

Lucky Us Study Guide

Lucky Us by Amy Bloom

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Plot Summary

Lucky Us, a National Book nomination by Amy Bloom, tells the story of Eva Logan Acton, whose life is defined by its losses. When she is twelve her mother abandons her on the porch of her sometimes father, Edgar Acton. She never returns. Eva stays with her father and her half sister, Iris, even though her father never acknowledges her as his daughter.

When Eva is fourteen, she and Iris leave home and head for Hollywood where Iris is sure she can be a Hollywood movie star. Eva goes with her because she doesn't believe she has a choice. Once there, however, Iris's naivety works against her. She is caught in a compromising situation with a well known actress. Her career comes to a grinding halt. Penniless, the girls are forced to accept their father's help and the assistance of a kind, homosexual makeup artist from MGM as the four of them make their way to New York City.

Once in New York, Edgar takes a job as a butler, and Iris pretends she is qualified to be a governess. They work for the Torellis family. The Torellis have a carriage house, and everyone is able to live comfortably there. Francisco, the makeup artist, has sisters who work in the city. He helps Eva get a part time job there sweeping the floors. While there, Eva asks if she can do tarot card readings for people. The sisters, Carnie and Bea, agree.

Iris meets the Torellis' cook whose name is Irene (Reenie for short), and falls in love with her. Unfortunately, even though Reenie returns her affections, she is already married to Gus. Knowing that Reenie takes her marriage vows seriously and won't divorce, Iris calls up the local police to tell them that Gus is a German spy. Since World War II has broken out, these types of reports are taken seriously. Gus is arrested and placed into an internment camp. Reenie, free from Gus, pursues a relationship with Iris.

Iris knows that Reenie wants children, so she enlists Eva's help in procuring a child for her. Eva and Iris abduct a four year old boy, whom they name Danny. They take him home to Reenie. The woman is thrilled with Danny. They don't tell Reenie how they obtained Danny.

Meanwhile, Edgar has met and fallen for a lounge blues singer named Clara Williams. Clara has impetigo. As a result, she can pass for being white if she so chooses. Edgar becomes ill, and they learn that he has a brain tumor. When he becomes bed ridden, Clara takes care of him. Then, Clara begins to see another man, and she no longer has time to help with Edgar.

Reenie and Iris argue late one night, and a fire starts in the kitchen of the carriage house where they live. Reenie is engulfed in flames and dies from her wounds. Iris, who tried to smother the flames with her body, is seriously injured. Eva is left to raise Danny on her own. She is also the caregiver for her bedridden father. Eva begins to get more clients for her tarot readings. Eva meets Ted Rosen, an FBI agent who is investigating



the disappearance of a judge. Eva works with another psychic, a real one, to help run down leads for the detective. He pulls Eva aside to tell her that she is not in the right profession and that the right one is about to happen. He tells her to have the courage to pursue it.

Meanwhile, Gus has been deported to Germany, and he has assumed a deceased friend's name and taken the friend's family as his own for cover. Gus is the only one in the family to survive a bomb attack. After the war he returns to America, and he tries to find Eva whom he's written numerous letters to over the years. Unsuccessful in his efforts, Edgar dies.

Clara leaves, and Danny writes a hate letter to Iris. Eva finally tracks down her birth mother, who is posing as a divine healer in a temple. Eva confronts her with the abandonment, and Hazel rationalizes that it was the best thing that could have happened to Eva. Eva tells her to go to hell. Meanwhile, Iris writes from London that her burns have healed but that she has no intention of returning to the United States. Eva is now fully responsible for Danny.

The Torellis tell them that they have to move out. Clara leaves for Detroit with Ozzie, her new husband. Mrs. Torellis helps Eva and Danny find a new home and gives them the first two months' rent to help out. While cooking breakfast in the kitchen for them, Francisco eats a sausage and begins to choke. Eva calls the doctor who tells her that she must perform a tracheotomy on the man. She does and later the doctor tells her that she should go into medicine. She remembers what Henk had told her so many months before and begins applying to medical school.

Meanwhile, Gus has located Eva and Danny, but he is afraid of what they will say to him. He also knows now that the reason he wrote only to Eva while he was away in Germany was because he was in love with her, not Reenie. He doesn't know that Reenie is dead. Finally, he talks to Eva, who tells him about Reenie. They part but have dinner a few weeks later. They eventually declare their love for each other, Eva is accepted into medical school. Iris sends a long, sincere letter apologizing for her actions. Eva finally learns that she can love and be loved.



Part One, Chapter 1

Summary

I'd Know You Anywhere

The story begins in 1939. Eva Logan is 12 years old when her mother tells her that her father's 'other wife' has died. Eva doesn't like the 'other wife', but she is interested in seeing her father's other home. Her mother indicates that they should pack their belongings and go for a visit to see what might be in it for them. She tells Eva that her father's other wife had a lot of money. Eva's mother hates living in the small town where she works as a waitress at a local diner.

Eva recounts the sum total of her interactions with her father. Her father, a college professor, would come to visit them on the weekends, sometimes, though she never knew exactly which weekend. They would always be ready every weekend just in case he showed up. When he did make an appearance, they would all eat dinner together. Then, they gathered around the radio to listen to FDR's Fireside Chats. They were very happy during these times as she sat at her father's feet on his slippers and her mother sat on her father's lap. Sometimes, if the Fireside Chats were not on, they'd dance to the radio music together.

They arrive at Eva's father's home, and Eva is shocked by the size of the house. Her father is shocked and astounded to see them, though he scoops her up and gives her a big hug. Eva is introduced to her half sister, Iris. Eva didn't even know that she had a sister until a few days prior when her mother had told her. Eva is smitten by how glamorous the 16 year old Iris seems. Eva's father doesn't introduce Eva as his daughter. Instead, he says that she's Mrs. Logan's beautiful daughter. Eva is too awestruck to be upset by his introduction.

Eva and Iris go upstairs to hang out in Iris's palatial bedroom while the adults have a heated discussion below. Iris tells Eva that she longs to be a movie star and that one day she will go to Hollywood to be a great starlet. She says that her mother died of a stroke and that the funeral was very well attended. Everyone who was anyone was there, she tells Eva, clearly indicating that since she and her mother weren't at the funeral that they obviously weren't 'everyone'. Eva notices but remains silent.

From below they hear the piano being played. Iris tells Eva that it's her father playing, which shocks Eva as she didn't know her father even played piano. He begins playing "Moonlight Sonata," and the girls go down the stairs. Eva hears the front door open and the borrowed car outside come to life. As Eva runs to the porch she sees her mother drive away. She notices that her suitcase has been left on the porch. Her father comes and puts his hand on her shoulder and asks if she has any other family that he could call for her. Eva says no.



Eva ends up living with them indefinitely, though her father never introduces her as his daughter. He, instead, tells everyone that she is a niece, and he changes her last name to Acton. Eva loves her new school. Though she is highly intelligent, she takes a back seat to Iris who is the star attraction wherever she goes. Eva designates herself as Iris's manager and helps Iris practice for her elocution and recitals, plays and poetry readings. She sews and repairs her costumes, and she even takes on the chore of cooking for both Iris and her father.

One day, Iris bursts into Eva's room and begins beating on her. Eva, who had been in a sound sleep, wakes up frightened, not understanding what she could have possibly done. Finally, Iris collapses in tears, apologizing. All of her 'going to Hollywood money' has been stolen. She says that she knows that Eva didn't steal it; their father did. He had done this before, she confesses.

Iris wins most of her upcoming speaking competitions, and she keeps the money for her future trip to Hollywood one day. She keeps hiding the money hoping that her father won't find it. Without asking, she takes Eva's favorite book, *Little Women*, cuts a hole in the interior pages and fills it with the money that hadn't been stolen. Later, Eva will find her father rifling through her closet looking for Iris's money. Eva will casually take her book and walk out of the room.

A year later, both Eva and Iris take the money from the book, pack their things, and leave home for Hollywood. They end up staying in an apartment building run by a kind, Jewish woman named Mrs. Gruber. Mrs. Gruber understands Eva (now 14) and Iris (now 18), and she tries to help. The year is 1941.

The book leaps ahead to the year 1946. There is a letter from Iris to Eva. From the letter the reader can tell that Iris has managed to make it as an actor in Hollywood. While she is not 'big', yet, she is certainly living the life that she had dreamed of all those years before. It is also obvious from the tone of the letter that Eva and Iris are no longer living together and that Eva may not have kept in touch with her sister after they left one another. No explanation is given as to why the girls are no longer together, or why Iris seems desperate to hear from her.

Analysis

The themes of abandonment and family are introduced in this initial chapter by a highly unconventional arrangement between Eva's mother and father. Then, after her mother leaves Eva on her father's doorstep, the new arrangement is just as strange as her father's refusal to claim Eva as his daughter. Family, as an instrument of destruction, is offered as Eva's first definition.

The theme of abandonment occurs in several ways. First, there is the literal abandonment of Eva at her father's home. Then, there is the abandonment of Eva by her father when he will not claim her as his child, even though she is now living with him. She is an embarrassment; and, even at the age of 12, Eva realizes that she is not



wanted by anyone. She ingratiates herself by taking on the household tasks that Charlotte, Iris's mother, used to do.

The symbol of the Hollywood and Vine money surfaces as more is revealed about Iris and the dynamics between Eva and Iris unfold. Iris, impractical and impulsive, needs Eva's calm assurances and direction. Both of them need to leave their father, who has become erratic since his wife's death. His true colors begin to show when he is caught rummaging through Eva's room to try and find the Hollywood and Vine money. That money represents the girls' freedom. By trying to steal it (after having stolen it several times before) he is curtailing their freedom from him.

The inclusion of the letter sets the tone for the distant future. Iris and Eva are estranged; however, Iris very much would like to reconnect with her. It is also obvious that Iris's attitude and demeanor haven't changed. She is still of the belief that the world revolves around her and that all of her accomplishments should be paraded constantly.

Discussion Question 1

What message must Eva have internalized when her mother dropped her off, her father didn't claim her, and her sister treated her like a servant?

Discussion Question 2

Given what is known at this point about both of Eva's parents, discuss how their abandonment and emotional distance have shaped her relationship with Iris.

Discussion Question 3

What do Iris's actions toward Eva indicate about her views on Eva?

Vocabulary

wiseguys, possessions, anklets, sorority, luncheon, loafers, taffeta, gin, brooch, skittered, languishing



Part One, Chapter 2

Summary

I May Be Wrong but I Think You're Wonderful

It is 1942, and Eva is attempting to write her father a letter. She gives up because she can't seem to get past the first sentence. She reasons that he isn't worth wasting the paper on. She and Mrs. Gruber share their afternoons together and listen to the radio news. They listen to President Roosevelt declare war on Japan. They look up Japan in Mrs. Gruber's encyclopedias and worry about the impending war and its implications. Mrs. Gruber is glad, on the one hand, that war has happened because now everyone will stop wearing the 'I Hate Eleanor' buttons that have been so popular, and likewise, the possibility of someone assassinating FDR will also subside.

Eva worries about the Japanese Americans that are living in the United States and how they will be treated. Mrs. Gruber always took a nap at 2:00 in the afternoon, so Eva leaves to go back to her apartment to wait for Iris to return. When she comes home she's aglow with news. She's gotten her first contract. Iris had been pounding the pavement going to auditions for the last month. MGM had liked what they saw and had given her a contract.

They soon have enough money to move out of the Hollywood Plaza apartments. The next place where they live, Firenze Gardens, doesn't have anyone that Eva can befriend; so, she spends a great deal of time being lonely. At three o'clock each day she goes to the library and reads, checking out more books to bring home to fill her time. Meanwhile, Iris is getting noticed by the directors and producers. She's befriended the makeup artist, Francisco, who makes sure she looks almost as good as the female leads. Iris brings home some of the makeup and tries it on Eva, too.

She once again tries to write to her father, but she just can't finish. She decides that she will save up all of the bits and pieces. Together, maybe they will make a complete letter. After thinking about the fact that her father couldn't care less about her or Iris, she burns them all.

Analysis

In this chapter, there is some foreshadowing. First, the war has begun, and it will change all of their lives. Secondly, there is the mention of the Japanese Americans and Eva's fear that they may be treated badly by white America. The girls' lifestyle and outlook turn brighter when Iris finally gains recognition by MGM and she is signed by them. They believe that they have made it; but, it becomes clear immediately that both Iris' and Eva's identities will be shifting, yet again. The theme of identity is demonstrated in this chapter as Eva struggles to determine who she is going to be in their new life. No one seems to care how she spends her time. Iris certainly only cares that she's there to



take care of her by cooking meals, keeping the apartment clean, keeping her company, and helping her rehearse when she's home.

The theme of family is also explored in this chapter as Eva struggles to decide what to put into a letter to their father. She starts and stops many times, and this sets the tone for a continual reaching out by Eva to connect with her father or a father figure. Finally, she burns all of her attempts at writing a letter and tells herself that Edgar isn't worth the paper. The use of fire is symbolic here and many times throughout the novel. In this instance, fire is a symbol of renewal, a clearing away of something old and decayed for something new to happen. This is exactly what occurs in that the girls meet and befriend a man named Francisco, a gay makeup artist from MGM. He will become a father figure to them throughout the novel. He plays a pivotal role in Eva's development.

