

# **The Mare Study Guide**

## **The Mare by Mary Gaitskill**

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# Plot Summary

NOTE: The following version of the novel was used to create this study guide: Gaitskill, Mary. *The Mare*. Vintage, November 3, 2015. Kindle.

Abused and hungry for love, Velvet Vargas befriended an abused and angry horse in the novel *The Mare* by Mary Gaitskill. Velvet had lived her life with her mother telling her that she was ugly and worthless but while participating in the Fresh Air program, it was discovered that Velvet had a natural talent for riding horses. In a short span of only three years Velvet became a good enough rider that she was able to compete even though her mother forbade her from doing so. Velvet's success in the competition proved to her that regardless of what her mother said, Velvet was not ugly or worthless.

Velvet first met Ginger and Paul Roberts when she was 11 years old. Because they lived next door to a riding stable, Velvet was offered lessons in exchange for helping out around the barn. During her first visit to the barn, Velvet was fascinated by a horse that seemed angry. A sign over her stall warned people not to go near her. Velvet could not help but walk up to the bars of the stall. When she offered her hand, the horse touched it.

Even though her visit with the Fresh Air program was supposed to last only two weeks, Velvet continued to visit with Ginger and Paul over the course of the next three years. Childless Ginger connected Velvet with her sister, Melinda, a girl whom Ginger felt had never had a good chance at life. Even though she tried to help her sister while she was still alive, Ginger felt she had failed. Helping Velvet seemed to be a way for her to try to redeem herself for not treating her sister better. For this reason Ginger continued to insist that Velvet come and visit even though Paul did not completely approve of the arrangement.

The action of the story culminates with Velvet's invitation to ride in a hunter/jumper competition. Velvet disobeyed her mother's request for her not to ride in the show and instead forged her mother's name on the permission slip. When Velvet's mother learned that she was going to ride, she sent Velvet a message telling her not to come home if she did compete. Wanting to prove to herself that she could win the competition, Velvet did ride. Her mother changed her mind at the last minute and attended the competition. She was both angry with her daughter for disobeying her and proud of her performance.

After Velvet finished the competition, her mother confronted her. Even though she was rough with her daughter and criticized her for disobeying her, she also recognized that Velvet had made her proud. As a result of her disobedience, however, Velvet's mother would not allow her to visit Ginger, Paul and the horses again. In the end of the novel, Velvet promised herself that even if she had to wait until she was 18, she would see her horse again.



## Pages 3 – 32

### Summary

Mary Gaitskill's novel is related in the past tense from the first-person perspectives of several characters. The author indicates who narrates each section by name.

In "Velvet," Velvet woke up from a dream she was having about her grandfather from the Dominican Republic. She and her younger brother, Dante, were leaving that day to go stay with white families through the Fresh Air Program. Her mother had signed them up for the program because the neighborhood into which they had moved was a bad neighborhood. She did not want Dante and Velvet at home all day alone while she worked.

Because her mother could not write, Velvet filled out the forms. She learned that family members were not allowed to go to the same family. Velvet hoped it would be fun. She had talked to the lady with whom she was going to stay. She had talked about riding Ferris wheels, swimming, and seeing horses while they were together.

At home, Velvet got her old cotton ball box out of her closet and spread the things from it onto the window ledge. She could see from the window where someone had written "Cookie" on the wall. It was in honor of a boy who used to stand there quite a bit. He ate big cookies all the time. Even though they were not supposed to, Velvet and Dante had talked to him. Velvet said he was nice even though he told her that he would kill her if someone offered him enough money to do so.

The last time Velvet saw her father was when she was nine and Dante was four. He had taken the money from her that her mother gave her in case of an emergency and would not give it back. Manuel, her father's friend, started renting a room in their apartment after that. Sometimes Dante got a card and a dollar from their father on his birthday, but Velvet did not get anything.

She thought of how her grandfather in the DR had loved her even though he had never met her. They talked on the phone and his voice was full of love and fun. When he got a picture of her he said she was beautiful. He sent her a gift of a dried sea horse. It was one of the things she kept in her box. During their phone calls he would tell her stories about how her mother had been bad as a child. One day on the phone he told her that he would always love her and would always be with her. He died a month later.

In "Ginger," the narrative shifts to Ginger's perspective. Ginger says that she was 47 when she met Velvet. She had not had children or a successful career, things she claimed usually aged a person. Ginger met her husband, Paul, in an AA meeting. Paul was still married when they met but he and his wife were separated. He earned a good living as a professor in a small college. After AA Ginger had begun to feel her desire to paint again, expressing creativity that had been almost killed by drugs and alcohol.



About the time she and Paul decided to try to get pregnant, Ginger's sister died. Even though they had been close when they were young, her sister had turned into mean crazy drunk who was liable to say anything. Ginger often wished she would go away until one day she died of a stroke while in the shower. When she and Paul went to clean out her sister's apartment and they saw the filth in which her sister lived, Ginger berated herself for not having done more. She knew her sister had known she did not want to talk to her so the money she sent did not do any good.

When Melinda had been young, she had loved horses. She worked in a stable in exchange for lessons. The first time Ginger saw her sister riding she was surprised by how confident and pretty her sister looked. Even her mother had not recognized Melinda on the horse at first.

Because they were not getting pregnant, Ginger tried to talk to Paul about adopting an older child but he balked. They continued to talk about adoption. One of Paul's friends mentioned an organization that matched up inner city kids with families who lived in the country. He thought it might be a good way to see what it would be like to have an older child living with them.

In "Velvet," narration returns to Velvet's perspective with her description of the morning they left on buses for their Fresh Air trips. After Dante's paperwork was processed, he ran to his mother crying that he was hungry. His mother talked to Dante like a baby and sent Velvet to get him something to eat. Velvet knew if it had been her who acted that way her mother would have told her to shut up and then would have left to go to work.

As Velvet waited for her bus she heard her mother's words repeat in her head "You're no good" and "It's your blood that's bad" (17). She tried to think about other things to drown out the sound of that voice. She listened to the conversations going on around her and heard some of the workers talking about how some people threw such a fit to get their kids into the program and then did not even show up to go. One of them blamed it on the culture of the people with whom they were working. She thought the poor people did not understand time the way others did. The women also talked about how they were setting a good example to the kids about how they could go about getting better lives for themselves.

In "Ginger," Ginger was nervous as she and Paul waited for the bus. She was afraid she did not have anything good to give Velvet even though Paul had told her that she was enough. She was stunned by Velvet's purity of expression when she first saw her. One of the workers introduced them to Velvet and she was theirs for the next two weeks.

In "Velvet," Velvet first noticed that Ginger did not look like the lady in the booklet she had seen advertising the Fresh Air Program. When Ginger and Paul asked, Velvet told them that she liked school and got good grades. When they arrived at the house where Paul and Ginger lived, it was not a rich-looking house like Velvet had expected but when she saw her room she decided she liked it. She even began to like Ginger when Ginger asked if Velvet wanted to call her mother.



In “Ginger,” Ginger continued to worry because she did not think she had what it took to care for a girl from another culture. She was worried when she saw sadness in Velvet’s face when she came downstairs from talking to her mother. When she asked Velvet what she wanted to do, Velvet asked to see the horses.

In “Velvet,” Velvet claims there was no particular reason she asked to see the horses. They were just close. Ginger suggested to Velvet that she could take riding lessons if she wanted to do so. Velvet felt she could hear the horses talking to her, calling her to come see them. She met Pat, the woman who gave lessons. Pat and Ginger walked ahead to the office to sign Velvet up for a lesson. As Velvet followed them slowly, two white girls leading a horse came into the stable. They stopped when they saw her. One horse began banging in its stall and one of the girls called out to the horse, which they called Fugly Girl, to be quiet. The same girl indicated to Velvet they did not mean her while the other girl laughed.

Velvet followed the sound of the banging and discovered the most beautiful horse that she had seen yet. Even though there was a sign over the stall ordering people not to touch her, Velvet put out her hand. The horse touched Velvet on the hand as she told the horse that bore scars around her eyes and nose that she was not ugly. The girls behind her had gotten quiet. One of them asked Velvet if she could read and warned her that horse was dangerous. Pat saw what was happening and told them all the horse was dangerous only if she did not like someone.

In “Ginger,” Velvet asked if the girls who were at the barn would be there for her lesson. Ginger said she did not know and wondered if they had said something hateful to Velvet. That evening they rode bikes together. As she cooked dinner, Ginger thought about how good it felt to be preparing food for someone. Even Paul seemed happy.

Velvet tried to call her mother again. This time her mother answered but Ginger could hear her yelling across the room. When Velvet hung up she said her mother had said thank you for the bike but she looked both happy and mad. They tried to watch a movie together but the first one had a father who yelled at his daughter that she was no good. Velvet asked if they could watch something else and chose a movie about a girl who discovered she was a princess.

In “Velvet,” when Velvet tried to tell her mother about the horses, her mother had just yelled at her that horses could kick her and kill her, like a horse had almost done to her in DR. She forbade Velvet from riding the horses. Velvet said she would tell Ginger and Paul that. That night Velvet felt uncomfortable trying to sleep without her mother and brother in the bed with her. She wondered where Dante was.

In “Ginger,” Ginger had a nightmare that night and woke herself calling out for Melinda. She realized she was in bed with Paul and thought perhaps it was not strange she had called out for her sister since they had slept together until Melinda was 12 and Ginger was 10.



In “Velvet,” Velvet woke up feeling sad as well. She had dreamed about a time when she thought her mother was a witch and refused to eat the food she had made. When her mother found out, she had beaten Velvet until she was bleeding. At the end of the chapter as Velvet stood watching the sun rise, she remembered her riding lesson was scheduled for that day.

## Analysis

Narration of this story is primarily passed back and forth between the two main characters of the novel. Velvet is an 11-year-old child who lives in the inner city. From Ginger’s description of her, she appears to be a black girl. It is known that Velvet’s mother came from the Dominican Republic. Ginger is a 47-year-old white woman who had at one point lost her way in life but is now settled down in a stable marriage. She hopes that she and her husband can consider adopting a child and wants Velvet’s stay with them to be a trial run. Velvet and Ginger meet through an organization called the Fresh Air Fund. Velvet’s mother wants her children out of the inner city while she is away at work during the summer and the Fresh Air Fund gives her a way to provide a place for them to go that is not cost prohibitive for her.

Right away it is clear this book will address the differences between cultures since Velvet and Ginger come from such different lives. The white people who work with the Fresh Air Fund pat themselves on the back for providing the inner city kids with experiences they would not have had otherwise. Velvet is miffed by the way these ladies talk about her and the people like her. Especially frustrating to Velvet is that they make generalizations about the people they are helping by saying things like: “They don’t understand time the way we do” (15). Culture is also one of the things that worries Ginger. She fears that she will not have enough good things to give a girl from another culture. Because she mentions culture it appears that Ginger is afraid that she will not be able to connect with Velvet the way she might be able to do with a white child.

Although Velvet and Ginger are very different in things like age and culture, they also have a good deal in common. They have both had childhoods where they sensed their mother loved their sibling more than themselves. Velvet’s mother, for instance, talks to Dante like he is a baby and gets him whatever he wants. Velvet, on the other hand, hears voices telling her that she is not good and she comes from bad blood. It can be assumed that these voices were planted in her by her mother. Ginger, meanwhile, felt left out of the close relationship between her older sister and her mother.

Notice correlations beginning to be drawn between Ginger’s sister, Melinda, and Velvet. Melinda had died shortly before Ginger and Paul considered taking part in the Fresh Air Program. Ginger’s guilt that she did not do more for her sister, who was obviously in pain, is clear. She carries this guilt into her relationship with Velvet “I couldn’t even respond properly to my own family, so how could I take care of a needy child from another culture?” (22) she asks herself. Another correlation between Velvet and Melinda comes when Ginger mentions that her sister liked horses and took riding lessons as a



girl. Neither she nor her mother had recognized the beautiful and confident girl Melinda was on horseback. Ginger encourages Velvet to take riding lessons.

Even though Velvet is obviously upset by her mother's rough treatment of her, it is clear she desperately wants her mother to love her. She sleeps in bed with her mother and brother but describes the way her mother turns her back to Velvet and sleeps curled up around Dante. She is sad and misses her mother when she first gets to Ginger's house. Her mention that she begins to like Ginger when Ginger suggests that she call her mother indicates that Velvet respects Ginger's realization that she is not Velvet's mother and that she will encourage Velvet to stay in touch with her mother.

Love seems to be something in short supply in Velvet's life. The only loving figure she has described in her life thus far has been the grandfather who lived in the DR. She never met her grandfather in person but the two talked on the phone. He told her she was beautiful and shared with her stories about her mother's childhood. Just before he died, he told her that he would always be looking out for her. Velvet has not seen her father in nearly a year. During that visit he stole money from her. She mentions that her father often sends Dante money and birthday cards but never sends anything to her.

Even though Velvet has not ridden a horse yet, she has already demonstrated some natural ability with them. A horse said not to like anyone has allowed Velvet to touch her. This horse and Velvet have a good deal in common. Just like Velvet wears the scars of abuse on her heart, this horse has scars on its head and face. Even though the others in the barn call this mare Fugly Girl, Velvet tells the horse it is beautiful. She thinks this mare is the best of all of the horses.

Because Velvet has developed such a quick connection with Fugly Girl, she is not afraid to use the language barrier between her mother and Paul and Ginger in her favor. Because her mother was almost killed by a horse, she is scared of them and scared one might hurt Velvet. She yells at Velvet on the phone that she is forbidden from riding horses. She threatens "big trouble" (30) for Ginger and Paul if they allow her to ride. Because her mother speaks only Spanish while Ginger and Paul speak English Velvet chooses not to tell them about her mother's desire for her not to ride horses. Still a child, Velvet probably believes her mother does not want her to ride just to be mean to her. She does not understand that her mother has a legitimate concern, that she could be seriously hurt by a horse.

The author uses a good deal of literary techniques in the descriptions found in this novel. Notice the similes in this quote: "The social worker walked around in little high heels, squishing out of tight pants like she's a model, but with her face frowning like a mask on Halloween" (3). This quote, found in one of Velvet's sections of the novel, compares the social worker to both a model and a Halloween mask. Because of Velvet's age and lack of knowledge, she describes things using what little experience she has. For example, she calls the horses' stalls "cages." In another sentence, she does not know the word armrests so she says "This bus was a dark and rumbling cave, with deep seats full of close smells and tiny jewelly lights on the arm-parts" (16). Notice also a metaphor is used to call the bus a "dark and rumbling cave" (16).





## Discussion Question 1

Compare and contrast Ginger and Velvet. In what ways are they alike? How are they different?

## Discussion Question 2

What is the tone of the novel thus far? How has the author developed this tone?

## Discussion Question 3

Why does Velvet choose not to obey her mother when her mother forbids her from riding horses? What does her decision not to mention her mother's forbidding of the riding lessons to Ginger and Paul say about Velvet?

## Vocabulary

dogma, eloquence, sinister, sentiments, nonchalance



## Pages 32 – 63

### Summary

In the next section titled “Ginger,” even though Velvet wanted to go to the horses as soon as she got up, Ginger made her eat breakfast first. They still arrived two hours before her lesson. Pat asked Velvet to help her while Ginger went back home. At home, Paul was trying to speak to someone in Spanish on the phone. Loud, angry words were coming out of the phone. He told Ginger it was Velvet’s mother when he hung up. He said he thought she was trying to say they were in trouble. They called the Fresh Air office and requested a translator to help them talk to Velvet’s mother.

In “Velvet,” Velvet watched as Pat worked with a one-year-old horse named Jimbo. She learned that Fugly Girl’s real name was Funny Girl. She was called Fugly Girl because her head looked too big for her body. Velvet could sympathize because people made fun of her and said her head was too big. Pat said Fugly Girl had once been used for racing but when Velvet asked if she could ride her, Pat warned her that no one could ride her.

Before her lesson started, Pat had Velvet brush the horse, Reesa, and help put the saddle on her. Once she was on Reesa, Velvet felt as if she was able to communicate with the horse through her body. She could feel Reesa’s strength. Pat told Velvet that a horse would accept her regardless of her color or how rich she was.

In “Ginger,” Ginger arrived to see Velvet already riding. She had brought the camera to take pictures and Velvet gave her smiles like a movie star.

In “Velvet,” Velvet admitted that she did not have any special feeling for Ginger but was glad that she would have some pictures to take home with her. At first it was strange, and then suddenly Ginger’s presence made sense to Velvet.

In “Ginger,” Velvet and Ginger went for a walk together that night. Velvet talked about the horses and Ginger mentioned that her sister had liked horses. That night, Ginger and Paul read to Velvet together before she went to bed.

In “Velvet,” Velvet watched one of the girls with the brown hair work in the barn until she finally got up the courage to introduce herself. The girl was named Beth. She said the other girl with purple hair was Gare Ann. Velvet spent her time getting to know the horses and studying Fugly Girl. She noticed the mare was studying her back. When no one was watching, she offered Fugly Girl a horse cookie. The horse took it so quickly she broke it and then acted like she was mad at Velvet. When Velvet went to her stall later with apple slices, Fugly Girl ate the apples and then bit at her stall but seemed peaceful.

In “Ginger,” a translator was available to talk to Velvet’s mother. Ginger believed it was fortunate that Paul was not at home because she did not think he would understand



what she had done. The first thing Velvet's mother said was that Velvet could not ride horses because it was too dangerous. Ginger returned the information that Velvet was riding ponies. The translator told Velvet's mother that Ginger would not allow Velvet to do anything that would be dangerous.

Ginger considered that she had lied to Velvet's mother but justified her lie because the translator had also lied to Velvet's mother about how well the Fresh Air host families were screened. Ginger also believed she had done what was right because she saw how happy Velvet was when she was with the horses.

In "Velvet," Beverly, the trainer, was at the barn the next time that Velvet visited. Velvet thought she looked like someone who liked to hit. Later, Velvet overheard Beverly telling Gare Ann to watch a particular horse because it had kicked Beth. She said that same horse had kicked her before but she'd had a conversation with the horse and he had not done that again. When Velvet asked Beverly what she said to the horse Beverly told her that she had hurt the horse.

In "Ginger," Ginger described how magical her life seemed now that she had Velvet to fill her days. She believed that both she and Velvet believed they were living a dream. Ginger even believed that Velvet had lied to her about her grades because she wanted to create an idealized version of herself. Velvet admitted she did not get good grades like she first told Ginger and Paul that she got. Ginger offered to help Velvet with her homework.

In "Velvet," Velvet began to like Ginger because she did not yell, even when she was angry. Ginger showed Velvet her art one day. Even though Velvet said she liked it, she really did not. One picture in particular surprised Velvet because it was a picture of Ginger's sister that made it appear her sister was crazy.

Velvet got to ride a bigger horse during her second week of lessons. She was scared of him at first and he would not do anything she asked. Pat compared the horse to Velvet's little brother and asked what she would do if he did not do what she asked. She first said she would hit him but Pat said that was not a good idea. Velvet said another option was for her to pick him up and move him. Pat instructed her to do that with the horse. Velvet felt herself being able to do that with Joker as she directed him to walk toward Ginger, who had just walked up to the ring. For a minute, Velvet looked at Ginger and saw her mother. That night, Velvet took a ring she had taken from Ginger and put it on a small blond doll she kept in her cotton ball box. She felt like she had Ginger in her box.

In "Ginger," Ginger could see that Velvet was really riding the bigger horse; she was not just on it. As she watched Velvet groom the horse after her lesson, Ginger learned from Pat that Velvet was a natural on horseback. She had made more progress with her lessons than other students did in twice the number of lessons.

In "Velvet," as Ginger and Paul read to Velvet, she thought about how her mother had sung to Dante but had never sung to her. She tried to imagine what it would be like living with Ginger at least some of the time.



In “Ginger,” Ginger asked Paul if they could keep Velvet longer but Paul told her they could not. Paul believed that Ginger wanted Velvet there longer more for Ginger than for Velvet. He tried to explain to Ginger that Velvet had needs that Ginger could not satisfy and vice versa. Paul grudgingly agreed to let Velvet stay longer if the Fresh Air people agreed.

In “Velvet,” Velvet dreamed she went into the backyard of Ginger and Paul’s house and found a trapdoor there. She knew the door led to hell and was surprised when her grandfather was there, encouraging her to go through the door. He said someone she loved was in danger. Her grandfather would not give her a name but he did say that it was someone from whom she brought out the good. She obeyed her grandfather’s directions and went through the door.

In “Ginger,” the next morning Ginger asked Velvet if she wanted to stay another two weeks. Velvet said she did. Ginger told Velvet they would call her mother, but not say anything about the horses. Ginger talked to people from Fresh Air until she finally found someone who agreed that if Velvet’s mother agreed they could keep Velvet as long as they liked; however, Velvet would not be covered under the organization’s insurance.

Paul first talked to Velvet’s mother, trying to get her to talk politely. Velvet talked to her mother next. She first tried to cajole her mother and then yelled at her in return. Velvet finally began smiling. When she hung up, she said she told her mother she was learning how to work in the barn. Ginger considered that what Velvet had told her mother was not really a lie since she would be working in the barn in exchange for riding lessons.

In “Velvet,” Velvet woke in the night and heard Paul and Ginger talking. She felt they were pissed off and that it had something to do with her. They did not sound mad so Velvet tried to convince herself that everything was okay. Even though she tried to ignore it, she knew they were discussing their decision to let Velvet stay there longer.

In “Ginger,” Ginger took pictures of Velvet with a pony and the colt so they could show them to Velvet’s mother if she asked about the horses.

In “Velvet,” on the train ride back to Brooklyn, Velvet wondered what would happen when her mother met Ginger. She thought perhaps her mother would see how much Ginger loved her and feel bad because she had not loved her in that way. She wished she could make Ginger understand how her mother made her feel. In her mind, she also wished that her mother and Ginger would like each other even though she knew they would not. She imagined them watching her ride Joker together.

In “Ginger,” Ginger was surprised by how old Velvet’s mother was. She described her as looking powerful because of her strong character. Velvet’s mother criticized Velvet when Ginger talked about how beautiful Velvet was. The translator flinched when she heard the mother’s response. Ginger felt uneasy because the woman did not look at her daughter with any approval at any point during the conversation. On the street, Velvet’s mother put her arm around her daughter and talked to her harshly. In a coffee shop,



Ginger believed Velvet's mother was looking at her as if she wanted to know if she could trust her.

