

# **The Last Anniversary Study Guide**

## **The Last Anniversary by Liane Moriarty**

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## Plot Summary

"The Last Anniversary" is the story of a quirky family living on Scribbly Gum Island near Sydney, Australia. Two sisters, Connie and Rose Doughty, grew up there during the Great Depression. They became famous when they discover a baby at the home of couple Alice and Jack Munro who have mysteriously disappeared. The girls raise the baby and build a business based on the Munro baby mystery.

About 70 years later, Connie dies and leaves her island house to a 39-year-old woman named Sophie Honeywell. Sophie had been the girlfriend of their great nephew, Thomas Gordon. Sophie is taken in by this quirky family as she adapts to island life and struggles with the search for a husband. The Munro baby named Enigma is about 70-years-old now and she is still happy about her celebrity. Her children and grandchildren struggle with their own lives and their lack of knowing the secret of what happened to the Munros.

After Connie's death, the family holds the last anniversary of the Munro disappearance where the secret is revealed. Rose is relieved to finally let the others know that she is Enigma's mother; Jack and Alice Munro were made up characters to hide the fact of Rose's pregnancy due to a rape. Sophie has three men interested in her and she holds out hope that she'll finally get a husband and children which she thinks will complete her life.

The story jumps back and forth from the present to the past, always maintaining the present tense. There is an exception, however, when toward the end of the story Aunt Rose reveals the family's mysterious secrets as she tells hers and Connie's story in the past tense.



# Chapters 1 - 10

## Summary

In Chapter 1, two unnamed girls discuss whether or not they'll be able to get away with something they're about to do. They say they will probably forget it wasn't the truth when they are old ladies.

In Chapter 2, a young woman named Veronika interviews her Aunt Connie about love and marriage. Aunt Connie tells her that marriage is a decision which must be worked at and not tossed aside as easily as some people seem to do now. Veronika also wants to know about the Munro baby mystery, which Aunt Connie is a part of, but Aunt Connie deflects and tells Veronika to go get a job.

In Chapter 3, Sophie Honeywell gets a call out of the blue from her ex-boyfriend, asking if she will meet him for a drink because his Aunt Connie has died and he needs to talk to Sophie about something. Thomas is now married to a woman named Deborah and they have a baby named Lily. Sophie and Thomas had dated for about a year when she broke up with him because he was boring. Thomas had planned to propose and take her to Fiji for a holiday and was crushed by the break-up. Thomas is the grandson of the Munro baby but even that bit of celebrity wasn't enough to keep Sophie interested. Sophie is 39-years-old and wonders if she will ever find the right man to marry and have children.

Chapter 4 takes place on Scribbly Gum Island near Sydney, Australia, in 1932. A local reporter named Jimmy Thrum has come to Scribbly Gum to interview 19-year-old Connie Doughty about the Munro Mystery. Jimmy and Connie are instantly attracted to each other. Connie lives with her father who is not right mentally ever since the war in France, and her younger sister, Rose, who mopes around all the time. Connie tells Jimmy that Jack and Alice Munro had disappeared from their Scribbly Gum home, the tea kettle boiling and a marble cake on the counter. Connie and Rose had come for a visit and found the Munros' baby in the abandoned house. There was blood on the floor and a chair had been knocked over. Connie says that the police weren't very interested because many people are abandoning their homes because they can't afford them during the Depression. When the baby wakes, Connie shows Jimmy the child whom they have named Enigma.

Chapter 5 is an excerpt from a brochure about the Munro Baby Mystery distributed to guests who visit the house. It states that Connie and Rose Doughty had stopped by for a cup of tea on July 15, 1932, but the Munros were not there. The tea kettle was about to boil and there was a marble cake on the counter. A few drops of blood on the floor and an overturned chair were the only signs of possible violence. Connie and Rose have raised the baby, Enigma, as their own and still live on the island along with Enigma's daughters, Laura and Margaret.



In Chapter 6, Grace Tidyman wakes from a dream to the sounds of her crying newborn, Jake. She remembers that her Aunt Connie died yesterday. Grace's husband, Callum, brings the baby to her and she wishes they would both go away.

In Chapter 7, Margie Gordon listens to her mother, Enigma, and her Aunt Rose bicker about what suit Aunt Connie should be buried in. Margie is in charge of the funeral arrangements and she eats cake to deal with the anxiety. Margie had found Aunt Connie's body in bed yesterday and she still reels from the shock. Connie had always planned things down to the last detail and it is up to Margie to pull off the funeral just as planned.

In Chapter 8, Sophie meets Thomas for a drink and he tells her that his Aunt Connie has died and left her house on Scribbly Gum Island to Sophie. Sophie is overwhelmed and begins to blush deeply, a trait that has plagued her since she was a girl. Sophie thinks the house must be a mistake but Thomas confirms that he has seen the papers and it is true. Sophie thinks that the house should have gone to Grace but Grace and Callum are building their own new house. Sophie hardly knew Aunt Connie but had complimented her on the house when she visited with Thomas. Sophie knows that Veronika, Thomas' cousin and Sophie's former friend, will be livid when she learns about the house. Thomas thinks it's possible that Veronika will contest the will.

In Chapter 9, Veronika is taking a shower when she hears a radio commercial from a lawyer about contesting wills. She writes the phone number on her steamed up bathroom mirror and wonders at Aunt Connie's cruelty at leaving her house to Sophie.

In Chapter 10, Sophie tells her mother that Thomas' Aunt Connie has willed her her house and her mother wonders if it is appropriate for Sophie to take the house since she has broken up with Thomas.

## Analysis

The author sets up the story by sharing a mysterious conversation between two girls and whether or not they'll be able to get away with something or not. This immediately draws the reader in to learn who the girls are and the circumstances surrounding the intrigue. This early establishment of a sense of mystery and secrets will drive the story as the characters slowly reveal the situation surrounding the two girls.

Relationships are important in the story, both familial and romantic. Sophie has broken up with Thomas who still suffers from a broken heart in spite of being married to another woman now. Sophie had thought Thomas too boring to marry but now she wonders if she was too hasty in making that decision because her biological clock is ticking and there are no viable husband candidates for her in sight. She views many men now from the standpoint of whether they are husband material or not. Her life had been rooted in her friends and her job but now relationships have taken the forefront.

The author also provides the details of the Munro Baby Mystery in this section. It is the story upon which the book revolves, and as is true with mysteries, there are secrets and



lies at the core and the reader is drawn further in to try to understand what happened with the Munros. An interesting note is that the author named the abandoned baby Enigma, a word which means a person who is mysterious or puzzling. This is a creative use of the word because the baby was truly an enigma in that the circumstances of her abandonment have still not been solved.

The Doughty sisters have built their extended family based on raising the abandoned baby as their own. The descendants have been held together by the secret of the Munro Baby and the resulting family business. That's why it's an outrage to some of them that Aunt Connie leaves her house to a virtual stranger, Sophie. As the story extends, Sophie will become a part of them and Aunt Connie's wishes will have come true just as she has planned everything else in her life.

## Discussion Question 1

Why does the author start the book by sharing the mysterious conversation between two unnamed girls?

## Discussion Question 2

Describe the circumstances in which Connie and Rose say they found the abandoned baby.

## Discussion Question 3

What does it mean when a woman's biological clock is ticking?

## Vocabulary

funnel-webs, grit, nappies, gape, shrieks, sexist, metaphor, relentlessly, fraud, disband, frangipani, marzipan, gluttonous, fraught, bemused, ravished, spinster, flailing, enthralled, doleful, shrewd, mollify, barmy, gruesome, irrefutable, euphoric, grimace, rivulets



# Chapters 11 - 20

## Summary

Chapter 11 provides the contents of the Scribbly Island website. The site tells the story of Jack and Alice Munro and how they disappeared one day during the Great Depression. Visitors to the island are invited to tour the Munro house as well as have tea with Enigma and the Doughty sisters at Connie's Cafe. The island's only full time residents are Enigma, Connie Doughty, Rose Doughty, and Enigma's daughters, Margaret and Laura and their families.

In Chapter 12, it is Grace's first day alone with her newborn because Callum is returning to work after parental leave. They live in her mother, Laura's, home while she is traveling and their new home is under construction. Grace notes that Callum is so easy with the baby but she feels overwhelmed by the infant's unrelenting care. After Callum leaves, Grace sits staring at a carton of milk on the table for an hour and a half. All the members of the family take turns giving tours of the Munro house and today is Grace's turn. She has to bake a marble cake to take to the house and she has to force herself to go through the process. Veronika calls Grace to share her outrage that Aunt Connie left her house to Sophie. Grace, unable to face the drama, hangs up on her. Later that afternoon, Grace conducts the Munro house tour and wishes one of the tourists would be willing to adopt Jake.

In Chapter 13, Sophie eats lunch at an urban park and thinks about her life and why she hasn't been able to find a husband and start a family. She dives into her regency romance book and is interrupted by a sweet little family playing together and having a picnic. Sophie is plunged into envy. Sophie re-reads the letter from Aunt Connie about the house and recalls the few times she had met Aunt Connie when visiting Scribbly Gum Island with Thomas. Sophie had fallen in love with the house but wonders if it is wrong to accept it since she and Thomas are no longer in a relationship. Sophie gets a call from Veronika who tells her that she is going to contest Aunt Connie's will because the family is so upset. Veronika had been Sophie's friend who introduced her to Thomas but since the break-up they have been estranged.