The author provides a historical backdrop to the novel for several reasons. The story is set in a time period when the country is in a state of turmoil before, during, and after World War II. FDR has been President for several terms, and his failing health is mentioned several times in the novel. This sets the tone for how the country feels about their leader. He is a surrogate father figure for all, though Eleanor is viewed less like a mother figure. Since the setting creates this emotional mindset and climate for the novel, when FDR dies while at Warm Springs, the reader feels the same shock and dismay as Eva and Iris do.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Eva miss Mrs. Gruber so much?

Discussion Question 2

What role does Eva assume for Iris?

Discussion Question 3

From what the reader learns about how she spends her time, what can one infer about Eva's character?

Vocabulary

progressive, commissary, outfit, tinker's dam, specifically, outmoded



Part One, Chapter 3

Summary

Dirty Butter

Iris is invited to her first Hollywood party. Though she tries to act sophisticated, she is rather overwhelmed. People are half naked, and the starlets and celebrities are rather bawdy and inappropriate for a party. Iris meets a woman named Sylvia who seems to sense that Iris is in over her head and guides her throughout the rest of the night. The party, itself, is held in a palatial home of one of the producers. Iris notices that twenty of her father's mansions would still not fill up the space in this home.

Iris seats herself on one of the pink poufs that dot the courtyard. At her feet are a number of guests. One woman reaches her hands up under Iris's dress and fondles her. Iris doesn't know what to do about it, but she doesn't want to make a scene. She gets up and walks into the other room where there is a buffet. She meets another woman named Rose, who offers her food and lobster tails. Iris accepts. Rose asks her to dance, and they do, though Iris finds it odd to dance with another woman. As Iris looks around there are naked women everywhere. An orgy ensues.

She finally arrives back home. Still intoxicated, Iris tells Eva that she's met a woman and is in love. Later, Eva attempts to write to their father again. She writes a few lines more than she usually does, and the reader learns that Iris, because of her friendship with Rose, has landed some speaking roles. Francisco has assisted Iris in learning how to wear the proper colors. As far as Eva can tell, Iris hasn't had to change anything about her body in order to be filmed. She shares that many of the other girls have been required to have all sorts of changes done to their bodies in order to meet certain directors' preferences. Iris is a natural beauty and doesn't have to change anything. Eva is very proud of her.

Analysis

The themes of identity and deception are examined in this chapter. Iris attends her first Hollywood party, and she is overwhelmed, though she struggles not to appear as such. At first, it is as lavish as she expected it to be. However, as everyone begins drinking and the night wears on, it becomes apparent what type of party it is that she has been invited to. The clothes begin to come off, and identities shift. Iris, in her attempt to fit in and be accepted goes along with what anyone wants to do. She meets and befriends Rose Sawyer, who will be instrumental in setting the sexual tone for Iris, one that will continue throughout the novel.

The theme of deception is introduced by the very nature of the party. It was touted as a meet and greet, as a time to network, to unwind from the movie shoot for the day. However, it is anything but a normal type of party. The people are acting inappropriately



and engaging in anything but businesslike behavior. Some part of Iris is appalled, but she is determined to make it as a star. The theme of ambition surfaces in this chapter as well when Iris allows herself to be fondled and used by both Sylvia and Rose, who take advantage of her naivety.

The fact that they take advantage of her seems to suggest that Hollywood will use and abuse Iris. Furthermore, if she isn't very careful she will lose her identity and become someone so far removed from who she really is that she may never find her way back. Eva's pride in her sister is a stark reminder of the innocence and naivety of both girls. Being proud of Iris's looks in comparison to the other starlets only perpetuates the myth that Iris is weaving about herself. Eva goes along with things because she is too naive to know better and too young to understand the ramifications of Iris's involvement.

Discussion Question 1

What does it say about Iris that she is willing to tolerate all of the immorality around her at the party?

Discussion Question 2

What has it cost Iris to pursue her dream of being a famous actress?

Discussion Question 3

How does Iris rationalize and justify the party and the actions of the party-goers to herself and Eva?

Vocabulary

bumpkin, dazzling, wrong-footed, promenades, divan, pearly, chignon, dense, orgy



Part One, Chapter 4

Summary

My Blue Heaven

This chapter is told from Rose's viewpoint. She is sunning beachside with Iris and enjoys putting suntan lotion on the pretty girl. Rose likes to select up and coming actors and actresses to dress up since she wasn't allowed to have playthings when she was growing up. Seeing that no one is at the beach, Rose takes her suit top off, which raises Iris's eyebrows. Iris says nothing, however, and then takes her top off as well. They make love.

Unbeknown to Rose and Iris, a hidden cameraman has been taking pictures of the two. The man's name is Pudge, and he's certain that the pictures that he's taken will make him a rich man. He knows that the one woman is America's Sweetheart Rose. He sells the pictures to Hedda Hopper, the news woman. Soon, Hedda calls Rose to meet her for lunch.

Rose tells Hedda that if the cameraman had stayed one more minute then he would have seen Rose slap Iris's face. She tells Hedda that Iris took liberties with her and that she was the victim. Hedda isn't convinced and shows Rose the picture of Rose kissing Iris's breast. Rose is adamant that she was coerced into the action. She says that she's engaged to be married, but she has been keeping it a secret. Rose is so frightened after the meeting that she calls her agent and her supposed fiance within hours of each other. There is an exclusive in the next day's paper announcing their marriage. Iris is castigated in the press, and Rose knows that she's just ended Iris's career. She regrets it; but, in the end, she doesn't care.

The viewpoint switches to that of Francisco Diego, the hair and makeup artist. He talks about how he once had high hopes for the Acton girl. She had more going for her than many of the young wannabees on the movie lot. He knows what happened and feels badly for Iris. He invites Eva and Iris over to his place for dinner. They accept, and it becomes their regular Tuesday night routine. He is waiting for Iris to confide in him, and he admits that he's given her plenty of opportunity to do so. However, she keeps lying to him about auditions and taking calls. He wants to help her turn her life around, but he states that she has to want him to help. Until then, he will be patient.

Analysis

Iris's continued affair with Rose is overwhelming for Iris, who's never had an intimate relationship with anyone in her entire life. She is swept away by the glamour of Hollywood, of being a part of the 'in' crowd because of Rose, and the continual physical relationship she continues to have with Rose. Iris takes her cues from Rose, thus



demonstrating the theme of identity. Iris is taking her cues from Rose and trusts her implicitly, to her own undoing.

When Hedda confronts Rose about the illicit affair on the beach, Rose doesn't waste a moment's thought when it comes to her own self preservation. She offers up Iris as the sacrificial lamb to the newswoman. As an established part of the Hollywood elite, Rose's word is taken over Iris's. In the blink of an eye, Iris's career in Hollywood is over. When she attempts to go to work the next day, Iris is given her notice and sent home. She is devastated at the betrayal and the loss of her job.

It is notable that both women (Iris and Rose) have names based on flowers. Both are very beautiful flowers, but it is obvious that the women are not very beautiful on the inside. Both Iris and Rose are similar in that they have no problem using people. It is just that Iris has been on the losing end of the abuse this time.

Still, the entire ordeal does have a silver lining in the form of the character Francisco. A kind, middle aged Mexican makeup artist, he has been in Hollywood for many years and feels bad for Iris. He has gotten to know both of the girls over the past few months and knows exactly what has happened, believing Iris's story over Rose's. Francisco is shown to be the type of character who personifies the archetypal wise old man or wise teacher persona. He sees the girls for who they are, not what they pretend to be. He also knows that they need help if they are going to survive. This is why he takes them under his wing and why, in later chapters, he will step in to help them at their lowest points.

Discussion Question 1

How does Iris's life come undone in one warm afternoon?

Discussion Question 2

Discuss the theme of sacrifice in this chapter.

Discussion Question 3

Discuss Rose's character and what the reader learns about her life.

Vocabulary

flinched, bungalow, unsavory, vanity, vulnerable, smocks, espadrilles, refuge, mangy



Part One, Chapter 5

Summary

If You Ain't Got the Do-Re-Mi

Iris can't find a job anywhere doing anything. The response is always the same. Everyone has read the papers, and they know that she's 'that' kind of girl. Eva and Iris can no longer live at Firenze Gardens. They go to see if they can move back in with Mrs. Gruber. Eva is glad to see her, and they are welcomed back immediately. Eva tells her the short version of what happened, and Mrs. Gruber is very upset with Rose Sawyer. She is very protective of both of the girls and is upset that this has happened to them. She says they can move in whenever they are ready.

Francisco comes over, and the girls cook dinner for him. While he's there the doorbell rings, and no one moves to answer it. Eva knows that they don't have the month's final rent for the Firenze Gardens. They need it for Mrs. Gruber's rent when they move back there. Finally, Iris answers the door, thinking that it might be Rose. It is her father. They are all speechless.

He hands her a present and some flowers. Eva notices that he's also brought his suitcase. The present is filled with cookies, which they all share in silence. Francisco decides that he will stay the evening just to watch over everyone. He sleeps on the floor, and Edgar takes the couch. The next morning he takes everyone out for breakfast. Francisco tells the girls that there is nothing there for them and that they should leave. He offers them all work in New York, where his sisters live. They all pack into their father's station wagon, and all four of them set off for New York. Francisco has decided that he will go with them, as he will need to make introductions. Iris tells her father what happened, and he cannot believe that something like that set everyone off, especially in Hollywood. Iris and Eva are somewhat comforted by his response, but they still don't really like or trust him.

Analysis

The theme of family is explored in this chapter in the form of Edgar and Francisco. Both Iris and Eva are traumatized by the events that have unfolded for Iris. The loss of their nice apartment, work, and funds have left both girls desperate for help. Francisco has moved in with them to watch over them and to be there for them. He personifies a decent family with his father like demeanor, which is a stark contrast to Edgar who shows up on the doorstep unannounced.

When Edgar returns, it is a shock to both girls. How he's managed to track them down, for one thing, is interesting. This is never explained because Eva never sent a letter to him. However, he has heard of Iris's shameful exit from Hollywood and has come to live with them and help as best he can. The reader learns, however, that this is just a ruse, a



con, since he's down on his luck as well, having blown through all of Charlotte's money. The theme of deception is demonstrated in his false claims to want to be their father, again.

It is the calm and quiet strength of Francisco that offers the solution for them all. They will move to New York where they can get work through Francisco's sisters. They begin their journey back to the east from Hollywood, turning the page on the entire experience.

Discussion Question 1

Discuss Francisco's character.

Discussion Question 2

Discuss the theme of family as it is demonstrated in this chapter.

Discussion Question 3

Why do the girls end up going with their father even though they don't like him?

Vocabulary

lozenge, begat, metaphors, famine, rational, seraph, elegant, poise, creme de menthe



Part One, Chapter 6

Summary

Every Day's a Holiday

The road trip takes a long time. Eva writes that they stop in interesting places along the way, but no one ever gives them a second glance since the war has made odd couples appear all over the nation. The plan, so far, is that Edgar will become a gentleman's butler, and Iris will become a governess. On the car trip, Iris and Eva pass the time with Eva helping Iris study and reacquaint herself with the classics, which she might be called upon to teach her charges as a governess. It's Eva's birthday, but no one remembers until she says something. Then they all fuss over her, stopping for lunch, which they don't usually do. Eva is happy.

When they arrive in Brooklyn, New York, at Francisco's sister's home, they are greeted warmly. Bea, one of Francisco's sisters helps Iris convert her starlet look to a governess look. Eva is impressed at the transformation. Carnie, Francisco's other sister, gives Eva 25 cents and sends her outside to go for a walk. She passes by an orphanage for Jewish children. She speaks to a blond boy about her age. She makes a point of walking past there each day.

Eva thinks about the war and how brave she would be in the face of real danger. She doesn't believe that she would be very brave. The brave one would be Iris, who always seems fearless. Eva knows that in a real crisis she would have her nose stuck in a book and her head buried in the sand.

Analysis

In this chapter, the themes of identity and family are explored. Though they have all been estranged from one another, Francisco being the exception, this is a time for Iris and Eva to try and reconnect with their father. Though he has his shortcomings, Eva does note that he did come and rescue them from Hollywood. Likewise, he has brought the little blue books that are a collection of all basic knowledge. Their contents are part textbook and part entertainment, so the girls take to them readily. Edgar tells them that there's nothing of worth that can't be learned from those little blue books.

The theme of identity is also presented in this chapter in that all of them are having to once again reinvent their identity in order to survive. Both Edgar and Iris must pretend to be something they've never been--hired help. Edgar will be a butler, and Iris will be a governess. Neither have any experience, nor do either of them have the education that they claim to have. Once again, Eva assumes the role of teacher and helps them ready themselves for their new roles.



Deception is also demonstrated in that they are attempting to deceive the Torelli family, whom they've never met, in order to get a job. A new version of family is introduced when Eva and the rest meet Francisco's sisters, Carnie and Bea. Francisco's sisters are glad to see him, and they welcome the rest of the group warmly. Eva is amazed at the love shown by Francisco and his sisters to each other. She immediately has a sense of what she has been missing, and she wants that for herself.

Discussion Question 1

What does it say about Eva's character and her development when she determines to walk past the Jewish orphanage each day?

Discussion Question 2

What actions indicate that no one considers Eva as relevant?

Discussion Question 3

Discuss the theme of identity as it is demonstrated in this chapter.

Vocabulary

mourning, crept, anonymous, phenomenally, slaughtered, contemplate, banister



Part One, Chapter 7

Summary

Dream a Little Dream of Me

Francisco, Edgar, Iris, and Eva pack into the car and go to the Torelli house for their interviews. Edgar will interview for the butler's position and Iris for the governess position. Francisco does everyone's hair and makeup, gives them pointers, and sends them on their way. The house is very grand, and there is a very long driveway. Iris remarks that there are many houses like this in Hollywood. Everyone ignores the statement.