In "Paul," the narrative shifts to Paul's point of view for the first time. Paul admitted that he was bothered by Ginger's desire to keep Velvet longer even though he was not exactly sure why it bothered him. He felt it was something motherly in Ginger that made her want to be with Velvet and something connected to Melinda but also something not quite right like a sort of addiction. At the same time he believed Velvet's mother was unstable and perhaps crazy. He wondered what would happen when neither Ginger nor Velvet's needs were met in the relationship.

In "Ginger," Ginger tried to give Velvet anything she could think of that the girl should experience. One day at the grocery store, Ginger had gone to get Velvet a special sauce and Velvet had told her that she was going to make her get everything she wanted. Ginger put the sauce back and said Velvet would do no such thing. She knew in that moment that she had been the adult but was not sure about other things. She felt tense all the time and could not sleep. She wanted to drink. She wondered how anyone succeeded at parenting full time.

In "Velvet," Velvet watched as Beverly and Pat took Fugly Girl out of her stall for exercise. She noticed that even with both women they looked like they barely had control of the horse. Velvet tried to make eye contact with the horse to get her to settle down. Gare Ann warned her that she needed to stay away from the horses because she did not know enough to know they were dangerous.

In "Ginger," Velvet ran into the house and to her room. There was a thud, a crash and a scream. When Ginger reached Velvet's room, the girl was crying angrily. She told them about what the girl in the barn had said to her about talking to Fugly Girl. Ginger and Paul convinced Velvet no one was going to make her leave the barn.

## Analysis

In addition to the voices of Velvet and Ginger, Paul joins the narration with one section told from his point of view. He addresses his concern about Ginger's desire to keep Velvet for an additional two weeks. He is concerned not only because Ginger appears to be trying to be a mother to Velvet but also because she seems to be forming some sort of unhealthy relationship, like an addiction to the girl.

Paul would be even more concerned about his wife's decision to keep Velvet longer if he knew that Ginger had lied to Velvet's mother. Paul had taken a call from Velvet's mother and thought she was trying to tell Ginger and Paul they were in trouble about something. When Ginger talked to Velvet's mother through the translator, however, she lied about the size of the horses that Velvet was riding. Ginger notes that Paul would not have understood the conversation. In contrast, Paul probably would have understood the conversation but he would not have approved of Ginger's lying to Velvet's mother.



Meanwhile, Velvet gets more attached to Fugly Girl. She sympathizes with the horse because she is called Fugly Girl because her head is too big for her body. Velvet has also been made fun of because her head is too big for her body. She, like the horse, has been called names because of her disproportions.

Changes take place in the relationship between Velvet and Ginger. At first Ginger describes her experience with Velvet as being magical. She describes the relationship in this way: "It was like we were both living a dream we had known from television and advertisements and children's books, a dream that neither of us had believed in yet had both longed for without knowing it. A dream in which love and happiness were the norm" (45). As Velvet becomes more familiar with Ginger and begins to manipulate her, Ginger despairs and wonders how parents raise a child 24/7. She describes an incident in which she and Velvet are in the grocery store together. Velvet develops an attitude and tells Ginger she will make her run all over the store to get her anything she wants. In response to Velvet's childishness, Ginger had put back a special item she was planning to buy for the girl. Although she knows she was acting like the adult in that particular situation, Ginger worries that she was not able to hold herself together and be an adult all of the time. She admits to herself that she wants a drink.

Meanwhile, Velvet wonders what it would be like to live with Ginger and Paul all of the time. She likes the way Ginger does not yell at her. She also likes the way that Ginger and Paul read to her at night and treat her like she is worth their time and effort. When she goes for a brief visit to her mother she wishes that her mother could see how much Ginger cares about Velvet and be hurt because she does not treat her daughter the same way. She imagines her mother and Ginger watching her ride Joker, the big horse she had just been allowed to ride for the first time, together.

Because Ginger lies to Velvet's mother about the riding lessons, it sets a bad example for Velvet to follow. These lies will cause trouble as the novel progresses. Ginger lies to Velvet's mother about the size of the horses that Velvet is riding. She says they are small ponies and will not hurt Velvet. Notice how Ginger justifies her lie with her knowledge of how the Fresh Air woman lied about how thoroughly the host families were screened. Similarly, Velvet justifies her lies to her mother because she knows that Ginger is lying as well. Velvet convinces her mother to let her stay longer with Ginger and Paul because she tells her mother that she is learning to work in the barn. This is a half truth since Velvet is working in the barn, but is doing so in order to get riding lessons.

As Velvet spends more time working with Pat she becomes more knowledgeable about horses and equine terminology. Before her first lesson, Pat has Velvet watch while she works the one-year-old Jimbo. Velvet describes how Pat "took Jimbo off the leash" (34); she still does not know the proper term is a lead rope. She shows she is starting to learn proper terms in this next quote: "Pat put a halter on her face and brought her out of her cage — her stall — and "cross-tied" her, that meant she was tied by her face to both walls" (35). Velvet has learned that horses are kept in stalls, not cages, and has also learned what it means to cross-tie a horse.



During Velvet's lessons, Pat stresses to Velvet how to communicate with horses and get them to do what she wants. At one point she explains to Velvet that the horse she is about to ride is accepting of Velvet just because she is a person: "She doesn't care who you are, how much money you have, where you're from. She accepts you" (35). This acceptance, regardless of her skin color and socio-economic standing is something that Velvet needs desperately. She also needs to be able to understand her worth as a person, regardless of her mother's opinion of her.

As Velvet sits on the horse for the first time, she feels like she is able to communicate with the horse through her body and that the horse is communicating with her. "And then I felt her. I felt her say things, deep things; mostly I felt that she was strong, that she didn't have to let me on her, or do anything I told her. But she did and she would" (35). Pat explains to Velvet how to use her body to communicate with the horse. For instance she says "Kicking her is like screaming at her, and you don't need to do that. She can hear you" (36). When she rides Joker, Pat instructs her to try to pick the horse up and move him just like she would her little brother if he was not going where she wanted him to go. Using this advice Velvet says that: "I picked him up with my legs and I moved him with my butt" (49).

One of the qualms that Paul has with Velvet spending more time with them is that Velvet cannot provide for Ginger what she needs. In the same way, he fears Ginger will not be able to be what Velvet needs her to be either. In defense of his hesitation when it comes to getting permission for Velvet to stay longer, he tries to explain to Ginger that the problem comes when one considers how unequal the positions are between Ginger and Velvet. "She's a disadvantaged child. She has needs you can't satisfy. It's unfair to act like you can" (52).

Notice the continued use of literary devices, particularly simile in this section of chapters. For instance, in a description of Fugly Girl Velvet says "her whole face looked raw, like her hair was on the wrong way, even though it wasn't" (63). In a description of Jimbo, Velvet says even if Pat had not told her, she would have guessed the horse was not very old because he "he moved like a little kid" (34).

The blond key chain doll that Velvet already had, and the flower ring that she took from Ginger symbolize Ginger. The doll and Ginger both have blond hair, connecting them in Velvet's mind. The flower ring is an obvious symbol of Ginger since Velvet took it from her jewelry box. Velvet has a cotton ball box inside which she keeps things of importance. When she adds the flower ring to the collection in the box, which had already included the doll, Velvet feels as if she has "Ginger in my box" (49).

## Discussion Question 1

Discuss the meaning of the dream that Velvet has about her grandfather and the trap door leading to hell. What do you think this means?



## Discussion Question 2

Discuss Paul's concerns about Velvet staying with them additional time. Do you think his concerns have merit? Why or why not? Use examples from the book to explain your answer.

## Discussion Question 3

In what ways is being with the horses therapeutic for Velvet? What specific actions give Velvet merit?

## Vocabulary

foliage, justified, idealized, deference, hypnotized, auspices, cajoling, wheedling, musculature, docile, complicity, demeanor, proprietary, diffidence, deported





## Pages 65 – 95

### Summary

In “Paul,” Paul remembered how his first wife had always told him he was jealous of her relationship with their daughter. He felt a pang of this jealousy watching Ginger with Velvet.

In “Velvet,” Velvet went to the barn early. She was afraid someone would have taken her horse away but when she got to the stables, Fugly Girl was still there. Pat did talk to Velvet about the incident the day before. She had noticed that Fugly Girl was quieter when Velvet was there. Pat reminded Velvet that Fugly Girl was still dangerous. She said Fugly Girl had been abused. Velvet noticed when Pat talked about the abuse she sounded angry about it. She compared Fugly Girl’s ability to hurt Velvet to a person who was in a bad mood. Pat also told Velvet that she thought Velvet reminded Fugly Girl of the girl who had owned her before she was abused.

That night, at a pizza place where they went to eat, Velvet noticed a black girl with a white family. Even though the mother was passing the girl food, the white children were not paying much attention to her. When she thought the girl might with the Fresh Air groups as well, she suddenly felt bad.

When she went to the barn that night Fugly Girl was kicking her stall. It was an impatient kicking like the horse thought that she desperately needed to get out of her stall. Fugly Girl’s pain reminded her of the time her mother beat her and her wounds got infected. She was sent to foster care where the other girls laughed at her. Fugly Girl and the other horses got quiet as they listened to her cry.

In “Paul,” Paul’s heart sank when he heard Ginger singing to Velvet again that night.

In “Velvet,” on her last day at the barn, Pat let Velvet help her groom Fugly Girl. She taught Velvet how to approach the horse and put the halter on her so that it did not scare her. As they brushed the horse, Velvet asked Pat about the abuse that Fugly Girl had suffered. She said the horse had stepped on a nail and the wound got infected. They sold her to a man they believed was a doctor who did not do a good job of tending to Fugly Girl’s wound and beat her when she did not do what he wanted her to do. The scars on her face came from a halter that was too tight that the man never took off. Pat explained that the horse was cribbing when she bit at her stall and that it was a nervous habit.

Pat said a friend of hers had called about the abuse. The girl who had owned Fugly Girl before had been called to say goodbye to the horse and was feeding her an apple when she got there. Pat said the girl led her into the trailer for her, an act Pat did not believe she would have been able to do on her own.



In “Ginger,” Velvet cried on the ride back to her mother. Paul had told her she would come back but she sensed a question in his voice when he told her it would be next summer. When they left her with her mother and brother, Velvet started crying again. Her mother had kissed Ginger on both cheeks when they first saw each other but her eyes got dark and she seemed angry when the crying started.

In “Velvet,” on the way home, Velvet tried to talk about her horse but her mother told her to stop talking before she gave her a headache.

In “Ginger,” Ginger called Velvet that night. At first Velvet asked questions about what Ginger had done since she got home. Then there was screaming and angry words on Velvet’s end of the phone. Velvet screamed and then came back to the phone telling Ginger that her mother had told her she was no good and that she had called the horse shoe she had brought home as a souvenir dirty and had thrown it out the window.

After Ginger calmed Velvet down, Velvet told her that she decided she was not going to yell anymore, even if she was mad. Ginger told her it was okay for her to yell because she was a fiery girl. When Ginger explained the meaning of fiery, Velvet decided she was going to call her mare Fiery Girl from that point forward.

In “Velvet,” Velvet woke in the middle of the night and discovered her mother was not in bed. She looked out the window and saw her standing on the sidewalk. She had Velvet’s horseshoe in her hand. Velvet smiled and her mother commented on how peaceful it was outside. Back in bed, she turned her back to Velvet but held her hand.

In “Ginger,” Ginger began her painting classes again. She had begun talking to women she met about Velvet and the things they had done together. She was excited and scared about helping Velvet with her homework. At a faculty party, Ginger tried to connect with Paul’s ex-wife Becca and some of her friends by talking about Velvet. Becca was hateful said she thought it seemed like “an easy way to play at being a parent” (82).

In “Velvet,” when their mother discovered Dante’s school pants were too small she laughed and kidded him about being her little piglet but when they discovered Velvet could no longer button her blouses across her chest she was angry. They went to a church in Bushwick that offered free clothes for the needy. Velvet pasted pictures of herself and the horses to the cover of her notebook.

In “Ginger,” after Velvet had suggested that she do a figurative painting of her sister, Ginger decided to try. She based the painting on a picture of Melinda as a ten-year-old and then again as an adult. The photo of Melinda as an adult showed how hardened she had become but she was smiling in it. Ginger intended to paint the younger version of her sister in the background with the adult version in the foreground. She could not make the painting look right.

She remembered how her sister had been put into a mental hospital when she was only 15. On weekend visits she came home with bruises from fights with other girls and listened to the same Alice Cooper song over and over again. When she was 19 she told



Ginger she had been abused by a psychiatrist at the hospital. Ginger was not sure if she should believe her sister or not because she stole and lied. In fact, Melinda said she told Ginger about the abuse to explain why she took money from her mother's purse. She stole in retaliation because she told her mother about the abuse but her mother never did anything about it.

In "Velvet," Velvet described how she still attended school in Williamsburg even though her family had moved to Crown Heights. Of the three girls who were friends with Velvet in years past only one, Marisol, had remained a good friend. During the past school year, Helena began talking about Velvet's clothes to her face and Alicia pretended to be friends with Velvet but talked about her behind her back. Velvet wished she was still friends with Helena and Alicia. She hoped Strawberry, the new girl in school, would help change things.

Strawberry had come to school in Williamsburg because her home had been destroyed in Hurricane Katrina. Because Strawberry was older, was attractive and seemed cool, all of the girls wanted to be friends with her. Velvet and Strawberry talked and began getting to know one another during detention one day. When Velvet said her grandfather was dead, Strawberry said her brother had died in the hurricane. The next day Velvet showed Strawberry the sea horse her grandfather had given her. Strawberry asked if she could have it and Velvet sensed Strawberry would take it even if she said no but Strawberry's look changed and she did not take the sea horse from Velvet. Velvet believed it was because she appeared to be friends with Strawberry that no one bothered her.

This year when Velvet found Strawberry with hopes of showing her the pictures of the horses, Strawberry looked at her like she did not know her. Strawberry was also hanging out with the girls who had been mean to Velvet in the past. When she heard them talking, she heard Strawberry mention her brother. She said he lived in Puerto Rico, like he was still alive.

In "Ginger," Ginger and Paul began fighting more about having Velvet visit on the weekends. Paul had even began to mention race in his arguments by calling Ginger Velvet's "white benefactor" (91) and asking what she planned to do when Velvet got pregnant. Ginger mentioned that she was afraid Paul might be right about Velvet and the way she was affecting her feelings. Because she was so worried, she went to an AA meeting and talked to a woman she described as a "half friend" (91) about Velvet. She told Ginger she needed to take care of her own life, and even though Ginger disagreed, she knew the woman had made a valid point because Ginger knew she was "addicted to emotion" (92). Still, Ginger justified to herself that she was different when it came to Velvet. She tried to convince herself that she could trust herself and she could trust Velvet.

In the section "Velvet," when Velvet told her mother how hateful Strawberry and all the others had been to her she sent some dates dusted with powdered sugar with Velvet to school as gifts. Alicia called them gross and Velvet dumped a wastebasket full of trash onto Alicia's head. Velvet was given detention but thought it was worth it because



Strawberry smiled at her for the first time that school year. During recess one day Velvet stayed in the cafeteria reading a book. Strawberry came to find her and Velvet was finally able to show her the pictures of herself and the horses. Strawberry asked if she could go with Velvet and ride the horses one weekend. Even though she wanted to comment about how hateful Strawberry had been to her, Velvet did not. She even agreed not to tell Alicia that Strawberry had asked about the horses.

In “Ginger,” Ginger waited several weeks before she called Velvet. Velvet told her that she had made a new friend at school and that she was keeping up with her school work. Ginger worked with Velvet on a book report and realized that even though Velvet could read well, she could not understand what she had read. Ginger worked with Velvet until she managed to write a page long book report that made sense. She was excited to hear what Velvet’s teacher said about the paper but Velvet told her that she had not gotten back the paper and suspected the teacher had lost it.

In “Velvet,” Velvet did not get her mother’s permission to go to Strawberry’s house. She visited in the two hour time span she had between the end of her school and the time she picked Dante up from day care. At Strawberry’s house, she made them go in a closet and cover up with coats before she would talk to Velvet about her friends from New Orleans. One day Velvet told Strawberry about Fiery Girl. When Strawberry said that she would hit Fiery Girl if she tried to kick her, it made Velvet mad but she did not show her anger.

On some of their days together, Strawberry would teach Velvet how to shoplift. Mostly she just wanted to talk about her friends from New Orleans, especially Maciella. She put makeup on Velvet with the intention of making her look like Maciella. When Velvet told her she was not Maciella, Strawberry asked if she could pretend to be. Velvet did so even though it was no fun for her. Even though she did what Strawberry wanted, Strawberry barely talked to her at school.

## Analysis

In this section of the novel, the reader is introduced to the stress in Velvet’s life away from Ginger and Paul. She goes to a school in a district different from where she lives. Although she still knows the girls from that school, they have begun treating her badly and making fun of her. She manages to make a new friend in Strawberry but Strawberry uses Velvet. When Ginger calls Velvet to help her with schoolwork, she realizes how ill prepared Velvet is for school.

Just like Ginger is using Velvet to address her need for a child and her emotional addiction, Strawberry is using Velvet to fill the spot her friend Maciella left open. Strawberry had lived in New Orleans when a hurricane hit and had been put in foster care because her parents were not able to get back on their feet afterwards. She misses her friend Maciella and tries to get Velvet to take the place of that friend. Even though Velvet knows that the way Strawberry is treating her is wrong, she also knows that being in Strawberry’s good graces is the only way to be accepted at school. Velvet



wants so badly to be friends with Strawberry that she allows Strawberry to do what she wants and even agrees not to tell Alicia and the others that the two are friends and visit after school.

Ginger, meanwhile, does her own soul searching about Velvet and what the girl means to her. She was upset by Paul's suggestion that Velvet did not need to come as often as Ginger wanted her to come. Ginger was also upset by the woman from her old AA group with whom she had talked. She knew the woman was being honest when she told Ginger that she needed to take care of her own problems before trying to help someone else. Ginger rationalizes that the woman had known her back when Ginger truly had trouble with an emotional addiction. Ginger believes she has since then improved in her handling of emotional situations.

Paul also upsets Ginger by bringing up the differences in race between Ginger and Velvet. These comments portray Ginger as rich and white, trying to care for a child who is poor and black. He sees the situation almost as if Ginger is trying to rescue Velvet from her poverty. One of the terribly offensive things that Paul says to Ginger is his suggestion that she will have to decide what to do when Velvet turns up pregnant. Paul does not want Velvet to come as often as Ginger does and even though she argues in Velvet's favor, Ginger admits to herself that: "Whatever I said, I was afraid Paul might be right" (91).

Pat gives Velvet the perfect going away present when she lets the girl help her groom Fugly Girl on her last day at the barn. She continues to school Velvet on how to treat horses by comparing the actions of horses to the actions of people. She explains how Fugly Girl could kill Velvet easily if she were to get spooked or was just showing out because she was in a bad mood. "Except most people, what they do, it won't kill you. She could kill you, like you or me would swat a fly" (68).

Pat explains to Velvet how Fugly Girl was abused and how it has caused her to act the way she does. This abuse is another connection between Velvet and the horse. On the night before she leaves, Velvet goes to the barn to see the horse. She cries because she remembers the time that her mother had beaten her and she had been put in foster care because of that beating. Velvet understands firsthand what it is like to be abused and to feel like no one loves you.

Certain characters in the novel, like Strawberry and Beverly, believe the way to solve a problem is by hitting. Velvet, as one who has been hit upon, struggles to reconcile her belief that Beverly and Strawberry are cool and their frequent use of physical abuse. Pat teaches Velvet that it is not a good idea to hit a horse. She says she learned her lesson when a horse she physically abused tried to kick her. The hooves came so close she saw the nails from the horse shoes but luckily the horse did not hit her directly. Beverly, on the other hand, believes that by hitting a horse, she showed him who was boss. Strawberry also believes in the power of hitting. When Velvet tells her about Fugly Girl, Strawberry says that if the horse ever tried to hurt her, she would hit it.



Strawberry is a bad influence on Velvet in other ways. During the time they spend together after school, Strawberry teaches Velvet how to shoplift. Strawberry also lies. One particular instance in which she lied occurred when she told Velvet that her brother had been killed in the hurricane. At another point, Velvet had heard Strawberry talking about her brother like he was still alive. When a mention is made of the brother later, Strawberry looks down and Velvet realizes the girl lied to her.

Use of literary techniques and language signify what a change in atmosphere Velvet has when she is at home versus when she is with Ginger and Paul. Up to the point when Velvet went home, Velvet's language in her sections of narration was not really that much different from Ginger's. In her sections after she returns home, her language become much rougher and contains more slang. For instance, when Strawberry sees Velvet for the first time the new school year, Velvet describes that: "she gave me a grill with her eyes like dead" (89). A "grill" being a smile with her dead eyes indicating that there was no emotion or friendship in Strawberry's expression.

Some Spanish words and phrases are also included in the novel. Before they go to sleep each night Velvet says "Bendición, Mami" (80) to her mother and her mother responds "Dios te bendiga" (80). It is easy for the reader to gather that this is some sort of blessing. In translation Velvet is saying to her mother "Blessings, mother" while her mother responds "God bless you." Another example of this use of a Spanish phrase comes when Velvet refers to the way Dante is acting. She calls him a "mal nacido" (83) which in Spanish is a bastard.

One simile in particular is worth mentioning. When Dante first sees Ginger and Paul he has an interesting way of describing them. He says "That ugly man and that lady like a cat food and sugar sandwich" (77).

## Discussion Question 1

Compare and contrast the Velvet who stays with Ginger and Paul, and the Velvet who lives at home with her mother and goes to school. What differences do you see in the girl?

## Discussion Question 2

How is Velvet's relationship with her mother portrayed in this section of the novel? What proof do you see that Velvet wants her mother's acceptance? What proof do you see that Velvet's mother loves Dante more than she does Velvet?

## Discussion Question 3

Do you sense that Ginger is trying to help Velvet to make up for the ways that she believes she failed her sister? Why or why not? Use examples from the novel to support your answer.