In Chapter 14, Grace spends her second day alone with her baby and congratulates herself that he is still alive. She takes good care of him, but she is just going through the motions; she feels nothing for her baby. Grace tries to work on her next children's book about a character called Gublet. When the baby cries, Grace realizes that she has been lost in thought for two hours.

In Chapter 15, Sophie meets her parents, Hans and Gretl, for dinner to tell them about Aunt Connie's house. They are a close family and meet regularly for dinner because they enjoy fine wine and food. Sophie reads Aunt Connie's letter in which she says she gave Sophie the house because she has the same capacity for joy that her late husband, Jimmy, had. She asks her to invite Veronika to dinner and consider a



friendship with Grace. The letter also states that Aunt Connie knows of a nice man who would be perfect for Sophie and whom she might meet as a result of moving into the house. Her parents now agree that it would be morally wrong for Sophie not to take the house since they know how Aunt Connie felt about her.

Chapter 16 is just a couple of lines between two unnamed people talking about whether or not they should tell Sophie about Alice and Jack Munro. They agree to do so but only once she reaches the age of 40, which is their rule for everyone in the family.

In Chapter 17, it is the day before Aunt Connie's funeral and Grace is dreading taking care of little Jake. Grace wonders how Alice Munro managed to take care of her infant, especially with no modern day conveniences. She wonders if Alice had lost her mind and abandoned her child. She wonders if she had been coming apart and just lost it one day and left, a marble cake on the counter and the tea kettle about to boil. Since she is Alice's great-granddaughter, she wonders if it is in her DNA to have the propensity to snap and if she should take some preemptive action to avoid that. She wonders if she'll ever be able to look at her child and feel any sort of love for him.

In Chapter 18, it is the day of Aunt Connie's funeral and Grace has had no sleep because Jake wouldn't calm down all night. She talks to her Aunt Margie who gushes over the baby. Grace wishes she could tell her how bad everything really is, but she doesn't. Margie has her own issues of being overweight and struggling even though she attends Weight Watchers meetings. Margie had been entrusted with Aunt Connie's funeral arrangements by Aunt Connie herself and she has been eating more out of anxiety. Enigma and Aunt Rose, who are known for being eccentric, arrive at the funeral riding their souped up mobility scooters and both Margie and Grace are relieved to see that they are dressed properly and don't have anything like birds painted on their faces.

In Chapter 19, Sophie dresses in a sophisticated black dress and makes her way to Aunt Connie's funeral. She's not sure if it is proper that she attend but she feels obligated to go. Sophie takes a train to Glass Bay and tries to catch a cab when she meets a man also headed to the funeral. They decide to share a cab and Sophie can't help but notice how handsome he is. Sophie's dreams of a romance are squashed when he introduces himself as Callum Tidyman, Grace's husband.

In Chapter 20, people are gathering at the church for Aunt Connie's funeral. Rose is in a lot of pain from her back and joints but she tries to remain composed. She finds it hard to believe that she'll never hear her sister, Connie's, voice again. She thinks about their childhood and all the days they spent together and it seems impossible to be parted from her. Rose thinks about how Connie had always wanted children but her husband, Jimmy, did not and she feels a fresh sense of anger for what was denied to Connie. Suddenly it occurs to Rose that she is the last of the Doughty family left and, she is overcome with grief.





## Analysis

The author uses Grace's experience of postpartum depression to show that life is not all the characters share an idyllic experience on the island and in life in general. Grace suffers an overwhelming feeling of ennui, also known as postpartum depression, since the birth of her child and finds it difficult to engage in her usual activities. She knows that she has things to do around the house but finds herself drifting in thought just staring at a milk carton on the table for an hour and a half. This is a typical symptom of the depression and can also be accompanied by crying, feelings of hopelessness, anxiety, and an inability to feel pleasure. What bothers Grace the most is that she feels nothing for her new baby. She takes good care of him but doesn't have any motherly love toward him which she knows she is supposed to have. She even wonders if she has inherited this disassociation from her baby from her great-grandmother, Alice Munro, who abandoned her own child. Women who have postpartum depression can get better by speaking with their doctor about treatment methods to help them through this period. Grace is afraid to say anything to anyone because of fear that she will appear to be incapable of handling her responsibilities in a family that is quite competent. Grace also has a mother who doesn't like failure.

Family is an important theme in the story and the author uses it to show how family members can feel included or excluded based on their role within the family unit. Even though Veronika is technically not related to Aunt Connie, she is outraged that the old woman willed her house to Sophie, someone outside the family. Aunt Connie and Aunt Rose created this unusual family when they took Enigma to raise so then Enigma's daughters and grandchildren feel as if Aunt Connie and Aunt Rose are their real family members. But whatever the legal relationship, the family that has been created is a strong one and the perceived intrusion of an outsider into the mix is an outrage to Veronika who intends to fight it.

The author continues to have fun with the reader with character names. Just as she named the mystery baby Enigma, she has named Sophie's parents Hans and Gretl. The fairy tale Hansel and Gretl were brother and sister lured by a cannibalistic witch. No such fate awaits Sophie's parents but it's an indicator of the author's sense of whimsy and fun with her readers.

The author also has character fun with Aunt Rose and Enigma, both elderly women with eccentric personalities. On the day of Aunt Connie's funeral, they ride up to the church on souped up mobility scooters in their vibrant colored clothes. They are also known for face painting but on this day they have restrained from decorating their faces.

## Discussion Question 1

Why does Grace dismiss Veronika and all the drama related to contesting Aunt Connie's will?



## Discussion Question 2

Why does Sophie question whether or not she should accept the gift of Aunt Connie's house?

## Discussion Question 3

In what ways does Grace think she might be like her great-grandmother, Alice Munro?

## Vocabulary

eucalyptus, larvae, concession, banksia, pulpy, creme brulee, avert, inexplicable, sappy, stash, conscientiously, operatic, obscure, elaborate, phlegmy, topple, enigma, conniving, manipulative, arthritic, infuriate, amiss, peculiar, veranda, cravat, catamaran, flibbertigibbet, stodgy, intriguing, fortitude, nondescript, uproarious, pawpaw, pram, cajoles, exasperated, kookaburra



# Chapters 21 - 30

## Summary

At her funeral, Aunt Connie is eulogized as being very smart, successful at business and the rock of her family. Enigma passes breath mints down the pew and Margie shoots her a reproachful look, thinking that she has always thought her to be a bit shallow. Margie thinks that now that Aunt Connie is dead there won't be so many fattening foods around due to her constant cooking and baking. Aunt Connie was always very skinny and Margie felt fat and inadequate around her. Margie is secretly glad that Aunt Connie is gone because she did a lot of behind the scenes work for her and Aunt Rose to let them feel as if they were still independent in their old age. It was a lot of work, but Margie didn't want them to go to a retirement home so she did what she could. Margie's husband, Ron, thinks that Aunt Connie was a hard-nosed manipulator and he's not sad that she's gone.

In Chapter 22, Sophie and Callum arrive late at the funeral. Grace recognizes Sophie and sees that she is trying to find a seat at the back but Callum pushes her toward the front of the church where the rest of the family is seated. Angry Veronika makes exaggerated noises of disgust as she is forced to accommodate Sophie. Grace notes how Sophie watches Callum holding Jake who is content in his father's arms.

Chapter 23 takes place on Scribbly Gum Island in 1999. Aunt Connie's husband, Jimmy Thrum, died just 13 weeks ago and she misses him so much that her body actually hurts. She is cooking dinner for the family and to cheer up Thomas who had just broken up with Sophie. Aunt Connie is distraught over the break up too because she had really liked Sophie on the few times they had met. Sophie had loved Aunt Connie's house and the island which reminded Aunt Connie of how Jimmy was always so positive and enthusiastic about everything. Meeting Sophie prompted Aunt Connie to think about what it might have been like to have had a daughter. Aunt Connie also realized that Thomas was not the right man for Sophie because she was out of his league so she is not totally surprised by the break up. During dinner, the family talks about other unsolved mysteries in the area, The Pyjama Girl who was murdered and not identified for ten years and The Bread Board Murder where a man was found with his face in his breakfast plate, having been hit on the back of the head with a bread board.

In Chapter 24, Sophie is headed to lunch at Grace and Callum's and she has baked a walnut liqueur cake as a gift. Grace had extended the invitation on the day of Aunt Connie's funeral and Sophie accepted, remembering Aunt Connie's instruction to have lunch with Grace sometimes. Sophie is a little apprehensive because she finds Callum so attractive and she knows that her extreme blushing will give her feelings away.

In Chapter 25, Grace brushes Jake's hair and thinks about repeatedly smashing his head with the brush. She quickly puts him in his stroller because she feels like she's having a panic attack so she begins to beat her arms and thighs with her fists, then



slaps her cheeks. Sophie arrives and Grace thanks her for the cake but Grace can't eat it because she is deathly allergic to nuts. Grace gives Jake to Sophie so she can finish preparing lunch and Callum shows her into the dining room. Sophie has a hard time concealing her attraction to Callum and hope she doesn't blush too much. Sophie is quite taken with the way that Callum interacts with Jake. He takes the baby so Sophie can eat and Sophie notices that Grace is not interested in the baby at all. When Jake falls asleep, Grace takes him to his bed and notes that Sophie and Callum are laughing and having a good time when she returns to the dining room. Before long, it's clear that Sophie and Callum feel a mutual attraction. Their lunch is interrupted by Rose and Enigma who have brought the keys to Aunt Connie's house for Sophie.