Francisco muses that the house looks newly built, so he says that the money that the Torellis have must have been newly acquired. Iris and Edgar agree that it doesn't matter how old or new their money is, just as long as they have it and are willing to pay it to them. While Iris and Edgar are interviewing, both Francisco and Eva sit in the shade at the end of the driveway and play a game of conquian, which is a Mexican card game.

The date is now 1947, many years in the future. Another letter from Iris has been written to Eva, whom Iris calls Evie. It discusses Iris's memory of the day she and Edgar had gone to interview at the Torellis. Both she and Edgar managed to be hired. Iris remarks that she felt bad at the time for conning Mrs. Torelli, since Iris really wasn't a college graduate. Iris writes that she could tell that the Torellis had just made the transition from one class to another and were very nervous about making good impressions and saying/doing the things that they thought they were supposed to do when one was instantly rich. Iris says that their cook came into the kitchen while Mrs. Torelli was taking her on a tour of the home that first day and that the cook was beautiful. Iris says that she was instantly smitten by her. Her name was Reenie Heitmann.

As a return to the earlier scene, Edgar and Iris have returned with their good news about their jobs. They are given the carriage house to live in, and they move in immediately, with the exception of Francisco who has an apartment in the same building as his sisters. There was no discussion of Eva going back to school; so, she spends most of her days bored and looking for something to do. She is allowed to use the pool when the family isn't home, and she does on occasion. Sometimes she spends time with Francisco and his sisters in Brooklyn.

Eventually, Francisco's sisters give Eva a job working in their hair salon. She sweeps up and does the chores. They begin teaching her how to do hair. They tell everyone that Eva is their niece. Iris and Eva spend time with Reenie and her husband, Gus. Eva likes Gus. He plays cards with her while Iris and Reenie go off on their own together. He has no idea how Iris feels about his wife and Eva feels badly for him. Later, on one such evening, Eva goes looking for Iris and Reenie to tell them that Gus wants to take them home. She finds the two women having sex.



There is another letter dated 1947 from Iris, though this is a letter that hasn't been sent. She has written it from London, England. Looking back in time, she is confessing in the letter to having called the authorities in Long Island that very night after she and Reenie had sex to report Gus as a German spy. She gave the police the number and address of Gus's service station.

The story recounts an earlier letter to Eva written by Gus in 1943. He writes about when the men came to his service station, accused him of being a spy, tore everything up, punched him, then put him in a car and drove for several days. He writes that he was placed in a cell and no one said anything. Then, he writes, four men in suits drag him out of the cell and take him for what they tell him is a hearing. The hearing is inconclusive so they send him to an internment camp in Fort Lincoln.

Analysis

In this chapter the reader sees that the entire group has had a change of circumstances and is better able to survive and live on a better scale than before. Iris and Edgar are hired, and Eva is even given a job working at the sister's beauty shop. The theme of identity is demonstrated here as Eva changes herself and her notion of herself to be not only the housekeeper and cook at their home, but also to work in the beauty shop with the sisters. The sisters decide that she should learn how to do hair and go into that for a living. Eva readily agrees to do as they ask, though she doesn't particularly enjoy it.

This is the chapter where Iris first sees Reenie the cook. She says that she was instantly smitten, and it is in this moment that Reenie realizes that what she had shared with Rose was merely a precursor to the real type of love and infatuation that she has with Reenie. This sets Iris on the course that she eventually takes, which ends up with Reenie's husband, Gus, falsely accused.

The theme of deception is also demonstrated in that Iris and Reenie are going behind Gus's back to continue their affair. Eva is also complicit in this in that they use her to keep Gus entertained while they take long 'walks' in the backyard. Eva feels badly about deceiving Gus because he is such a great guy. She really enjoys his company and later has angry words with her sister about what she is doing. Iris is determined to have things her own way.

Discussion Question 1

What do Francisco and Eva have in common?

Discussion Question 2

Compare Iris and her father. How are they similar in the way they treat people?



Discussion Question 3

What does the entire incident with Gus tell the reader about Iris morally and ethically?

Vocabulary

wrought-iron, Mediterranean style, carelessness, cobblestone, conqian, palaver, shopped



Part Two, Chapter 8

Summary

You're Not the Only Oyster in the Stew

Clara Williams, a stage performer, is introduced in this section. Though she is African American, she is light skinned. She will often add makeup and go onstage as a white woman. There is a letter included from the same time period (1943) from a fan of hers. He writes that he bought her a drink between sets and thinks that her performances are spectacular. He says that her Lena Horne impersonation was especially striking. He wants to meet her and buy her another drink the following week. He signs it as Edgar Acton.

The point of view shifts to Edgar. He confesses that he'd felt particularly odd being the only white man in an all black bar. There is another letter from Edgar to Clara. He asks her if she'd like to have dinner with him some time. He admits to himself, though not in the letter, that courting an African American will be difficult. He finds a few restaurants in Greenwich Village that don't care. They have a magnificent evening. Later, they sit in the car and listen to the radio. He is up front and frank with her at one point, telling her that he isn't a rich man, nor is he young anymore. He says that in spite of that he would like to see her again if she would agree. She agrees.

Analysis

This short chapter explores two themes, deception and ambition. Clara Williams, an African American lounge singer wants to be a big star. She is constantly comparing herself to Lena Horne. Clara suffers from a skin disorder, impetigo, and she literally can choose which color she wishes to be to suit her purposes, thus demonstrating the theme of deception. Edgar sees her performing in a lounge called the Nite Cap. He falls for her immediately, and doesn't care that he's the only white man in the all black lounge.

Ambition enters into the equation for both of them. Edgar has plans to make it big and eventually live well again as he did in Ohio. Clara wishes to become famous like Lena Horne. In this regard, both Edgar and Clara are well matched because both will do anything to get what they want, including sacrifice the people they care about. This will be hinted at throughout their courtship. In the end, it plays out to be true.

Discussion Question 1

Discuss the theme of ambition as it is demonstrated in this chapter.



Discussion Question 2

Why is Edgar taking a big risk by dating Clara?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Clara agree to have dinner with Edgar?

Vocabulary

nicked, appeasement, pallor, harmlessness, colleague, shawl, tremendous, penitentiary



Part Two, Chapter 9

Summary

Pennies from Heaven

Eva observes the Torelli household with something akin to hero worship. She equates the fine home with a fine person. She reasons that her original home with her mother had been shabby and that they had been shabby people. Her father had married a fine woman and had lived in a fine home, and Iris's mother was such a saint that she made up for Edgar's shortcomings. So, when she observes the Torellis, especially Mrs. Torelli, she believes that they are the best of all possible people. She continually compares Mrs. Torelli to her own mother, who wasn't there for her. She greatly admires Mrs. Torelli.

Iris moves Reenie into the carriage house with them after Gus is arrested, and then she changes her own last name to Reardon, which was her mother's maiden name. She begins going on auditions again. Iris lands several roles and begins to relegate Eva to doing her governess tasks with the children. Mrs. Torelli doesn't mind as long as the children are learning something and are happy.

Edgar introduces Clara to everyone one evening. Aside from being a little shocked at her color, they welcome her readily. She begins staying most nights at the carriage house. Eva feels the odd man out since everyone has someone. She confesses that she has been stealing money from everyone's pockets for months. Just a penny here, a nickel there, from purses, wallets, and drawers. Then she writes that Francisco's sisters had started to take her with them when they did in-home hair styling. While at the homes she would take small things that wouldn't be missed, like a jar of peanuts or a pair of socks. She also found five dollars in a man's raincoat pocket. She took that, too.

Eva's father gives her a stack of books so that she can educate herself. On the bottom is a book on how to read tarot cards and the actual cards. Eva begins delving into tarot card reading. Bea and Carnie, Francisco's sisters, give Eva a corner of their beauty salon to set up a reading table so she can read clients' fortunes if they wished. She charges a dollar for ten minutes. She becomes instantly popular and begins making a lot of money. She opens her own bank account.

Analysis

The theme of deception is demonstrated in several ways in this chapter. First, there is the blatant form of deception in that poor Gus is arrested because of Iris's lie. She tells the police that Gus is a German spy. Then, there is a more subtle form of deception that is going on. Eva is in love with the Torelli family and believes that it should be the benchmark for all families. Obviously, there is no such thing as a perfect family, but Eva



has deluded herself into believing that the Torelli family is one. What this serves to do is make her feel the lack of such a family in her own childhood more keenly.

Eva demonstrates the theme of identity in that, once again, she is trying on a different persona. She is now a thief. She writes that she has been taking money from everyone's wallets and pockets when they aren't looking. She does this because she doesn't want to be the only one without money in the group. Then, she expands upon this to start taking small items from clients' homes when she accompanies Francisco's sisters on their home visits.

In a pivotal moment, Edgar gives Eva the stack of blue books. They range in topics from math to science, to social studies, languages, and history. On the very bottom, however, is a book on how to read tarot cards. The symbolism of the blue books indicates that Edgar has actually thought about Eva for once. He has offered her something that would literally get him nothing back in return. It was a truly selfless gesture. The tarot cards allow Eva to start making a good living for herself, something that she will need very much in the future.

Discussion Question 1

What does Iris changing her last name seem to indicate about her?

Discussion Question 2

How has Eva changed since Chapter 1?

Discussion Question 3

Discuss the theme of deception in this chapter.

Vocabulary

enterprise, beau, tarot, hocus-pocus, salacious, dubious, disapproving



Part Two, Chapter 10

Summary

Bei Mir Bist Du Schoen (Nice work if you can get it)

This chapter starts with a letter from Iris. She is still writing from London. Iris writes about the time in 1943, just shortly after Gus had been taken away. Reenie was despondent because without Gus she would never have a chance to have a child. Iris writes that she was grateful at the time for an orphanage not too far away. However, she also writes, she knows that going through the normal channels to adopt a child would never meet with approval. Single women adopting were frowned upon. Iris writes about how she coerced Eva into going with her to the orphanage every day and standing outside of the fence, looking at the children. They made friends with many of them. Finally, Iris found a child that she felt Reenie would love. After a few weeks the child, a boy of about five years old, trusted them enough that when they cut a hole in the fence, he willingly went through.

Reenie loves him instantly and begins caring for him. They name him Danny Lombardo, and Iris believes she has really done something remarkable for Reenie. She confesses in the letter that she never did care for children, and she still didn't even after they'd had Danny for more than a year. She hints that the reason Eva isn't responding to any of her letters is because of something that happened later on with Danny. What happened is never divulged.

The point of view shifts to Eva, who says that she purposely guided Iris into selecting Danny because she'd watched him each day that she'd walked past the orphanage and felt a type of connection to him. She knew that Iris, and most likely Reenie, would tire of him. Then, she could swoop in and really take care of him properly. However, a wrench is thrown into the works when Danny confesses that he has a brother and that he's not really the Diego sister's neighbor's abandoned child. Reenie is furious and demands that Iris go back down to the orphanage and get the brother, too. Irritated, Iris goes back down with Eva. They see Danny's brother, Bobby, right away. He is the playground bully, and Iris makes Eva agree to tell Reenie that he was nowhere to be found.

Analysis

The theme of ambition is clear in Iris's actions toward Reenie. She wanted Reenie for herself, and she got her. She wants Reenie to be happy; so, she goes and takes a young boy from the local orphanage for her. Her ambition to have what she wants when she wants it is still the type of ambition that leaves little room for thought, consideration, or even common sense.



Discussion Question 1

What does the entire orphanage event say about Iris's character?

Discussion Question 2

What does Eva figure will happen regarding Danny and her sister?

Discussion Question 3

How is Eva becoming more like her sister?

Vocabulary

elocution, appalling, deluded, permanent, conniving, wisecracking, genteel, plucky, resolute



Part Two, Chapter 11

Summary

You Made Me Love You

Eva writes that despite her plans to be the fairy godmother to Danny, Reenie proved to be an amazing mother. In truth, she writes, she became jealous of the little boy because he had the mother that she, Eva, never had. She confesses that she has offered her services more and more to Mrs. Torelli because she just wants to be near her. One evening Mrs. Torelli is struggling with the baby who is suffering from a very bad illness. He is having trouble breathing. Mrs. Torelli asks Eva to step into the bathroom with her. She turns on the shower until there is a lot of steam in the room. Then, she undresses and steps into the shower with the baby.

She asks Eva to help her, and Eva does so. Eva writes that in that moment of listening to Mrs. Torelli sing to her baby, in the warmth and the fogginess of the room, she felt as if she had died and gone to heaven. For a moment she had a taste of what it felt to have a loving mother, to have someone who was glad you were alive. The baby recovers. Afterward Eva and Mrs. Torelli sit in silence for a while.

A letter from Gus interrupts the earlier scene. It has been written in 1944. He is writing to Eva (whom he calls Evie). He says that he works on keeping things at the internment camp fixed. Gus talks about a man he met at the camp whose abduction and arrest tale is similar to Gus's. He'd been interrogated five different times. Then, he and his family were taken in separate trains. The children were asked if they loved Germany more than America. In the end, they incarcerated everyone; but, the women and children weren't allowed to be in the same camp as the men. It's clear that Gus has become bitter. There's been an outbreak of TB, and the man whom he'd befriended had died from it. On the plus side, he writes sarcastically, they decided to allow families to house together. Too late for his friend. However, he writes, when his friend died, he left a beautiful wife with two children. It was then and there that he conspires with his friend's wife to pretend that he's really her husband. She agrees, and Gus switches identification with his dead friend. He tells Eva to call him Karl from now on. He tells her not to tell Reenie.