## Vocabulary

imploring, incredulous, exude, clique, monopolizing, figurative, foreground, disfigured, wraithlike, benefactor, nurture



## Pages 98 – 130

### Summary

In “Ginger,” Ginger tried to talk to Velvet’s teachers but had to get a permission letter from Velvet’s mother in order to do so. When the teacher, Ms. Rodriguez called Ginger back she said that Velvet had discipline issues but that she was doing better with her work. The teacher, however, knew nothing of the book report with which Ginger had helped Velvet.

In “Velvet,” Even though Strawberry still would not talk to Velvet at school, she pushed Velvet to get permission so she could go to Paul and Ginger’s house as well. On the way to the station Velvet’s mother yelled at her, telling her that she was stupid. Velvet noticed people were looking at her like she was crazy.

In “Ginger,” on the train ride home, Ginger was surprised when Velvet said she thought people were stupid for trying to build another, even taller building to replace the World Trade Center. When Ginger explained it was a symbol that the people of New York were not afraid, Velvet said she knew people were afraid and that they should not build a building that would symbolize something that was not true.

In “Velvet,” Velvet went to see the horses first thing. She saw that Fiery Girl had a leather and metal contraption on her face and neck. Ginger said there was probably a reason for the contraption and that she should ask Pat about it. The next day, Pat told Velvet the contraption on Fiery Girl was so that she would not bite the side of her stall any longer. Pat said it did not hurt her and that cribbing was not healthy for Fiery Girl so they were trying to break her from doing it.

Ginger told Velvet that because Velvet had suggested it she was trying to paint a real picture of her sister. Velvet thought that this picture was ugly and crazy looking. She wanted to ask Ginger if she had hated her sister. Because she could not find anything nice to say about the picture, Velvet looked around the room and saw a doll that was beat up and crazy looking.

In “Ginger,” Ginger described how Velvet spent most of her time with the horses over the weekend. Ginger could not help Velvet with her homework the way she wanted to because Velvet forgot it at home.

In “Velvet,” Velvet went to the barn one night during her weekend at Ginger’s house. Fiery Girl had been acting like she was mad at her during the entire weekend. In the barn that night, the horse did nothing when Velvet walked in. Velvet told the horse she was mad at her because she had almost knocked her down when she went into the stall to give her food. When she turned to walk out of the barn she felt like the horse apologized to her. Velvet ignored the horse the next day and then even forgot to say goodbye to her before she left.





In “Ginger,” Ginger promised Velvet that if her grades got better, she would be allowed to bring Strawberry with her to visit.

In “Velvet,” one day at school, after an experience with some boys, Strawberry asked Velvet to come sit with her at lunch. Before that Strawberry and Helena had gotten into a fight about a boy. Velvet had slammed into Helena with her tray because Helena was accusing Strawberry of taking her boy away. It was a few days later that the boys walked up beside her and Strawberry called one Chris. One of the boys called Velvet “shawty” (108) and asked how she was doing. He told her that his name was Dominic. When Dominic found out how old Velvet was, he suddenly ended the conversation and told his other friends that he had to go.

Velvet heard Strawberry talking about the trouble boys could bring. She told her that her first foster family had made her leave because they said she had invited their son to go to bed with her. She said it was the boy who asked her. Velvet suspected it was a lie because Strawberry had also lied about not approaching Chris for a conversation yet Velvet had heard Strawberry tell Chris to call her. Velvet told Strawberry about Manuel, a man who had rented a room in their apartment, who had caused trouble for her.

In “Ginger,” Velvet asked Ginger about the doll she found in her studio the next time they talked on the phone. Ginger said she kept it because it was her sister’s doll. She and Paul had found it in her sister’s things in a box of toys after she died. When Velvet told Ginger the story was sad Ginger heard through her voice that Velvet was saying that the situation was funny. Ginger also felt Velvet’s sarcasm through the phone.

In “Velvet,” Velvet was unsure how to feel because she had never had one doll, except the key chain doll, while Ginger and her sister had a whole box full. Later that day, Velvet’s mother made her feel good by braiding her hair for her and making fun of white women, like Ginger, who said they liked black people’s hair.

In “Ginger,” Ginger remembered how she had found the dolls in her sister’s apartment during one of Melinda’s attempts to get sober. She had gotten angry with her sister and told her that she should throw them away. The suggestion hurt Melinda’s feelings so badly that she had cried. Ginger apologized but Melinda said it was okay. They threw the box away together but she figured that her sister must have gone and gotten it as soon as she left. When she found the box after her sister died, she had dug through it to find that specific doll.

In “Velvet,” the next time Velvet went to the barn there was no one there. At Fiery Girl’s stall, she noticed that the mare’s stall was full of waste. The horse looked at her asking her for help. She seemed to be telling Velvet that she would not hurt her if she came and cleaned her stall. Velvet told the horse she would trust her. She was able to clean the stall with no problem and Fiery Girl seemed to say thank you after she was finished. She saw Beth only when she went to leave the barn. Beth said Beverly and Pat were gone to a show and had left her in charge of the barn.



In “Ginger,” Ginger described how she and Paul had particularly good sex one night when Velvet was there.

In “Velvet,” when she walked up to the barn the next time, Pat had let the horses out for exercise. Velvet smiled at the way it looked like they were dancing. Pat said Fiery Girl could not be let out with the others because she tried to fight with them.

Later, at Ginger’s house Gare knocked on the door. She was asking for Velvet. She said that Pat wanted her to come to the barn because they were going to let Fiery Girl out. In the paddock, Fiery Girl ran and then lay down on the ground and rolled. Velvet thought that she was showing off what she could do. She decided at that moment that she would ride Fiery Girl one day.

In “Ginger,” Ginger learned that the students were picking on Velvet because they knew it upset her. Other than that Velvet was doing better in school but the teacher has still not gotten Velvet’s paper that Ginger had helped her write.

In “Velvet,” Velvet noted that her mother had at first liked it when Ginger called on the phone but soon began criticizing her for calling so much. Later one night after Ginger had called, Velvet’s mother put relaxer and bleach on Velvet’s hair. She thought that, as well as the way their mother cooked food for them and cleaned up the kitchen thoroughly so they would not get sick, this showed her mother’s love for her.

In “Ginger,” Velvet’s teacher called Ginger to ask if she or Paul could chaperone a class trip to the Statue of Liberty. The weather was so bad the trip was cancelled but the teacher invited Ginger to visit in the classroom. Ginger had to go through a metal detector and show ID in order to get into Velvet’s elementary school. In the classroom, Ginger did not see Velvet right away. Ms. Rodriguez pointed to a girl who looked furious. Ginger saw her hair had been fried in an attempt to straighten it and that it was a horrible shade of red. Because Velvet did not look at her, Ginger talked to some of the other kids before approaching her. She tried to help Velvet with the lesson on which the teacher was working but it was moving so fast even Ginger could not keep up. She told Velvet it was too fast for her and Velvet asked why all the other kids were able to keep up with the teacher.

In “Velvet,” Strawberry and Alicia stared at Ginger, and Velvet wondered why Ginger enjoyed the attention so much. She sensed Strawberry both liked and did not like Ginger.

In “Ginger,” when Ginger saw Strawberry, she was uncomfortable right away. She was not sure Strawberry was the kind of person with whom she wanted Velvet to be friends.

In “Velvet,” after Ginger left, Velvet expected Strawberry and Alicia to start talking badly about Ginger. Instead, they talked about a boy. Alicia said she liked this boy named Dominic but when Velvet said she thought she knew him she noticed that both Strawberry and Alicia got quiet.



In “Ginger,” Velvet’s teacher introduced Ginger to Eliza Lopez, the school social worker. Ginger expressed concern that she could not understand Velvet’s mother but the social worker told her that no one could understand her.

In “Velvet,” Ms. Rodriguez read one of Velvet’s papers to the class because it was such good work. Her classmates were angry and called her names because she had been singled out for praise.

In “Ginger,” Ginger felt that things got worse after her visit to the school. Even though Velvet worked hard on her homework over the phone, Ms. Rodriguez told Ginger that Velvet had stopped turning in work entirely. She had also become more of a discipline problem. Velvet told Ginger she was turning in her work but that the teacher hated her and probably lost it. When Ginger expressed her concerns to the teacher Ms. Rodriguez told her that Velvet was very manipulative.

In “Velvet,” Velvet believed that she was not lying about the work because she did take it to school. Her mother, however, belittled Velvet and told her it did not matter how hard she worked, she would fail anyway. She said that Ginger did not understand where Velvet came from and that she had decided to help a child because she did not have any of her own. She did advise Velvet to be nice to Ginger and not let her know what she was really like. She also said that Ginger had money, but she was empty inside.

In “Ginger,” even though Velvet’s grades did not improve, she allowed the girl to visit again.

In “Velvet,” during the weekend Ginger talked to Velvet about her new habit of not turning in her papers. She said it reminded her of the way her sister behaved. Velvet was thinking of the way that Joker had bucked Beverly off one day while they were riding. Her head hit the ground so hard that her helmet cracked. The next day Velvet had been grooming Spirit, who kept stamping his feet because he was upset and wanted to be outside with his friends, and Beverly had gotten up in the horse’s face, telling him to settle down. Velvet remembered how Beverly had bragged that she hurt Spirit worse than he had hurt her. Even though Velvet was not sure about the way Beverly dealt with the horses, she thought Beverly was cool. She said there was not anything a human could do to really hurt a horse; a whip was used more as a psychological tool than as a punishment. She said the goal was to control the horses from inside their heads.

## Analysis

The worlds in which Ginger and Velvet live collide in this section of the novel. Ginger visits Velvet as school hoping to surprise her but instead it is Ginger who is surprised. Velvet even looks different because of the attitude she has. She is withdrawn and angry. She is unsure of herself and lacks confidence because she is unable to do an assignment that all the other students seem to be able to handle with no problem. Ms.



Rodriguez warns Ginger that Velvet is manipulative when Ginger calls with concerns that Velvet is doing her work with Ginger, but then apparently not turning it in.

The idea that Velvet is manipulative leads to a discussion of how her actions could be interpreted differently by different people. This is the teacher who earlier told Ginger that the other students picked on Velvet because they knew it got her riled up. Now she tells Ginger that Velvet is manipulative. Because the reader has both Ginger and Velvet's sides of the story, the reader knows that Velvet is acting as she is because she is being bullied by the students at school. Her teacher reads a paper written by Velvet out loud to the class with the intention of encouraging Velvet but instead it causes her fellow students to resent her. They call her names and ridicule her because she has been singled out for praise.

The students at school are not the only influences in Velvet's life keeping her from achieving. Her mother tells her that she is stupid and that she will fail no matter how hard she tries. She tells Velvet that book smarts do not do a woman any good. When Velvet points out that Ginger is able to read, her mother tells her that it was not Ginger's ability to read that got her a husband but instead her figure.

As Velvet has all of these negative forces influencing her experience at school, she is like the horses which Beverly seeks to control psychologically. Beverly bullies and beats the horses, believing it is funny when they try to rebel against her authority. She is like the students in school who pick on Velvet and try to control her through their own form of cruelty. It is ironic because Velvet believes these people who bully others and get their way through cruelty are cool.

The reader can sense that Dominic, the boy whom Velvet met on the street, will be bad news for her. He had the sense to leave her alone when he realized how much older he was than she was. Later, Velvet learns that her friend, Alicia, the one that is so often mean to her, has a crush on Dominic as well. Instead of saying nothing about having met Dominic, Velvet tells Alicia that she knows him. Velvet notes the silence that comes between Alicia and Strawberry. It almost appears as if they were trying to see if Velvet would say that she knew Dominic, a sign that perhaps she likes him as well.

Velvet asks Ginger about the doll she saw in Ginger's studio and learns it was one that belonged to Ginger and her sister when they were girls. This doll shows the different socioeconomic levels on which Velvet and Ginger grew up. Velvet takes away from the conversation that as a child, Ginger had a whole box full of dolls while Velvet had only a tiny, broken doll that she had found. This is not the only difference Velvet notes between herself and Ginger in this section that bothers her. She notices that while Ginger is at her school that she seems to enjoy the attention from the other students. Ginger thinks to herself "Who likes to be stared at? A stuck-up person who thinks they all that. But Ginger didn't think she was all that. Did she?" (123). Because her mother has put doubts in her mind about Ginger and her personality, Velvet begins to doubt the kindness she believes is at the heart of Ginger's actions. She wonders if Ginger really is stuck up.



Also highlighting the differences between Ginger's childhood and Velvet's childhood is the metal detectors through which anyone going into the elementary school must pass. Ginger is disturbed by the fact that the students, even at the elementary school level, have to go through metal detectors to be sure they have no weapons with them. While it is just part of the students' day, one that is so normal to Velvet she does not even mention the metal detectors, Ginger thinks to herself: "And I went back out through the metal detectors. Wondering what it would be like to be eleven years old and to walk through that thing every day with a guard watching" (126).

Meanwhile, Velvet's act of befriending Fiery Girl seems to have an effect not only on the horse but also on Pat. Because she sees that Velvet is able to handle this otherwise dangerous horse, and actually has a calming effect on her, Pat begins letting Velvet work with the horse more and begins giving the horse more privileges. The relationship has a small setback when Fiery Girl pushed Velvet down rushing back into her stall. Velvet describes the feeling in a simile "she threw me like a hurricane throws a house" (103). In this experience, Velvet has realized for herself how easily Fiery Girl could hurt her. She is scared because she was not even doing anything that might threaten the horse when she was pushed down by it. Later when Velvet goes to Fiery Girl and explains why she was angry with her, Velvet seems to sense Fiery Girl is telling her she did not mean to hurt her but had actually forgotten she was there.

In the scene where Pat finally allows Fiery Girl to be let out for exercise, Velvet sees a side of the mare she had never seen. She indicates that it appears as if the mare were showing off for her, demonstrating what she could do. It was after Velvet watches Fiery Girl frolic outside that she decides that one day she will ride that horse.

## Discussion Question 1

During a conversation with her mother about Ginger, Velvet's mother tells Velvet not to let Ginger know what she is really like. What do you think she means by this?

## Discussion Question 2

What is significant about Velvet's decision that one day she will ride Fiery Girl? Based on what has been said about the horse thus far, do you think this decision will come to pass? Why or why not?

## Discussion Question 3

Do you think Velvet is manipulative? Why or why not? Give reasons from the book to support your answer.

## Vocabulary

crude, ineptitude, leverage, contemptuous, manipulative, preternaturally, privilege



## Pages 134 – 165

### Summary

In “Paul,” Paul did not argue with Ginger about having Velvet over for Christmas because he figured Velvet’s mother would not allow the visit. When he returned home from an errand he discovered Edie, his daughter from his first marriage, was enthralled by Ginger’s description of Velvet. She asked if she could hang out with her since she would also be coming to visit over Christmas.

In “Velvet,” Velvet’s brother acted out because Velvet had been asked to go to Ginger’s the day after Christmas. Her mother hit her in the head and told Velvet he was acting as he was because of her. In her bedroom she looked out the window at the Christmas lights in the window across the street. It was the only thing festive in her area. She felt her grandfather telling her that her mother did not mean anything by the way she acted.

In “Paul,” Paul noted that Ginger had not told him that she was buying gifts for Ms. Vargas and Dante. He was irritated but was surprised to see that Ms. Vargas had brought them a gift of a scented candle. On the walk toward the train, Velvet said she had gotten a mug with a flower on it from her mother for Christmas, the same thing she always got. Paul felt ashamed of all the gifts they gave each other until they got home and Velvet saw their tree.

In “Velvet,” Velvet was upset at first because Ginger and Paul would not let her go right away to see the mare. When she saw the tree, however, it was prettier than anything she had ever seen before. She felt like a little kid. Ginger let her open one gift that night. It was a ring in the shape of a butterfly.

In “Ginger,” the next day spent with Velvet was filled with joy. Ginger felt like she remembered what Christmas was all about as she watched Velvet experiencing Christmas and even Edie playing her part.

In “Velvet,” Velvet was so excited she was unable to sleep. After Paul and Ginger went to sleep she went to see Fiery Girl. She went into the stall, petted her horse and promised to come clean the following day. She sang to the horse until she calmed herself down.

In “Paul,” Paul noticed how mature Edie acted when Velvet was there. At one point when Velvet was out of the room, he commented she was glad he was doing this. Paul thought to himself he was not sure what he was actually doing.

In “Velvet,” Velvet noted her best gift was getting to ride Little Tina bareback. She got other gifts, like a radio and CD player as well as a Gap shirt from Ginger and Paul. Velvet noted she also met Edie, who was nice.



In “Ginger,” Ginger talked to Velvet about the girls being mean to her at school as they rode back to Brooklyn on the train. When they arrived at the train station, Velvet’s mother was not there. When Ginger asked what sort of neighborhood in which Velvet’s mother worked, Velvet told her there were white people there. Ginger thought that had not been what she asked but understood what Velvet was telling her. Ginger suggested that they would call the police if her mother was an hour late but Velvet begged her not to because she was afraid the police would take her and Dante away from their mother. They went to the house of a friend of Ginger to wait.

In “Velvet,” Velvet was so miserable that she could not eat anything. The lady at the house where they stayed was pregnant and appeared to be trying to keep from crying when she saw that Velvet was crying. Velvet thought that if she could get in touch with her mother, she would not go to Ginger’s house again. When she used Ginger’s phone to call her mother, she finally answered.

In “Ginger,” Velvet relaxed after she finally talked to her mother. Ginger did not believe her mother’s story about having to take her brother to the hospital. In bed that night Velvet asked why white people seemed to be able to live their lives better than black people. Ginger said that was not necessarily true, that sometimes white people did not succeed at their lives even though they had advantages.

In “Velvet,” Velvet had a dream in which she and horses were running toward a red sun.

In “Ginger,” it was a cousin who came to pick Velvet up at the train station. After they left, Ginger realized how courageous Velvet had been when she used the expression “people of my color,” (149) when she asked about the differences in whites and blacks.

In “Velvet,” in the subway Velvet noticed how the white people seemed happy and seemed to have things while the black people seemed sad. She wished she had not asked Ginger about the differences in blacks and whites. She noticed a black man looking at her who seemed happy and she remembered her dream. Because of that memory, Velvet was happy even when her mother told her she was lazy and unwanted, and then took the radio Ginger had given her away. She was happy even when Strawberry would not look at her ring but instead walked past her like she did not exist. She wanted to tell her mother about the dream with the horses but knew that she would not understand and would just get angry with her.

In “Ginger,” Velvet told Ginger that when she wore her new shirt and ring to school that girls had stared at her and then spat at her in the cafeteria. She hit someone and got detention but Ginger was glad Velvet had stood up for herself. To make matters worse, it was Strawberry and Alicia who had spat at Velvet.

Ginger called the social worker who said Velvet had not said anything about spitting but had said her mother hit her. She was unable to show bruises so the worker, who had called Child Protective Services before because Velvet claimed she was being abused but then admitted she was lying, so the social worker ignored the claim. Ginger asked if her response to Velvet’s question about white people had been appropriate, and the





social worker said it was. As she hung up the phone, Ginger realized she had gotten herself into a situation that there was no good way to get out of.

In “Paul,” as Velvet stayed more and more with Paul and Ginger, he began to think that perhaps they were doing a good thing. Then, however, Paul learned that Velvet had told Edie she was going to come live with them and Ginger was going to homeschool her.

In “Velvet,” Velvet fell off Little Tina when the horse was spooked by someone shooting. Even though she did not think she would be able to get back on because of her fear, she did.

In “Paul,” Ginger thought Velvet got the idea that she would be homeschooled from a movie they watched together. When Velvet turned 12, Ginger took her shopping. Paul never saw what was purchased but learned about it later from Edie.

In “Velvet,” Velvet recounted how Ginger took her to a store to get clothes for a party to which Alicia had invited her. The store they went into had clothes no one in Velvet’s neighborhood wore. Even the salesclerk said the outfit that Ginger picked out for Velvet was not appropriate. At the party, Dominic walked in and Velvet was glad Ginger had bought the outfit for her even though she had been worried about her decision to wear it.

When a boy named Shawn began bothering Velvet, Dominic came and distracted him. He said Velvet was his cousin. Velvet was surprised that he remembered her name. Dominic offered to let Velvet hang out with them. He sat with his leg pressed to Velvet’s so that Shawn would not bother her.

In “Paul,” Edie told him that a group of girls had attacked and beaten Velvet. Her brother had been there when it happened. He laughed at his sister.

Ginger and Paul had their first argument about Velvet. Paul advised her to leave the girl alone so she would not get her hurt worse. Ginger yelled at him that Velvet could come live with her if it weren’t for Paul. Later, Ginger begged Paul not to take Velvet away from her. He said that if she loved Velvet, she should consider the girl’s safety and not get her into situations where she could get hurt.

In “Velvet,” Velvet said Alicia had first approached her during recess but Velvet had hit her in the head. She said even though Dante did not help her when the group of Alicia’s friends attacked her, he was too little to do anything. He did carry her backpack home that day. At home, her mother tended to her cuts. It made Velvet feel good because her mother was angry for her instead of being angry with her. Even though her mother promised she would hurt the girls if they ever approached Velvet again, Velvet noted that it was Shawn who helped her the next time she was in trouble. The girls had been threatening to put Velvet in the hospital when Shawn came up to Velvet. His look at them made them go away. He asked if she wanted to smoke some weed with them and she agreed to do so.



In “Ginger,” Velvet said the girls who hurt her were not bothering her any longer. She changed the subject and asked Ginger if she believed in hell. She said there was a doorway to hell in Ginger’s backyard that her grandfather had shown her. The information made Ginger’s hair stand up.

In “Velvet,” Velvet went with Shawn to his grandmother’s house. Shawn tried to kiss Velvet. He asked her what grade she was in and if she had ever felt a man.

In “Silvia,” the narrative shifts to the perspective of Velvet’s mother for the first time. Silvia said that she knew when she first saw the clothes that Ginger had gotten for Velvet that her daughter would get hurt. Silvia believed she had made a point to Velvet when she got beat up for wearing the fancy clothes. Silvia admits she thought Ginger was silly, but she seemed to be becoming disrespectful. Every once in a while Silvia saw a strange look in Ginger’s eye that she could not figure out. When Ginger began sending Silvia money, Silvia felt she had to take the money because her boarder was moving out. She did not know how she was going to make ends meet financially.