In Chapter 26, Margie is at her Weight Watchers meeting where she meets a man named Ron--the same name as her husband--who invites her to have coffee and she accepts, wondering if he is trying to hit on her. Sophie and her mother are at a spa where a psychic tells Sophie that she won't have children, much to her mother's chagrin. Veronika is working out at a Boxing for the Broken Hearted aerobics class. Veronika has been taking the class since her husband said he wanted a divorce two years ago. Veronika still has a lot of anger and she enjoys going to the class. As she drives home she thinks about her family and comes to the conclusion that the whole Munro story has been fabricated; that Aunt Connie must have poisoned Jack and Alice.

In Chapter 27, Aunt Connie had left instructions that she wanted her ashes to be scattered by Aunt Rose and Enigma at midnight at Kingfisher Lookout. Rose has painted silver stars and a moon on hers and Enigma's cheeks and they gather their champagne picnic items and Aunt Connie's ashes and head out. They scatter the ashes together and Rose cries for the first time since her sister died.

In Chapter 28, Margie puts on a swimsuit for the first time in a long time and hates what she looks like. Tomorrow she and her friend, Ron, are going to have their photos taken for a Weight Watchers event. Her husband, Ron, is always so derogatory of her appearance that she feels especially vulnerable. When she was younger, Margie had a great figure but after her pregnancies, she never lost the additional weight.

In Chapter 29, Grace has made thank-you cards with a photo of Jake's smiling face that she sends to those who gave them baby gifts after his birth. Jake gurgles and coos in his bouncy chair as Grace pays bills and she tries to work up some emotion for him but just can't. Grace thinks about how easy Sophie had been with Jake and she thinks Sophie would be a good replacement for her if she were to disappear. Tomorrow Sophie is moving into Aunt Connie's house and Grace will set to work on a plan for Sophie and Callum to fall in love so Grace can leave the life that is stifling her. All it will take is eating a spoonful of sesame seeds and she'll go into anaphylactic shock and die.

In Chapter 30, Sophie awakens on her first morning in Aunt Connie's house and feels like she is on holiday. She's completely in love with this house and loves that she can feel this good without a man being involved. Sophie is tremendously grateful to Aunt Connie for her new life. At the Tidyman household, it has been eight weeks since Jake was born and Callum misses having sex with Grace but he's afraid to talk about it



because she seems so distant lately. He misses her and wonders if she has fallen out of love with him.

## Analysis

Women are predominant in the book so it is natural that women's issues come to the forefront. Just as Sophie struggles with being single in a "married" world, some of the others struggle with being married. Margie, for example, is married to a man who pays no attention to her other than to make derogatory comments about her weight. Clearly, Margie is a caring, compassionate person who eats when she is anxious which is most of the time. Her husband makes Margie feel inferior even though she is a major caretaker in the family and has supported him for the full expanse of their relationship. Aunt Connie was married to Jimmy, a man who was opposite her in personality, but when he died, she was so wracked with grief that her body physically hurt. Grace and Callum's marriage is in a limbo place right now as Grace has distanced herself from him as she struggles with postpartum depression. The author wants the reader to understand that just reaching the marriage state is not the goal. Like Aunt Connie said earlier in the book, "Love is a decision." Love and marriage must be worked on every day and Sophie is deluding herself if she thinks that her life will be nirvana if she can only achieve it.

Grace's postpartum depression continues to worsen as she imagines what it might be to beat Jake's head in with his little hair brush. This results in a panic attack and her hurting herself to punish herself for thinking these thoughts. Now she has gone so far as to begin to devise a plan to kill herself to relieve herself of the emotional anguish. She wants to create a situation in which Sophie and Callum fall in love and they can be together and take care of Jake when she's gone. This may seem a bit extreme but, unfortunately, it's not uncommon for women who suffer the depths of postpartum depression. Grace maintains a perfect facade, though, so no one close to her even suspects that she is suffering, especially after she has made such beautiful thank-you cards for the baby gifts. By all outside appearances, Grace is perfectly fine and the epitome of a beautiful new mother.

The author provides a bit of foreshadowing when she talks about the other mysteries in the area, particularly the Bread Board Murder. Details of this mystery will be revealed at the end of the story.

Once again, the author has some fun with a character's name. Callum's last name is Tidyman but he is the complete opposite of what that would imply. Callum is a big brute of a man who is sometimes awkward and messy in his appearance which makes his name a bit funny for the reader.

## Discussion Question 1

Why did Margie spend so much time behind the scenes helping Aunt Connie and Aunt Rose manage their lives?



## Discussion Question 2

Why don't any of the people close to Grace suspect that she is suffering from postpartum depression?

## Discussion Question 3

Why would Callum think that Grace has fallen out of love with him?

## Vocabulary

solemn, wailing, brandishing, distinguish, flinch, melancholy, imperious, distraught, macabre, garish, bickering, osteoporosis, cryptic, sedative, ferocious, sulking, mortification, feeble, pathetic, eulogy, self-deprecating, fluster, ventriloquist, tremor, futile, ninny, dismissively, bland, extraordinary, neurotic, sulking, sycophantic, menage a trois, inexplicably, omen, feisty, hari-kari, ruminative, anaphylactic, obliterated, austere, celibacy, besotted



# Chapters 31 - 40

## Summary

In Chapter 31, Sophie meets Aunt Connie's solicitor, Ian Curtis, and he asks her out to dinner. Sophie and her friends think this must be the nice young man Aunt Connie had mentioned in her letter to Sophie.

In Chapter 32, Sophie meets Aunt Connie's gardener named Rick one day when he gives her instructions on how to care for the plantings around the house. He asks Sophie out on a picnic and Sophie and her friends are now torn as to which young man Aunt Connie had intended for Sophie.

In Chapter 33, Callum and Margie discuss whether Grace is managing OK with the new baby. Callum thinks that Grace doesn't seem quite right and that it's possible she has postpartum depression. Margie contends that anyone who manages as well as Grace does definitely isn't depressed.

In Chapter 34, Enigma and Margie discuss whether Grace has postpartum depression. Enigma thinks it's natural to feel depressed after having a baby because it finally occurs to you that you're stuck with all that hard work for years. Besides, anyone who sends out such beautiful thank-you cards couldn't be suffering from postpartum depression.

In Chapter 35, Sophie thoroughly enjoys living in Aunt Connie's house but especially likes feeling like she belongs to a big, quirky family. She goes fishing with Enigma, swimming with Rose, and watches reality TV shows with Margie. Sophie really likes spending time with Grace, Callum and Jake but she's getting closer to Callum because Grace always goes to bed early or just vanishes, leaving the two of them alone to talk.

In Chapter 36, it is Margie's turn to give the Munro house tour today and when she dresses, her skirt falls to the floor. She has lost weight but she hadn't realized how much it affected her wardrobe. Elsewhere on the island, Sophie has Grace, Callum and Jake over for lunch. Grace questions Sophie on things like education and Sophie feels like she's on a job interview. Callum takes a call from their builder who doesn't have good news and he's in a touchy mood the rest of the day. That night Jake is really fussy too and Grace feels like she wants to throw him against a wall but she goes out for a walk instead.

In Chapter 37, Sophie meets with Ian to go over the details of the house, one of which is to invite Veronika to dinner so she will stop sulking. When Veronika does come to dinner, she tells Sophie that she thinks Aunt Connie murdered Alice and Jack Munro by poisoning them and chopping up their bodies. She speculates that Rose was involved only to help hide the crime. Veronika wants Sophie to help prove her theory and then Veronika is going to write a book about it. Veronika wants Sophie to interview the family members and get them to talk about what they know.





Veronika stays the night and Sophie leaves her sleeping as she leaves to get her first training session with Grace about how to conduct the Munro house tours. Sophie mentions to Grace that Veronika has more outlandish theories about what happened to the Munros, but Grace contends that it's possible that all the pressures of Alice's life made her snap. Sophie talks to Grace about Ian and Rick and Grace begins to panic because she wants Sophie to be interested in Callum so she can kill herself knowing that Sophie will take her place.

In Chapter 38, the family promotes the anniversary of the disappearance of Alice and Jack Munro. There will be a festival and the only night of the year when non-island residents can stay on the island after dark. Enigma is mad at Margie who can't attend the anniversary festival this year because she is going to an event with her Weight Watchers friend, Ron. Margie has done her part in organizing everything for the festival but she is firm that she has other plans for that night, much to Enigma's consternation. Enigma's other daughter, Laura, is still traveling and won't attend the anniversary either so Enigma pouts that she was not only abandoned by her parents, but now by her daughters as well.

In Chapter 39, Veronika has placed an ad in the paper requesting information on the disappearance of Jack and Alice Munro. At Sophie's house, she is getting ready for a date with Ian when Grace and Jake show up. Grace tells Sophie that she's thinking of leaving Callum. Sophie is secretly excited by the news but acts horrified for Grace. As Grace walks home, she thinks that Sophie clearly likes Callum and she'll treat him differently now that she knows Grace will be leaving. Grace plans to make her escape in two weeks at the Anniversary.