Analysis

The scene with Mrs. Torelli, the baby, and Eva in the shower is important because it is as if Eva is reentering into a rebirthing of her own. She feels herself drawn to Mrs. Torelli and her concern for her child, and has the most intense longing to belong to Mrs. Torelli, just as her real children do. Mrs. Torelli is a nurturing individual and is always kind to Eva. However, this gives Eva a glimpse into what she eventually wants for herself by way of a family and how she is going to be as a mother one day.



Gus's letter shows that his nature is to make the best of things wherever he finds himself. Though he has been abandoned by his country, he has made other friends. In addition to the theme of abandonment, he also personifies and demonstrates the themes of deception and identity when he knowingly takes the identity of Karl and states that his wife and children are his. This, of course, allows him to leave the camps and go to Germany.

What is most telling in this chapter is that Gus asks Eva not to tell Reenie about him. The reader is left to wonder if he meant that she was not to tell Reenie that he has been writing to her, and only her, or that he is pretending to be married to another woman. What is interesting about all of this is the fact that Gus feels comfortable enough with Eva to confess everything in the letters.

Discussion Question 1

Why is Gus bitter?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Gus decide to take his friend's identity?

Discussion Question 3

What becomes obvious about Eva's emotional needs after the shower incident with Paulie and Mrs. Torelli?

Vocabulary

traitors, INS, sympathize, patriotically, exterminating, restraint, TB



Part Two, Chapter 12

Summary

I'm Beginning to See the Light

This chapter is told from Edgar's point of view. He is experiencing health problems. Words are failing him; they just won't come to the front part of his mind. Also, his equilibrium has been affected, as well as some of his eyesight. He goes to the library to look up his symptoms, but he can't find anything that matches what he's experiencing. He tells no one.

Through a series of memories it's revealed that he is not really an Englishman, though this is what he's told people most of his life. When he was living in Chicago, he decided to rise above his circumstances. He adopted an English accent and bought a presentable suit and a pocket watch. He then told people that he was an English nobleman who had fallen on hard times. He ingratiated himself to a professor at Windsor College who drank too much and needed a friend. Then, Edgar was hired as an associate professor. This is where he'd met Charlotte, Iris's mother. He laughs at the memory and how Charlotte had been taken in by his lie of a poor man of noble birth trying to make his way in the world.

He compares all of the women he's ever been with and considers that Clara is the one that is perfect for him. This is because she sees him clearly. She didn't buy his noble gentry tale at all, but she loved him anyway. She truly cares for him. He feels, for the first time in his life, grateful for someone to be in his life. He notices that many of his memories just won't surface, even though he knows that they are there. He is worried that something is critically wrong.

Analysis

The theme of deception is presented largely in this chapter as it chronicles Edgar's back story. The reader learns that most of Edgar's life has been laced with lies and deception. He was originally not English, but pretended to be from England. He was born a poor boy from the Bronx. When he adopted a British accent, donned a nice suit, he was able to befriend someone whom he deceived into believing that he is truly English. This lands him a job that he is little qualified for, that of an English professor of literature.

He laughs at the memory of how his now deceased wife, Charlotte, had believed every lie that fell from his mouth, including the one about being an English noble down on his luck. However, he begins thinking about Clara and how she didn't buy his tale for one minute, and that this made him love her all the more. He realizes that she loves him despite the fact that he's a liar. He knows that she practices her own brand of deception each night on stage.



Clara Williams understands Edgar because she is also demonstrating the theme of deception. Each night she pretends to be a white woman singing, or a black woman singing, but in the end, she presents a side of herself to the public that is just 'smoke and mirrors'. How she truly is, is revealed in her tender moments with Edgar, her compassionate gestures towards Eva. Edgar sees Clara differently, too. Until Clara he always viewed people as commodities, something to be used until it was no longer useful. He doesn't view Clara that way.

Discussion Question 1

Discuss the theme of Deception as it is offered in this chapter.

Discussion Question 2

Why does Clara stay with Edgar?

Discussion Question 3

Until meeting Clara, how has Edgar viewed people?

Vocabulary

prohibition, pawnshop, ingratiated, nausea, vertigo, rhetoric, forbade, genteel, loafers, monogrammed



Part Two, Chapter 13

Summary

Never a Day Goes By

The chapter begins with a letter from Gus..who is now going by the name Karl.

The year is 1944, and Gus writes that the administrators of the camp offered all of the camp prisoners one way tickets to Germany if they wanted to go back. Gus's new wife, Greta, was originally from Germany and still has family there. They will offer to take the administration up on their one way tickets back to Germany, he writes.

There is another letter dated five months later. Gus writes that they have been living on Ellis Island for two weeks, packed in tight with other immigrants. He says that many of the other immigrants are Germans that had been living in South America and had been abducted and sent to Ellis Island for processing, whatever that means, he says. There are 800 German-Americans who have volunteered to be expatriated. They will be on the ship called the Gripsholm.

Another letter follows this one. It is written a month later. Gus writes that they landed in Switzerland and it is very cold. He says the Swiss are not happy that they are there. It is just a waystation, Gus writes, as they are being put on a train soon to continue on into Germany.

Another letter is dated a month later in December of 1944. Gus writes that they have reached Germany and that there was an exchange of German and American POWs. Then, he says, they simply opened the door and shoved them out. They walked for many miles until they came to a boarding house where Greta could make a phone call to her aunt and uncle. They are shocked that Greta would be in Germany and are not happy that they are there. They tell them that there is very little food. They also tell them that they are crazy to have come back.

Analysis

The theme of abandonment is explored in this chapter as Gus, Greta, and the children arrive in Switzerland. They are not greeted or treated well at all. Gus had been rejected by the United States. When he and Greta arrive in Germany, they are rejected, initially, by Greta's aunt and uncle.

Gus takes everything in stride, making the best of a bad situation. He makes jokes while describing the terrible conditions. Yet, the situation that he and Greta find themselves in is traumatic. No one really wants them. Gus understands that Greta is just going along with the ruse about who he is in order to survive. She doesn't love him, and he cares for



her as a friend. He loves the children, however, and this makes him think that one day he would love to have some of his own.

Discussion Question 1

Discuss the theme of family as it is demonstrated in this chapter.

Discussion Question 2

What were Gus's expectations when he left America? How did his expectations compare to the reality of his arrival in Germany?

Discussion Question 3

How are the expatriates all treated along the way?

Vocabulary

medieval, repatriated, sardines, aliens, baffled, inclined



Part Two, Chapter 14

Summary

Let's Fly Away

Eva writes that her father's health has declined to the point that he's become a bed-bound invalid. Clara and Eva care for him together. He is seldom coherent; and, when he speaks, it is all in Yiddish. The Torellis send a priest to sit with Edgar. There is a discussion about religion and the fact that Edgar didn't have any. Father Dom, the priest, tries to figure out the state of everyone's soul and is turned away by all of them. Clara tells him that black people who believed in Christ are twice the fools.

Clara and Eva bond over their similar mother abandonment stories. Clara's mother gave her a ham sandwich and five dollars and wished her well. Eva tells her that her mother just left her with a suitcase. The doctor arrives and checks on Edgar. He tells the women that it is as he has feared. Edgar has cancer, and it has progressed rapidly. He warns them that it will not be long before Edgar dies.

Analysis

Edgar's decline is rapid, and it serves to peel back all of the layers of his carefully built facade. His name was never Edgar, and he is most likely Jewish because he speaks in Yiddish constantly. The theme of identity is revealed in this scene in that Edgar's identity is returning to its starting point, regardless of whether he wishes it or not. The author would seem to be suggesting that eventually everyone rises to the level of who they were when their life began.

Clara and Eva bond over their childhood histories. The theme of abandonment is demonstrated during their conversation as they both commiserate and wonder about women who could treat their children as their mothers treated them. Eva realizes that she still holds a great deal of anger towards her mother. It is at this point that she believes that at some time in her future she would like to track down her mother ask her why she did what she did by leaving her on her father's porch without so much as a word.

Discussion Question 1

Now that Edgar's mind has been affected, what is revealed about the real Edgar?

Discussion Question 2

Why would both Clara and Eva reject religion?



Discussion Question 3

How does Eva take strength from Clara's story of leaving home?

Vocabulary

disposition, patron, diaphragms, adultery, contrition, assault



Part Two, Chapter 15

Summary

Harbor Lights

Eva is wakened from a sound sleep by screaming and the smell of fire. She runs downstairs to find out what's going on and doesn't see any flames anywhere. She hears screams and goes out into the back yard. Reenie and Iris are rolling on the ground. Reenie seems badly burned, and Iris is also hurt. Eva runs to them and helps put the fire out. The ambulances arrive within minutes and take both Iris and Reenie away on stretchers.

The Torellis come out of the house and Mrs. Torelli comforts Eva. Mr. Torelli says that he has a cousin who is a doctor and that he will call him to find out what their condition is. Mrs. Torelli tells Eva that she needs to go get cleaned up and try to rest. Eva does so and helps herself to Iris's special shampoo and face cream. She is reminded of one of her tarot cards, the tower, which indicates change.

There is a letter, dated 1947, from Iris to Eva. The reader learns that at some point Iris has left the United States to go on stage in Europe. She has left Danny for Eva to raise. She writes that she has heard how Eva was faring from one of Francisco's sisters who happened to look her up when she was in London. She states that she has learned that Eva is still reading palms. She shares that she has a recurring dream where they act out various movies and sing popular songs together. Then the dream jumps and she is in a restaurant with two Hollywood directors courting her. Then, she wakes up.

The reader learns that Reenie died from the fire that enveloped her. She'd carelessly lit a cigarette on the burner of the stove and it had quickly leaped and engulfed her whole body. Iris had, had enough presence of mind to run outdoors with her, then smother the fire by throwing herself on Reenie and rolling her on the ground. The reader learns that Reenie died from her injuries and that Iris was also so badly burned that she was not able to attend Reenie's funeral.

The Torelli's stepped up to help and covered all of the medical bills for Iris's treatments. This meant that Iris had to be flown to England where a doctor who'd specialized in treating burned soldiers during the war, could work on Iris. She was there with many pilots who were recovering from worse burns and injuries than she was. Still, they all pulled together, she writes. Making the most of her situation, Iris ingratiates herself to everyone and she says that they all found her charming.

Analysis

This is a very tragic chapter. Reenie dies when she carelessly lights a fire on the burner and is so badly burned that she dies from her injuries. What is interesting to note is that



Iris threw herself on Reenie in order to try and put out the fire. This selfless act shows that Iris really did love Reenie and that she was willing to offer up her career and her life for her. This is a monumental step forward for Iris. However, with Reenie's death, and Iris's slow recovery in London, all of that comes undone.

The Torellis are a good family and they step up to help Eva out financially. They make sure that Iris's medical bills are covered and they also arrange the funeral for Reenie. After the initial fire, it is curious to see that Eva is almost in a type of shock about it all. It is as if she feels relieved that she doesn't have to deal with Iris or Reenie any longer. She goes in and uses some of her sister's very expensive items, items that the reader is sure she is never invited to enjoy. She takes advantage of the fact that Iris is not there, something that she would not have done in previous chapters.

Likewise, there is the symbolism of the fire, itself. In this scene it destroyed Reenie and the relationship that Iris had, the one true relationship that made her a better person. Without it, Iris becomes her old self again. In many respects, though she cared for Reenie, Eva is benefited by the fire. It has had a purgative effect and she feels, in many respects, free.

Discussion Question 1

By helping herself to her sister's special products, what does the reader understand about Eva's relationship with her sister?

Discussion Question 2

Why does the author have Eva mention the tarot cards?

Discussion Question 3

With her father about to die and her sister injured, what might the future look like for Eva?

Vocabulary

soot, gracious, flagrant, imbibed, conflagration



Part Two, Chapter 16

Summary

After You've Gone

Eva writes that she ended up shoving her own grief at Reenie's death aside in order to keep things held together. Iris has been taken to a hospital and will soon be flown to London for special treatment. It is all Eva's responsibility. She takes care of her father, whose brain tumor has reduced him to a bed ridden infant. She also takes care of Danny. It breaks her heart when she has to tell Danny that Reenie is dead. Clara, who is on tour for three more weeks, isn't there. Eva immediately hates her for not being there.

Francisco and his sisters come to see Eva, and they take her and Danny to the hospital to see Iris before she is flown to London. No one has told her about Reenie's death, so Eva writes that she has to break the news to her. To Eva's relief, Iris already knew. She watched her die in the ambulance that night.

Analysis

In this chapter, Eva is once again assuming an identity that is well beyond her years. Both her sister and her friend are badly burned. Yet, she also must consider Edgar as an invalid and Danny as a dependent child. She is shouldering a lot of responsibility for her age. The themes of identity and family are demonstrated in this chapter as Iris throws herself on Reenie in order to put out the fire, without thought for her own personal safety. The author is suggesting that loving family members protect and love unconditionally to the point where they will sacrifice their own well-being for the sake of the other.

Likewise, Eva demonstrates the theme of family as well because she steps up and shoulders the burden of being the able bodied member. She does what she can to take care of those who can't take care of themselves, such as Edgar and Danny. Francisco also exhibits the theme of family in that he comes when called for help, proving that one doesn't have to be related by blood in order to be considered a family member.

Discussion Question 1

How is the theme of family demonstrated in this chapter?

