was no way I was mugging for the camera if I hadn't checked off all the boxes in the hotly contested "having it all" category: cool job, impressive zip code; hungry body, and the kicker — dreamy, loaded fiancé."

-- Narrator (Chapter 5)

Importance: Before she agrees to participate in the documentary about the shooting at her school, Ani wants to appear as if she has a perfect life.

When that finally cleared up, I was left with something much worse. Something that to this day seems to lie in wait, pouncing right at a moment that joy or confidence dares to dance. The memory that I had apologized to my own rapist, and he had laughed at me."

-- Narrator (Chapter 6)

Importance: The morning after Liam rapes Ani she apologizes to him because she realizes she had also apparently hooked up with Dean at some point during the evening. When she apologizes she does not yet realize that what the three boys — Peyton, Liam and Dean — had done to her was rape. When she did realize what had happened she is angry with herself for apologizing to the boy who raped her and even more upset when she remembers how Liam laughed at her.

But on it went for the rest of the night — Luke barking orders at Bailey, cutting him down for carrying them out wrong, my horror swelling the drunker and meaner Luke got."

-- Narrator (Chapter 7)

Importance: When Ani witnesses how cruel Luke is to one of his friends from college and thinks about how he might have been the kind of teen in high school who might have raped an unwilling girl, she is disgusted with him. It is at this point that Ani stops thinking Luke is a person who could keep anything bad from happening to her.

It must sound stupid, but it was the first time I realized that for the rest of my life, till death do we part, it was on me to maintain this veneer's sparkly, streak-free shine. If Luke noticed so much as a pinkie's smudge, he would punish me for it."

-- Narrator (Chapter 7)

Importance: Ani's opinion of Luke drops even further when she realizes during an argument one day that he expects her to bend and make any changes necessary to keep the peace between them even if he is the one at fault.

Even after everything was said and done, after the ashes fermented the grass, after I moved on to college and then New York City and got everything I thought I wanted, Mr. Larson was the only person who ever told me that this, none of this, was my fault."

-- Narrator (Chapter 8)

Importance: Andrew (Mr. Larson) is attractive to Ani because he knows what had happened to her at Bradley. Even with every thing that he knew about her, Andrew is the only person who did not blame Ani for anything that had happened to her including her rape and the shootings.



I thought I'd be one of those when everything first happened, but once the acid-flavored anxiety of what would become of me dissolved to reveal what had become of me, the hot new girl already washed up seven weeks into the semester, food had never tasted so good."

-- Narrator (Chapter 10)

Importance: After she is excused from the popular group of students Ani thinks she might lose weight because of the stress. Instead she begins smoking pot and hanging around with Arthur who encourages her to eat while they are together at his house after school. Instead of losing weight, Ani discovers that she finds comfort in food.

And so, what do they think? That TifAni planned this, this massacre with the other school outcasts to exact her revenge?"

-- Dina FaNelli (Chapter 14)

Importance: As Ani's mother talks to their lawyer she realizes that the police believe that Ani helped Ben and Arthur plan the massacre in order to get revenge for Peyton, Liam and Dean raping her.

The most damning claim came from Dean, who insisted Arthur handed me the gun and told me to kill him 'just like we'd planned.' Of course Arthur never said that, but no one was going to doubt the popular, six-packed soccer star, paralyzed from the waist down, his promising future wrenched from him at the starting line of what would have been a charmed life."

-- Narrator (Chapter 14)

Importance: Although there was never enough evidence to charge Ani with any crime connected with the slaughter at Bradley, Dean planted suspicion in the minds of the police when he told them that he had heard Arthur tell Ani to kill Dean like they had planned when Arthur tried to hand her the gun.

I saw how there was a protection in success, and success was defined by threatening the minion on the other end of a cell phone, expensive pumps terrorizing the city, people stepping out of your way simply because you looked like you had more important places to be than they did."

-- Narrator (Chapter 14)

Importance: It is during a high school trip to New York City that Ani meets a woman dressed in high fashioned clothes who appears to be feared by the person to whom she is talking on the phone. Ani believes it is because that woman is successful that she has power over people. Knowing she wants the protection that success can give her Ani makes up her mind she will work as hard as she has to in order to be successful.