In Chapter 40, Sophie and Rose go swimming early in the morning and they talk about marriage. Rose never married and Sophie wonders if it's possible that sometimes people just don't meet the right person. Rose starts to tell Sophie a story about how she saw a beautiful turquoise fabric in a store window when she was young but they couldn't afford it. Rose then catches herself, knowing that if she continues, she'll be giving away too much of the Munro Baby Mystery. Sophie will have to wait until she turns 40.

## Analysis

The theme of postpartum depression continues to be a major theme in the story. People such as Callum, Margie and Enigma all discuss Grace's demeanor, with differing opinions. Grace tells Sophie that she could understand if Alice Munro had just abandoned her baby due to pressures she wasn't prepared for. Grace's condition doesn't seem to be improving as she reaches a point of wanting to throw the baby against a wall when he won't stop talking. At least Grace has the presence of mind to give the baby to Callum and go outside for a walk. Grace is also undeterred in her plan to kill herself and decides on the day of the Anniversary festival. Grace is putting her plan in motion by letting Sophie know that she plans to leave Callum, she just doesn't say when or how she will do it.





The theme of abandonment is a big issue for Enigma who was obviously left by her parents, Jack and Alice Munro, when she was just a baby. However, Enigma feels it even more acutely this year when neither one of her daughters will be present for the Anniversary. Laura is traveling and Margie has an event with her Weight Watchers friend. This is the first time that the girls won't be with their mother for the Anniversary and she is feeling anxious about it.

The theme of family is still very important in the story, but even more so with Sophie's joy over being included as part of them. Sophie grew up as an only child with no extended family so to be included in such a quirky mix of people is both enlightening and happy for her.

## Discussion Question 1

Why is being part of the family so appealing to Sophie?

## Discussion Question 2

Why is Veronika so adamant about finding out more information about the Munro Baby Mystery?

## Discussion Question 3

Why does Grace tell Sophie that she is thinking of leaving Callum?

## Vocabulary

solicitor, brawn, frenzied, postnatal, muesli, deft, jetty, bream, sashaying, wraith, entrepreneurial, dumbfounded, problematic, octave, malicious, whimsical, recoil, abstract, arsenic, fervently, remorseful, etiquette, elfin, ungainly, outlandish, hysteria, peering, disconcerting, non-committal, eiderdown, principled, tremor, hypothermia, elusive



# Chapters 41 - 50

## Summary

In Chapter 41, Sophie walks toward the ferry wharf to go on a picnic date with Rick the gardener. She sees Callum running toward her, trying to get some exercise. He asks Sophie if Grace has said anything unusual to her lately about her and Callum but Sophie lies and says no. Rick and Sophie picnic on a private beach and Sophie has a great time, feeling young, pretty and happy.

In Chapter 42, Grace's mother, Laura, has sent Grace a postcard from Rome in which she indicates that her trip is not all she had hoped it would be. Grace is restless and hurrying to complete household tasks such as ironing and preparing food for the freezer because she knows her time will soon be up. Grace tells Callum about how her mother used to punish her by ignoring her, once for 21 days when Grace had left a banana in the bottom of her book bag. Grace admits to wanting to hurt herself on purpose just to get her mother to pay attention to her.

In Chapter 43, Margie and her friend, Ron, declare that neither one of them has told their spouses about what they are about to do.

In Chapter 44, Veronika calls to talk to her mother but her father says that she's not home and has probably gone to a Weight Watchers meeting. Veronika cautions her father that he should pay more attention to his wife now because she could be having an affair because she has lost weight, something he hasn't even noticed in spite of all his complaints about her shape. At Enigma's house, she, Margie and Rose are baking marble cakes for the Anniversary. Rose suggests that they tell the truth about the Munro Baby Mystery and make this the last Anniversary. She's just tired of keeping the secret and feels that they have made enough money off it. Margie informs them that someone has responded to Veronika's ad regarding the Munro family and will be coming to the Anniversary.

In Chapter 45, a woman has just had amazing sex with another woman and can't believe she spent so many wasted years on having sex with men.

In Chapter 46, Sophie and some girlfriends are at dinner discussing whether she should marry Ian or Rick. Secretly, Sophie doesn't wish for either one of them, preferring to think of Callum instead. The next night Sophie is having dinner at Grace and Callum's house and enjoys playing with little Jake. Grace offers Sophie the opportunity to give the baby a bath. Sophie hesitates but Grace assures her that Callum will show her what to do. Being so close to Callum in the small bathroom makes both of them uncomfortable and they have to will themselves not to kiss.

In Chapter 47, Sophie wakes on the morning of the Anniversary with the thought that Connie and Rose could have killed Jack and Alice together and wonders if this is the



family secret. Sophie marvels at how the Jack and Alice house and even the whole island remains comfortably charming and how the family has made a fortune out of the mystery. They've had good business sense but it's creepy that it's all based on murder. Tonight Sophie will dress up in a pink fairy costume and sell fairy floss at the festival. Sophie has an uneasy feeling because of how much she wanted to kiss Callum the other night and the look on Grace's face telling her that she knew.

Rose wakes and tries to stretch her aching body. She can't believe it's been 73 years since the mysterious event occurred on the island. Rose thinks about the besotted love she has for her grandchildren which is more tolerant than the love she has for her children. The love for Enigma always had a sense of fear about it as if she might be taken away at any time. She can still recall the actual day of the event and how Connie had given her one last chance to back out of their plans. Rose said nothing and they went forward and now it is 73 years later. Rose feels a sense of fear and outrage that some kook who answered Veronika's ad will be at the festival with a story about what happened that day.

Enigma wakes and can't help but think that she is alone on the Anniversary. She doesn't really miss her dead husband who never could get used to the fact that she was a local celebrity. Enigma does wish that her daughters were going to be at the festival tonight though. Enigma loved being raised by Connie and Rose and lived in fear that her parents might some day return. When they told her the truth on her 40th birthday, it made Enigma mad that she spent all those years worrying that her parents were going to show up when nothing could have been further than the truth.

At Margie's house, Margie gets a text message which makes Ron suspicious that she's having an affair because Margie never gets text messages. Ron tries to engage her in conversation which he never does and Margie remains evasive. She does confide in him, however, that when she was little, every year on the Anniversary, she was petrified that her parents were going to disappear and that she, too, would be abandoned. Ron asks again if he can accompany her to the Weight Watchers event tonight but she tells him that he can't.

At Grace's house, she has been up all night preparing dinners for the freezer and cleaning in preparation for her departure tonight. She thinks that her mother will be embarrassed by Grace's decision because of the drama it will have created in public. Grace feels an affinity with Alice Munro who must have known she couldn't be a good mother to her baby so she took her own life, too, but not before she killed her husband. Grace doesn't like to think about inflicting so much emotional pain on Callum but she simply can't go on living the life she has.

In Chapter 48, Sophie's mother is upset with her because she has opted to be the Fairy Floss Fairy at the festival tonight instead of going to the opera with her parents. Sophie enjoys the extended network of family and looks forward to participating and her mother grudgingly understands. Grace pushes Jake in his stroller on the way to the festival and breathes in all the wonderful smells of the food and mulled wine in the crisp evening air. Callum is warming up with his jazz band which has played for three years at the



Anniversary. At her fairy floss station, a man with a large vase under his arm asks Sophie where he can find Veronika and she knows this must be the kook who answered the newspaper ad.

Grace and Aunt Rose are manning the face painting booth while Enigma keeps an eye on Jake. Enigma is also enjoying her celebrity as people want to get their pictures taken with the Munro Baby. Grace feels euphoric because her departure plan is in set and it won't be long now.

In Chapter 49, Sophie enjoys watching Callum's band from her fairy floss stand and she wonders what would have happened if she had kissed Callum in the bathroom that night. Sophie is roused from her thoughts by an exuberant Veronika who introduces her to her new girlfriend. Veronika declares that she is a lesbian and has never been happier in her life. Sophie does not act surprised much to Veronika's chagrin. Sophie tells Veronika that the kook from the newspaper ad is looking for her and she doesn't seem that interested. Sophie sees Ian who tells her that he is not going to practice law any longer and is moving to New Zealand.

The kook asks Rose if she knows where Veronika is and Rose confronts him and he backs down temporarily. Ron sees Veronika at the festival and wants to know if Margie is having an affair and wants to know where she is tonight but Veronika doesn't know. Ron grabs his mobile phone and tries to call Margie. Rick, who has been doing a fire-eating performance all night, approaches Sophie to tell her that he has gone back with his ex-girlfriend. Margie's friend, Ron, answers her cell phone and her husband, Ron, is outraged. Margie gets on the phone and tells her husband that she and her friend are at the Hilton and she invites her husband to come and watch.

Grace reads the note that Margie left for her regarding which foods at the festival contain nuts--the Satay sticks and the Samosas. Ron runs toward the wharf, intent on getting across the river and to the Hilton to retrieve Margie. On his way, he sees a familiar figure in the dark, yells an acknowledgement and keeps running. The festival is shutting down and Callum finds Sophie to see if she wants to dance with him. Rose is surprised to see that Laura has returned from her travels. Veronika talks to the kook who claims that Alice Munro was his mother and he has brought her cremated remains with him. Enigma says the kook is a con man and Laura, who calls him by his name, David, tells him to give up the charade. Laura states that she had dated David for awhile and revealed some family secrets while intoxicated one night.