Discussion Question 2

What situation does Eva find herself in as a result of Reenie's death and Iris's injuries?



Discussion Question 3

Describe the Torellis and how they have behaved toward Eva and the others?

Vocabulary

vagrant, abandonment, finesse, haphazard, askew, mangled

Part Two, Chapter 17

Summary

Hitler Has Only Got One Ball

A letter from Gus is included, dated 1945. Life in Germany is difficult, writes Gus, since he doesn't speak the language. However, Greta's aunt and uncle are kind enough, and the girls are assimilating into good little German girls, giving the heil salute like regular citizens. He writes that the aunt and uncle truly don't want them there, but they are at least willing to help them out for now. He helps the uncle fix old tractors in the district.

The next letter is dated three weeks later. He writes that they were bombed. When the bombs fell on the town they all ran down into the cellar. When they emerged the next morning, most of their house was gone. In town, Gus makes friends with a man who has no legs. His name is Hans. They drink together and often speak about how Gus happened to come to Germany. A refugee from Dresden comes to live with them. He says that nearly everyone there is dead from the bombings.

A large non-stop bombing raid happened, Gus writes, and they were in the cellar for three days straight. When they emerged, there was nothing. The town had been leveled. Ash falls from the sky like snow, Gus writes. Then, just when they thought it was over, more bombs came. One was so close that it knocked him out. When he came to, the aunt, uncle, and two little girls were dead. Gus writes that he looked around for Greta but never found her body. Everywhere he went, there was nothing but death and the dying.

Analysis

Identity and family are explored in this chapter. Gus writes in his letters that he has assumed the name of Karl and that he and Greta have settled into as normal a life as they can. However, the fact that Gus continues to write to Eva indicates that he has not embraced his new identity and is only using it as a way to survive, as do many of the characters in this novel.

Family is demonstrated in that war destroys families. Not only did it separate Gus from his first wife, Reenie, but it also killed and destroyed his new family. Without them, he assumes yet another new identity. When he immigrates back to the United States, he is reluctant to go back to his old name of Gus. This is because he doesn't know how to be Gus any more because he's been so long estranged from his true identity. Gus was a man whose identity was wrapped up in his family. When he was with Reenie, he was Gus. When he was with Greta, he was Karl. Then, when he had no family at all, he became Gersh the friendly math teacher whom everyone viewed as a father figure. Later, when he finally gathers the courage to see Eva, he becomes Gus again, thus coming full circle.



Discussion Question 1

Why does Gus make a point of telling Eva that he's only pretending to be Karl so that he can survive?

Discussion Question 2

Why is Gus reluctant to go back to being Gus when he returns to America?

Discussion Question 3

How has Gus handled seeing and living through all of the death and dying in Germany?

Vocabulary

atrocious, magnanimous, transcendent, facade, practicality



Part Three, Chapter 18

Summary

Going Home, Going Home

Eva realizes that she needs to go back to work at the salon, reading palms, if they are going to survive. She knows that the Torellis won't allow them to stay much longer because they now have no butler or governess. There's no reason for them to be in the carriage house any longer. In order to move, she needs money.

She tells Francisco's sisters about her situation, but Bea has eloped and married someone; so, she can't take them in. Carrie also can't take her in as she's engaged to be married. Francisco has a boy living with him, and there's no room. While they are discussing her options they learn that President Roosevelt has died from an aneurism while at Warm Springs. Everyone is devastated and begins weeping uncontrollably.

Eva moves out of the carriage house, and Mrs. Torelli gives most of the furniture to her to take with her at their new house. She also gives Eva two months' rent so that she can have a place while she's getting on her feet. The house is a place that Mrs. Torelli found for them through a mutual friend. The house is situated in the 'Negro' side of town, she writes. She didn't care. Clara had returned and helped them all move into the house. It is unclear whether she will help Eva with the continued care of Edgar or not.

The war is officially over, she writes, and there is a large parade. She doesn't care. Her days are an endless parade of their own. Each morning she feeds Danny and her father, cleans her father up, empties his bedpan, and gets Danny off to school. Then, she scoots out the door to get to the salon to read tarot cards for the day. She is 18 years old.

After the war, she writes, everyone wants their future read. She does very well and is making nice money, so much so that Francisco helps her find a business office of her own. She puts a sign out front that reads, "Association for Metaphysical Research." She is able to barter her services with a nearby bakery. At least, they always have good bread and pastries. She writes that now the war is over, people have money to purchase things, and she is one of those things they purchase.

Analysis

The themes of deception and abandonment are evident in this chapter. First, the country is ecstatic that the war is over. At the same time, it is devastated by the loss of FDR. In fact, most of the country feels abandoned by his sudden death. The loss



shakes the country. Eva writes that everyone is seen with a tissue to their eyes because of their sadness.

Eva feels abandoned, herself, since Iris has made it clear that she does not intend to return anytime soon and that once she is recovered, she will not come back for Danny. Once again, Eva has been left to do the work that no one else wants to do. She is resentful, but there's nothing else left to do but move forward and hope for a better future. She continues with the deception of being a tarot card reader. She writes that she makes up all sorts of predictions for people and that they eat it up as if it were real.

Eva finds herself making a lot of money off of the misery of those who lost loved ones in the war. She doesn't feel guilty about it though as most of the women who come in for readings are quite well off and she believes that in some small way she gives them hope and comfort. She also feels abandoned due to Francisco's sisters telling her that they are moving on and that she can't use their salon for doing readings any longer. It makes Eva feel as if everyone in her life eventually leaves her.

Eva feels abandoned when she must leave the carriage house. She doesn't blame Mrs. Torelli for asking them to move on. After all, Edgar and Iris were employees and now that they were unable to fulfill their duties, new employees would be needing the carriage house. Still, Eva had come to view Mrs. Torelli as a surrogate mother, of sorts, and it hurts her terribly to have to leave them.

Mrs. Torelli is sympathetic toward Eva and what she's having to shoulder. She helps find her a house and gives her two months' rent to start over at a new place. This indicates that not only is Mrs. Torelli a kind and generous person, but it shows Eva that not everyone who is wealthy is spiteful and arrogant. To Eva, Mrs. Torelli is the perfect wife and mother. She will keep that image with her throughout her life.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Eva feel abandoned in this chapter?

Discussion Question 2

Why doesn't Eva feel guilty when she does tarot readings for the war widows?

Discussion Question 3

What has Mrs. Torelli taught Eva about people?

Vocabulary

maternal, wayward, encouragement, crevice, bountiful, hallowed



Part Three, Chapter 19

Summary

There is a letter from Gus included. It is dated August of 1945. He's still in Germany. He writes that he's converted to Judaism and that he still wonders about her from time to time. He doesn't miss anyone else in the United State, but he does miss Eva, who was always very kind and intelligent, and genuine. He writes that the conditions where he is are deplorable. The lice infestation is the worst, and there seems to be no way to get rid of them. People are still dying even though the war is over. There's no food or medicine. Almost everyone has some sort of injury. He writes that in the midst of all the suffering there are still people who are all about deceiving those around them in order to take even the smallest items that someone might have. He says that the worst culprits are the people who pretend to be medical personnel, but then they leave the dead to die, taking all of their belongings, instead.

He writes that he is teaching English to people who are trying to find a way to come to America. Over a hundred Polish Jews were sent back to Poland after being liberated from the camps. When they arrived back in Poland, they were all killed as they got onto the trains. Still other Jews tried to go back to their old homes, but no one wanted them back, claiming that they were the cause of the war. The Catholic churches are supporting this type of discrimination. There's nowhere for any of them to go. He wonders if any of his letters are reaching Eva.

Analysis

The theme of identity and deception are demonstrated by Gus in this chapter. Gus is surviving by adopting yet another way of living. He has converted to Judaism and has made friends. They all support one another in any way they can. Conditions in Germany are intolerable, even though the war has ended. They have very little to eat and Gus (as well as others) are lying, cheating, and stealing in order to survive. Gus shares that many people are posing as medical personnel or relief workers just to get close enough to take other people's belongings.

The symbolism of Gus's letters is magnified in this chapter because he wonders, not for the first time, if his letters have even gotten through to her. He truly cares for Eva and wants his letters to reach her. It has been his letters to her that have sustained him and given him the hope that he would see her again.

Abandonment is also demonstrated in this chapter with the plight of the Polish Jews who are trying to return home. Their fellow countrymen don't want them, and the Catholic church actively supports the discrimination against them. Considering what many of the Polish Jews had gone through in the concentration camps makes it unfathomable that their own people and country have abandoned them.



Discussion Question 1

How is the theme of deception demonstrated in this chapter?

Discussion Question 2

Discuss the symbolism of Gus's letters in this chapter. What is their purpose throughout the novel?

Discussion Question 3

How is the theme of abandonment extended to include groups of people in this chapter?

Vocabulary

internment, lingering, harbinger, reticence, cacophonous



Part Three, Chapter 20

Summary

To Each His Own

Ruthie Post is a little neighbor girl that lives a few doors down from Eva and Danny. She befriends Danny. Eva writes that she is a Godsend. She takes Danny off of Eva's hands during the afternoons after school. Ruthie's mother takes them under her wing and makes sure to help Eva with introductions to the grocer and the other businesses in the area.

Ruthie helps Danny with his new school and gives him the courage to walk himself home every day. She tells him whom to sit next to on the bus going to school and whom to avoid. Though Ruthie is African American, Eva writes that it doesn't matter at all. Kindness is colorblind, she writes.

Analysis

This short chapter features a new voice for the book. Ruthie is an African American girl who has befriended Danny. Both children could care less about the skin color of the other, though they are both aware that other people in their world make skin color matter. Ruthie gives Danny a strength that he has been lacking. As a result, he experiences true kindness. He sees how a 'normal' family acts toward one another and becomes very much aware of what an unusual arrangement he has with Eva and Francisco.

It is interesting to note that both Danny and Ruthie have held onto their own personalities and identities, even though Danny's real name has been changed. Despite the name change, he is still the same boy who walked out of the orphanage. Likewise, Ruthie most likely takes some flak from her own neighborhood and friends at school for befriending a white boy. Yet, she ignores them because she really likes hanging out with Danny. They understand each other.

Discussion Question 1

What is the author's purpose for including Ruthie's point of view on Danny and his family?

Discussion Question 2

How have Danny and Ruthie remained true to their own natures ?



Discussion Question 3

How do Danny and Ruthie make each other better people?

Vocabulary

instigated, companionable, seated, aware



Part Three, Chapter 21

Summary

Not in the Day and Not at Night

This chapter is told from the Ruthie Post's point of view. She says that she likes hanging out at Danny's house because his family was interesting and not like her boring family. Danny had a strange Aunt who wasn't much older than Ruthie's oldest sister, and then there was a black woman named Clara that would stop by. Ruthie thinks that Clara is the most interesting black woman she's ever met, aside from her mother, of course. She likes Danny and prefers to hang out with him rather than the girls from school. He reads on the same level as she does and this makes him better than most boys.

Analysis

This chapter features Ruthie once again and gives an outsider's opinion of Danny's household. The concept of Family is demonstrated in this chapter as Ruthie analyzes Danny's living arrangements. She finds it interesting and is not judgmental, but rather curious about it all. She is most fascinated with Clara, whom is neither black nor white.

Ruthie sees Danny as living with a very young aunt, a woman that she assumes must be black but only visits on the weekends, and a kindly older Mexican man. It is the strangest combination of people calling themselves a family that Ruthie has ever seen. The author is making the statement, once again, that the definition of family is more than mere biology.

Discussion Question 1

What is Ruthie's opinion of Danny's family?

Discussion Question 2

What is the author's purpose in having Ruthie comment on Danny's family?

Discussion Question 3

Compare Danny and Ruthie.

Vocabulary

pedestrian, baneful, quixotic, rampant



Part Three, Chapter 22

Summary

Step We Grandly

This chapter is told from Clara's viewpoint. She remarks that she still visits Edgar, though she knows that he is really just a shell now. He doesn't respond to anything, but she keeps coming to see him every day, bringing food for Eva and Danny. She has begun seeing another man, named Ozzie.

Edgar dies on a Tuesday, and Clara writes that she left on a Sunday, which was only decent. The funeral had been well attended, and Eva had received so much food in the way of casseroles and fruit baskets that they wouldn't have to buy groceries for weeks. She writes that she and Ozzie are going to Detroit and will be married there.

In a flash forward it is in the early 1960s and Clara has been widowed for many years. She is driving her car through the countryside in Michigan. She's had a good life and is thinking about how Danny must look now. She thinks maybe she should write Iris, Eva, or even little Danny (who isn't little anymore she's sure). She also knows that she won't write them as too much time has passed. She reaches for a cigarette from the glove compartment in the car.

The scene cuts to a police officer approaching the wreck of Clara's car calling her M'am. She knows, though, with her car smashed into the guardrail and her body broken and mangled, that this is the end for her.

There is a letter from Danny included in this section, dated 1946. It is May, and Danny writes to Iris saying that he hopes that sometimes before she goes to sleep she stops to realize what a bad thing she did and hopes it keeps her from sleeping sometimes. He writes about how well he's doing in the fourth grade and that he has a long list of people in his life that aren't there any longer, including her. He says that she need not write back to him or worry about him any longer, though he does wonder why she took him from that orphanage if she never intended to really keep him. He writes that he is fine and doesn't care if he ever sees her again.