In “Ginger,” even though Velvet technically failed her grade in school, she was passed to the next grade. She spent six weeks over the summer. Even though Ginger had planned to tell Silvia about the horses, she did not; she instead began sending Silvia money.

## Analysis

Even though Velvet’s teacher tells Ginger that Velvet is manipulative, Ginger is manipulative in her own right. First, she blames Paul for allowing Velvet to get by keeping her from living with them full time. She tells him that she will no longer consider adoption; she is interested only in Velvet. To top things off, she takes advantage of Silvia’s poverty by sending her money that she knows Silvia will have to take. This money allows Ginger to have control over Velvet and her situation because Silvia knows the money could stop if she does something to anger Ginger.

This is the first time that Silvia’s voice is heard. Up to this point she has been developed as a hateful woman who likes to yell and curse. She favors Dante over Velvet and often hits Velvet for things that are not her fault. These impressions give the idea that Silvia does not care about her daughter at all. In the section narrated by Silvia, however, it appears that Silvia does care about her daughter but it is in a twisted way. She had known that the clothes that Ginger bought for Velvet would cause a problem for Velvet. Instead of trying to explain to Velvet that she was asking for trouble by wearing the clothes, Silvia let her learn the lesson the hard way.

Although Silvia gets a strange vibe from Ginger, she is not able to pinpoint exactly what is wrong with her. She indicates only that Ginger gets a strange look in her eye occasionally that never lasts long. Although she believes Ginger is basically harmless, she does understand to what she is agreeing when she accepts the money from Ginger the first time. She rationalizes that despite her money, Ginger is sad and empty and that



because she has no children of her own, she has been through some kind of personal hell.

Velvet continues to indicate that even though Ginger is kind to her, she prefers her mother to Ginger. Velvet strives to please her mother and make her proud even though her mother is generally only hateful to her. One example of this in particular comes after Velvet is beat up by the group of girls from her school. Velvet says: "This angry was big and warm like a horse, and it felt better than her nice. It was better than anything Ginger had, and what Ginger had was good" (161). To Velvet, her mother being angry with the girls who had hurt her was better than anything that Ginger had ever done for her. It meant she was an important fixture in her mother's life even though her mother did not admit that often.

Another instance in which Velvet proves how important her mother is to her even though she is mean to her occurs when Silvia is not at the train station to pick her daughter up as scheduled. Velvet is obviously upset that her mother is not there and that they cannot get in touch with her on the phone. Even though she does not keep her promise, Velvet swears to herself that if she is able to get back with her mother and Dante that she will not go to Ginger's house again.

Ginger and Paul's relationship begins a downhill plunge as they fight more and more about Velvet. After hearing from the social worker about Velvet's lie that her mother had beaten her, Ginger realizes for the first time that Paul might be right about their interaction with the girl—that it is dangerous. Of course, she never admits this to Paul and begins to cover for Velvet's more frequent lies. For instance when Paul learns from Edie that Velvet told her that she was going to be homeschooled by Ginger, Ginger passes it off as a fantasy that Velvet had put together because of a movie they had watched. Ginger also does not allow Paul to see the clothes they bought for Velvet. He only hears about the trouble they caused for the girl through Edie.

Despite his misgivings about Velvet, Paul admits there are some places in time where he thinks they might actually be doing the right thing for the girl. One of these comes when he sees Velvet's pleasure during their celebration of Christmas. Another comes when Velvet had been spending a good deal of time with them and seemed to be fitting in well with the family. This comes before Edie tells him about Velvet's lies to her that Ginger was going to home school her.

At home in Brooklyn, Velvet begins getting in more and more trouble. Strawberry is gone so that girl no longer has any influence over Velvet but the other girls do not re-establish their friendship with Velvet. Instead they become more resentful toward her and are physically abusive. It is because Shawn helps get rid of the girls the second time they plan to beat her up that Velvet goes with him and smokes weed in his bedroom. He fondles her and kisses her, trying to find out her age. It is apparent by the way the boys react to Velvet that she looks a good deal older than she actually is. Dominic was respectful and backed off when he learned how young Velvet was. Velvet does not tell Shawn her age, apparently thinking she does not want to scare him off as



well. Notice at the party where Velvet met Shawn, Dominic stood up for her and arranged things so that he could look out for her and keep Shawn from bothering her.

The differences between races are a question that comes up between Ginger and Velvet for the first time. Velvet's mother has not shown up to pick her up at the train station as had been arranged. For this reason, Velvet goes with Ginger to visit a friend of hers who is actually well off financially. Seeing the stark contrast between the way whites live and the way blacks live, Velvet asks Ginger why there is so much difference in these two groups of people. Ginger argues there are poor white people just like there are poor black people, and that Velvet just does not know enough white people. Notice that even though Ginger argues that there are disadvantaged whites, she understands immediately that Velvet is telling her that her mother works in a decent neighborhood when she tells her that white people live there. Even though whites try to deny the differences between the races it is a familiar bias that whites are more advantaged than blacks.

## Discussion Question 1

Discuss the dream that Velvet has about running with the horses into the sunset. How does this dream make her feel so good? What does it symbolize?

## Discussion Question 2

Discuss Velvet's question to Ginger: "Why is it that white people can walk their path in a way that black people — and people of my color — cannot?" (146). What prompts Velvet's question and how does Ginger respond?

## Discussion Question 3

How does Velvet's relationship with Paul and Ginger, and vice versa, change as Velvet gets older?

## Vocabulary

unequivocally, subtle, soberly, forthright, purity, technically, scenarios



## Pages 166 – 196

### Summary

In “Velvet,” when Velvet returned to the stables in the summer there was a new girl, Heather, with her horse Totally Crushed. She and Beverly liked each other a good deal. Velvet recounted that it was on the day that Joker got loose that Heather was finally blamed for doing something wrong. Beverly had stopped Joker’s escape with a rake and shooed him back into this stall but hollered at Heather to be more careful. When Beverly went in the stall with Joker and began hitting him, Velvet thought that Pat would say something to her about it but she did not.

In “Ginger,” Velvet begged to be allowed to take a bareback class. Even though Ginger did not like the woman who would teach the class, she sensed that Velvet respected her and the woman was at least paying attention to Velvet.

In “Velvet,” Beverly introduced the girls in the bareback class to her friend, what she called the bullwhip that she cracked. She told Velvet to ride Joker since she did not have her own horse. Velvet thought this was strange because Beverly did not like Joker.

In “Ginger,” Ginger could not believe the military style in which Beverly taught the bareback class. She mentioned the way Beverly would use the bullwhip on the horses to keep them going.

In “Velvet,” Velvet noticed how the whip distracted Joker and that she had to work extra hard to convince him that he was okay. She felt like she and Beverly were working against each other. Later, Velvet talked to Pat and asked her why Beverly was allowed to hit horses. Pat described abuse as hitting a horse over and over instead of just once to get a message across.

In “Ginger,” Ginger dreamed she had gone to hell. An old lady had taken her to a hallway where heads protruded from the walls. One was Ginger’s head and the other was the head of Michael. The old woman told Ginger that he was her love. She remembered an old man coming to help her. She remembered Velvet’s dream of going to hell through a door in their backyard.

In “Velvet,” Velvet remembered getting the respect of Gare one day when she made Fiery Girl pay attention to her using her body and voice when the mare tried to push past her as she and Pat were taking her outside to the arena for exercise.

In “Ginger,” Ginger wondered how it would work if Velvet’s mother and brother were to move to the village where they lived. The man in the Mexican grocery store and Velvet both looked at Ginger like she had three heads when she suggested the move. After Velvet saw the middle school, she answered yes with a different tone when Ginger asked if she wanted to move there.



In “Velvet,” Velvet was surprised one day when Gare started talking to her. Velvet remembered Gare telling her that she could get deported, but Velvet stopped and talked to her anyway. When Gare asked, Velvet lied and told her that she was in a gang.

In “Paul,” Paul stated that he felt at ease with Polly. He did not begin an affair with her because she was a younger woman. She was also not one of his students. When he told her about Velvet and her experiences with the horses, she was very moved by his stories.

In “Velvet,” Velvet woke thinking about Dominic. Her grandfather’s voice in her head reminded her of the promise that she had made to Fiery Girl. She got the halter on the horse with little trouble but the mare moved sideways. She filled her belly up with air so that Velvet struggled to get the saddle on her. She fought the bit but Velvet was patient and won out. She managed to get on her and stay on when Fiery Girl reared. Velvet struggled to find the horse through her other thoughts as Fiery Girl walked and then trotted. She behaved beautifully when Velvet groomed her and put her back in her stall.

As she tried to go back to sleep that night, Velvet thought about Manuel and how he used to rub her between the legs. Her mother accused her of lying but when she kicked Manuel out she reminded him of what he had done to her daughter.

In “Ginger,” Ginger had her translator ask Silvia if she would consider moving there. Silvia said she might. She had asked Ginger how much a gallon of milk cost there and Ginger was embarrassed because she did not know.

In “Velvet,” the girls in middle school abused one another about the way their hair looked. Velvet felt like they were in a show that someone else chose for them to be in with only moments of showing their real personalities. Ginger and Paul were in a different show from her mother and the kids at school. Riding Fiery Girl felt like it had happened on a different planet.

One day Velvet was helping her mother fix dinner. She wanted to tell her mother how good her food was but instead took a piece of bread and crushed it in her hand. Her mother hit her.

In “Silvia,” Silvia thought about the way her daughter was acting. She thought that was why the girls at school hated her and could not believe that Velvet could not see it.

In “Velvet,” Mr. Nelson at the store was the first person she told about riding Fiery Girl. He fixed her a sandwich and kissed her on the mouth before she left, telling her to keep riding her horse.

In “Silvia,” Silvia felt pressured by lack of money and loneliness. The lady, Rasheed, whom she felt she could talk to had a pregnant daughter with HIV who would not even talk to her mother. For this reason, Silvia felt she could not dump her problems on Rasheed. She remembered the time she rode a horse. Her father had put her on the horse. It began to walk and then to run. Someone tried to stop the horse and it reared up, throwing her off and banging her head so hard she passed out. Her mother whipped



her but her father had stood up for her, telling her mother what happened was not her fault. She was still sad because she had no money to go see her father when he was dying.

In “Paul,” when Ginger told Paul that she wanted to act in the children’s community theater he realized he was married to a woman just like his slightly crazy Aunt Bea. She wanted to act so that Velvet’s mother would come see the play and realize that she wanted to live in that area.

In “Ginger,” when she first met the people who ran the theater, she thought it was the perfect arrangement since Yandy, the man who played the piano spoke some Spanish.

In “Paul,” Paul admitted that he did not discourage Ginger from trying to get Velvet and her family to move upstate because it took Ginger’s attention from their relationship and helped him cover his affair with Polly.

In “Velvet,” Velvet was approached by a boy on the street who wanted her to do drugs with him. He said he had heard about her that it did not matter if she knew a person or not in order for her to play with them.

In “Ginger,” even though Ginger did not get the part she wanted, she did get some smaller roles and loved them. She was hurt when one of the women made fun of her and told her that her reaction to the death of the man who had been pushing her to pay her bills was not realistic. She tried to think how Mrs. Vargas might react if she learned her landlord had died and she did not have to pay the back rent she owed.

In “Velvet,” some of the girls told Velvet that Kwan liked her. She knew that Kwan was 16 and that he was the boyfriend of Brianna the “baddest bitch in school” (197). She told Kwan to leave her alone before she told Brianna about what he was doing. Velvet’s mother accused her of being a troublemaker but Ginger told Velvet that she was proud of her. Pat also told Velvet she was proud of her for her progress with her riding.

When she went back to Brooklyn, a picture was circulating of a girl kissing Kwan’s chest with her hand in his pants. Velvet’s schoolmates said the girl was Velvet but her hair was damaged with bleach, not like Velvet’s. Marisol told Velvet that she knew the picture was not of her. Even though she pretended that she did not care, Velvet remembered Pat telling her that horses who were troublemakers were driven to the outside of the herd because that was where the predators were.

## Analysis

In this section Velvet considers what Pat told her about dominant mares and connects it to her life. “The dominant mare drives the troublemakers to the outside of the herd. Because that’s where the predators are” (198), Pat told her. The idea is that the stronger horses prefer to sacrifice those who cause problems for the herd. They do this by alienating them from the group, leaving them open to predators. Brianna and popular girls are doing this to Velvet at school. She is being pushed out of the safety of the



popular clique and left to fend for herself. Shawn, the man who once protected her from the girls who wanted to beat her up has even spread stories about her. He has let people know how quickly Velvet let him fondle her and kiss her after he offered her protection once. Additionally a picture had been circulated showing a girl kissing Kwan with her hand in his pants. Even though it is obvious the girl is not Velvet, the girls at school say that it is and criticize her for it.

Ginger's inability to understand money and financial issues is stressed in this section of the novel. She asks Silvia if she would consider moving closer to them but is unable to tell the lady how much common things, like a gallon of milk, cost there. Ginger is embarrassed because she does not know how much milk costs.

In her theater practice, Ginger is embarrassed when one of the leaders criticizes her "because she thought my debtor's reaction to hearing of Scrooge's death was too nice" (195). Ginger does not understand how even a woman with no money and no resources could gloat over the death of another person, even if that person who died was the one pressuring her to pay her debts. In order to try to properly play her role, Ginger tries to imagine herself as Silvia if she suddenly did not have to pay the back rent that she owed. Even as Ginger thinks about that scenario, she imagines the hardened Silvia as someone who would pray for a dead person, even if she was glad she did not have to pay her debt.

Even though Velvet begged to be allowed to take the bareback class and Ginger thought it was a good idea because she felt Beverly was at least paying attention to Velvet, it turns out to be a bad experience. Even though Beverly does not like Joker, she makes the decision to have Velvet ride him for the class. Velvet wonders why she makes that choice since Beverly does not like Joker. All through the class, as Beverly flicks at the horses with her bullwhip, Velvet feels she and Beverly are fighting against each other. She has to fight to keep Joker focused on her instead of focusing on Beverly's whip.

When Ginger sees the class, even she thinks it might have been a bad idea. She says of Beverly, "That crazy woman was so completely in her element that she didn't even look crazy" (171). Even though she is not familiar with horses, riding or training, even Ginger does not like the way Beverly uses her bull whip to keep the horses going.

There are a couple of good similes included in this section of the novel. In one of them Velvet describes Joker as looking "like a smiling tornado" (167) as he ran past her on his way out of the barn after Heather accidentally let him out of his stall. When Beverly first introduces the bullwhip that she uses during the competition Velvet describes her cracking the whip hard "like black lightning, and the cats ran with their tails low" (170). Beverly uses the whip as a form of power and intimidation. When she demonstrates it, even the cats in the barn run away. The term "black lightning" seems to refer to an even more dangerous form of this natural phenomenon.

Velvet does talk to Pat in this section of the novel and she asks why Beverly is allowed to hit the horses when no one else is. Pat does not really give good reasons. It is





apparent that Pat does not really have any control over Beverly's actions. She does seem to try to make Velvet feel better about what she perceives as abuse by telling her that hitting a horse once does not make an act of abuse. She says it is when a horse is hit over and over again with no reason that the action becomes abuse.

## Discussion Question 1

Discuss Ginger's inability to properly portray gladness that Scrooge had died in the play for which she is practicing. Do you think Ginger's idea of how Silvia might have reacted to the death is correct? Why or why not?

## Discussion Question 2

Pat tells Velvet that abuse comes when an animal is hit over and over again for no reason. Do you think this definition is correct? Why or why not? Do you think the way Beverly handles the horses is abuse?

## Discussion Question 3

Discuss the way the girls at school treat Velvet. How is this similar to the way horses will push one whom they perceive to be a trouble maker out of the herd, exposing them to predators?

## Vocabulary

element, rhythmic, hypnotic, protruded, incessantly, cunt, relative, appealed, juxtapose, wilding, pathos, reminisced, depraved, intrepid, pantomime, retrospect, solicitor, ecstatic, ambivalent, pious



## Pages 198 – 229

### Summary

In “Ginger,” Lydia, a woman who lived down the block from Velvet, called Ginger wanting to know if Ginger was Velvet’s godmother. She said Velvet had come to her house crying because her mother was abusing her. Lydia said there were no bruises but she believed Velvet because she was so upset. She described Velvet as being like a puppy, a good deal younger than 15. Ginger stopped her and told her that Velvet was 12. The woman’s voice became harder when she learned Velvet’s true age. She said she was going to take Velvet home but thought that Ginger should know what was happening.

In “Velvet,” Velvet overheard Lydia’s conversation with Ginger. She thought Ginger would believe how her mother treated her because an adult had told her.

In “Ginger,” Lydia told Ginger that when she took Velvet home her mother had cried but Velvet had cursed her. Velvet claimed that her mother acted fake in front of others. Paul asked Ginger if she really wanted them to move closer to them.

In “Velvet,” during her next visit to Ginger’s house Velvet went to the barn but Fiery Girl would not speak to her. She watched Beverly in the ring whipping a horse because it would not stop when she told it to and then being super sweet to it when it finally obeyed.

The next day, Gare told Velvet that Heather’s horse had kicked a girl and broken her ribs. Gare was not sure why it had kicked. Velvet thought that if she was a horse she would kick and maybe even trample people.

In “Ginger,” Velvet’s mother and brother agreed to come and see Ginger’s play.

In “Paul,” when Paul picked the family up at the train station, he noticed how exhausted Silvia looked. Regardless, she stopped Velvet from hugging Paul and instead indicated Velvet needed to tie Dante’s shoe. In the restaurant, Silvia was angry and said her food was disgusting. Even after it was recooked, she refused to eat it. Instead, she forced Velvet to eat it even though the girl said she was full. In the theater, Paul noticed that Silvia seemed happier. When a man approached her and started speaking in Spanish, Silvia seemed bewildered.

In “Silvia,” Silvia recounted how the man had asked her if she was thinking about moving there. She knew that he wanted her to be happy about the idea of moving there but Silvia could not do it. Because she had not slept the night before, she had dropped an old woman for whom she was working. Her ribs had been broken. She begged the old lady, telling her that she had children but she was worried about what would happen.



In “Ginger,” Ginger encouraged the kids to do their best acting because she had guests from the city.

In “Velvet,” Velvet described how strange the version of the play in which Ginger was involved was. She looked at her mother and saw she looked like she was dreaming.

In “Silvia,” the narrative is related in the present tense, unlike other chapters. Silvia tries to watch the play but is preoccupied with thoughts of the old lady she had dropped. Velvet jabs her to wake her up. There is a girl on stage pretending to be unhappy who obviously does not know what it is like to be unhappy. Silvia goes to sleep, dreaming about meeting her love but Dante wakes her up telling her that she is snoring.

In “Ginger,” Ginger looked out once to see Silvia’s face upturned, looking at the stage. Ginger believed she was enchanted. Yandy, the man who had spoken in Spanish to Silvia told Ginger he did not think that Silvia was very intelligent.

In “Paul,” Velvet, her mother, and her brother all slept in Ginger and Paul’s room that night. When Paul went in to adjust the thermostat he noticed that Silvia and Dante were clinging to each other while her back was to Velvet who was sleeping on the far edge of the bed.

When he got into bed with Ginger, he could tell how angry she was. She said that Silvia had made Velvet come out in the hall and translate for Ginger that Silvia wanted Ginger to look at Velvet and see how ugly she was. Despite the way Silvia treated Velvet, Ginger knew that Velvet loved her.

In “Ginger,” when Silvia took a shower with Dante the following morning, Velvet asked Ginger if that type of behavior was normal. Ginger said it was not in her opinion.

In “Velvet,” Velvet took her brother and mother to see the horses. As they watched them playing in the paddock, Velvet inwardly begged her mother to smile. She stood at the fence with her back to Velvet. Instead, it was Ginger who smiled at Velvet and the horses.

Suddenly a girl who Velvet had never seen before led Diamond Chip Jim out of the barn; when she looked at Velvet and the others she asked who they were. Pat introduced them all, referring to Velvet as the “talented young lady I’ve been telling you about” (217). The woman smiled at Velvet at that point and Velvet found herself liking her even though she did not want to do so. Pat introduced the woman as Estella Kadner. Velvet did not help her mother out by translating what Estella was saying to her she only told the woman that her mother could not speak English. Estella repeated her words in Spanish and Silvia’s face grew dark.

In “Ginger,” Ginger began to see what was happening between Velvet and her mother. Her mother shrank as Estella continued to talk and Velvet became more animated. When Estella learned that Velvet liked the horse everyone called Fugly Girl she suggested they go and see her. Silvia looked at Ginger like she was Judas. Ginger



whispered to Silvia to forgive her but she did not answer. Velvet looked pleased with herself while Dante appeared to be afraid.

In “Velvet,” Velvet noticed that Paul kept looking in the rearview mirror as they drove to the train station. Her mother was laughing and he did not appear to know what was happening. Ginger hugged Velvet and said they would work it out. Silvia yanked Velvet away. Silvia found a seat for Velvet and threw the sandwiches at her that Ginger had made for them. Velvet tried to convince her mother that she was not riding horses but her mother would not listen. She called her a liar, and then went to find seats in another car for herself and Dante.

When Velvet tried to follow her mother a man on the train made her mother let Velvet sit with her. Silvia told the man that Velvet did not want to be part of the family but the man did not respond or act like he cared.

In “Ginger,” Ginger realized that Velvet had humiliated her mother. She did not blame her but was surprised at the way that Velvet’s mother had just shrunk inside herself like Velvet had all of the power.

In “Velvet,” inside their apartment, Velvet’s mother knocked her down in the hallway and then ordered her to get up. When Velvet tried to get up her mother kicked her in the stomach and made her fall back. She told her daughter that here she was the boss, not Ginger. If she wanted to ride horses and die, that was fine.

Velvet ran out into the street in front of a car. The people in the car stopped. They cared if she died. She went to Lydia’s house but Lydia did not answer her door. Velvet sat on the front step and cried. A woman whom her mother called the Haitian walked by and told Velvet that she needed to go home. She was kind to Velvet and told her she was blessed and that her mother would not hurt her again that night.