Rose can't take any more of the chaos and tells everyone that Jack and Alice Munro never existed; she and Connie made them up. Enigma is Rose's biological daughter.

Sophie is in heaven because Callum is kissing her on the dance floor. Nearby, Grace eats a Samosa and immediately goes into anaphylactic shock. Rose feels relieved that the truth is out and the kook says that the family is going to be sued for fraud. Suddenly someone yells for help because Grace has been found gasping for breath. Callum bolts away from Sophie and Grace can hear her mother's voice telling her to hold on.



In Chapter 50, Sophie wakes to the sound of a ringing phone and realizes that she is really hung over from drinking too much mulled wine at the festival. She recalls Grace's attack from the night before and how she was whisked away to the hospital. Rose arrives at Sophie's house and she is all dressed up to celebrate the end of the Munro Baby Mystery. Rose tells Sophie that Grace is a little shaken up but is going to be fine. She also tells Sophie that Ron ended up in jail last night. Rose tells Sophie to get cleaned up so they can have breakfast and talk about Jack and Alice Munro.

## Analysis

The story reaches its climax in this section as it finally is revealed that Jack and Alice Munro never existed; that Connie and Rose made them up. All this time they have been living a lie and making a fortune selling the lie to the public. This supports the theme of deceit because Connie and Rose fabricated a story more than 70 years ago and played on the public's sympathies to perpetuate it. They created a family fortune by capitalizing on the deceit and never really seemed to be bothered by the fact that they duped the world for so many years and profited by it.

The revelation that Enigma is actually Rose's daughter changes the family, too, because they all thought that Rose was a nice old woman but not a blood relative. Now, Enigma's children and grandchildren will learn that they are actual descendants of Rose herself, and not Alice Munro. This may be difficult for some of the people to come to terms with, but it seems as if Rose is very relieved that the truth has finally come out.

The author has created a sense of intrigue throughout the story to keep the reader interested in learning the truth about the family mystery. She also uses intrigue as she tells Grace's story as she prepares to end her suffering at the Anniversary. Grace has methodically set up Sophie and Callum to be together; she has prepared food for the freezer; she cleaned and did all the ironing; and now she can eat the wrong food which will create anaphylactic shock and death. The theme of postpartum depression remains strong throughout this section as Grace's thoughts tell the reader that she simply feels nothing for her child or the life she now has. She is looking forward to death as a sweet relief.

It is fortuitous that Grace's mother, Laura, has returned early from her travels, as she is the one who saves Grace by giving her an injection to stop the attack. Even though Grace and her mother have had their challenges over the years and her mother admits to not being the best mother that ever lived, her love for Grace is what saves her. A mother's love may take many forms, but in the end, it should be the one thing a person can count on and Grace learns this lesson now.

The theme of motherhood is important here both for Grace and her own mother and the author wants to show that even though they are alike in their challenges regarding being mothers, their inherent instincts are correct. Even though Grace thinks she is a bad mother, she takes the time to express breast milk and put it in the freezer for Jake and tries to push Sophie and Callum together to become his parents after she's gone. Grace



may not be aware of it, but she is doing the things that a good mother does: she's preparing things so that her child will have a good life.

## Discussion Question 1

In what ways has the family been deceitful regarding the Munro Baby Mystery?

## Discussion Question 2

Do Grace's preparations indicate someone who is about to end her life?

## Discussion Question 3

Why would Rose be relieved that the truth is finally out about the Munro Baby Mystery?

## Vocabulary

clenching, singlet, acquaintance, frivolous, gelato, anecdotes, serviette, brandishing, irrational, egalitarian, taut, pathetic, pornographic, irrelevant, Aubade, chafe, gullible, sieve, outrageous, conundrum, splayed, incoherent, guffaw, haze, apprehension, vile, companionable, interlaced, unadulterated, droning, imperceptibly, ludicrous, blackmail, rancid



# Chapters 51 - 60

## Summary

In Chapter 51, Rose tells Sophie the secret of the Munro Baby Mystery. In 1932 there were only two houses on Scribbly Gum Island, the house where Rose and Connie lived with their parents and their grandparents' home. Their grandmother was dead and their grandfather lived there alone. Their grandfather had won the island in a bet. Rose and Connie's father, Mr. Doughty, was never quite right in the head since he had fought in World War I so he wasn't able to work. Their mother supported the family by working in a clothing factory. One day she left her winter coat on the train and caught pneumonia by walking home in the winter. She died of pneumonia a few days later at the age of 37. Their grandfather died a month later.

The little family was in dire financial straits and Connie became obsessed with money. Connie wanted to create a place where people could buy her scones which were much better than the ones sold at a nearby resort area. Mr. Doughty wanted Connie to get a tenant for their grandparents' house to help with the money situation. There were no prospects to rent the house so Connie just told Mr. Doughty that she found tenants named Jack and Alice Munro. Connie got the "rent money" by being a bookie at the wharf. Money was still very tight so Rose went to work at a department store.

One day, Rose spotted a bolt of turquoise fabric that she would have love to have for a dress, but it was too expensive. That's when Rose stole the money from a cash register and was caught by the floor supervisor. He made a deal with Rose that he wouldn't report the theft if she would provide him special favors. The man took his time but one day raped Rose and she never said anything.

In Chapter 52, Margie tends to Ron's black eye and he tries to placate her by asking if she wants to go on a picnic. Margie is not interested. For years she has tried to engage him in doing things together and he didn't and she has run out of patience with him. It turns out that Margie and her friend, Ron, had hired a personal trainer to get into shape for a beginner's body building contest. Last night they won second place. It was at the event at the Hilton that Margie got a call that her husband had gotten into a fight with a taxi driver and he was taken to jail. Margie is weary of life with her husband and tells him that she is going off on a vacation across Australia for a couple months by herself.

In Chapter 53, Rose continues her story with Sophie and tells her that she got pregnant and feared that her father would kick her out of the house when he found out. When Connie found out, she determined that they would figure out a way to keep the baby. Connie's solution was that Jack and Alice Munro were going to have a baby and then just disappear one day just like the people who disappeared from the famous ship, Mary Celeste, in 1872. Connie's plan would save Rose's reputation, provide for the baby and bring in money when word of the disappearance spread and Connie could sell them scones and tea.





Mr. Doughty paid no attention to his daughters so it was easy for Rose to hide her pregnancy. Connie got a job cleaning offices and managed to turn their grandparents' house into Alice and Jack Munro's home. Rose's baby arrived three weeks early and Connie delivered it because she didn't trust a midwife with their secret. They took the baby home and told their father that they had gone to have tea at the Munro house but Jack and Alice had vanished, leaving their infant in her bed. He agreed that they could keep her and the next day Connie went to the police to report the abandoned baby. Then the newspaper sent Jimmy Thrum to do a story and people started showing up to view the house and Connie sold them scones and tea.

Connie didn't tell Jimmy the truth for many years later and decided not to tell Enigma until she turned 40. Rose admits that Connie was more active in raising Enigma and Rose became more like her big sister. By the time Mr. Doughty died in 1940, Connie and Rose had made more money than they'd ever dreamed of. Connie built the business up over the years, sometimes inventing things to make the mystery more intriguing.

In Chapter 54, Callum calls Sophie to tell her that Grace is fine and that he is sorry about his behavior the night before. He is really attracted to Sophie but he is in love with Grace and can't be unfaithful to her.

In Chapter 55, Grace is still in the hospital feeling shaky but glad to be breathing properly. Grace's mother questions her about whether she deliberately ate the Samosa last night and Grace said she was just distracted. Her mother tells her that one of the doctors told Callum that Grace may have postpartum depression and suggests that Grace see a psychiatrist.

In Chapter 56, a week after the Anniversary, Callum takes Grace and Jake to the mountains to view the progress on their new house. Callum and Grace act tentatively toward each other. Callum is ashamed that he had kissed Sophie and entertained thoughts of having an affair. Plus, he's not sure how to talk to Grace anymore because she has distanced herself from him. And he's not sure if Grace ate the Samosa on purpose and tried to kill herself.

In Chapter 57, Rose leaves a message on Sophie's answering machine that she has remembered that it is one of Callum's friends whom Aunt Connie thought would be perfect for her.

In Chapter 58, Sophie determines that she will try to eliminate any thoughts of Callum to distract her. Sophie knows that she's been coasting in her career and love life for the last several years and that some change is due. As she's pouring a cup of tea, a man barges into her kitchen saying he is Callum's friend and wonders if she would like an estimate for painting her house. Sophie learns that his name is Eddie Ripple and they had gone to school together. Callum had told Eddie that Sophie may want her house painted and had sent Eddie over to talk to Sophie about it. Sophie learns that Eddie is gay but would have liked to have been a father.





In Chapter 59, Grace takes Jake for a walk up to Kingfisher Lookout. The hike is strenuous and she wants to quit but forces herself to go on. Grace has been going to support group sessions for postpartum depression and has found a friend who has experienced many of the same things that Grace has. The group's coordinator had stressed the importance of exercise and fresh air so Grace is going through the motions hoping it will help.

In Chapter 60, two unidentified people talk about the chances that if they had a baby it would both blush and twitch.