The choice placement of a coffee mug altered a headline in a yellowed copy of The Philadelphia Inquirer, POLICE THINK GUNMEN DID WORK ALONE. Mrs. Finnerman picked up the cup and the word 'not' reappeared, righting my fate."

-- Narrator (Chapter 15)



Importance: When Ani and Aaron first arrive at Mrs. Finneman's house a coffee cup covers one word on the headline of a newspaper she has lying on the coffee table. Ani says it is only when the headline reads that the police believe the gunmen at Bradley did not work alone that her fate, as it had been determined by the media and public opinion, is rightened. It is ironic that the headline reads correctly until the truth is uncovered when Mrs. Finneman moves the coffee cup.

I remember that he was kind to me on my first day of school, when I didn't know anyone. I remember how he was the only one who stood up for me when a lot of people turned on me."

-- Ani (Chapter 15)

Importance: When Arthur's mother tells Ani that she cannot believe that Arthur was really a psychopath, Ani agrees with her assessment of her son by telling her how Arthur had been kind to her even before he knew her.

The media narrative concluded that Arthur and Ben were bullied — for being weird, for being fat, for being gay. But the police reports tell a much different story, a truth that has nothing to do with bullying, the cause du jour."

-- Narrator (Chapter 15)

Importance: Even though the newspaper reports indicate that Arthur and Ben had planned the attack on Bradley students because they had been bullied, Ani knows that the police believe Arthur was psychotic and had planned the attack because he was just cruel.

Luke Harrison wouldn't marry a murderess skank,' I said. 'He fixes me.'"

-- Ani (Chapter 15)

Importance: Ani tries to explain to Andrew that by being acceptable enough to marry Luke it means that she is not the bad person that public has made up its mind that she is.

I don't,' Andrew said. 'I never did. I'm bowled over by you. You cared for Peyton. You held Peyton's hand. After what he did to you. You don't even know how amazing you are. You should be with someone who sees that.'"

-- Andrew (Chapter 15)

Importance: When Ani and Andrew meet at a restaurant after Ani's part in recording the documentary Andrew tries to tell Ani that he does not think that Luke is a good choice as a partner for Ani. He recognizes before Ani does that Luke does not realize how wonderful a person Ani is.

Dean was the one who'd wanted to do this, had asked Aaron to ask me if I would be willing to see him."

-- Narrator (Chapter 15)



Importance: Dean requests that Ani see him as part of the documentary because he wants to apologize to her for telling everyone that she was part of Arthur and Ben's plan to massacre the other students. Ani, however, wants from Dean an apology for the rape and wants an acknowledgement from him that he knew what he and the other two boys had done to her was rape and that he knew it was wrong.

Because if I'd gotten my hands on it, I think I just might have blown that motherfucking cocksucker's cock right off. Arthur would have gone second."

-- Narrator (Chapter 15)

Importance: Ani admits that she cut Dean slack during the filming for the documentary by not making him acknowledge that he had raped her. She does not feel any remorse for cutting him this slack because she knows that if she had gotten the gun from Arthur she possibly would have shot Dean in the groin first in retaliation for raping her and then turned it on Arthur second.

His story changed,' I said, rushing to fill in the uncomfortable silence, confirming what I've always suspected about Luke: He doesn't think it was rape. He thinks it was an unfortunate incident, something that happens when hornball kids get together and drink too much."

-- Ani (Chapter 16)

Importance: It is when Ani tells Luke that neither she nor Dean talked about the rape for the documentary and she actually uses the word rape to describe what happened to her in high school that she realizes that Luke never thought what had happened to her could be defined as rape.

Everything on his face went dark and different when he saw the seashell pinched between my fingers. I didn't even wait for him to lock us in before I asked, 'What did you do with that picture of Arthur and his dad?'"

-- Ani (Chapter 16)

Importance: It is when Luke realizes that Ani knows he destroyed the picture of Arthur and his father that he knows he is in trouble. The knowledge that he allowed something that was important to her to be used in the way it was and destroyed by his friends is the breaking point for Ani. She calls off the wedding after she confronts Luke with the shell she had found.