In “Ginger,” when Velvet came for her thirteenth birthday, she told Ginger that her mother had hit her and knocked her down because of the horse issue. Ginger apologized but Velvet was still sullen. The next day they fought because Velvet refused to help with the dishes. Ginger said that if Velvet did not help they would not go out for her birthday. Velvet finally cooperated after Ginger pointed out to her it was in her hands if she had a good time or a bad time.

In “Velvet,” Velvet decided the people who were at the restaurant where they went to eat were Republicans based on how they looked and how they talked.

In “Ginger,” Ginger thought that Velvet’s decision that the people in the restaurant with them were Republicans was adorable. When Velvet laughed out loud over a woman and man’s over the top reaction of seeing each other again, Ginger ordered an alcoholic drink.

In “Velvet,” Ginger asked Velvet not to tell anyone she was having a drink. Velvet noticed changes in Ginger right away that she did not like. After they finished their dinner, Ginger drove them around and sang until they were lost.



In “Ginger,” after she put Velvet to bed, Ginger criticized herself for having made such a big mistake.

In “Paul,” Paul worried that when he met Ginger at the station that she would know he had spent the weekend with Polly. She did not. She just told Paul that Velvet had said her mother had beaten her when they got home. Ginger had not called social services because Velvet asked her not to do so. Ginger said she thought Velvet had thought maybe she could come live with them. Paul said that was not an option.

Paul told Ginger that if she still wanted a child, they could adopt one. She wanted only Velvet and if she could not have her completely, she would take what she could get. It was the same thing Polly had said about him. He thought about Ginger that if she wanted to get hurt, he wished she would not use a child.

In “Velvet,” during the last week of school Alicia gave Velvet a sea horse that she said was from Strawberry. Velvet could not help but smile. Alicia invited Velvet to a party given by a girl who was friends with Brianna. Even though it was Brianna who had spread lies about her, Velvet agreed when she heard that Dominic would be there.

## Analysis

There are a good deal of shifts in this section of the novel as characters come up against challenging situations. Velvet’s mother learns that Velvet has been riding horses all along during a trip to visit Ginger’s house. This causes a shift in the already strained dynamics between Velvet and the members of her family. Her mother is angry to the point that she accuses Velvet of no longer wanting to be part of their family. Ginger notices at the barn when Silvia begins to look angry, Dante looks scared, a sign that he understands what is happening and how things will play out later.

Silvia is angry not only because Velvet has been lying to her but because she feels she is losing what little control she had over her daughter. She has been sending her to Ginger’s house with the hope that Ginger at least was not letting Velvet do what she had prohibited. She learns that Ginger has been lying to her as well and has been encouraging Velvet to lie and be disobedient. When Ginger looks at Silvia after the secret is out, Silvia looks at Ginger as if she is accusing her of being Judas. In the Bible, Judas is the friend of Jesus who betrayed Jesus, leading the Romans to Jesus so he could be killed. Ginger has betrayed Silvia’s trust.

In Paul’s case, he finally has a physical affair with Polly. Under the cover of a conference for work, he and Polly get away together. Even though Paul is afraid that Ginger will be able to sense that he has been with another woman, she is too caught up in the drama with Velvet and her mother to pay much attention to him.

Ginger also makes a mistake in this section of the novel. While celebrating Velvet’s thirteenth birthday, Ginger orders an alcoholic drink. This is a dangerous move for her because of her former addiction. Even Velvet comments about Ginger’s decision to drink but Ginger asks her to keep it as their secret. Velvet notices the changes that



come over Ginger when she starts drinking. It is not until Ginger gets home that she realizes what a mistake she made by having a drink.

Meanwhile, Velvet wants someone to believe her when she tells them that her mother hits her. It appears, however, that Velvet has already had an incident where she told her social worker about the abuse and child services were called. When she was questioned by child services, Velvet recanted on her story. For this reason, some people, like the school counselor will not believe Velvet is being hurt unless they see bruises. When Velvet runs to Lydia's house after claiming her mother hit her, Ginger tells Lydia to check for bruises. Since there are no bruises, Ginger signifies to the lady that she should not make a big deal of Velvet's story. To make matters worse for Velvet, her mother hugs her and cries when Lydia brings her home. For this reason it appears to Lydia that Velvet's mother is not abusive but instead a caring mother. Velvet tells Ginger at one point that she is tired of her mother's manipulative behavior.

At Ginger's house during the visit after the incident where her mother found out about the horses, Velvet acts badly. She tells Ginger that her mother had hit her when they got home. Because Ginger does not respond to Velvet in the way Velvet had hoped, Velvet acts pouty and mopes. She is most hurt by her mother's comment that she does not care if Velvet gets killed by the horses. The book does not indicate if Velvet mentions this to Ginger.

The bad relationship between Velvet and her mother is clearly seen in this section of the novel. It is evident to Paul when he sees the way the three of them sleep in bed together. Silvia is clinging to Dante but has her back to Velvet. Ginger recognizes Silvia's attitude toward her daughter when Silvia tells Ginger to look at Velvet and see how ugly she is. Ginger tells Paul of the experience: "Human love is the vilest thing in the world" (214). She says this because she realizes that as badly as Silvia treats Velvet, Velvet still loves her mother and craves her love and acceptance. At the barn when Velvet takes her family to see where she has been working, she wishes desperately that Silvia will show some indication that she is pleased with her. "Mami, smile. Please, Mami. Like she heard me, Ginger turned to me and smiled. She smiled like a mother. My mom stood with her hands on the fence and her back to me" (216).

The scenes where Velvet's mother watches the rendition of A Christmas Carol are very powerful in terms of defining the differences between Ginger and Silvia. While Ginger has the available money and time to act in a children's theater, Silvia sits in the audience and worries that she will lose her job. Silvia did not sleep the night before the performance and falls asleep several times during the performance. As she tries to figure out what is happening in the play, she thinks about the way she dropped a woman for whom she worked, causing the woman to have broken ribs. She is worried that she will be sued even though she begged the woman, telling her that she had children to support.

In the section that includes Silvia's thoughts about the play, the format of the chapter changes to stream of consciousness as her thoughts stray from the play that she cannot understand. She is tired, sleeps and dreams about meeting her lover. Her children wake



her and she tries to figure out what the play is about. Remember, Silvia does not speak English and does not understand it very well. There is one point where Silvia notes: “A girl stands in the spotlight, holding a doll and crying out, trying to sound unhappy, but she obviously has no idea what it is” (211). Even though she cannot understand what the girl is saying, Silvia can tell she is supposed to be acting as if she is unhappy. Silvia, who is well versed in unhappiness, can tell that the girl does not know what unhappiness is.

The author highlights the use of different perspectives as each character tries to decide what the other character is thinking as they watch the play. When Ginger looks out through the curtains she sees that: “Mrs. Vargas’s face was upturned and enchanted” (213). In her naiveté, Ginger believes that Silvia is enjoying the play. She is unable to discern from her face that Silvia is actually miserably tired and worried about her job.

A final thing to notice about this section of the novel is the author’s use of the present tense in the section of the novel where Silvia watches Ginger’s play. This switch to the present tense seems to stress the reality of Silvia’s situation. It also helps to give her thoughts an unreal, dreamlike quality as she struggles to stay awake.

## Discussion Question 1

Discuss Silvia’s reaction to the play in which Ginger acted. Compare Ginger’s take on Silvia’s reaction to the play with Silvia’s real feelings.

## Discussion Question 2

Do you understand Silvia’s anger with Ginger when she learns that Velvet is riding horses despite Silvia saying that Velvet could not ride because of the danger? Why or why not?

## Discussion Question 3

Why is it significant that Ginger buys herself a drink when she goes out to eat with Velvet for her thirteenth birthday? Why does she warn Velvet not to say anything to anyone about her slip?

## Vocabulary

telenovela, entreating, conferred, imperiously, hectoring, inaccessible, vilest, brawling, obnoxious, aggrieved, benignly, gravitate



## Pages 230 – 261

### Summary

In “Ginger,” Velvet called Ginger from the school social worker’s office telling her that her mother had a disease and was going to die. Later, Ginger got a call from the social worker to tell her that Silvia was not dying, she only had irritable bowel syndrome. She had told her daughter she was dying to teach her a lesson. The social worker admitted she had never heard of a mother doing that to her daughter before.

In “Velvet,” Velvet snuck out of the house to go to Alicia’s party. She felt out of her league when she reached the address that Alicia gave her because all of the women were so dressed up. When Velvet said that Dominic had invited her, the bouncer at the door let her inside the club.

In “Silvia,” Silvia woke up from a nightmare. She went to check on Velvet and found only clothes in her bed. Silvia was afraid.

In “Velvet,” she could see people dancing, drinking and having sex in the rooms of the club that she had entered. A boy who had once approached Velvet on the street offered Velvet a cigarette. When Velvet asked where Dominic was the boy said he did not know but that he was right there. Velvet saw Brianna and her girls glaring at her because she asked about Dominic. The boy put her hand on his penis but when she jerked it away he slapped her. Dominic came to her rescue and took her outside.

Dominic told Velvet that Alicia had “played” (236) her by inviting her to the party. He told her that she needed to go home. Because Velvet played up to him, he started to kiss her but an elderly man ordered Dominic to leave Velvet alone. He said that he was her grandfather. Velvet surprised herself by responding to the man and acknowledging that he was her grandfather even though she had never met him before. At the bus stop the man directed Velvet to the correct bus. He told her to tell her mother that she loved her. After she got on the bus Velvet looked back at the man but he was gone.

When Velvet arrived home her mother grabbed her by the throat and pushed her up against the wall. Her mother said she could kill her but did not think it was worth it. She dragged Velvet into the bedroom and made her sleep on the floor. Velvet tried to tell her mother that she loved her but her mother told her not to manipulate her.

As Velvet lay on the floor, she wondered if she had imagined the man. She knew she did not because Dominic had seen him as well and talked to him. She wanted to talk to Dominic again so she got up and went outside. Instead of trying to get on the bus, Velvet just sat on her front stoop and thinking of how Ginger was nice but she was not familiar with Brooklyn and her life there. As a result, Velvet threw her Ginger doll down into the sewer.





In “Ginger,” even though she had not thought of Michael for years Ginger began fantasizing about him regularly. These fantasies had begun when Ginger slipped up and had her first drink during dinner with Velvet. Because she felt she could not talk to Paul about the slip as she feared he would connect it to Velvet, she decided to go to one of her old AA meetings. Michael was there.

In “Velvet,” because she wanted to hurt Ginger, Velvet pointed out Ginger’s bald spot and then asked if she had been out drinking again. Ginger warned her if she ever talked about that again their relationship would be over.

At the barn, Beverly was working with Joker in the ring. Velvet sensed that Joker was scared while Beverly was both excited and scared. Velvet watched as Beverly teased Joker with the whip. She wanted to take the whip away and use it on Beverly. Inside the barn, Gare was watching Beverly and crying. Velvet went to Pat. Pat first tried to defend Beverly’s ways and then said that there was nothing that she could do.

Because Pat would not do anything, Velvet asked Gare to get a bridle and help her. Velvet asked her to help her get the bridle on Fiery Girl and help her get on the horse’s back. Gare looked happier when she sensed what Velvet was doing. When Velvet got on Fiery Girl, the horse started walking and Gare hollered. Pat came out of her office and tried to grab the reins but Velvet already had the horse headed out of the barn.

When Beverly saw Velvet on Fiery Girl she turned and Joker reared up behind her. Velvet saw Beverly fall but did not see what happened next because Fiery Girl began running. Velvet pulled the reins and yelled “whoa” at Fiery Girl but she did not stop. It was not until they reached a fence that Fiery Girl reared and Velvet fell off backwards landing on her back and head. Velvet’s vision was blurred and she felt dizzy. She called the mare but the horse would not come.

Velvet threw up as she thought about how little she was worth. She remembered Ginger threatening to end their relationship and her mother telling her she was not worth killing. She remembered having oral sex with Shawn to make Dominic jealous. Instead, Dominic would not look at her the next time she saw him. She hit herself and called herself names.

Velvet suddenly realized her horse was standing over her with her nose on her shoulder. Fiery Girl licked her face and hair. Velvet saw that she was scared. Velvet tried to reassure the horse but only seemed to make her more scared. Velvet got her calm and got back on her. They were headed toward the barn at a trot when she saw Pat and Beverly headed her direction. Pat and Beverly both looked surprised to see Velvet on Fiery Girl.

In “Beverly,” the narrative makes a rare shift to Beverly’s perspective. Beverly was angry because Velvet claimed that Fiery Girl loved her. She did not believe that love came into play when training a horse. She thought a trainer needed to make a horse feel like it was worthless so that it would do everything to prove that it was not. At the same time,



Beverly admitted she would not kill a horse in training because she knew horses were worth more than she was; she was the one who was worth nothing.

In “Ginger,” when Ginger first saw Velvet and Pat she thought Velvet had won some sort of prize. Instead, she learned that Velvet had been in an accident and that she probably had a concussion. Pat told Ginger that Velvet had been expelled from the barn because she had broken the rules by riding Fiery Girl bareback and almost getting Beverly hurt.

On the way to the hospital, Ginger tried to get Velvet to understand the consequences of her actions even though Velvet looked pleased with herself. Velvet said that Pat was going to let her ride her horses but Ginger did not believe her. At the hospital when Ginger learned that they could not treat Velvet without her mother’s permission, she thought for sure that she had lost Velvet.

In “Velvet,” Velvet did not call her mother but instead called her cousin for permission to be treated. She knew that Ginger looked scared because she was afraid of Velvet’s mother. The doctor said that he thought Velvet was fine.

In “Silvia,” Silvia remembered a memory from when she was pregnant with Velvet and had just moved to America from DR. She was staying with Miguel, her lover’s brother, while she waited for him to come to America. During the time she stayed with Miguel, he had taken her to the beach and she had collected shells.

When Jesus had called her and said his wife was pregnant and that he would not leave her, Silvia looked in the mirror and wondered who would want a child who came from a person with her background. When Velvet was born, she had dark skin. It was confusing to Silvia because she and Jesus were both light skinned. It was her Aunt Maria who called the baby black velveteen and said she would have a hard life.

In “Ginger,” Ginger learned that Pat really did invite Velvet to come and ride at her stables. Pat lined out good reasons for Ginger that Velvet needed to continue to ride even if she had been barred from the barn. One of these included Pat’s belief that riding was therapeutic for Velvet. Pat told Ginger she needed to impose some discipline at her house so Ginger assigned Velvet some math workbooks as well as extra credit essays.

Velvet told Ginger she did what she did to keep Beverly from abusing Joker. She said she had told Pat about the abuse but that she had not done anything. Ginger tried to make Velvet understand that Beverly might take what she had done out on Joker. Ginger explained to Velvet that if she had been hurt when she fell off Fiery Girl her mother would have been upset. Velvet told Ginger that her mother would not have been destroyed. Ginger thought it would have been a relief to have a mother who could not be destroyed since her mother was always telling her that Melinda’s behavior would destroy her.

In “Velvet,” Velvet talked about all the things she had to do in order to get to go to Pat’s house and ride her horses. When Estella asked Velvet why she had acted as she had, Velvet explained that Beverly had been hurting Joker. Estella looked concerned. When Velvet apologized to Beverly, Beverly commented that there was a time when an adult



could beat a child in order to make them behave. Velvet told Beverly that her mother did beat her.

In “Silvia,” Silvia admitted that she understood why a man went into a theater and shot many people. She understood what it was like to want things and have nothing. She had even lost her job. Silvia repeated to herself The Lord’s Prayer. She felt like the horse that Velvet told her about, the one that was locked in fear and hardness.

In “Velvet,” on the way to Pat’s house and barn, Velvet thought about how Shawn had told her that Ginger was nice because she had other people to do her violence for her. At Pat’s barn, she introduced her mare, Chloe, and the gelding, Nut. When Velvet asked, Pat told her that she did not think that Beverly would hurt Joker or Fiery Girl because of what had happened.

Pat told Velvet that she and Beverly had gone to school together. Beverly was Estella’s half-sister. As they worked, Velvet asked Pat what a competition was and why Estella wanted her to be in one. Pat said that Velvet could still be in a competition if she could behave herself and follow instructions.

In “Ginger,” Ginger sensed that as a 13-year-old, Velvet had already lost the coolness of her childhood when it came to relationships with boys. When Ginger asked, Velvet told her that there was a boy she liked a lot. Ginger thought of the differences between herself and Melinda as teenagers. She believed that Melinda was a natural. She wondered why Melinda had to be hurt in the way she was.

## Analysis

Silvia’s abuse of her daughter continues in this section of the novel. She first tells her daughter that she is dying from a stomach disease when she really only has a non life threatening illness. When the social worker at school asks Silvia why she told her daughter she was dying, she said she was trying to teach her a lesson. After Silvia realizes that her daughter had snuck off to a club in the middle of the night Silvia is frightened for her daughter but does not tell her this. When Velvet got home, Silvia tells Velvet she is not worth killing.

In Silvia’s sections of the novel, the reader realizes it is not hatred for her children that causes her to act as she does but deep unhappiness and despair. “They are beautiful; my children smile and reach for them, thinking they can have them — their smiles, their hope destined to go black and die” (257). She thinks it is cruel to tempt her children with possibilities she believes they can never achieve. In other aspects of her life Silvia struggles with behavior problems with her children like any other mother might. “If you love me, act like it. Don’t play bullshit stunts like you just played and then come at me, Oh, I love you. That drama might work with your social worker. I’m sure it works with Ginger. But it don’t work with me” (262) Silvia indicates that she believes Velvet is trying to manipulate her, just like she manipulates Ginger and the social worker at the school.



To make matters worse, Velvet's "friends" at school recognize her gullibility and are luring her into situations where she will get hurt. Alicia uses Velvet's friendship with Strawberry to get her to go to a club where she knows Dominic and Brianna will be. Velvet falls for the trick but luckily Dominic is there to keep her from getting hurt. He takes her outside to try to get her to go home but is influenced by the infatuation Velvet has for him and almost takes advantage of her himself.

It is against this backdrop of negativity that Velvet arrives at Ginger's house to find Beverly abusing Joker with the whip. Velvet can relate to Joker's fear and his inability to decide what he should do, to decide what action will not cause him to be punished more. She sees even the ultra tough Gare crying because of what Beverly is doing to Joker. When Pat refuses to do anything to stop what Beverly is doing, Velvet takes matters into her own hands. Gare helps her in the stunt where she rides Fiery Girl bareback in order to distract Beverly from tormenting Joker.

Velvet's time alone in the field after she fell when Fiery Girl reared is a kind of coming to reality moment for Velvet. She hears in her mind all of the negative things people have said about her in the past week. "I fell onto my knees and the sound became words. I hit myself and said them: Ugly stupid chicken-head bitch. Worthless, stupid. Nobody wants you. Even the horse doesn't want you. You're worse than shit. Even the horse knows. You're not worth it" (244). In the past, Velvet has struggled against accepting these words about herself that others, particularly her mother, tells her. In this moment of raw physical and emotional pain, Velvet unleashes her unhappiness on herself. She hits herself and calls herself names.

When Fiery Girl comes to Velvet, Velvet realizes that she has to stop concentrating on her own pain and think about her horse. She senses Fiery Girl is scared, but that she overcame her fear to make sure Velvet was okay. Velvet knows she has to push aside her own feelings and do her best to reassure the mare.

Regardless of how wrong Velvet's actions were in riding Fiery Girl without permission, she has made a definite impression on Pat. When Ginger first sees Pat and Velvet walking to the house together, the expressions on their faces indicate that Velvet had won some sort of prize even though Pat's words tell her that Velvet had a riding accident and probably has a concussion. When Pat and Beverly first see Velvet riding Fiery Girl they have different expressions. "Pat with her face like she just saw God, Beverly like somebody'd stuck a rake in her face" (245). Both women are surprised by Velvet's ability to control the horse that no one else could even touch.

It is in this section that Velvet acknowledges the differences in herself and Ginger because of where they live. "I thought, upstate is nice. But compared to here, upstate is like somebody dreaming to themselves" (238). Velvet compares where Ginger lives to her neighborhood in Brooklyn in a simile. Velvet knew that in reality, her neighborhood was always going to be different from Ginger's and it was a difference in their lives that Ginger would never understand. Because Velvet has come to the point that she realizes Ginger will never be there for her in the problems that plague her in her neighborhood, Velvet symbolically throws the doll that represents Ginger into the sewer.



Another difference in Ginger and Velvet lies in the strength of the people with whom they associate. Ginger makes a comment to Velvet that if anything were to happen to her, it would destroy Velvet's mother. Velvet corrects her, telling her that her mother would not care if she were hurt. Ginger thinks to herself: "It would be a relief to have a mom who could not be destroyed. My mom used to say that Melinda was going to destroy her and that if I ever 'went like Melinda' it would destroy her" (254). Ginger had been plagued all of her life by her mother's threats that Melinda's behavior was going to destroy her. Ginger was threatened with destroying her mother if she ever became like Melinda. While Ginger may think that having a mother who was not so easily devastated by what her children did might be a relief, Velvet would not necessarily agree. She would like to have a mother who could admit that she loves her children and would be hurt if they were to get hurt in some way.

In this section of the novel the only chapter narrated by Beverly is included. She describes the way she feels about the idea that a horse might love its owner and how the owner should use love to manipulate a horse. "Sure you give it love, just a touch. And then you make it crave the love, make it try to please you for another little taste — it will turn itself inside out to show you it's good; you make that horse prove it over and over, every time" (246). Beverly's attitude toward being stingy with love is similar to the attitude of Velvet's mother. Velvet, like the horses that Beverly trains, needs to hear that she is loved and accepted regardless of her behavior. Because her mother refuses to give her any love, Velvet tries different, not always good, ways to get love and acceptance from someone.

There are two comparisons worth noting in this section of the novel. The first comes when Velvet visits the club where Alicia said she was having a party. "I wanted to turn around and go home, but I couldn't stop looking: they were heaven-beautiful with a little hell added for flavor. The women like lightning hitting the ground, the men like thunder calling back" (232). Velvet uses the imagery of heaven and hell, thunder and lightning in a simile to describe the people she sees waiting to get into the club where the party is being held. In another comparison, Velvet compares the horses to the people in her Brooklyn neighborhood. "The horses have what the people here have. They get beat down and locked up but still, when they run, nobody can stop them" (239).