Analysis

This is a pivotal chapter as Edgar dies, Clara leaves, and Danny confronts Iris. The theme of abandonment is prominent in this chapter on many levels and for most of the characters. First, Danny finally has the courage and anger to write a long letter to Iris, telling her all of the things that he had kept to himself for the last few years. He tells her, in so many words, that he both pities and hates her for what she did in leaving him. The fact that he can list a long group of people who have left him puts him in the same



league as Eva, who has a long list of her own. The reader sees that he is becoming as hardened, cynical, and bitter as Eva in some respects.

Clara abandons Eva and Danny, having met and fallen in love with another man. She stays through the funeral, helps them move forward through it, then turns her back on them and leaves, never looking back again. The flash forward confirms that she never did get back in touch with them after she left; that the abandonment was complete. She dies alone in a mangled car.

Discussion Question 1

Discuss how the theme of abandonment is displayed in this chapter.

Discussion Question 2

Discuss Clara's character.

Discussion Question 3

What does Danny hope to accomplish with his letter to Iris?

Vocabulary

petulant, ambulatory, dirge, hoisted, numb



Part Three, Chapter 23

Summary

They Can't Take That Away from Me

Eva writes that Danny took Clara's leaving badly. When he told Eva, in tears, that Clara never really loved Poppa or him, Eva writes that she smacked him across the mouth for having said such an ugly thing. Eva writes that she feels terrible that she did it. She sent him to his room while she cleaned up the kitchen. Later, she'd apologized to him and now, later, writes that of all of the people that the poor boy could have ended up with, she's the worst, and ill equipped to raise a kid. She and Danny both agree that they hate Iris, completely. At least Poppa died and Clara remarried and moved away. At least Clara and Ozzie stayed for Edgar's funeral. Iris never even acknowledged his passing.

Grief binds Eva and Danny to one another. She tries to include him in most things and as he is very intelligent he takes to almost anything she sets before him to accomplish. They like to tell Danny's life story and alter the outcome, or change some of the details that are more upsetting. They both know that they are making things up, but still, Eva writes, it makes them both feel better.

Analysis

In this chapter both Eva and Danny console one another for their numerous losses in life. They both share how terrible and angry they feel that life has dealt them such heavy burdens and terrible people with which to share their lives. Both of them draw comfort from the fact that they would always be there for one another. It is significant that Eva doesn't consider at any point leaving Danny and walking away. She could have easily done so or taken him back to the orphanage, making him another person's problem. During her life, she has seen many examples of such behavior. But, perhaps this is exactly why she can't do this to Danny. She understands the toll that it takes on the person who is abandoned. She will not be the perpetrator of such a crime.

Eva strikes Danny when he makes the statement about Clara because the stark truth catches her off guard. She had wanted to believe that at least Clara was the genuine article; that at least she had at some point loved them all. But the fact that now that Edgar was dead that she was free of them, hits Eva hard and she reacts without thinking, striking Danny. She realizes this after she's slapped him and immediately goes in to console him. They bond over their shared misery and loss.

Discussion Question 1

What does Eva's slap tell the reader about her state of mind at that moment?



Discussion Question 2

Why doesn't Eva consider leaving Danny to fend for himself?

Discussion Question 3

Compare Danny's losses to Eva's losses.

Vocabulary

blubbering, commiserate, anxious, exhalation



Part Three, Chapter 24

Summary

Prisoner of Love

Danny's point of view is offered in this chapter. He is now in the fifth grade and is still best friends with Ruthie Postman. However, another girl has been added to their group. Her name is Dorothy and no one at school really likes Dorothy because her family is very wealthy. Dorothy, however, has taken a liking to both Danny and Ruthie. They go over to Dorothy's house. Dorothy, Danny quickly realizes, is strange. He believes it is due to the fact that her family is too wealthy to be bothered to love her or teach her how not to be so strange. She is bossy, and likes to do things that shock people. Danny and Ruthie can't wait to leave, and actually try to leave a couple of times, but Dorothy won't let them.

There is a letter from Gus included in this section, dated 1947. He writes that they've changed his name yet again. It is now Gersh. They have no papers that explain his existence there, so he is an embarrassment to everyone involved. They are talking of sending him back to America because there has been a massive miscarriage of justice. He writes this sarcastically and says that they want to send him home before the tragedy of his life becomes contagious.

Analysis

Danny's point of view is offered for the first time in the entire novel. The reader sees that he has assimilated some of Ruthie's life view and some of Eva's life view. He sees the very wealthy as spoiled and slightly deranged, as typified by the character of Dorothy. Dorothy is a pitiful character, in actuality. She is the daughter of a wealthy set of parents, who never have time for her. In this, she demonstrates the theme of abandonment and offers it in a new way. Her parents haven't physically left her, but she is abandoned to raise herself, her parents having very little interaction with her at all.

Gus's letter is included in this chapter and it is jarring when juxtaposed with Dorothy's lavish lifestyle. People are starving and dying in droves in Germany. Gersh (Gus) states that he is teaching English to people who wish to immigrate to the US. He's going to be sent home, too, very soon. He hopes that maybe he will be able to find her and check on her and the others.

The reader will remember that Gus doesn't know that Reenie is dead at this point, and yet, he has not mentioned her one time in any of the letters that he's written to Eva. He is also bitter when he writes that they are sending him home because his deportation was an utter miscarriage of justice. Gus's entire storyline underscores the motif of the innocent being caught up in the crosshairs of another's scheme.



The theme of Ambition is also touched upon here in that it was Iris's ambition and desire to have Reenie to herself that prompted her to turn Gus in, in the first place. He suffered because of her thoughtless and greedy actions. Her self-serving ambition also led to Danny's abduction and 'adoption'. She gave no more thought to taking Danny than if she'd been choosing a puppy from the pound. Her ambition left no room for emotion or common decency.

Discussion Question 1

How did Iris's ambition cause damage to her and to those around her?

Discussion Question 2

Compare Dorothy to Ruthie.

Discussion Question 3

Why is Gus being sent home and is he necessarily happy about it?

Vocabulary

mendacious, audacity, febrile, furtive, splayed



Part Three, Chapter 25

Summary

On the Sunny Side of the Street

This chapter is written from Gus's point of view. He has arrived back in America and is living in the same part of New York as Eva and Danny. He revels in all of the food that is so readily available. More Jews arrive every day from war-torn Europe and he tries to help them assimilate. He takes a job as a professor of math and engineering at a local school. Every day he walks among the boroughs looking for a sign of Eva and Danny.

There is a letter from Iris. It is not dated. She talks, in true Iris fashion, about herself. She's broken up with yet another girlfriend and muses that the thing to do these days is marry a Jewish man, preferably one up in years. She says that the arrangement would suit her perfectly as they could present whatever façade seemed fashionable, but behind closed doors do as they pleased. She says that she hopes Eva has married a Jewish man to help her raise Danny.

Analysis

This chapter shows that Iris is still unchanged. Though she is still in London working with the Veteran's organization as a fundraiser, she is untouched and unchanged by the war, her injuries, or the suffering of those around her. She simply does not care to see others or to have empathy for anyone. People are commodities and she still sees herself as a broker. Ambition is shown to dehumanize anyone who gives in to it too long.

Gus's situation becomes clear. He has written all of those letters to Eva and only to Eva because it was her that he was in love with all along. Still, even with this realization he's unclear of how to find her. It is telling that she is the one that he seeks out, rather than trying to find his legal wife, Reenie, whom he doesn't know has died.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Gus seek out Eva, instead of Reenie, when he first returns to America?

Discussion Question 2

What does Iris's letter tell the reader about her character?



Discussion Question 3

How does Iris view others?

Vocabulary

revels, assimilates, boroughs, narrowly, lox



Part Three, Chapter 26

Summary

Find Out What They Like

Eva has decided that it is time that she tracks down her mother. She is now 21 and has been raising Danny for three years on her own. She thinks that if she could manage to do it, then her mother surely should have been able to. She manages to track her down as she has been passing herself off as an evangelistic healer. There was an article about her, and even though she has spelled her name differently, Eva knows it is her.

Eva takes a taxi to her mother's place of business, which she calls the temple. Francisco is babysitting Danny and had asked her if she was going to forgive her mother or punish her. Up until she sees her mother she is unsure, but when she sees her mother swooping down the staircase like a queen, calling herself Mother Logan, Eva's mind is made up. She wants to gut her like a fish, she writes.

Her mother is polite and tells her, when asked about it, that she impulsively left Eva on that porch because she could see the writing on the wall. She tells Eva that she was 15 when she had Eva and that at age 27 she knew that Edgar was going to tire of them both sooner or later. She tells Eva that she seems to have turned out all right. Eva coldly leaves the temple telling her that she wouldn't piss on her if she were on fire. Eva feels good having said it. She goes home and Francisco and she have a beer.

Analysis

The theme of Family is demonstrated in this chapter as Eva tracks down her birth mother. When she confronts her mother with leaving her at her father's house, she finds her mother completely unremorseful. She believes that she did the right thing by leaving Eva with Edgar.

In the end, Eva is able to gain some closure in that she tells her mother that she doesn't care for her, and never would. Then, she goes home where Francisco is waiting for her. She realizes that her family is Francisco and Danny. She realizes that she loves both of them ferociously.

The theme of Deception is demonstrated as well in the character of Hazel Logan, Eva's mother. She has set herself up as a divine healer and operates a healing temple of worship. The irony of the situation is that the acolytes call her Mother Logan, which makes Eva laugh derisively. Her mother is no mother, Eva knows. And, healing is the last thing Hazel is capable of doing. Her deception is complete, not only of those around her, but to herself.



Discussion Question 1

How does Hazel justify her abandonment of Eva all those years ago?

Discussion Question 2

Compare what Hazel does for a living to what Eva does for a living.

Discussion Question 3

What is ironic about Hazel's new nickname, Mother Logan?

Vocabulary

acolyte, binge, seraphs, gilded, sputtered



Part Three, Chapter 27

Summary

Now is the Hour

One of Eva's clients is a young woman who lost a child a year previously. Her name is Mrs. Ronson and her husband works for the FBI. He's currently working on a high profile case involving a missing judge. Mrs. Ronson introduces Eva to Mr. Ted Ronson and Eva is immediately awestruck by him. She knows that he's married and she would never, or so she tells herself, stoop so low as to go after someone's husband. So, she contents herself with just looking at him while they work together. There's another psychic working with them. His name is Henk Croiset. He is a true psychic and during a break he tells Eva's fortune. He tells her that she is a mother and a daughter, and that she has not yet found her profession, and that when it arrived she should not run from it, but embrace it. At first Eva is upset, but the fact that he knew about Danny and Francisco, though he didn't mention their names, makes her believe that he is legit.

She goes home and tells Francisco all about the mission. The next morning Francisco chokes on a sausage, and Eva calls the doctor for help. She ends up having to perform a field tracheotomy on the kitchen floor. They go to the hospital and come by for several days afterwards to see Francisco who will make a full recovery. Dr. Keith tells Eva that she would make a great doctor, that she performed that surgery under stressful conditions and did it like she'd been doing it her whole life. Eva thinks that possibly she could become a doctor.

Analysis

The theme of Identity is demonstrated heavily in this chapter. First, there is the discovery of the body by Henk, the French psychic. It is also Henk who easily sees through Eva's psychic scam and tells her that he understands why she has done it, but that it will no longer serve her. Her real life's work is about to begin. Eva is shaken by the prediction but doesn't think any more about it until the incident with Francisco.

Her love for Francisco is what drives her to commit to the bloody surgery on the kitchen floor. She does not hesitate and takes care of him, saving his life. Later, of course, she will wonder how she managed to do it. The theme of Family is indicated in this scene, showing that family, true family members, take care of one another and will often go to great lengths to save the lives of its members.

Discussion Question 1

What does Henk tell Eva that causes her concern?



Discussion Question 2

What does Eva end up having to do for Francisco and why is she able to do so well under pressure?

Discussion Question 3

What lets the reader know that Eva is growing up and contemplating finding a boyfriend of her own?

Vocabulary

admiring, contentious, alluring, sweltering



Part Three, Chapter 28

Summary

It's Been a Long, Long Time

Gus's point of view is presented in this chapter. He finally sees Eva and Danny in the bakery in New York. But, he can't bring himself to go up to them. Instead, he follows them home and mistakenly believes that Eva has married Francisco.

The viewpoint shifts to Eva. There is a thunderstorm and it wakens Eva and Danny. The reader learns that with Francisco's help Eva has forged her high school and college transcripts and graduation papers. They apply to many medical schools in New York. She's hoping to become a pediatrician.

Analysis

The theme of deception continues, and along with it ambition. This time the ambition belongs to Eva, who wants desperately to attend medical school. Francisco is willing to help her forge the necessary documents that will allow her to take the exam. Believing that no one will be hurt from the deception, Eva is willing to go through with the ruse. She never was allowed to finish high school, let alone college. However, she has educated herself continually through the years, and she believes that she can do it.

Gus finds himself at a crossroads. He only wants to see Eva, to let her know that he is alive and back in the US. But, when he sees her with Francisco, he jumps to the wrong conclusion about their relationship. His reaction to this assumption is very telling and the reader knows that Gus is, indeed, in love with Eva.

Discussion Question 1

Why can't Gus go up to Eva's house to talk to her?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Eva feel as if it is okay to forge the documents she needs?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Francisco help Eva forge the documents?