## Analysis

At last, the truth about the Munro Baby Mystery has been revealed. The theme of deceit comes to an end but not before examining whether or not Connie and Rose behaved properly by living a lie. Connie basically made up the whole story of the Munros in order to protect Rose's reputation when she got pregnant as a result of a rape. Is it ever right to fabricate a story? And does the lie become worse because people profited from it? Perhaps a lot can be attributed to Connie's youth when she made the decision. And it's important to factor in the time and the situation in which the Doughty family found itself. In 1932, it was considered a black mark on a girl and her family if she got pregnant and wasn't married. Social mores were much more strict during that time and Connie probably thought she was doing the best thing for Rose and the Doughty name.

It's also important to know that there were few, if any, social service agencies available in 1932 so there would have been no real resources for the Doughty girls to access. The girls were already poor, having no parental support, so it can be understood why Connie decided to profit from the situation. She was very enterprising and turned a negative situation into a business so that she and her family would never lack for anything again. Some might say that Connie was manipulative and defrauded people, but 1932 was a desperate time during the Great Depression and making money any way you could was the norm. Connie and Rose were not educated so there were no professions available to them, plus they lived on an island where there were no sources of commerce. It's not always right to take a black or white view of a person's situation until it is put in context.

The theme of motherhood is important to this part of the story in that Rose became a mother but not through the usual circumstances. She bore a child that was a result of rape and cared for the child even though the situation was deplorable. It's no wonder that Rose said that she could not care for the baby for awhile after she was born. It may be that Rose suffered from postpartum depression or it could be that she could not love the result of a crime that had been committed against her.

It's now clear why the author titled the book, *The Last Anniversary*. The truth about the Munro Baby Mystery has been revealed so there, obviously, will be no more celebrations of the event. It is something that is bittersweet because it has been an



element of the community for so long that it will be missed, but it has also perpetuated a deception which needed to be stopped because it was fraudulent.

## Discussion Question 1

Does it seem right that Connie and Rose should have profited from a story they made up in order to protect Rose's reputation?

## Discussion Question 2

What changes have occurred in Margie that give her strength to know that her husband has not been good enough for her?

## Discussion Question 3

Does it seem that Grace really wanted to kill herself? Why or why not?

## Vocabulary

straightforward, unravelled, shrapnel, repatriation, menacing, scones, lusted, dispassionately, vulnerable, Amazonian, adrenaline, euphoric, choreographed, ecstasy, inferiority, triumphant, cliched, surreal, revelling, distracted, facial, disdain, pashmina, spectrum, tentative, sleazy, samosa, perceptibly, horrendous



# Chapters 61 - 65

## Summary

In Chapter 61, Grace continues her walk with Jake up to Kingfisher Lookout. She talks to Jake as they go and is pleased when he chuckles. When they reach their destination, she lays him on a blanket and he laughs again at something she says. It's at that moment that Grace feels a shot of joyful love for her child.

In Chapter 62, Sophie watches Eddie walking up the footpath to her house. She wonders why it wouldn't be ok for the two of them to have a child since they both want that so desperately.

In Chapter 63, Rick calls Sophie to tell her that he has broken up with his ex-girlfriend and wants to take her out again.

In Chapter 64, Ian calls Sophie to tell her that he's not going to New Zealand and wants to take her out again.

In Chapter 65, Rick has been providing Rose with marijuana which she smokes to alleviate her joint pains and she feels like a new person. One day the urge to paint comes over her and, lacking a big canvas, decides to paint on her white kitchen floor. She paints scenes from her life and all the people she loves. She also thinks about the day when she went to the house of the man who had raped her to show him their baby. He was shocked to see her and said the baby was ugly. This enraged Rose so much that she put the baby down and picked up a bread board and whacked the man in the back of his head. He fell forward into his breakfast plate and died. The mystery of the Bread Board Murder was never solved.

When Rose is finished painting, she mops it all away. The next day, Sophie comes to give her an invitation to her 40th birthday party and Rose looks like she always does--like an old woman whose secrets involve only recipes.

## Analysis

At last Grace has some positive emotions about her new baby. Unfortunately, she had to take drastic measures and almost kill herself to realize that she wanted to be available for her son. And now, too, the people closest to her can move beyond speculation that she needs help and be supportive in her efforts to get better. Sophie's life seems to be improving too. Rick and Ian both let her know that they are available again, plus Eddie is in the picture and Sophie is considering having a child with him. The theme of motherhood is important for both of these characters. They may not be conventional definitions of what mothers are but life is fluid and there are many ways for people to embrace motherhood.



Rose has been released from the bonds of the secret that has held her captive for so many years. She reaches a real cathartic moment when she paints her life on the kitchen floor. It is very visible to her in its entirety but unlike the real events, the bad memories can be washed away with the swish of a mop.

The author closes the story with the solution to another mystery that has gone unsolved for years--the Bread Board Murder. No one ever suspected that it was mild mannered Rose who whacked her rapist on the back of his head, killing him. Rose has had several weighty secrets in her life but she has presented herself as a simple woman who loves her family, and indeed she did.

## **Discussion Question 1**

Discuss Grace's difficult journey in bonding with her baby until the moment she feels love for him.

## **Discussion Question 2**

Is it out of character for Sophie to consider having a relationship with a gay man to have a child?

## **Discussion Question 3**

Describe Rose's mood and outlook since the mystery of the Munro Baby has been revealed.

## **Vocabulary**

markedly, scrawny, jacarandas, deceit, exertion, jig, glimmer, immense, glee, sneering, tottered



# Characters

## Sophie Honeywell

Sophie Honeywell is a 39-year-old woman who works as a Human Resources Director at a company in Sydney, Australia. She broke up with a man named Thomas but she sometimes wonders if she did the right thing because she wants a child and her time is running out. Thomas' Aunt Connie leaves Sophie her house when she dies which alters Sophie's life because she opens up to different possibilities in life.

Sophie is an only child and has a very close relationship with her parents. She does, however, adopt Thomas' family as her own when she takes residence in Connie's house. When she moves to the island, she is adamant about finding a husband, even entertaining the idea of stealing away Grace's husband, Callum.

Sophie is sophisticated, worldly and sassy but feels inadequate because she hasn't been able to marry and have children. She reconnects with an old school friend whom she learns is gay and considers having a child with him because he wants a family too.

## Connie Doughty Thrum

Connie Doughty Thrum is a controlling, manipulative main character in the story. She is the mastermind behind the Munro Baby Mystery which was created to save her sister, Rose's, reputation. Connie is the older sister and always felt responsible to help the family. She holds a couple of low paying jobs during the Great Depression just to take care of their basic needs. Connie is inventive and not only devises a story to shield Rose, but also make money for the family.

Connie is tall and thin throughout her life in spite of her propensity to cook and bake all the time. She opens a cafe near the Munro Mystery house to cater to tourists and visitors.

Connie is very organized and plans everything, even her own funeral. Connie doesn't have much time for foolish or weak people but she takes a real liking to Sophie, whom Connie feels has a real capacity for joy just like Connie's husband, Jimmy.

## Thomas Gordon

Thomas is the son of Margie and the grandson of the Munro baby, Enigma. He was in love with Sophie and wanted to marry her but she declined because he just wasn't the right person for her. Thomas then married his travel agent, Deborah, and they have a baby named Lily. Thomas is a model husband and father, but he is still in love with Sophie.



## Jimmy Thrum

Jimmy Thrum was the reporter who came to Scribbly Gum Island to interview Connie about the Munro Baby Mystery. He and Connie hit it off and they eventually married. Jimmy was outgoing and happy in contrast to Connie's controlled demeanor and that's what made the relationship work. After Jimmy died, Connie mourned for him deeply and ultimately willed her house to Sophie because she reminded her of Jimmy's happy nature.

## Enigma

Enigma is the Munro Baby and the center of the island mystery. She was raised by the Doughty sisters, Connie and Rose. She enjoys being a local celebrity during her life and is distressed when she learns the real truth when she turns 40. Enigma is actually Rose's biological daughter. Enigma has two children, Margie and Laura.

## Rose

Rose is the younger of the two Doughty sisters. She has a baby as a result of a rape which is kept secret via the Munro Baby Mystery. Rose helps to raise the baby but can never claim her as her own until the truth is revealed. Rose is very artistic, and loves to paint, bake and swim. She is more sentimental than her sister and not as calculating or organized. Rose likes to see the good in people in spite of the ugly things that happened to her as a girl.

## Margie

Margie is Thomas' mother. She is a very caring person who has drowned her frustrations by overeating. Her husband, Ron, essentially ignores her unless he is deriding her for being overweight and flighty. Margie goes to Weight Watchers and then goes into body building with a personal trainer which totally transforms her. She gains new confidence and is able to see that her husband is a little man who has killed her spirit. She takes off on an adventure across Australia by herself to reinforce her new powerful identity.

## Grace Tidyman

Grace is the daughter of Laura and the granddaughter of Enigma. She is married to Callum Tidyman and has a new baby named Jake. Grace is a graphic designer who creates children's books, but since the birth of her son, she has suffered from postpartum depression and feels no love for her child. She considers killing herself so that Callum can remarry and she will be relieved of the burden of motherhood. However,



at the end of the story she has a change of heart and begins to feel motherly love for her son.