## Discussion Question 1

Do you think that Velvet is right in stopping Beverly from hurting Joker? Do you think she does it in the right way? Why or why not?

## Discussion Question 2

Discuss the appearance of the grandfather figure in this section of the novel. What does the grandfather represent?



## Discussion Question 3

Compare and contrast Beverly's idea of love with that apparently held by Velvet's mother. How are they similar? How are they different?

## Vocabulary

floridly, coincidence, insouciant, crave, antics, indefinitely, volatile, cadence, primitive



## Pages 264 – 295

### Summary

In “Velvet,” Pat started teaching Velvet how to jump horses. After the lesson was finished, Velvet asked Pat about Fiery Girl. She wanted to know why Pat did not keep her at her stables if she belonged to her. Pat admitted if she had a stall for the mare and a divider fence for the paddock, she would move the mare there because she was behaving so much better. Velvet snuck out of the house one night to visit Fiery Girl. Even though she brought treats, the horse acted like even she was mad at her for disobeying.

Velvet felt a special connection with Chloe when she rode her, a connection she had never felt with Fiery Girl. Velvet discussed this feeling with Ginger who told her that just because she did not feel that feeling with Fiery Girl, that like love it did not mean that it was not there.

In “Ginger,” Velvet did the work that Ginger asked her to do without groaning too much. She was aware that Velvet was still not turning in her homework. She also became aware that Velvet was lying to Edie during the time they spent together. Edie commented to Ginger that she must have been proud because Velvet had gone from failing to the top student in her grade.

In “Velvet,” Velvet did not have a good response when Ginger asked her about the lie she had told Edie. Ginger tried to explain to Velvet that lying would create a distance between them but Velvet argued that she was not lying. She got up and went to the barn to see Fiery Girl.

In “Ginger,” Ginger did not talk to Paul about Velvet’s lies. Instead she talked to other women, some of whom were in Becca’s clique. They tried to convince Ginger that she was competing with Velvet’s mother. They explained that Velvet’s mother wanted her to fail and that was why Velvet was not turning in the homework even though she was doing it. One said Ginger was interfering in Velvet’s life without knowing anything about their culture or background. One of the women tried to console Ginger by telling her that she was sure she was doing a good thing but that it was complicated; Ginger was still angry.

In “Velvet,” Pat and Velvet went to Wildwood to load Fiery Girl into a trailer for the trip to Pat’s house. When the horse refused the trailer, Velvet thought about the way she had been tricked before by the girl Fiery Girl liked. She thought she was going home but was instead hurt by being taken to a strange stable. When Velvet was able to understand the horse’s hurt and get her into the trailer, Estella told Velvet she had done a good job like she meant it.



In “Ginger,” Ginger and Paul took Velvet to a faculty party with them. One of the women who was friends with Becca approached Velvet telling her that she should come to the stable where her daughter rode. After Paul excused himself, Ginger could tell that Velvet’s attention was elsewhere. She looked in the direction of where Velvet was looking and saw Paul talking to a woman with red hair. When Ginger later looked for Paul both he and the red haired woman were gone.

In “Velvet,” Velvet was distracted by her thoughts of Paul with the other woman during a trip to the county fair. She had noticed there was no fight that night and wondered if Ginger had not seen the way Paul was with the other woman. Velvet did not like the barrel racing and told Ginger she did not want to ride in that sort of competition. She did ask if she could go to the other barn like the woman had suggested. Paul said he thought it would be a good idea but Ginger did not answer right away.

In “Ginger,” Velvet did not seem to want to talk when Ginger called her after she got home from her visit. Ginger called back the next week and Dante told her that Velvet was asleep.

In “Velvet,” Velvet finally asked her mother why her father never sent her birthday cards like he sent to Dante. Her mother told her that the man who was Dante’s father was not her father. She had asked him to allow Velvet to call him her father. She told Velvet that the shells she thought came from her father were actually some that her mother had collected on the beach while she was pregnant with Velvet. She hugged Velvet and Velvet felt protected by her mother for once. When Silvia told Velvet that her father had never come back for them from the DR that was what she meant when she told Velvet she had bad blood. Velvet told her mother that just because her father was bad did not mean that she was bad as well. Velvet noticed her mother looked hurt. She informed Velvet that she had lost her job.

In “Ginger,” Ginger got a call about Velvet having turned in a beautiful paper about a horse. The teacher said she had not told Velvet about it because Velvet had not been at school that week and she had been unable to contact the family by phone.

In “Velvet,” Velvet remembered seeing older kids from her school abusing an old man. The teachers had yelled at them all because of the abuse. When one of the teachers commented it could have been the kids’ father or grandfather, Velvet knew it could not have been hers because she did not have a father or a grandfather.

In “Ginger,” when she talked to Velvet next, Velvet asked Ginger if she could help her get into a better school. She said they would think about it if Velvet could get her grades up.

In “Velvet,” Velvet spent her time after school looking for Dominic. She went to the spot where the old man was abused and wondered what it was like for the abusers and the man being abused.

In “Paul,” Paul refused to talk to Ginger about sending Velvet to Catholic school. Paul knew he had not only said hateful words to her but had said them in a hateful way. He





knew he should have comforted her but he had just learned from Polly that since she had finished her degree, she was leaving. She had broken up with him.

In “Velvet,” Velvet tried to call Shawn back to understand his comment about Ginger having other people to do violence for her. He never called her back.

In “Ginger,” when Ginger told Velvet they could not pay for a private school Velvet said she understood. She would not commit to a day she would come back to ride. Meanwhile, Ginger felt there was too much distance between herself and Paul to talk to him.

In “Paul,” Paul did not think that Ginger realized he had cheated on her because she was too focused on Velvet.

In “Velvet,” because Velvet never got an answer from Shawn on the phone, she finally went to his house. She learned from his grandmother that he had gotten shot. Velvet felt numb and wished she could be with her mare. She tried to call Paul and Ginger but did not get an answer. She did not leave a message.

In “Ginger,” Ginger admitted that at the end of the meeting she had attended with the hopes of finding Michael, they had gone off alone together. At Michael’s apartment, Ginger’s phone had rung--a call from Velvet that she did not answer. Michael suggested they go into the other room.

In “Velvet,” Velvet did not want to talk to her mother about Shawn because she did not want her brother hearing about his death. She decided to try to talk to Lydia. When Lydia heard what Velvet wanted to talk about, she told Velvet she needed to go to the police. Velvet said the police knew but Velvet wanted to talk to someone; she could not talk to her mother because she was too stressed about losing her job. Lydia let Velvet come in but asked her not to talk about the shooting because she did not want her children knowing about it.

In “Ginger,” when Ginger called Velvet back her brother answered and said he did not know where Velvet was. She asked him to have her call when she came home. Meanwhile, she sat outside and thought about her encounter with Michael.

## Analysis

The reader is reminded how difficult Velvet’s life in Brooklyn is when her friend is shot because “He was just there” (292) according to the boy’s grandmother. Even though Velvet was not really close to Shawn, his death still shocks her. She had wanted to talk to him about a comment he had made about Ginger being able to be nice because she had someone else to do violence for her. Now, violence has taken this acquaintance.

Another violence that touches Velvet’s life is the beating of the old man by students in her school. She is both upset by what happened and curious about it. When she goes to the area where the old man was made to crawl through glass, she sees what she



believes to be blood on the pavement. Although Velvet had seen a group of guys in the area where the man was beaten and sensed that they were up to no good, she had not gone closer to find out for sure what was happening. Later, the students were lectured by their teachers because no one had stepped in to help the man. They had used a technique to make the students guilty by saying it could have been their father or grandfather getting hurt. Velvet is immune to this technique because her grandfather is dead. She has also just learned the truth about her father.

Velvet's mother picks this time to tell Velvet the truth about her father. Velvet prompts the conversation by asking why he sent birthday cards to Dante but never to her. Velvet's mother tells her that her father had told her that he would come from the DR for them but never did. She says this is why she always tells Velvet that she has bad blood. Velvet stands up for herself when she tells her mother that just because her father did not do what was right does not mean that she has bad blood as well.

Meanwhile in Ginger's world, Velvet knows that Paul is having an affair even though Ginger does not recognize it. Velvet is not sure how to react since she senses that Ginger is unaware of the affair. Ginger worries because she senses that she and Paul are not close but does not seem to know why. She describes that as they lay next to each other that Paul was "like something chaotic happening somewhere far away from me" (290). At the point after Paul has gotten away with his affair and the woman has broken up with him, he seems to take out his frustration on Ginger. It is almost like he wants her to know what he has been doing and to feel as hurt and angry as he does. At one point, Paul indicates he believes Ginger did not notice anything wrong in their marriage because she was so focused on Velvet. Paul indicates that it was "almost insulting" (291).

Meanwhile, because Ginger cannot talk to Paul about the troubles she is experiencing with Velvet, she tries to talk to the women who are friends with Becca. The answers they give her are not the ones for which Ginger hopes. One reason is that Velvet is trying to make both Ginger and her mother happy. She works hard for Ginger because she knows that is what Ginger expects but she also knows that her mother expects her to fail. Velvet is acting in the only way she can in order to placate those two opposing worlds. Meanwhile, Ginger learns that Velvet has told Edie that she has gone from failing in school to the top of her class. When Ginger asks Velvet why she lies, she is not able to give her a good answer.

One of the women to whom Ginger talks about Velvet gives her the following suggested answer to the problem: "She just may be highly ambivalent about somebody else messing around with her kid. Somebody white, with money, who doesn't know anything about their culture" (293). Although the woman who makes this comment makes Beverly mad, the comment really hits the head on the problems that Velvet is suffering. She is trying to understand how some people can live a life like Ginger—a life that Velvet considers a dream for people in Brooklyn—when she and her family struggle with poverty and violence. From her point of view as a white woman with a good middle class lifestyle, Ginger simply does not understand the troubles Velvet and her family face in Brooklyn.



Note how the trapdoor has become a metaphor for hell. The image was first introduced when Velvet had the dream about her grandfather showing her a trapdoor in Ginger's backyard that led to hell. In the chapter in which Michael invites Ginger to go into another room with him she indicates "The trapdoor opened and I went down the stairs" (294). This indicates that her attempt to have an affair with Michael is a step toward hell for her.

## **Discussion Question 1**

Why do you think Velvet is doing her homework with Ginger, but then not turning it in at school? What does her inconsistent behavior mean?

## **Discussion Question 2**

As Velvet gets older, how does it get more difficult for her to reconcile the differences between her neighborhood in Brooklyn and Velvet's lifestyle?

## **Discussion Question 3**

Why is it significant to Velvet that when loading Fiery Girl into the trailer, Estella tells Velvet that she did a good job like she really means it? What does this say about both Estella and Velvet?

## **Vocabulary**

stilted, clique, contradicts, oblivious, synchronized, inventive



## Pages 296 – 328

### Summary

In “Velvet,” Velvet wished she could see the Haitian lady.

In “Ginger,” when Velvet finally called Ginger she said she had not been going to school because something bad had happened. She told Ginger about Shawn getting shot.

In “Velvet,” Velvet went back to school because Ginger told her that she had to do so. She began turning in some work and paid attention to the teachers. In the time after she got out of school before she picked Dante up Velvet spent her time walking around looking for Dominic. It was on the day that Velvet decided that she was not going to look for Dominic any more that she found him.

Dominic told her about what had happened to Shawn. She told him that the man who came up to them on the street was not her grandfather. Dominic told her that she was strange but when she started to walk away he invited her to get something to eat with him. While they ate, Dominic told Velvet that she carried herself differently from other people, even when she was 11. He added, however, that he would like to see her on a horse.

In “Paul,” Ginger told Paul about Shawn’s death only when it woke her up in the middle of the night. He sensed that she wanted to be a better person so that she could protect Velvet. Paul indicated that if she had asked about Catholic school at that time he would have said yes.

In “Ginger,” Ginger convinced herself her life was better without Michael because Velvet needed her to be an adult.

In “Velvet,” Pat knew right away something was wrong with Velvet when Ginger dropped her off for a lesson. Velvet was trying to jump Fiery Girl but was unable to focus on jumping. She felt Fiery Girl getting frustrated. Pat had her dismount and take Fiery Girl through some trust exercises. Even though she was still thinking about Dominic and his promise to come see her, she began to connect with Fiery Girl.

In “Silvia,” Silvia warned Velvet to watch herself around men. When Velvet smarted off to Silvia, Silvia slapped her daughter’s face with her house slipper. When Velvet cried, Silvia told her it would be worse if her man hit her to which Velvet replied that he would not hit her. Silvia felt she was doing right by hitting her daughter because she was getting the truth out of her.

In “Ginger,” Velvet did not show up for her next visit. Ginger wondered what she should tell Paul and finally decided to tell him that Velvet had called to tell her she was sick but Ginger had already left to go to the train station.



In “Velvet,” Pat was mad at Velvet the next weekend when she did come to see her horse. She told her that Fiery Girl had been looking forward to seeing her. Borrowing an idea from the novel *The Little Price*, Pat told Velvet that because she had tamed Fiery Girl, she was responsible for her. Even though Velvet sensed that Fiery Girl was not afraid of the jumps this time, she still would not jump. Velvet felt it was because the horse sensed Velvet had no jump left in her.

In “Ginger,” Ginger got a call from Silvia through a translator asking her to have Velvet for Christmas because she was getting into trouble in Brooklyn. Silvia also told Ginger that Velvet had an “A” on her report card.

In “Paul,” Paul asked Dante what he wanted to be when he grew up when the two families met for Christmas. He did not really understand when Dante told him he wanted to be a “statue of the suffering of hell” (311). It was only later that Paul realized that Dante was saying he believed he would grow up to be dead.

In “Velvet,” things at Ginger and Paul’s house did not seem the same for Velvet because she was not sure if Ginger really did not know about the affair or if she just pretended she did not know.

Velvet walked to the barn and thought about the night Dominic had finally come to visit her. He had been scared but said the people of whom he was scared would go to Brianna’s house. He was busy with texting but stopped at some point and saw the look in Velvet’s eyes. He kissed her, raising her shirt and fondling her breasts. He told her they could not do it all because he was with Brianna. She asked him if he was with Brianna, why he was talking to her at all. He said he loved her and they lay down on the bed together with their shirts off. Velvet noticed the Bible verse tattooed on his chest. They talked about their pasts and their dreams. Velvet told him about Fiery Girl. Dominic told her he had once thought he could be an actor. He said he would show her the picture of him as Romeo in a play. Velvet ended up giving him oral sex.

In “Ginger,” Ginger realized something was different when Velvet would not lean against her when they watched a movie together. She knew it was because someone else had made touch different to the girl, and that she no longer trusted it.

In “Velvet,” during her Christmas visit, Fiery Girl finally took the jumps for Velvet. She believed if she could get good enough she could win a competition, get some money and get herself fixed up, and then go find Dominic. Fiery Girl had tried to resist the bit but Velvet slapped her and believed it made the horse act better.

Back at home Velvet fixed herself up the best she could. On the bus she wondered why she was looking for Dominic. When she got to the place where she had seen him before, the building was dark and empty. As she was getting ready for bed back home, Mr. Figuera, the man who was renting their room was coming back from Bushwick. Velvet asked if he knew Dominic. He asked if she was mixed up with him. He said Dominic was not bad but just involved in some things that had the potential to go bad before Dominic would even realize what was happening.



In “Ginger,” Ginger learned from Velvet’s teacher that Velvet wandered from doing what she was supposed to and had even gotten a detention for bullying a teacher. The teacher said a group of girls had picked on a male teacher.

In “Paul,” he and Ginger had Velvet visit them so they could talk to her about what she had done. Velvet had at first lied about her involvement in the bullying but when Ginger ordered her to stop lying Paul could sense Velvet getting angry. Ginger shouted at Velvet when Velvet said she did not know why she had treated the teacher like she had. Velvet argued they had not hurt the man but Beverly told her that they had hurt him like Beverly hurt the horses. As a punishment for her actions, Velvet was not allowed to see the horses that weekend. Ginger told her she wanted her to write about why she had treated the teacher as she did.

In “Velvet,” Ginger explained to Velvet how her period could cause her emotions to fluctuate and feel angry for no good reason. Velvet wished she could explain to Ginger how a person could not be weak around horses. If a person could not handle a horse, like the teacher could not handle his class, he did not need to be there.

In “Ginger,” Velvet wrote two different times about why she had treated the teacher as she had. In her first writing she said she did it because she was afraid not to go along with the other girls. She handed Ginger a second sheet and asked her not to read it until she was on the train. On this sheet, Velvet tried to help Ginger understand how she felt about the substitute using her comparison with the horses.

In “Velvet,” Velvet went looking for Dominic. She found him eating in a diner with Brianna. She did not go inside but texted him asking why he had not texted her back. He watched as he looked at the message but then did not answer it. It was not until she was walking back home with Dante that she got a response from Dominic. At home, her mother threw a letter at her. It was from Ginger telling her that although her description was beautiful, Velvet was a person, not a horse. Additionally, Velvet’s mother told her she got a job at the candle factory. She told Velvet she was going to continue renting out the room so Velvet would have to stay on the couch.

In “Ginger,” Ginger got a call from Velvet and learned that Velvet and her mother had argued because Velvet was going to have to continue to sleep on the couch. Velvet asked if she could come live with Ginger and Paul.

In “Velvet,” during her next visit Ginger told Velvet that she could not come live there because she would miss her brother and mother too much. She did get good news from Pat that she was allowed back at the stables at Wildwood. Beverly was no longer working there because she had run off students. Estella also wanted Velvet to represent the stables in an upcoming competition. Velvet suggested she could ride Fiery Girl and Pat said perhaps if Velvet schooled her enough it would be possible.



## Analysis

This section of chapters tells the story of an extremely rough and confusing time for Velvet. She is still struggling to understand and come to terms with Shawn's death. To make matters worse, Dominic begins leading her on even though he tells her they cannot have a relationship. In addition to talking to Velvet about Shawn's death and his own desires to be an actor when he was young, Dominic gets physical with Velvet. He holds and kisses her, and does not stop her when she offers to give him oral sex. Even though he tells her that she is different from other girls in the neighborhood, he does not treat her like she is any different. Because she is so young, Velvet does not understand Dominic's actions. She continues to hunt for him and pursue a relationship even when he gives her obvious clues that he wants to contact her only on his terms.

Even though Velvet is clearly in love with Dominic, she is warned several times to stay away from him. One of the people who warns Velvet to stay away from Dominic is Mr. Figuera, the man who is renting the room Velvet's apartment. Mr. Figuera will not say that Dominic is definitely caught up in something bad but makes it clear that he does not think Velvet is safe with him. When Velvet asks if Dominic is bad, Mr. Figuera replies that he was "liable to be into shit he really don't know how deep it is until it's too late, you know what I'm sayin'?" (319). Velvet's mother also warns her to stay away from boys. Her method of warning Velvet is much more physical. She hits her, believing that she will get more information out of Velvet if she hits. "If I push her enough, she always lets the truth out. She can't hold anything back" (306).

During this hard time in her life, Velvet even has trouble with her horse. She and Fiery Girl have been practicing jumping but Velvet cannot get the horse to cooperate with her. She refuses to jump and Velvet feels it is not because she is afraid; she seems to feel Velvet's emotional tiredness.

When Velvet misses a weekend she planned to work with her horse, Pat even gets angry with her. She criticizes Velvet for not doing as she said she would do and ignoring Fiery Girl. Pat references a novel, *The Little Prince*, which teaches the lesson that when a human tames an animal, it also makes him responsible for it. Pat tries to explain to Velvet that because she has helped to tame Fiery Girl, she has a responsibility to the horse.

Velvet even shows a change in personality through her actions when she hits Fiery Girl for refusing the bit. In the past, Velvet has gotten upset and angry when she saw others abusing or hitting animals. Keep in mind that she got kicked out of Wildwood because she almost got Beverly hurt trying to distract her from tormenting Joker. Now Velvet has hit her own horse, a horse once mean and hateful because of abuse. Velvet seems to think her act of hitting Fiery Girl made the horse act better—a similar thought to her mother's belief that she could only get the truth out of her daughter by hitting her.

Velvet also gets into trouble at school when she and a group of girls pick on a male substitute teacher. At first, Ginger cannot believe what she is being told when she gets a phone call informing her of what happened. It is the first time that Paul and Ginger have



confronted Velvet together for something that she did wrong. Paul is angry that Velvet would take advantage of someone else's weakness in that way. Ginger is angry with Velvet for lying about the situation when they first asked, and then not seeming to know why she had acted the way she had.

When Velvet finally puts some thought into her actions, she compares the situation in the class room to one with horses. She tries to explain to Ginger, "You can't go into a barn weak and tell horses what to do. Horses are real. They don't care who deserves what. They do what they do and if you can't handle it, you shouldn't be there" (323). In her comparison the students are the horses while the substitute is the person trying to handle the horses. Like the handler who cannot control a horse does not need to be around horses, Velvet believes an adult who cannot handle students does not need to be in the classroom. Velvet also uses her horse analogy to explain why she went along with the crowd instead of leaving the teacher alone. She says that just like horses, when students misbehave, all of them misbehave. If one horse runs from a pack, they will all run. She explains that what she was doing was just running with the pack.

Regardless of the way Velvet has acted through this section of the novel it ends on a high note. Pat tells Velvet that she is being allowed back at Wildwood. Beverly is gone. Estella also wants Velvet to participate in a competition. Pat promises Velvet that if she schools Fiery Girl enough, she might even be able to ride her in the competition.

## Discussion Question 1

Discuss the way Velvet uses the example of the horses to explain why she treated the substitute teacher the way she did. Based on her description, do you think she understands what she did wrong? Does her explanation make sense? Why or why not?

## Discussion Question 2

Discuss Velvet's relationship with Dominic. Why does she go looking for him even though he tells her that he is with Brianna?

## Discussion Question 3

What does Velvet's act of hitting Fiery Girl say about the way she is handling the stress she is under?

## Vocabulary

biliously, cantered, liable, trifling, instigator, temperamental





## Pages 328 – 359

### Summary

In “Ginger,” Ginger says that it was Paul who would not allow Velvet to come live with them. She did not tell Velvet because she felt the girl would think Paul did not like her.

In “Velvet,” Velvet visited Spindletop. Velvet was impressed by how clean and ordered the stables were. When she told Joanne that she rode at Wildwood and was being taught by Pat, Joanne commented that Pat and Beverly were sweet.