Vocabulary

watermark, medallion, cum laude, ceremony, ashamed, bedraggled



Part Three, Chapter 29

Summary

How High the Moon

There is a letter from Iris with no date. She is writing from London to apologize for everything she did and didn't do to Eva. She encloses a check in this letter and tells her that she will be sending one every month for the rest of her life to make amends for everything. She is now working with the Veteran's Administration in London to try and raise funds for fixing burned and disabled soldiers. She says that they have nicknamed her the Singing Guinea Pig.

Gus finally gets the courage to go and knock on Eva's door. Eva is shocked to see him. She corrects him when he suggests that Francisco is her husband. Eva tells him about Reenie, leaving out the parts that would upset or hurt him. There was no point in hurting the poor man all over again, she reasons.

After he leaves, promising to come back sometime to play cards like they used to, Francisco tells Eva what she, herself, cannot see. Gus is in love with her. Eva laughs in disbelief at Francisco's declaration about Gus. But, she thinks about it as a possibility, still unsure about how to feel about someone that has come back from the dead.

The next day she goes to Gus's school where he teaches, and she apologizes for not being more hospitable the night before. He asks her to dinner and she agrees to come over to his place that evening. When she arrives she sees that he truly lives in a bachelor pad and as the evening progresses she feels as if she should not have come. He keeps telling her that he wishes that she had gotten his letters. Later, after a bottle of wine has been consumed they begin to make out on the couch. It becomes awkward, however, when he is so frantic that he hurts her. He apologizes and Eva gets dressed and leaves. He says he won't bother her again.

Meanwhile, Eva takes her medical exams and passes with flying colors. She and Francisco celebrate and then, quite inebriated, he stumbles off to bed. There is a quiet knock on the door. It is Gus. Eva and Gus begin again, reconnecting. They go to Eva's room and make love, and it is everything that Eva had thought this moment would be like. He bares his soul to her, and she clings to him like a lifeline. Gus moves in with them and after about a month, Francisco declares that it is time to go to town hall to make it official. Everyone agrees.

There is a letter from Eva to Iris. It is dated, 1949. The letter contains only two words, "Come home."

There is a telegram from Iris to Eva declaring that she is in tears and on her way. The final scene is many years in the future, though a date is not given. Danny is in college. There are additional children. Eva looks at a picture depicting a perfect summer



afternoon by the water's edge. The reader sees Eva and Iris both happy and surrounded by the family that they never had growing up.

Analysis

In a shocking turn of events the reader sees Iris turn a new page in her life. She has finally realized that people are not commodities to be used and discarded. She has especially had the point driven home that success means nothing if there is no one there to celebrate with you. She truly realizes that she misses her sister. She realizes how horrible she's been and finally realizes how her sister must certainly detest her. The generous offer of the check isn't to buy her absolution, but to try and make amends and to help out with Danny's upkeep.

Eva has moved on, in this chapter. She has passed her medical exams and she and Gus are together. The theme of Family is demonstrated in Gus and Eva finally finding in each other what they have been seeking for many years, quiet acceptance and unconditional love. Just at the point where Eva believes that she couldn't be happier with her life, she reads Iris's letter. She believes that her sister is truly and sincerely reaching out to her and she asks her to come home. Iris does.

The final snapshot of everyone indicates that life has been quite the winding path. However, everyone ends up happy to some extent and comfortable in their new lives. Eva, who started out as everyone's whipping girl, is now the wealthiest one of them all. She has an adoring husband and children around her. Her identity has finally been established and restored to her.

Discussion Question 1

What does the snapshot that they all look at indicate about how Eva's life turned out?

Discussion Question 2

What does it tell the reader about Eva that she is unwilling to tell Gus about Reenie's death or about her living arrangements at the time?

Discussion Question 3

What has contributed to Iris's shift in perspectives?

Vocabulary

whimsical, tertiary, shambling, fumbling, intertwined



Characters

Eva Logan Acton

Eva Logan Acton is the protagonist of the story, though her viewpoint is not the only one offered throughout the story. The novel begins when Eva is 12 and her mother abandons her on the doorstep of her father. Abandoned by her mother, her father will not acknowledge that he is her father, calling her, instead, his niece. Thus begins a cycle of abandonment and identity crisis for Eva.

She struggles with her place in the world, trying on many personas during the span of the novel. First, she becomes the cook, housekeeper, and governess for Iris, her older half sister. She follows Iris to Hollywood and while there is her seamstress and housemate. Later, she must step into Iris's life as a governess when her sister leaves to perform on stage. Then, she becomes a mother when Iris abandons her adopted son, Danny.

It is clear that Eva is highly intelligent with a desire to learn. She is often reading or in the library teaching herself new things. In the end, it is this desire to learn that serves her well and allows her to survive when everyone else around her has abandoned her. Tired of feeling like a disposable person by all of those around her, the exception being Francisco and Danny, she finally learns that she was meant to be a doctor, and is capable of being loved, and of loving someone fully.

Iris Action

Iris Acton is 16 when readers meet her. She is depicted as a startling blonde beauty, and it is easy to see that she has 'star' quality. Iris takes this star quality, and rather naively goes to Hollywood. While she makes a splash there it comes at a heavy cost, one that she is willing to pay. Unfortunately, she is caught in the act by a photographer and is sacrificed and abandoned by someone that she considered her close friend.

Iris is shallow and ambitious to the point of treating people as if they are commodities to be used and discarded as it pleases her. She does this with Eva, Danny, and in many respects Francisco, Edgar, and even Reenie. She is elitest and believes that the world revolves around her. Even after she is badly burned trying to put out a fire that had engulfed Reenie, she does not stop believing thing she is the one in charge, the one that everyone wants to be with.

However, after the war, and as she begins to work with other burn victims, she begins to realize and have a clearer view of life, and of how important family is. She begins to see how horribly she has treated people in her life and she no longer wishes to be that person. It is only when she comes to terms with this that she's able to make a positive and genuine change.



Hazel Logan

Hazel Logan was 15 when she became pregnant with Eva. Though Edgar is the father, he never formally claims Eva. When Hazel hears that Charlotte, Edgar's first wife, has died, she immediately packs up Eva to go to Edgar's house to see what might be in it for them. The reader sees initially that she is opportunistic and even a little desperate. Later, when the reader sees her as Mother Logan, a divine healer, the reader realizes, as does Eva, that she is a base person whose only interests are her own. Her ambition has made her lose her ability to truly become close to someone.

Edgar Acton

Edgar Acton was formerly a Yiddish boy living in the Bronx. He decided that he didn't want to live like that any longer, and so as a young man he adopted an English accent, bought a suit and tie, and set out to change his fortune. He embraces his deception so thoroughly that he is able to convince a drunken professor that he is the real deal and they become friends. Through this friendship Edgar is able to gain a position as a professor of English at the local college.

Edgar is Eva and Iris's father, though he will only formally recognize Iris. It is not in Edgar's best interests to present Eva as anything but his niece, and to Edgar image is everything. He dies at the end of the book of a brain tumor.

Mrs. Gruber

Mrs. Gruber is a Jewish woman from Russia who runs the boarding house where Eva and Iris come to live when they leave Ohio. The boarding house is in Hollywood. Mrs. Gruber quickly sizes up the situation with Iris and Eva and befriends Eva because of it. She is sad to see them go when Iris begins to make it big in movies.

Rose Sawyer

Rose Sawyer is an established actress in Hollywood. She has the nickname of America's Sweetheart because of the wholesome image of her characters. However, she is anything but 'wholesome' to those in the know. In fact, she is a lesbian during a time when it is considered a moral sin and an aberrant behavior. She forces herself on Iris who is only willing to comply in order to move about in the elite circles in Hollywood. Unfortunately, Rose is only using Iris as a distraction and when a photographer captures them making love on the beach and threatens to go public, Rose accuses Iris of seducing and forcing herself on Rose. The public believe Rose and reject Iris as a result. It almost ends Iris's career.



Francisco Diego

Francisco is one of the most likable characters in the entire novel. He is kind, loving, and astute with his observations of human beings. He is homosexual in a time when it was not acceptable. As a makeup artist in Hollywood he has seen his fair share of immorality and unethical behavior. When Iris is treated as she is, he's had enough and leaves the business for good. He goes with both Eva and Iris to New York where he helps them get back on their feet.

Francisco rescues Eva so many times that he becomes a father figure to her in many respects. He understands the burden that has been placed on Eva and he supports her as much as he can, even becoming her protector when necessary. When he chokes on a sausage in the last chapters, Eva saves him and thus realizes what her true calling is.

Bea

Bea is one of Francisco's sisters who lives in New York and is co owner in a hair salon.

Carnie

Carnie is Francisco's sister and is co owner of a salon in New York with her other sister. They both give Eva a corner of the salon to do her tarot readings.

Reenie Heitmann

Reenie, short for Irene, was originally married to Gus. However, she was attracted to Iris and after they managed to start an affair, it is Iris who tells the government that Gus is a spy in order to get rid of him. Reenie is very Catholic and never would have divorced Gus. She also very much desired children and this is what prompts Iris to abduct Danny for her from the orphanage. She is a kind and caring parent to Danny. However, she dies in a terrible accident from a cook stove that engulfed her in flames. She dies from the injuries. Iris nearly dies as well from trying to put out the fire.

The Torellis

The Torellis are the family that Edgar and Iris go to work for in the better part of New York. They are able to live on the estate with Francisco, Clara, Danny, and Eva for several years before Edgar develops a brain tumor, and Iris is burned and incapable of working any longer. Eva admires Mrs. Torelli as she believes that she is the perfect mother.



Clara Williams

Clara Williams is an African American woman who is a blues singer in a lounge called The Nite Cap. Edgar notices her and begins dating her, even though they both know it is risky. Clara has a skin disease, however, that makes it possible for her to 'pass' as white if she chooses to. She falls in love with Edgar and they move in together. Even when Edgar becomes ill, Clara still comes by to take care of him some of the times and to see if Eva needed anything. However, in the end, she leaves Eva like so many others. She marries another man named Ozzie, and they move to Detroit. Later, Clara dies in a car accident.

Gus

Gus Heitmann was Reenie's husband. When he is arrested on suspicion of being a spy, he can't believe it. However, the longer they hold him the more unreasonable his incarceration becomes. He takes the first chance he can to be deported back to Germany. He meets and assumes the identity of a friend of his from the camps when his friend dies. The man's wife and children start calling him Karl. He lives for almost a year in Germany and is the only one to survive a terrible bombing campaign on their village.

During all of this he writes to Eva, not knowing if any of his letters have ever made it through to her. In the end, he is returned to the US and he makes it his goal to see if Eva has been okay. He finds her and realizes that he is in love with her. They end up getting married.

Danny

Danny is a Jewish orphan boy whom Iris abducts from the playground in order to make Reenie happy. Danny is shy and intelligent. He is very thoughtful and considered in his actions. Later, he becomes close to Eva when he realizes that she's lost almost as much as he has. He eventually writes Iris a letter telling her what a horrible person she is.

Ozzie

Ozzie is the man that Clara eventually marries and moves to Detroit with. He helps Clara with Edgar when he is incapacitated.

Hans

Hans is a crippled man that Gus befriends after the war. It is Hans that tells him about the death toll throughout Germany.



Mrs. Ronson

Mrs. Ronson is one of Eva's most regular clients for tarot readings. Her husband is an FBI officer.

Henk

Henk is the psychic that works with Ted Ronson on a case. He also takes Eva aside and tells her that her gift is not that of telling futures with the cards, but that her calling would be making itself known to her very soon.

Ted Ronson

Ted Ronson is an FBI agent who is investigating a high profile case involving a missing judge. He brings in Henk the psychic and Eva to help him pick up clues.

Greta

Greta was Karl's wife in the internment camps. She is who Gus marries in order to leave the country. Greta agrees to the ruse. She is killed in one of the last bombings.

Ruthie

Ruthie Post is an African American girl that lives a few doors down from Danny and Eva. She is Danny's best friend.

Charlotte

Charlotte Acton was Edgar's first wife. At the beginning of the novel, she has died. She was very wealthy, and according to Iris, she was loved by many, many people.

Hedda

Hedda is the newspaper woman, gossip columnist, that contacts Rose to tell her that she has the pictures from the cameraman depicting her and Iris involved on the beach. She chooses to believe Rose's story about Iris's seduction and physical attack on her, thus effectively ending Iris's career in LA.



Symbols and Symbolism

Hollywood and Vine Money

In the beginning of the book the reader learns that Iris has been saving all of her prize money from her speeches and recitals so that she can afford bus fare to Hollywood. The money is stolen, more than once, from Edgar. This not only represents the fact that Edgar has a total disregard for his daughter's money, but that she doesn't trust him. The relationship between Edgar and Iris is an adversarial one, and it is easy to see why Iris leaves as soon as she can.

Red Lipstick

Each time Iris is about to go for an important audition or is meeting someone very important she applies red lipstick. This becomes to symbolize a putting on of armor, so to speak. Later, the reader will see Eva repeat the same ritual, as does Clara Williams.

Reenie's White Hair Ribbon

When Iris was falling in love with Reenie, but was having to keep it a secret, she kept a white hair ribbon to remember Reenie by. White is the symbol of purity and it is evident that Iris was deeply and truly in love with Reenie.

Little Women Book

This was one of Eva's favorite books, but in the end, she sacrifices it in order for her sister to hide her Hollywood and Vine money in it.

White Pearl Ring

Iris offers a white pearl ring to Reenie as an engagement ring. Reenie turns it down saying that they can't live openly like that. It upsets Iris greatly. A pearl is often seen as a symbol of birth, renewal, and purity, and thus Reenie is telling Iris that what they have is not moral or pure. This is why Iris is upset and feels rejected.