## **Callum Tidyman**

Callum Tidyman is Grace's husband. He is a big, boisterous man whose last name does not describe him at all. He teaches music at a high school and plays in a jazz band in his free time. Callum is a very attentive husband and wonderful father. He loves Grace but considers an affair with Sophie when he thinks that Grace has fallen out of love with him.

## **Veronika**

Veronika is Margie and Ron's daughter. She has a very contentious personality. She is determined to prove that Aunt Connie killed Jack and Alice Munro and plans to write a book about it. Veronika had been Sophie's friend which is how Sophie got introduced to the family. Veronika still hangs on to bitter feelings about her divorce and is angry most of the time. Her demeanor and outlook change, however, when she realizes that she is a lesbian and finds love with another woman.

## **Ian Curtis**

Ian Curtis is Aunt Connie's lawyer. Sophie meets him when they finalize the details of Aunt Connie's house. Sophie views him as potential husband material because he is attractive and financially secure.

## **Rick**

Rick is Aunt Connie's gardener and Sophie calls him Rick the Gorgeous Gardener. Sophie meets Rick when he advises her on how to take care of some of the plantings at Aunt Connie's house. Rick is comfortable in nature and Sophie considers him good husband material because he brings out her earthy side.

## **Eddie Ripple**

Eddie Ripple is a friend of Callum's who went to school with Sophie. He reappears in Sophie's life when he comes to her house to see if she wants it painted. Eddie is gay but wants a family and Sophie entertains the thought of having a child with him.

# Symbols and Symbolism

## The island

The island is the location of the Munro house and the extended Doughty family and it symbolizes how the family has set itself apart from the rest of the world. Being set apart from the mainland adds to the mystique of the Munro Baby Mystery and has allowed the family to generate wealth for many years.

## Regency romances

Sophie is very fond of reading regency romances and they symbolize the romanticism of life she prefers to reality. These may have given her a false view of love because she expects someone dashing and handsome to whisk her away to create a life together. She does reach a point where she wishes she had invested more time in cultivating her own romance instead of reading about the love stories of other people.

## River

The river that flows by Aunt Connie's house is symbolic for the passing of time. She loved to watch it from her house and when Sophie watches it from the same vantage point, she also loves it. The river is consistent and keeps moving in spite of all the changes occurring with the people on the island.

## Jack and Alice Munro

Jack and Alice Munro symbolize the attempt to save Rose's reputation. They were fabricated by Connie so that a story could be built to explain the sudden appearance of Rose's baby.

## Mary Celeste

The Mary Celeste symbolizes the possibility of unexplained mysteries, as it was a ship whose crew disappeared in the Atlantic Ocean near Portugal in 1872. Connie was fascinated by the story and could be what led her to fabricate the Alice and Jack Munro story.

## Marble cakes

Marble cake symbolizes the family's commitment to perpetuating the myth of the abandoned Munro house. According to the myth, Alice Munro had left a freshly baked





marble cake on the kitchen counter prior to disappearing forever. Now, when a family member is on duty to give a tour, she must bring a fresh marble cake to add to the scene.

## **Turquoise fabric**

The turquoise fabric symbolizes Rose's desires for nice things in life which she can't have. The entire Munro Baby Mystery actually began because Rose wanted some turquoise fabric that she couldn't afford. When she stole the money from the store's cash register and was caught by a floor supervisor, he forced her into silence and raped her. Rose had a baby that had to be explained all because of her infatuation with this length of fabric.

## **Samosa**

The samosa that Grace eats symbolizes her willingness to take her life into her own hands and end her misery. A samosa is a fried appetizer with special fillings. When Grace eats the samosa, fully aware that it contains nuts, she is intentionally trying to kill herself. It seems odd that a fried snack can cause death but in this case it seems like the solution to a major problem.

## **Kookaburra**

The kookaburra symbolizes the joy that both Connie and Sophie share about life. A kookaburra is a bird found in Australia and its call sounds very much like a laugh. Connie always loved the kookaburra who would call outside her window and then Sophie enjoys it when she lives in the house. Both characters appreciate joy and it is symbolic that the bird comes to them.

## **Scones**

The scones that Connie bakes symbolize the "dough" that can be made from an innovative family business that Connie creates. Connie knew that she could make better scones than a nearby resort area so when they devised the Munro Baby Mystery, she knew she could make money selling people her scones and a cup of tea. The scones symbolize Connie's resourcefulness and her ability to bake up ideas that would literally and figuratively feed her family for the rest of their lives.



# Settings

## Sydney, Australia

Sydney, Australia is the setting for all activities in the book that don't occur on Scribbly Gum Island. Sophie had lived there all her life until she is willed Aunt Connie's house on the island. People from Sydney come to the island to view the Munro house and attend the Anniversary. All the hospitals, hotels and major restaurants available to the islanders are all located in Sydney.

## Scribbly Gum Island

Scribbly Gum Island is a fictional place where the main characters live. It is the site of the Jack and Alice Munro house where tourists come to tour.

## Kingfisher Lookout

Kingfisher Lookout is located on Scribbly Gum Island. It is a nice place to play and have a picnic. It is the site where Rose and Enigma scatter Connie's ashes. It is also the location where Grace first falls in love with her baby.

## Aunt Connie's House

Aunt Connie had a beautiful house on Scribbly Gum Island and she left it to Sophie in her will. When Sophie moves in, she feels like her life has been changed for the better because she is part of a big family now.

## The Munro House

The Munro House is the supposed site of the disappearance of Jack and Alice Munro. Connie and Rose perpetuated the abandonment story and gave tours of the house for many years.



# Themes and Motifs

## Deceit

The theme of deceit is important in the story because it underlies everything about the plot and the characters. Connie and Rose fabricated a story designed to protect Rose's reputation when she became pregnant as a result of a rape. They crafted a story about an imaginary couple named Jack and Alice Munro who disappeared from their home and abandoned their baby daughter. This may have seemed like the only solution at the time but perpetuating the deceit and profiting from it defrauded the family and the public.

Enigma was deceived into thinking that her real parents had abandoned her and that Connie and Rose rescued her out of the goodness of their hearts. This must have been very wounding for Enigma when she finally learned the truth at the age of 40. Not only was she not abandoned, she actually was living with her biological mother but wasn't aware of it. Enigma also lost her identity as a local celebrity too.

Enigma's children and grandchildren always loved Rose for caring for their mother but had no idea that they were related to her. Rose was denied the opportunity to outwardly show love for her descendants as her own relatives.

And the public was also deceived as a result of Connie and Rose's lies. They kept the mystery alive, gave tours of the Munro house and celebrated with a big Anniversary every year.

## Postpartum Depression

The author uses the theme of postpartum depression to show how life may not always be as pleasant as people anticipate. Postpartum depression occurs in women after they deliver a child and experience symptoms such as overwhelming feelings of not being able to cope with the new responsibilities of motherhood, inability to bond with their new baby, feeling empty and numb, an inability to concentrate, and many other frightening feelings. This happens to many women and should not be taken lightly because there is help available.

Grace suffers from postpartum depression in the story. She has a hard time getting motivated and can stare at a milk carton, lost in thought, for a couple hours. And while she takes good physical care of her baby and makes sure he is fed, she has a hard time coping when he cries and she doesn't know what he wants. She even envisions beating his head with his hair brush or throwing him against a wall. Fortunately, she is able to stop herself from acting out on these thoughts.

Grace's depression is so consuming that she even crafts a life in her mind for Callum and Sophie to become Jake's parents so that she can kill herself and end her pain. Those close to Grace don't really see that Grace is ill because she is keeping up



pretenses with her appearance and her family obligations. It is only after she eats the samosa trying to kill herself that Callum and her mother suspect that there is something seriously wrong. Fortunately, Grace gets the help she needs and is making progress by the end of the story when she is able to start feeling love for her own baby.

It is also mentioned that Rose could not stir any feelings for Enigma after she was born either. It's possible that Rose had postpartum depression but it would be highly understandable if Rose were rejecting the baby due to the nature of her conception.

## Motherhood

The author uses the theme of motherhood to show that relationships can take different forms but that unconditional love is possible between people who are not biologically related. Even though Rose is Enigma's biological mother, that secret is kept and Enigma is raised by two mother figures--Connie and Rose. After creating the story that Enigma had been abandoned, they take her to raise and the world recognizes them as substitute mothers.

Rose reveals later in life that it always hurt her when Enigma wanted to call Connie her mother but she was powerless to say anything about it. Being a single mother during the Great Depression would have been very difficult for Rose so she and Connie devised a way to share the work so it wouldn't be so hard. What they received in love more than made up for the hardships.

Grace is another young mother who struggles in her role. She is suffering from postpartum depression which makes caring and bonding for her baby virtually impossible. In some ways, Grace is not sure how to be a mother because her own mother, Laura, wasn't comfortable in the role. They have found a way to be together but there was never a feeling of unconditional love that a mother has for her child.

Motherhood is a big part of many women's lives and Sophie wants to have that experience even though her attempts at finding the right husband have not been very productive. The drive to have a child is so strong, though, that she considers having one with a gay man who reappears in her life 30 years later.

## Family

The author uses the theme of family to demonstrate the important connections that are possible between people. It is the feelings and bonds that really matter between people in life and family can take many forms.

Connie and Rose created a public family when they took Enigma to raise as their own. They were the only two who knew that Rose was Enigma's biological mother. The carefully crafted family grew over the years to include Enigma's children, Margie and Laura, and her grandchildren, Veronika, Thomas, and Grace. The bond of the family's



mystery held them all together and they lived on the island, essentially protected from the rest of the world.