In “Ginger,” Velvet looked troubled when Ginger picked her up from her lesson. Velvet asked Ginger how the women at the party were connected to Ginger and Paul. When Velvet asked about the red-headed lady that Paul had talked to at the party, Ginger said she did not know who she was and turned on the radio.

In “Velvet,” Velvet told the trainer at Spindletop she wanted to work on jumping. Two girls watching the lesson made her nervous. She felt like she was doing everything wrong, but noticed one of the girls looking at her like she might be a problem. Even though Velvet had wanted to talk to Pat about her experience at Spindletop, Pat was busy doing her own veterinary work to save Nut from colic. Nut survived and Pat told Velvet she had to learn how to do her own veterinary work because she did not have the money needed to properly run a business in horses.

In “Ginger,” Ginger sensed something happened at Spindletop that confused Velvet. She also felt that Velvet was feeling her out concerning her weak spot—letting Ginger know she was aware of how the snobby women affected Ginger.

In “Velvet,” Velvet and Gare rode in the ring at Wildwood together before Velvet went back to Brooklyn. Velvet had decided that even though Gare was dumb, she liked her because she helped her keep Beverly from hurting Joker. Velvet also felt that because Ginger had seemed so unconcerned about the red-headed woman that there must not have been anything to that situation.

In “Ginger,” Ginger continued to be bothered by the way Velvet asked about the women. She felt there was some sort of aggression behind her question.

In “Paul,” Paul got angry with Becca when she suggested perhaps Velvet could come take lessons at Spindletop. She said Joan had suggested that Velvet come along to a competition as a groom to see what it was like. At the end of the conversation, Becca admitted to Paul that she had heard gossip about Velvet that the girl was not very nice. There was a rumor that she had gotten kicked out of Wildwood because she got a trainer hurt as well as another girl who said she was afraid of Velvet.



When Paul introduced the idea to Ginger, Ginger was angry. She did not think that Becca meant well by her invitation. Paul tried to convince her, telling her it would be a good opportunity for Velvet but they did not have to say anything if Ginger wished.

From seemingly nowhere, Ginger asked Paul if he was having an affair. He said he was not, which was the truth. Ginger went back to talking about her anger with Becca but then stopped when she realized Paul was blushing. Even though nothing is said, it is assumed that Ginger realized at this point Paul had had an affair.

In “Ginger,” Ginger was surprised that Velvet agreed to go to the show since she would be going with two girls she did not know.

In “Velvet,” Velvet described how the girls going to the show, Lorrie and Lexy, put what looked like a clothespin on the horses’ noses so they could trim the hair out of their ears. Velvet felt as if she could do nothing right because the girls would look at the work she had done and then redo it.

In “Ginger,” Ginger wondered if Paul was having an affair. She wondered how it would change the relationship between herself and Becca.

In “Velvet,” Lexy was hateful to Velvet and Velvet had to work hard to make sure Lexy’s horse did not feel her anger. Velvet went and sat on some bleachers. She was overwhelmed by what she saw at the competition and did not understand how any of it worked. Even though being around horses usually made her feel calm, she felt something she could not explain around these horses.

In “Ginger,” Ginger got a call from Velvet saying she was coming back from Spindletop early. Velvet did not talk much about her experience at Spindletop but she did not go to the barn that day or the next. That night she did tell Ginger that she had decided that she did not want to ride in a competition. She told Ginger she would not win in a competition because all the horses at the competition were better than hers and that they were better riders than she was. She thought perhaps Pat said she was a good rider only to make her feel good about herself.

Ginger later went to the barn and asked Pat if she could talk to Velvet about the competition. Pat was silent when Ginger mentioned Velvet’s visit to Spindletop. Ginger felt the silence spoke more than words could.

In “Velvet,” after several attempts to contact Dominic, he finally met up with Velvet at Lydia’s. He would not kiss her. He told her that Brianna was pregnant and that he had to take care of her. Because she was not the typical street girl, he would not continue seeing her on the side. Velvet tried to hide her hurt from Dominic. He pulled a picture of himself as Romeo out of his pocket. Velvet asked if she could keep it but he would not let her. He warned her not to tell anyone that she had seen the picture. Before he left, he told Velvet they were friends, but that she should not call or text him anymore.

In “Ginger,” Ginger was called by the social worker at the Catholic school to see if she could help pay for damage done to the social worker’s car by Velvet. Velvet had been in



a fight where she had taken on three girls. The social worker had tried to break up the fight and at some point her car was keyed. Ginger agreed to pay half the cost of the repair. After the call she thought maybe black people were just different from white people in that they were more violent and less rational.

In “Velvet,” Ginger lectured Velvet because she had to help pay for the damage Velvet had done to the car. Ginger upset Velvet first by telling her they were drifting apart and then telling her she could not come for the weekend. She told Velvet she thought she did not even care about her horse anymore. After Velvet hung up she decided to go and try to find Dominic. When she heard her mother throwing up in the bathroom, she decided to stay at home with her instead.

In “Silvia,” Silvia had begun feeling sick at work but made it through her work day. At home she had strange dreams. When she woke, she was sick. She believed she had food poisoning from food she had bought from a food truck.

In “Velvet,” Velvet took care of her mother that night just like her mother had taken care of her when she was sick. She knew her mother noticed she was wearing makeup but did not comment on it.

In “Paul,” Paul’s sponsor at AA advised him not to tell Ginger about the affair that he’d had. He said that if Paul really felt he had to have the conversation with Ginger, he should start by asking why she had asked about an affair. When he did so, Ginger said that she had noticed a difference in him. That even Velvet had noticed something was wrong.

In “Ginger,” Ginger was most angry at Paul because she felt she was being blamed for the affair.

In “Paul,” when Ginger had indicated to him that she did not think that an affair meant anything to him, he retaliated by saying that he had felt for once like someone was paying attention to him. Paul could not bring himself to tell her that Polly had ended the affair, instead he told Ginger it was over because he wanted the woman he was with to be Ginger. When Paul asked Ginger if she loved him she said she did but that she could not feel it.

In “Ginger,” Ginger criticized herself because she believed she did not know how to play the game of relationships. She believed this was why Paul had cheated on her. She believed she was unable to do anything right.

## Analysis

The problems hiding in Ginger and Paul’s relationship come to the surface in this section of the novel. Ever since she began working with Velvet, Paul has felt he has gotten the short end of Ginger’s attention. He has admitted in the past that even his first wife accused him of being jealous of Edie and Edie was their own child. He tells Ginger that he cheated on her because he wanted to have his lover’s attention. He lies and tells



Ginger that he wants her to be the one to give him this attention. He cannot give Ginger the satisfaction of knowing that his lover broke up with him.

Paul's revelation to Ginger and Ginger's realization that Velvet sensed the truth about Paul all along causes Ginger's already low self esteem to hit rock bottom. She feels as if she is unable to do anything, even things that other uneducated women are able to do, naturally. Ginger compares herself to Velvet's mother: "But now the truth is so plain that even Velvet's illiterate mother can see it. It's clear even to her — somehow especially to her — that I couldn't even do the thing every woman on the planet knows how to do" (360). Even though Ginger was more educated than Silvia, she feels other women have an ability to sense things about relationships that she cannot sense. She feels that Velvet's mother probably wonders how Ginger managed to get a husband at all.

As Velvet matures and begins to get into more trouble, Ginger wonders if there really are fundamental differences between the emotional and psychological constitutions of whites and blacks. "I hung up and thought, Maybe they really are different from us. More violent, more dishonest — nicer in some ways, yes, warm, physical, passionate. But weak-minded. Screaming and yelling all the time, no self-control. Do her homework with her on the phone, she doesn't turn it in and lies about it. Give her all the special treatment in the world and she throws it away because she can't follow through. Just different. So Paul was right. Everybody was right. I'm racist. At least now I know" (352-353). When Ginger first considers that there are these differences between whites and blacks, she decides that she is a racist, something she had really not considered herself to be. It seems to hurt Ginger to have to come to the realization that she might not be able to make a significant difference in the way Velvet lives simply because of her culture and genetics. It is an idea that Paul, as well as others, have been trying to get her to understand all along.

When Velvet visits Spindletop, she realizes that even in the world of the whites, there are levels of privilege. After she sees how clean and organized the stables at Spindletop are she thinks that Wildwood seems dirty and low class. "But at night I was wondering, why was I at the poor, dirty place? I used to think it was so cool, but now it just seemed like crap — as Ginger would say, literally, like it had to be pulled out of the horses" (334). With a comparison point, Velvet realizes that Wildwood is not the great stables that she had always thought they were. She had once been grateful for her ability to ride and take lessons at Wildwood, but after seeing Spindletop, she is afraid that she will not be able to compete against the girls whose families have more money.

Pat also teaches Velvet a valuable lesson when she lets her help her take care of Nut. Nut is suffering with colic, a disease that has the potential to be deadly to horses. Because she cannot afford a veterinarian to visit, Pat has to take the chance and try to save Nut herself. "She said it old and tired, like she forgot I was even there. 'I have the ability,' she said. 'I have the quality animals. But I don't have money, and it's all about money in this business.'" (334). Pat tries to stress to Velvet that even though she does not have the money she needs for fancy barns and equipment she does the best she can with her abilities. The idea is that even though Velvet may not be able to take lessons at the fanciest barn in the area, she has the ability to ride well and good basic



skills. Pat tries to help Velvet understand that money is not everything if a person has the desire and ability to do well.

Just like Ginger doubts herself when she learns that Paul has had an affair, Velvet doubts her own abilities after her visit to Spindletop. She surprises Ginger by telling her that she is not going to compete because she is not that good. When Ginger questions Velvet's doubts about herself, Velvet responds in a way that is very telling. She says she believes Pat might have told her she was good at riding: "To make me feel good about myself. To 'make a difference.'" (349). Velvet knows the difference between a real compliment and a fake one. In an earlier section she noted the difference when Estella told her she had done a good job getting Fiery Girl into the horse trailer. Velvet knew that Estella truly admired Velvet's work. Now that Velvet has been taken out of her element, she doubts that Pat is being honest in her compliments. She realizes from her lesson at Spindletop that there are many things Pat has not taught her about jumping and may wonder if she has not been taught these things because Pat does not think she can handle them.

There are a few literary techniques of note used in this section of the novel. One is a simile in which Velvet says of Fiery Girl: "I could feel her happiness like I can smell perfume" (336). In another quote, flowers are personified, or described in a human-like way. As Ginger walks through her neighborhood after Velvet has left she notes that there are "hidden flowers sleeping in red pots" (338) on the porches. The flowers are personified because they are described as sleeping.

## Discussion Question 1

Why is Velvet so distressed after her first visit to Spindletop? How does this visit show to her that even in Ginger's world, some people are more privileged than others? Why is this lesson important?

## Discussion Question 2

When Ginger allows herself to think that perhaps Velvet and other black people really are different from white people, Ginger believes that she has finally admitted she is a racist. Do you think this acknowledgement that there are differences between different cultures is automatically a sign of racism? Why or why not?

## Discussion Question 3

When Ginger learns that Paul had an affair, why does she use Silvia as a comparison point when she belittles herself? Why is her choice significant?



## Vocabulary

confrontation, secluding, subdued, perceptive, menace, brute, whimsical, obscenities, discretion, impotent, piety, amends, illiterate



## Pages 361 – 392

### Summary

In “Velvet,” Velvet noticed right away there was something different about Ginger. Ginger said that she could not talk about what had happened but that everything would be okay. Velvet went to the barn and tried to pretend that Ginger was right, that there was nothing wrong. Fiery Girl had been moved back to Wildwood. She and Pat saddled horses and rode down the path Fiery Girl had run down when Velvet rode her bareback. Pat talked to her about the competition. She explained the best thing about competing was the bond Pat felt she had with the horse she rode. At the fence, Pat told Velvet they were going to practice galloping their horses up to the fence to jump it.

In “Ginger,” Ginger fought through her own unhappiness to give Velvet the chance she needed to practice for the upcoming competition. She told Paul they could not break up until after the competition. She and Paul agreed to keep with their daily routine even though Ginger felt like some mixed-up form of herself.

In “Velvet,” Velvet described her first jump as being “beautiful-easy” (367).

In “Ginger,” Ginger searched the Internet looking for advice on whether she should reconcile with Paul or not. She clicked off the site quickly when she heard Velvet come in the door jubilant because she had seen the distance on a jump properly without even knowing how. She announced she was going to be in the competition.

In “Paul,” Paul was impressed when he finally watched Velvet ride for the first time. Paul took Ginger’s hand and told her that she was right to work so hard for Velvet. Ginger said she just wanted Velvet to win.

In “Velvet,” Velvet noticed the change in Ginger and Paul after they watched her ride. It was like one of the first times they were together. She wished they could stay like that. At her own home, Velvet’s mother sensed her happiness and even reached out to her with love. While she was sitting on the front step, she saw the Haitian lady. Velvet was surprised that the woman recognized her. She told Velvet that she thought something good was coming her way. She learned the woman’s name was Gaby Alabre.

In “Ginger,” after Velvet left, Ginger walked to the barn. She realized why Velvet liked it because it seemed safe and secretive. Paul was on the front porch when she arrived home.

In “Velvet,” when Velvet heard some other girls come into the school bathroom she pulled her legs up so they would not know she was there. She heard them mention Dominic. One girl said that even though Dominic had gotten Brianna pregnant, she could tell that he had someone else on his mind. Velvet thought about how the Haitian lady had told her something good was coming her way and thought it was related to Dominic. Velvet tried to keep herself from thinking about Dominic because he had asked



her not to call him or text him. Instead she tried to think about Fiery Girl but found her mind returning to him.

In “Silvia,” Dante woke his mother up telling her he had dreamed Velvet fell off her horse and got killed. He told his mother that Velvet said she was going to ride in a competition. Silvia tried to go back to sleep but was so angry she got up and went to Velvet’s room. When she saw the girl was asleep, she could not beat her as she had intended to at first. Besides, her friend Rasheed had suggested she find some other way to deal with Velvet since beating her did not seem to be working. Following Rasheed’s example, Silvia tried to pray. She begged the Virgin Mary not to let her daughter die riding a horse.

In “Velvet,” Velvet went again to see Dominic. When she found him, he was with another man and asked her what she wanted like he did not know her. She told him that she was going to be in a competition with her horse. Dominic replied in a sarcastic way and Velvet wondered why he was being so hateful. He finally told her that he had heard about the way she was in the habit of coming to look for him. He ordered her to stop looking for him. Brianna’s friends came up behind him as he was responding to Velvet’s comment that he had showed her his picture. He told her that was not even him in the picture and told her to leave again. As he walked away with Brianna’s friends, Velvet felt as if she were exposed to the world. She could hear her mother telling her that her actions were not her fault because she had bad blood. Suddenly she thought that her mother said that because she was trying to make her feel better.

In “Ginger,” as she walked through a graveyard on the way to have coffee with her friend, Ginger thought about how she really was on her way down. Her husband was even looking for a younger woman with which to replace her. She suddenly realized how Becca must have felt when Paul married her. She also realized she was hypocritical because she complained about Paul cheating on her when she had tried to restart her relationship with Michael. Ginger believed the only thing she had left was the possibility that she could help Velvet win the competition.

In “Velvet,” Velvet’s mother cooked a special meal for her birthday but Velvet was so hurt by Dominic that she could barely eat. Then her mother asked about the competition. Velvet said she was not riding in it because she did not want her to do so. Even though Dante knew Velvet was lying, Velvet’s mother commented Velvet had finally gotten wise.

In “Ginger,” Ginger fought with herself as she considered signing the parental consent form to allow Velvet to be in the competition. She knew the mother could sue them if something did happen to Velvet. Ginger finally got a translator and called Velvet’s mother. The woman said that Velvet did not want to be in the competition.

In “Velvet,” after Velvet told Ginger on the phone that she did not want to be in the competition, she went outside to sit. She was afraid that she had hurt Ginger enough that Ginger would not allow her to come visit again. Although she did not intend to at first, Velvet went to visit the Haitian lady.





In “Ginger,” Ginger believed that Velvet’s refusal to be in the competition would allow both Becca and Laura to believe they were right about her.

In “Velvet,” at Gaby’s house, Velvet asked her what she meant when she told her that she had a good thing coming her way. She told her about Dominic. When Gaby learned Dominic had not pressured her for sex, she told Velvet that he had respected her body. She had to respect his wishes to take care of his pregnant girlfriend.

Velvet also told Gaby about the competition. Gaby agreed that Velvet could not be in it if her mother did not want her to be in it. She did suggest there was perhaps someone who could set her mother’s mind at ease about her participation but Velvet said there was not. At that point, Velvet got a text from Dominic so she was not able to pay much attention the rest of her conversation with Gaby.

Gaby walked her outside and Velvet was surprised to see her mother there. Gaby told her mother that Velvet had carried groceries home for her. Even though Velvet felt her mother saw through the lie, she did not say anything and did not appear to be mad. It did make Velvet feel good to know that her mother had come looking for her even though she had to come to a place of which she was afraid.

In “Ginger,” Ginger spoke to Becca one day when she saw the woman sitting alone. Becca was obviously uncomfortable and told her that she was waiting for someone. She seemed more comfortable when Laura came in the door but Ginger did not back down this time. When Laura told Ginger that her act of bringing to their memory the way they had been hateful to her was inappropriate, she said she understood why they did not like her, but that they had no right to say the things they did to her. She was glad she finally said something to them about how hateful they were to her.

At home, when Paul heard what happened, he put his head in his hand like he thought it was idiotic. Ginger slapped him not only for allowing Becca to insult her for years but also for cheating on her and undermining her relationship with Velvet. Paul looked at her like he had just woken up.

In “Velvet,” Dominic’s text said that he wanted to meet her at Riverbank Park. When he asked her about the competition, she said she was not going to participate after all. Velvet asked Dominic why he acted the way he did in front of Brianna’s friends. He tried to explain to her that he had feelings for her but that he had to do what was right. He wanted to meet with her to say he was sorry, that he never should have messed with her.

When he pulled out the picture of himself as Romeo Velvet took it and tore it in half. Dominic said it did not matter because he was going to give it to her. When he walked away Velvet felt her heart crying out to him. She thought he heard it because he turned and walked back to her. He told her that Brianna’s girls were not going to bother her. He also said it was a shame she was not going to be in the competition because he thought she would win.



## Analysis

When Velvet returns to Wildwood after she had been expelled, the first thing she notices is the changes in Fiery Girl. Fiery Girl has been moved back to that stable as well. In the time that she was gone, she learned to get along with other horses from being around Pat's well behaved pair. For this reason she can be safely let out in the paddock with the other horses for exercise. She does not spend her time in her stall going out of her mind because she has to stay locked up all of the time. Instead of having a sign on her stall door that reads "Do not touch" Fiery Girl's stall has her name on it. Her stall is clean, unlike it was before because the stable hands were afraid to clean it. Even though she still bites her stall sometimes she no longer has to wear the cribbing muzzle. She even looks forward to Velvet coming and bringing the halter and tack.

Velvet decides for sure that she wants to participate in the competition after Pat let her jump a fence going at a full gallop. Even though she had not been taught to do so, Velvet was able to see the distance of the jump. This proof of natural ability is what Velvet needed to boost her confidence back up. Meanwhile, Paul watches Velvet ride for the first time in this section of the novel. When he sees for himself how talented she is he finally agrees with Ginger that she was right in pushing Velvet to ride and participate in the competition.

Problems at Velvet's home begin, however, when Dante lets it slip that Velvet has been talking about being in a competition. It is not entirely his fault since he told his mother only after he woke up from a bad dream where he dreamed Velvet fell from her horse and was killed. Because she does not want to get herself worked up, Velvet's mother decides not to wake up her child in the middle of the night but instead beat her later. She follows her friend Rasheed's advice and tries to pray to calm herself.

The picture of Dominic as Romeo again enters the action of the novel as Dominic gives it to Velvet as a goodbye gift. He does her the honor of breaking off their friendship in a proper way by meeting her in a park where they can talk in private. Velvet shows she is getting wise to pranks by the mean girls in her school by making sure that it is really Dominic before she agrees to meet him. His response to her question if it is really him texting her is "Wherefore art thou?" (393) a well-known quote from the Shakespeare play Romeo and Juliet in which Dominic once played Romeo. The picture that he gives Velvet is of him dressed as Romeo. Even though Velvet is angry with Dominic and tears the picture up, Dominic takes her anger in stride. He does not get angry at her in return. Instead, he leaves her with the promise that Brianna and her girls will not bother Velvet any more. He also encourages her to participate in the competition.

While Velvet is struggling through the pain of losing her first love, Ginger is also struggling to decide what direction she should go. She is not sure if she should try to repair the relationship with Paul or if they should divorce. Even though she feels as if she cannot go on, she is encouraged by her friend to keep going for Velvet's sake. "I laid the dishes out, and through the chaos came the special feeling I had whenever Velvet was there and I made food for her. Well now here was the other side of that



privilege, a tiny, tiny taste of what people mean when they say parenting is hard” (365). Ginger realizes at this point that being a parent involves keeping on with day to day life even when bad things have happened. She knows that she and Paul have to find a way to stay together at least until after the competition is finished so that they can support Velvet.

Meanwhile, Velvet searches for proof that her mother loves her even though she abuses her. She believes that she finds it in the special dinner that her mother cooks the night of her birthday. Velvet believes she sees another glimpse of her mother’s love when Velvet goes to visit Gaby and her mother comes looking for her. “She had come to find me, down the street she was scared of” (390), Velvet tells herself as she tries to convince herself this proves her mother’s affection. Velvet even tries to see the positive in the fact that her mother often tells her that she has bad blood. She believes that her mother is trying to make her feel better about her actions, blaming them on her bad blood instead of Velvet herself.

Trying to overcome her own feelings of lack of self worth, Ginger confronts Becca and Laura, the two women who had nasty things to say about Ginger’s relationship with Velvet. Even though they are clearly uncomfortable with her around, Ginger tells the two that their comments about Ginger playing at being a parent and interfering with a child from a different culture were inappropriate. Even though they both claim not to remember what she is talking about and accuse Ginger of making a scene, Ginger believes she can tell by the look in Becca’s eyes that she does remember what Ginger is talking about.