Embroidered Linens

When Charlotte died Edgar wanted to make sure to make a good impression on everyone that attended the reception at the home, so he had all of the embroidered and monogrammed lines used.



Tarot Cards

Eva uses tarot cards in order to make a living when it falls to her to raise Danny and care for her bedridden father, alone.

Little Blue Books

There are a series of blue books that are educational textbooks for the lay person. Edgar swears by them and passes them along to Eva. This is one of the only practical and thoughtful gifts that he ever gives to her.

Letters

Letters figure prominently in the novel. Each character, with the exception of Eva writes them. Eva keeps a journal, and does not respond to the letters that are written to her. She does not respond in the case of Iris because she does not care to. She detests and is angry with her sister. Gus's letters never reach her, or otherwise she might have written.

Other letters are written to various other characters, and offer more detail on some event mentioned in the chapter.

Fire

Fire is destructive but it can also be an instrument of change. In the book this symbol is used in both ways. First it is used when Iris and Reenie are badly burned. Because of this Eva is transformed into a caretaker and Iris is sent to London to recover. It is because of the fire that both women finally come into their own truths.



Settings

Ohio House

This is the house where for twelve years Eva lived. It wasn't big and she and her mother never had nice things, but Eva thought they were happy.

Hollywood Plaza

This is where Mrs. Gruber had her boarding house. It was not on the same par as the place that Iris had stayed with her mother many years prior, but the girls are grateful for a place to stay that they can afford.

Firenze Garden

This is the new set of apartments that Iris and Eva move to when Iris begins getting speaking roles for MGM.

Malibu Beach

This is the beach where Iris and Rose are photographed making love.

Torelli House

The Torelli House is where Edgar and Iris come to work as a butler and a governess. The Torellis are kind and offer a home for all of them to stay in.



Themes and Motifs

Identity

No one seems to know who they really are in the novel, *Lucky Us*. Eva Logan, who loves books and likes to listen to the Fireside Chats by Roosevelt, has her identity erased when she ends up living with her father. Though she had been his daughter, now she finds herself having to act as if she were his niece. He even changes her name to Eva Acton.

Eva attempts to be whatever it is that those around her needs the most. This is most likely a survival mechanism, believing that if she is useful and helpful that people will allow her to remain with them. This the reader sees when she steps in and acts as a surrogate housekeeper and cook for Edgar and Iris after Charlotte dies. Later, she acts as Iris's personal valet and maid. Then, further on in the book, her identity shifts again when she pretends to be the Torelli's governess, even though that was Iris's job.

When Iris abandons Danny, it is Eva that, once again, steps in and assumes the role of cook and mother. She takes care of him, alone, and sometimes with Francisco's help, for the span of four to five years before Gus finally reenters the picture.

When she finally pretends to be a fortune teller and is assigned to Ted Ronson, FBI agent, she is finally confronted with the fact that she is not living her own life. The psychic Henk tells her that she will be confronted with a situation which will make clear what it is that she should be. When she saves Francisco by performing a tracheotomy in her kitchen, she finally realizes who she was meant to be. She pursues and obtains her medical license.

Family

The theme of family is demonstrated in many of the chapters in Bloom's novel, *Lucky Us*. The 'Us' referenced in the title, refers primarily to two women, half-sisters, and their lives as they unfold. Surrounding them are a cast of characters, some related by blood, and others not related, but certainly considered family by each.

Eva's notion of family is skewed from an early age. She never knew a father who was there full time, as Edgar Acton, her father, only visited her and her mother on the weekends. Sometimes he wouldn't even show up. Later, her idea of family is warped again when her mother drops her off at her father's house and drives away. At twelve, she's internalized that family can't be trusted. Her sister, Iris, whom she meets at this same time, uses and abuses her, though she can also be kind. Her own father, Edgar, in having to raise her on his own does a paltry job of it, and it is Eva who ends up taking care of the rest of them because of their ineptitude. Iris includes Eva in her plans to run away, not because she seems to care for her sister, but because she needs someone to help her survive on the outside.



Later, when Eva meets Francisco, she finally meets someone who likes her for who she is, not what she can do for them. And, when Edgar finally joins the mix, Eva is able to see him for who he is and realize that he was never cut out to be a parent. It will be much later when Eva meets Gus after the war that her knowledge of a truly loving family is finally realized.

Iris's notion of family is also a bit warped. She views her mother as a saint, and hero worships at her unattainable altar. When her mother dies, when Iris is 16, Iris realizes that her mother was the only one that kept the home running, not Edgar. She likens him to an old piece of furniture and with about as much emotion. She has picked up from Edgar the ability to use people to get what she wants. However, when she meets Reenie she realizes what true love is and the depth of commitment that comes from that. And, then, later, when Eva forgives her and asks her to come home, she realizes that family can encompass not only those you are related to, but those whom love you enough to love you despite your issues and quirks.

Ambition

Out of control ambition is featured prominently in this novel. The characters that personify this the most are Edgar Acton and his daughter Iris Action. Both are not above changing who they are in order to get what they want out of life. Edgar's ambition causes him to turn his back on his culture, his family, and his home at an early age. It causes him to become a bigamist because he needs Charlotte's money in order to continue the lifestyle and his cover story as a professor.

Ambition is also personified and exemplified in Iris's character. When she goes to Hollywood there is nothing off bounds to her. She will do anything to attain fame and fortune. This also causes her to throw common sense out of the window. The risks she finds herself taking in order to succeed in the industry lead to her early fall and is nearly the end of her career before it has even started. She learns a hard lesson about those who are in her chosen field and how ambition and drive to be the best often asks for morality and ethics to take a back seat.

Ambition, left unchecked, is shown to lead to lonely and tragic ends. The reader sees this as Edgar dies of a brain tumor with no one really sorry that he is gone, with the exception of Clara. Even Clara shows the lengths that she will go to in order to be famous. She changes her skin color to suit her needs, living in both worlds, and never fully in either one.

Iris's ambition also leaves her immobile and badly charred, both inside and outside. It takes her many years before she can gain the insight that Edgar never gained, which was to see that sacrificing the people who love you for the sake of fame can leave a person without anyone to celebrate the success with. The true love and support of family and friends is something that Iris begins to value. It is only then that she is able to apologize to Eva for treating her as she has, and to begin making amends.



Deception

Deception is one of the prevailing themes in the novel *Lucky Us*. From the beginning Eva is deceived by her own mother into believing that her father is really married to her mother, instead of being a mistress who mothered his illegitimate child. Then, she deceives Eva by telling her that they are going to her father's house to see if there might be something in it for them. Then, without warning, she leaves Eva standing on the porch watching her go away. Edgar refuses to acknowledge her as his daughter and tells everyone that she's his niece.

Deception enters into the equation in the character of Iris. She wants to be an actress, an occupation that is based on deception and pretending to be what one is not. When they leave Ohio they lie about who they are and pretend that they are younger than they really are. Later, they lie constantly in order to get work, food, and rent.

When Iris goes to her first Hollywood party she lies about what she likes and doesn't like which leads to her first sexual encounter with Rose. She pretends to like the foods that the celebrities like, even though she doesn't. Later, she has Francisco help her to forge papers to make it look as if she is a college graduate so she can become the Torellis governess.

Edgar deceives many people along the way. His motto is that one should only deceive the people who can afford to be scammed. Originally a Yiddish boy from a poor section of New Jersey, he changed his name, adopted an English accent, bought a fancy suit and began to pass himself off as an Englishman. From this he became friends with a professor and by association he became a professor, too, even though he didn't have a formal education. Clara, who is an African American, suffers from a skin disease that leaves her neither white nor black. She can literally choose which she will be each night that she steps on stage.

Abandonment

Many of the characters in this novel either abandon others or are abandoned. Eva, the protagonist of the novel, is abandoned at birth by her father, who only comes to see her from time to time. Later, when she is 12, she is abandoned again by her mother on her father's doorstep. Then, Iris abandons her, saddling her with the responsibility of raising Danny on her own.

Iris is abandoned by Hollywood early on in her career because she was too naïve about the way Hollywood and its stars worked. Caught in a compromising situation, and sacrificed by the main culprit in the situation, Iris finds herself abandoned and rejected by the very society that had considered her the next rising star.

Danny was abandoned by his biological father when he was dropped off at the orphanage along with his brother. He also suffers abandonment and loss when Reenie dies and Iris wants nothing more to do with him afterwards.



Gus also deals with abandonment, first from his wife, Reenie, who clearly doesn't love him as he expected. Then, later, he is abandoned by his own country when Iris turns him in as a spy so that she can have Reenie to herself. Of all the characters in the novel, poor Gus is the innocent in everything. A decent person, he falls in with the wrong people and as a result suffers for it through most of the novel.

Styles

Point of View

The point of view shifts between most of the major characters in the story. However, the prevailing point of view is that of Eva Logan Acton, whose journey of self identity and worth are chronicled. Told in third person limited, regardless of the character involved, the reader is given access to the character's thoughts, while also offering insight into the circumstances surrounding them.

Quite often details in the story are offered via letters or telegrams, photos, or newspapers. These letters tend to offer more information about a situation that the reader has been given in the character's limited point of view. For example, when Reenie is badly burned in the fire, and Iris is as well, the reader only knows what Eva knows, which is that there was a kitchen fire and Reenie and Iris were both injured. However, through Iris's letter, from many years later, the reader learns that Reenie had been angry at Iris for staying out so late. They had argued and Reenie leaned down to light a cigarette from the burner on the stove. These details are offered only through the letter.

Language and Meaning

Language and meaning are utilized in a manner that would be easily grasped by intermediate and advanced readers. Adults will find the novel does not offer difficult language. Sentence structure and the manner in which the story is told indicate the historical set point of the novel, which is the 1930s and 40s in the United States. Additionally, there are some Yiddish and German words included.

Structure

The structure of the story is told in three parts, covering the span of fifteen years in the life of the characters. While the storyline is mostly linear in fashion, letters from the past and future are included. These letters serve to fill in necessary elements which the characters could not have known during the present.



Quotes

Mrs. Gruber said that happiness was not something she aspired to, that when we had seen as much of the world as she had, we would know that what lies right behind the horseshit is not a prize pony, my dears, it's more horseshit.

-- Mrs. Gruber (Chapter 2 paragraph Page 19)

Importance: Mrs. Gruber says this just after Iris has received her first contract from MGM. She is warning Iris not to be taken in by the glitz and glitter. Of course, Iris ignores her.

Rose, Love looks not with the eyes but with the mind, and that's how I look at you.

-- Iris (Chapter 4 paragraph Page 32)

Importance: This shows how Iris cares for Rose and how she has given her heart to her.

These were my people: the abandoned, the unloved, the phenomenally unlucky.

-- Eva (Chapter 6 paragraph Page 50)

Importance: This indicates just how alienated Eva feels. She says this when she walks past the Jewish orphanage near Bea's apartment.

Clara understood that race was more than a matter of appearance, but it was also a matter of appearance.

-- Narrator (Chapter 9 paragraph Page 76)

Importance: This underscores the theme of deception in that Clara Williams changes her appearance from white American to African American to suit her purposes.

Clara thought that it would be good if he did; it would be cool water on her blistered heart if he did.

-- Clara (Chapter 8 paragraph 81)

Importance: This quote indicates that Clara has had disastrous and scorching relationships before and that she's hoping that Edgar will be someone that will help her find love again.

Lucky us, that there were Torellis who specialized in things other than perfect fruits and vegetables.

-- Iris (Chapter 15 paragraph Page 134)

Importance: This was written in a letter from Iris to Eva. She is speaking about the Torellis who stepped up to get her the best care after she was burned trying to save Reenie from a stovetop fire.



My father had been a beaker of etiquette and big ideas, Iris was a vase of glamour, and I was the little brown jug of worry.

-- Eva (Ch 16 paragraph page 137)

Importance: This is an important quote because it shows how Eva views herself in relation to the people in her life. It shows how she values herself and how she believes others value her.

Telling Danny that Reenie was dead, that Iris was in for a long recovery in a hospital somewhere, and that the person taking care of him for now and the indefinite future, was me, was the worst day of my life. I would rather have been left on that porch, sick to my stomach, watching my mother motor down an endless road, for every day of my life than ever relive, or even recall, telling Danny his mother was dead.

-- Eva (Ch 16 paragraph Page 138)

Importance: Eva has to tell Danny that Reenie is dead and that Iris is in critical condition. It dawns on her at this point that she is now going to have to raise Danny on her own. Even if Iris recovers, she won't want the boy and she doesn't want Danny to go through the rejection that she, herself, felt when her mother abandoned her.

One should only take advantage of those who can afford it.

-- Eva (Ch 18 paragraph page 149)

Importance: This seems to be the one motto that Iris, Eva, and Edgar share.

Edgar would lie like a white field of bits and bone just beneath the green layers of her life, for the rest of her life.

-- Clara (Chapter 25 paragraph page 171)

Importance: Clara is remarking about Edgar and the time they spent together. This quote indicates that she did really love him.

Clara said that if you sing the blues, you know that if you can't make friends with grief, you've got to at least make way for it.

-- Danny (Chapter 25 paragraph page 183)

Importance: Danny is remarking about Clara's philosophy on bad times and how one handles them. At the time he is at Dorothy's listening to Dorothy sing the blues.

I wiped his face with my hand and he curled around me, still sleeping, not an inch between us.

-- Eva (Chapter 29 paragraph 229)

Importance: This quote indicates that in Gus, Eva has found the love and acceptance that she's always longed for.