The definition of family can mean many things and Sophie came to benefit from that aspect. Connie liked Sophie because she reminded her of her husband, Jimmy's, joyful nature. She made the decision to draw Sophie into the family by leaving her house to her when she died. This is life changing for Sophie who grew up as an only child with no extended family and she revels in being included in the family's activities.

## Abandonment

The author uses the theme of abandonment to show what can happen to people when they lose, or never have, important foundations created in life. People need connections for stability and confidence and are negatively impacted when these are absent for any reason.

For many years the Munro Baby Mystery was based on a set of parents who disappeared and abandoned their baby. At the time there were reasons given that it was the Great Depression and people couldn't afford their houses so they were just abandoning them. The element of the abandoned baby was too heart wrenching to understand and Connie and Rose capitalized on that.

Abandonment may have been what drove Connie and Rose to devise the Munro story in the first place, however. Their father was not able to work and provide for them properly because he was not right mentally after having served in the war. Their mother had to work but barely made enough to feed them. Then when their mother died, they were essentially orphans, left to fend for themselves. Hunger and poverty do awful things to families and Connie and Rose did what they felt they had to do, especially after Rose's being raped.

It is interesting to note that Grace seems willing to abandon her new baby because she doesn't feel any bond with him. Fortunately, this is avoided but had it occurred, Grace would have set up her son for emotional problems from which he would have struggled to recover probably for the rest of his life.



# Styles

## Point of View

"The Last Anniversary" is written in the third person omniscient point of view. This means that the author writes the story using third person pronouns such as "she" and "he." The author also has insight into what the characters are thinking which makes it an omniscient view, as opposed to a limited view where only the activities of the characters are reported. For example, the author writes, "She remembers his Aunt Connie well, but the old lady must have been at least ninety and it's not as if she had ever been likely to see her again, since she and Thomas aren't together anymore. Surely, after three years of stony, betrayed silence, he hasn't asked her for a drink just to tell her that his Aunt Connie has died?" (5).

The author also switches to first person perspective in some chapters too. For example, she writes, "I'm positive I remember her saying that she wanted to be buried in that lovely burgundy suit she wore to Grace's wedding." In instances like this, the characters share their own thoughts and feelings in their own words without the author needing to add any support. In a few instances, the author writes very brief chapters that consist of dialogue between two people who are unnamed and it is up to the reader to determine who is saying what and how it fits in with the story.

## Language and Meaning

Because "The Last Anniversary" is set in modern day, the language is current for the times. The author uses twenty-first century terminology and euphemisms in narration and dialogue to show authenticity. The author uses things like current movies and pop culture icons so that the modern day audience can relate to them.

Because the story is set in Australia, the author uses terms that are native to the country. For example, when Rose eats an entire packet of chocolate biscuits, she has eaten cookies. The author also uses British English in which words like honor, color and flavor are written as honour, colour and flavour.

The author also keeps the language authentic to the characters. For example, dialogue from reserved, composed Aunt Connie is quite different from that of Veronika who has a highly charged personality and everything she says seems to be an emergency.

## Structure

The structure of a novel usually takes one of four forms: character, milieu, event or idea. And while a story can contain all four forms, one usually predominates. "The Last Anniversary" takes the structure of a character form. These types of novels tend to show a character's personal growth as the story extends. A character structure shows

transformation as being important as opposed to an event story which is more concerned with what a character does.

It is easy to identify a character structure novel because there comes a point in the story when the main character reaches a point of frustration with life or a set of circumstances that are no longer acceptable for personal growth. The character then decides on changes, both small and dramatic, that will move the character's life in a different direction. The story concludes then when the character has resolved his or her issues and feels satisfied with the transformation or decides to stay in the current situation.

In *The Last Anniversary*, several of the characters transform as the story extends. As the main character, Sophie's transformation is most obvious as she moves from being a professional single woman to a woman who chooses life on an island and entertains the idea of connecting with men who are different from those she usually dates. Grace is another character whose transformation is obvious. She begins as a woman suffering from postpartum depression and wanting to end her life but as the story ends she has progressed to a woman who can finally bond with her child and loves him completely.



## Quotes

Neither of us is going to jail, you ninny. One day we'll be sweet old ladies and we'll probably forget that it didn't happen the way we said it did.

-- Connie (chapter 1 paragraph 4)

**Importance:** Connie tries to calm Rose when they are determining how to manage through a secret they share. This occurred nearly 70 years before the story takes place and Connie's prediction very nearly comes true.

Love is a decision.

-- Connie (chapter 2 paragraph 2)

**Importance:** Veronika tries to interview Aunt Connie about life's mysteries and she very directly tells Veronika that people have to make the decision to love. This refers to marital love as well as other forms of it. Without revealing anything, Aunt Connie is giving her own story in that she and Rose decided to love the Munro Baby in spite of everything and that has ruled their lives.

Grace thinks, 'please just go away,' and says, 'Come here, sweetie.'

-- Grace (chapter 6 paragraph 8)

**Importance:** Grace has a newborn baby with whom she is having difficulty bonding. She notices that her husband can hold and bathe the baby easily but she struggles with him. This is an indicator that Grace may be suffering from postpartum depression that some women get after giving birth.

Oops, stuffed it up, buttercup!

-- Sophie (chapter 13 paragraph 1)

**Importance:** Sophie recalls a former co-worker who used to say that phrase when she made a sill error. Now Sophie applies it to her own life, only the "mistake" is not a slight one--she has neglected to find a husband and have children and her time is running out.

Here's the thing, Aunt Margie: it's just that I really, truly don't like being a mother. It's not that I'm tired or a bit emotional. It's just not the job for me. It's not that I'm having a few problems bonding with my baby; I don't even like him! I feel nothing. I want out. Oh, please, please, I want out.

-- Grace (chapter 18 paragraph 5)

**Importance:** Grace imagines what she would tell her Aunt Margie about her feelings for her new baby if only she could be honest. Grace doesn't have the same feelings for her child that most women do after their babies are born. She has to keep quiet about her true feelings, though, because it's not "normal" to not like your own child.





And when you turn forty we'll tell you the truth about Alice and Jack.  
-- Rose (chapter 25 paragraph 1)

**Importance:** Rose and Enigma have give Sophie the key to Aunt Connie's house so that she may move in. They consider her to be part of the family now which means that she will learn the Munro secret when she reaches the age of 40. That is the age that Aunt Connie had determined that the younger people in the family would be able to comprehend it.

Oh, no, darling, I'm sure she hasn't! Look at those beautiful thank you cards she sent out to all of us. Now, I can assure you a woman with postnatal depression would not be able to manage that.  
-- Margie (chapter 33 paragraph 7)

**Importance:** Callum talks to Margie about the possibility of Grace having postpartum depression but Margie declares that she's sure she doesn't. Grace has been managing fine by all outside appearances but something in her demeanor is not right and Callum is right to question it.

This isn't funny. She murdered my great-grandparents and got away with it! She probably laughed all the way to her grave!  
-- Veronika (chapter 37 paragraph 13)

**Importance:** Veronika is convinced that Aunt Connie killed Jack and Alice Munro because she was in love with Jack who couldn't bring himself to leave Alice. Veronika's intense personality pushes her forward and she is unrelenting in proving that Aunt Connie had committed murder and shouldn't be revered in the family and community like she is.

It didn't make any difference what I did. She was like the guards at Buckingham Palace. She looked right through me. Until all of a sudden one day it would be over and she'd be talking to me normally again.  
-- Grace (chapter 42 paragraph 6)

**Importance:** Grace tries to explain her relationship with her mother to Callum. Her mother would give Grace the freeze out treatment if she did anything bad. For example, when Grace was little and accidentally left a banana in her bookbag and it rotted, Grace's mother was so angry about it that she didn't talk to Grace for weeks regardless of what Grace tried to do to prove she was sorry.

No, I mean on my own. I'd like to take a holiday on my own. For a couple of months.  
-- Margie (chapter 51 paragraph 3)

**Importance:** Ron is finally showing some interest in Margie after many years of marriage but she thinks it is too little too late. For years, she has tried to engage him to do things and go places but he wasn't interested. Now that Margie has more confidence due to losing weight and getting a friend at Weight Watchers, she knows that she should



expect more from her life. Her first step is to take a vacation by herself in order to sort out her feelings and test out her new independence.

But it's a different era now. You modern girls are a lot better informed and a lot more assertive, which is a good thing. The problem was, I truly believed I was the criminal."  
-- Rose (chapter 53 paragraph 338)

**Importance:** Rose is talking to Sophie about the secret she had to keep for all her adult life. Rose could not tell anyone that the supervisor at work was blackmailing her because she stole money from the cash register. So she had to give in to his demands, got pregnant and covered up her shame for years. Today's young women would have been bold enough to own what they did wrong but also call out the man for his criminal behavior too, something which was denied to Rose.

Actually, I love you more than anyone," she whispers in his ear.  
-- Grace (chapter 61 paragraph 7)

**Importance:** Grace has been going to a support group for postpartum depression sufferers and is getting some fresh air and exercise as has been recommended. She and Jake have hiked to Kingfisher Lookout and this is the first time she has felt any joy or love for her baby.