## Discussion Question 1

Discuss what Velvet means when she returns to Wildwood and thinks to herself: “Here is like coming back to my country, and not sneaking in like a illegal” (362).

## Discussion Question 2

Do you agree with Velvet’s revelation that her mother is trying to keep her from feeling bad about herself when she tells her daughter that she has bad blood? Why or why not?

## Discussion Question 3

Discuss Ginger’s encounter with her own set of mean girls. How does she put Laura and Becca in their places? Is she right in slapping Paul for the way he reacts when he hears what happened? Why or why not?



## Vocabulary

horrific, confronted, despised, exultant, senatorial, ambling, involuntary, dispersed, impassive, deprived, implored, intercession, petitions, decrepit, anonymous, legible, animated, aloof, forged, intention, ostentatious, bereft, retracted, stalwart, repulsive



## Pages 395 – 419

### Summary

In “Ginger,” Velvet called to tell Ginger that her mother had changed her mind about the competition. She said that if Ginger would send the permission form, her mother would sign it. When Ginger asked if Velvet’s mother would come Velvet said she would, but Ginger knew she was lying.

In “Velvet,” Pat schooled Velvet on what to expect at the competition. She told her she needed to keep herself calm and keep Fiery Girl calm and under control. Back at home in Brooklyn, Velvet felt that her mind was full of interference. She could not calm herself nor give herself confidence so she wondered how she could send those feelings to her horse.

In the morning, Velvet sensed that her mother knew something was going on even though she did not know what day the competition was. Because she knew that Velvet was up to something, she picked a fight with Velvet before she left. Her mother worked at her until she finally got Velvet to say something about being in the competition and that if she was able to ride in it, she would win. Her mother reminded Velvet she had said she did not want to ride in the competition. When Velvet argued that she could win the competition if her mother let her, her mother began hitting her.

In “Ginger,” Ginger was surprised when Edie, who was with her mother, greeted her in the grocery store, asking if Velvet was there. Ginger said she was not but that she would be competing at Grace Meadows the following day. Edie said she would come and seemed pleased that Velvet’s mother was supposed to come as well.

In “Velvet,” as Velvet’s mother hit her, Velvet yelled and hit back trying to keep her mother’s words from taking root inside her. Velvet told her mother that others believed she could ride in the competition and win; it was only her mother who thought she was worthless. Even as her mother yelled at her that perhaps she would learn when she was crippled by the horse, Velvet drug her bag down the hallway out of hearing range.

In “Ginger,” Velvet admitted that her mother probably was not coming because she might have to work. When Velvet was upstairs, Paul asked if Ginger was sure that it was Velvet’s mother who had signed the permission form. He said they could get into a good deal of trouble if she had not. After Velvet went to practice Ginger went to her room. She noticed on her dresser there was a picture of Dominic, a dried out sea horse and a piece of a blue shell. When Ginger saw the blue shell she knew she needed to do whatever it took to get Silvia to come.

In “Velvet,” Velvet and Pat visited Grace Meadows the day before the competition. Velvet’s first reaction was that the show was a small one, but then she saw Lexy with



her mom. The girl greeted Velvet but said her greeting in a way that implied she was surprised Velvet was there.

In “Ginger,” when Ginger and the translator finally got Silvia on the phone, Silvia exploded when Ginger mentioned the competition. She talked so fast the translator could not understand her. The only thing she understood from the conversation was a mention of “a can of whup-ass” (405).

In “Velvet,” as Velvet was preparing for a jump, she felt her phone in her pocket and knew it was her mother. Fiery Girl sensed her distraction and almost refused the jump. When Velvet dug her phone out of her pocket, Pat lectured her for allowing herself to be distracted by the phone. Even though it was Velvet’s mother, Pat insisted the phone be given to her for the rest of the practice session. She ordered Velvet to either get whatever was bothering her under control so that she could ride safely or to get off and go home.

It took Velvet a few trips around the arena on Fiery Girl to get herself composed but when she did Pat congratulated her for riding like a “dressage queen” (407). After Fiery Girl was cooled off and put away, Pat let Velvet have her phone back. She asked Velvet if everything was okay at home. Velvet lied and said that it was. Her mother had left two messages telling her that if she rode in the competition, not to come back home. Back at the house, Ginger asked Velvet if her mother had really signed the permission slip for the competition. She mentioned having talked to Velvet’s mother on the phone.

In “Ginger,” Ginger tried to get Velvet to call her mom but she would not do so. She said that her mother was always pissed off. She was tired of her behavior, or being yelled at and called names. When Ginger mentioned that she as well as Wildwood could get into trouble if Silvia had not signed the permission slip there was a change in Velvet’s eyes that indicated to Ginger that Silvia had not signed the form. Velvet said her mother did not care enough about her to cause legal trouble for anyone.

Going up the stairs, Velvet slipped and banged her knee. She did not cry but Ginger could feel the pain in Velvet as she held her. Velvet asked that they not talk about her mother any more. She asked if Ginger had a Bible at which she could look. Velvet flipped through the book and when she found what she was looking for, Ginger noticed she read it intently.

In “Velvet,” Velvet remembered her mother telling her friend Rasheed that she felt like she was in a hurricane of stress. She knew how her mother had felt, she felt like she had to ride a horse through that hurricane. Velvet considered telling Ginger the truth and not competing but when she thought about her mother’s perceived hurricane, she realized her mother felt she was alone in the hurricane. Velvet and Dante were part of the storm. Velvet took Dominic’s picture, the sea horse and the piece of the shell to the field where she and Fiery Girl practiced riding. She dropped them on the ground and recited the Bible verse she had looked up earlier, the one she had seen tattooed on Dominic’s chest.



In “Ginger,” even though Ginger felt she had to call Velvet’s mother, she sensed the words “no” and “don’t” (411) being spoken to her. She decided to call later.

In “Silvia,” Silvia cleaned her house as she thought about how she and her family should not be there. She thought that her prayers were not heard and there was no grace for her. She believed she was being punished for allowing Ginger to turn Velvet into a pet. She was so angry with herself that she banged the table too hard with the mop and caused the one pretty thing she owned, a vase, to fall and break. As she was reaching under the couch for some of the broken pieces she found the blue shell that she had given Velvet.

Silvia stopped herself short of smashing it because she wondered why it was under the couch. She examined it and saw that part of it had been broken off. Dante was looking at her as if he could read her thoughts. Knowing that she had just cashed a check from Ginger for \$300, Silvia told Dante to get the phone. She needed him to make a call.

In “Velvet,” when Velvet went back to the barn, she wondered why she was there. She liked Ginger but could not talk to her. She loved the horse but she was not hers. Even if she did win the competition, there was nobody in Brooklyn who would care. When she walked into the barn, she heard the horses talking to her like they had the first day she had visited the barn. She suddenly knew why she was riding in the competition even if she could not explain it to anyone else.

In “Silvia,” Silvia felt bad to make Dante talk on the phone but made him make the call. She refused to call Paul and have him make the arrangements.

In “Ginger,” Ginger wondered for a minute if she was doing the right thing by encouraging Velvet to be in the competition. A girl with purple hair greeted Velvet at the barn and Velvet told Ginger she was coming along to help. Ginger felt like she had done the right thing by encouraging Velvet when she realized Velvet looked like her mother. Instead of being a fighter alone in a tank, Velvet was a fighter out in the open. At home, Paul told Ginger that Dante had just called him. He and his mother were coming to the show.

In “Paul,” even though he felt that Velvet was the reason his marriage had been ruined, Paul was glad that Velvet’s mother and brother were coming to see the competition. He was sent to meet the train but when he got to the station, neither Silvia nor Dante were there. As he searched for them he thought about his wife’s habit of thinking she could transform everything into something more beautiful and glorious than it already was.

In “Dante,” Dante made the train reservations with his mother’s credit card. When he called Paul, Paul told them to go to a different stop but Dante did not tell his mother. When Dante did tell his mother he thought Paul wanted them to get off at an earlier stop, she just sat there like she was in a dream. Dante thought when they got off at the next stop they could call Paul but that did not work out because the phone was dead.

In “Velvet,” Velvet sensed a new form of excitement in her horse when they arrived at the show grounds. She and Pat walked the course twice with Pat giving her instructions.



When Velvet went back to Fiery Girl she realized she wanted to win. Her excitement filled her just like it filled her horse. Pat advised her to calm down and mentally go through the course with her.

## Analysis

The action of the novel builds to a climax as Velvet prepares for the competition. She tries to deal with the stress of competition as well as the stress her mother is putting on her. Velvet seems not so much interested in going against her mother's wishes but in proving that her mother is wrong in her belief that Velvet is worthless. She has been given a chance to get away from her mother's negativity and has found a sport at which she excels. She wants to believe she is good and capable winning a competition even though her mother, who has not even seen her ride, says she will not win.

Silvia decides to attend the competition but the reader is unsure of her motivation. Is she going there to try to negatively influence her daughter? Does she want to be there if Velvet does not win so she can rub how unworthy the girl is in her face? Or is she going because she really wants to support her daughter? She sees the shell that she gave to Velvet under the couch and is moved by seeing it. Even Silvia is not sure what she is thinking when she tells Dante to get on the phone and made a train reservation.

Throughout the novel, a good deal of communication between characters goes on below the surface. Instead of using spoken words, characters communicate through feelings and facial expressions. For example, when Ginger talks to Velvet on the phone she believes she understands the unspoken things that the girl says to her. Ginger describes these things about Velvet's life as "the things she never told me but that I could feel in the warm electronic phone dark where the voice is tactile and subtle as an animal" (397). The day before the competition, Ginger is able to feel Velvet's pain caused by her mother even though the girl does not talk about it. "She let me hold her. She didn't cry. But I could feel the pain beating against her body like it was too big to get out without breaking her," (409). An unspoken conversation also goes on between Silvia and Dante after Silvia finds the piece of broken shell under the couch where Velvet has been sleeping. "The TV was on but Dante was watching me like he could see what was happening, like it was a picture being drawn" (412-413). The way in which the author describes this unspoken conversation between Silvia and Dante is a simile in which Dante sees what his mother is thinking "like it was a picture being drawn" (413).

Meanwhile, much emphasis is put in this section of the novel on how important it is for Velvet to be concentrating on keeping Fiery Girl calm during the competition and not letting her get out of hand. The author includes an example of Velvet allowing herself to get distracted by her phone and messing up a jump because of her distraction. Pat warns Velvet that if she is distracted she not only takes the risk of not winning but also possibly hurting herself and her horse. As Pat describes the atmosphere of the show to Velvet, she says to her "You're also sensitive, and this will be new to you. You can't spook. You've got to be in charge, and give her confidence and comfort, all the way" (398). Velvet thinks of Pat's words and realizes that she is having trouble calming and





comforting herself. She is so worked up that she is unable to sleep. When Pat tells Velvet that she needs to put a stop to whatever it is going on inside her, Velvet gathers her inner strength and manages to get herself under control.

## Discussion Question 1

What do you think Velvet's mother changes her mind about attending Velvet's competition? Give examples from the book to support your answer.

## Discussion Question 2

Discuss Ginger's observation of Velvet that: "She looked like her mother. Like her mother the fighter. Except that, unlike her mother, she wasn't in a tank. She was out in the open" (416).

## Discussion Question 3

Why does it make Velvet feel better when she is able to hear the horses talking to her again? Discuss why hearing their voices the night before the competition is significant.

## Vocabulary

defied, tactile, repulsive, obnoxious, inflated, dressage, intently, arrogance, forestall, quixotically, egotistical, conveyance



## Pages 421 – 439

### Summary

In “Ginger,” Ginger looked for Velvet when she arrived at Grace Meadows. She hoped to be able to tell her that her mother would be coming to watch the show. No one seemed to know Velvet so she went to a pavilion where two women were talking into microphones. One of them with a strange face looked at Ginger like she knew her. The other woman pointed out where Velvet was on her horse but the horse was rearing and bucking. Ginger noticed the woman with the strange face seemed to gloat when Velvet was bucked off the horse. She realized that woman was Beverly, the trainer with the bullwhip.

In “Silvia,” as she and Dante waited for Paul, a taxi driver approached and offered to take them to Grace Meadows for half price. Even though Silvia said she would wait for Paul, the taxi driver continued to stay and talk to Silvia. He finally cut his fare down to five dollars.

In “Velvet,” Fiery Girl moved strangely under Velvet when she first mounted but a Mexican complimented Pat on the beautiful horse and its good blood. Velvet felt as if he were complimenting her as well. When they walked past the pavilion, Velvet felt Fiery Girl get tense. She tried to get ahead of the buck she felt coming but was unable to do so. Once she got her breath back, Velvet believed Pat when Pat told her everything was okay. The Ginger ran up to them irritating Pat, Velvet and the horse.

In “Ginger,” Ginger knew she should not have run up to Velvet but she sensed Velvet and the trainer connect, which seemed to give Velvet courage. When she went back to the bleachers, Ginger was shocked to see Becca was there. Ginger stumbled as she walked up to the group that included Becca, Edie and Kayla. Kayla pointed out that Paul had gone to take a call. Paul told Ginger that Velvet’s mother was coming, they had taken a taxi.

In “Velvet,” during her practice session, Velvet felt there was something bothering Fiery Girl. Velvet began to hear her mother’s voice in her head but worked to shut it out. On her practice jumps Fiery Girl hit the first one with a hoof and knocked a rail off the second one.

In “Paul,” Paul met the taxi when it arrived. Silvia nodded curtly at him and then surprised him by leading him back to the bleachers. He sensed that Silvia softened as she took in the newness of what she was seeing. Dante pointed out his sister in the ring. When Silvia saw Velvet, Paul noticed that her face lit up. Just a moment later, Paul noticed Silvia’s face was dark with anger again. When the women sitting in front of them asked if Velvet was Silvia’s daughter, it seemed to soften Silvia’s mood but she still cursed at Ginger after the women had turned around. Paul, thinking they might get sued, asked Dante to translate what his mother had just said. Dante translated her



words to be “Black is beautiful, tan is grand, but the white man is the big boss man!” (430). When Paul said he doubted that was what his mother had said, Dante only repeated the phrase.

In “Velvet,” as Velvet waited for her turn in the ring, the announcer calling the horse Fugly Girl instead of Fiery Girl made Velvet remember the day she had ridden her horse bareback to keep Beverly from tormenting Joker. She had been all alone on the day. She felt that way again.

In “Sivlia,” when Silvia saw Velvet, she did not recognize her. She saw a beautiful girl, not one who lied to her and disobeyed. In pride and fear, Silvia told Ginger that if anything happened to Velvet, she would kill her.

In “Velvet,” Velvet realized that even though she was alone, she was alone with her horse. She felt like they were riding together into the storm when Pat told her it was her turn to perform.

In “Paul,” Velvet’s mother called out to her as soon as she entered the area. He, Ginger and Dante joined her in her cries. He even heard Becca shouting for Velvet. Silvia’s cries went from supplication to cries of exhortation and then ones of pride as she realized Velvet had won.

In “Ginger,” when Velvet saw Dante and her mother, her lips quivered but instead of showing weakness, it showed Velvet’s triumph. Ginger expected Silvia to congratulate the girl but instead she spoke to her sharply. Velvet’s eyes went hard; she handed the horse’s reins to Pat and ran away.

Silvia grabbed Dante’s hand and they went after Velvet. Even though Ginger wanted to follow them, Pat told her to let them work whatever it was out as a family. They looked toward a blond girl who was throwing a fit as her trainer tried to talk to her. Ginger said she was pleased that Velvet had won. Pat added she hoped her mother had really signed the consent form because if she did not, Velvet’s ribbon would be taken away.

In “Velvet,” Velvet’s mother had said to her “So you won. That’s great, Miss Big Shot!” (436). She had no words to respond to her mother so she ran. She tried to make her way through thorny bushes to avoid her mother but heard Dante pointing out where she was. Silvia accused her daughter of disobeying her and lying. Velvet told her mother that she did not want her. She heard Dante say something about them having come all that way and Velvet said it was only so her mother could call her ugly and stupid in front of the crowd. Her mother stumbled through trying to talk to Velvet, to explain to her that she had come because she did not want Velvet to get hurt. Dante added their mother had even cheered for Velvet.

Velvet turned and saw her mother had her sandal ready to hit. She asked Velvet how she dared to treat her mother the way she had. She was crying instead of yelling and then she hugged Velvet telling her that she could have died and that she could not ride again. Velvet said she had just wanted to make her mother proud but her mother said that because of Velvet’s pride, she would not be allowed to come to see Ginger again.



When her mother rocked her in her hug and commented about Velvet's ribbon and horse, Velvet knew that her mother was proud of her.

In "Ginger," Paul joined them wanting to know where Velvet and her family were. He said Edie and Becca wanted to take a family photo. When Velvet, Silvia and Dante did come back they all looked emotional. Silvia thanked Ginger. They all had their picture taken together.

In "Silvia," Silvia was happy because she felt she had her daughter back. She even enjoyed the picture taking that followed.

In "Velvet," Velvet thought that the pictures that were taken that day captured the happiness of the celebration but that they did not capture the sadness that was in Velvet's real life, like her inability to show her ribbon to Dominic. Back in Brooklyn, she felt that even though those things had been real, it did not feel like they existed any longer.

She thought about Fiery Girl and the connection she made with the horse. Even though she did not know if her mother would let her see her horse again, she had already decided that she would go someday even if it was after she was eighteen. Velvet did not know how her life might turn out, if she would go to college or if she would have a baby by then, but she knew that she would see her horse again.

## Analysis

Velvet's nemesis appears in this section in the form of Beverly. It is because Fiery Girl senses Beverly's presence in the pavilion that she gets so out of control when Ginger rides past that structure on her way to the ring. Instead of feeling badly because of the horse's reaction to her, Beverly gloats as if she is getting some sort of revenge on Velvet by watching her get thrown off the horse.

The horse's name being announced as Fugly Girl upsets Velvet as she is about to ride. Ginger tells the announcers that the name is wrong but they refuse to change it because that was the way it was turned in. It is doubtful that either Velvet or Pat would have used the name Fugly Girl so the reader has to wonder if Beverly changed the name in an attempt to mess with Velvet. When Velvet hears the hateful nickname her horse was once called it reminds her of the way her mother said that she was alone.

Velvet vindicates herself when she rides the jumping portion of the show and does better than all of the other riders. Not only does she prove to Beverly she can perform even with her interference, but she also proves to Lexy, the girl who was so hateful to her at Spindletop, that she is a better rider even though she learned at a less classy barn than Lexy did.

The novel climaxes as Velvet and her mother come face to face after the riding competition. Velvet left her home with her mother angry with her, telling her not to come back home. In order to prove herself, Velvet felt she had to ride in the competition.



Velvet did not see the way her mother cheered for her in the bleachers, but Velvet's little brother tells her about his mother's cheering. He also reminds her that they made a long trip to see her. It is clear that Dante, for once, is trying to help his mother and sister make peace. He senses this is a turning point in their relationship and wants them to turn the right way.

Velvet's mother asks Velvet why she disobeyed her. When Velvet turns as ordered, she sees her mother in the normal stance, with a shoe in her hand, ready to hit Velvet. Instead of hitting Velvet with the shoe as hard as she can, Silvia cries and asks Velvet why she disobeyed. Velvet blames her disobedience on pride and calmly accepts her mother's punishment: she is not allowed to return to Ginger's home again. Silvia, who had resented Ginger's influence in her daughter's life, feels as if she has won because she has finally gotten Velvet out of Ginger's grip. Velvet feels as if she has won because she recognizes pride in her mother's voice and her stance when she hugs her close after they make their peace.

One quote in particular is noteworthy as it describes in a simile Silvia's response to first seeing her daughter on a horse. Paul says that Silvia's face "lit up in amazement, as before a religious icon come to life" (429). He compares her reaction to one that a person might have if they were to see a religious figurine suddenly become animated. Although Silvia does not appear to have a strong religious background, because she is Spanish, Paul connects her with the Catholic religion and how she might feel if a statue of the Virgin Mary or the figure on the crucifix were to come to life.

The ending of the novel is bittersweet as Velvet feels her time with Ginger is far away and her winning of the ribbon meaningless once she returns to the reality of her life in Brooklyn. She misses Dominic and her heart hurts for him. Even as she hurts, Velvet sees hope in her life. She is open to the possibilities of the future though she is not sure yet where the future will take her. She also promises herself that she will see Fiery Girl again even if her mother refuses to even let her return during her teen years; she intends to make the trip when she turns 18 to see the horse with whom she has formed such a strong bond.

## Discussion Question 1

Discuss Silvia's words to Velvet: "Pride is for fools and rich people" (437). What do you think she means by this statement? How does it relate to Velvet?

## Discussion Question 2

How does Velvet's act of riding in the competition help to prove her self-worth? Do you think the peace in Velvet's family found after the riding competition will remain? Why or why not?



## Discussion Question 3

The author does not give the reader any insight into how the relationship between Ginger and Paul works out. Why do you think this is significant?

## Vocabulary

vindicated, audibly, speculative, malign, resolve, diffused, averted, supplicating, exhortation



# Characters

## Velveteen “Velvet” Vargas

Velveteen “Velvet” Vargas is the main character and heroine of this novel. She is a girl whose mother came from the Dominican Republic and is trying to make a living in Brooklyn as a single mother of two children.

From the beginning, Velvet is at a disadvantage because her father abandoned her mother when she was pregnant with Velvet. Her mother's anger at Velvet's father carries over to Velvet. Velvet's mother tells Velvet at one point that she has bad blood because of what her father did. Velvet tries to argue that just because her father messed up does not mean that she will do so as well.

Velvet meets Ginger when she is an 11-year-old participant in the Fresh Air Program. Ginger gives Velvet the opportunity to learn to ride and discover her talents as a horsewoman. In exchange for her work, Velvet is given lessons at the barn next to Ginger's house. During her first visit to the barn, Velvet meets the horse everyone has been calling Fugly Girl at the time. Velvet has a special connection with this horse and eventually tames her to the point that she is able to ride her in a competition.

Life is not smooth for Velvet in her school or personal life. Because she is not like any of the other girls at her school in the way she carries herself, the other girls pick on her and try to get her worked up. They get angry with her when she turns in homework that she had put effort into and gets good grades. They make fun of her hair when her mother fries her hair with bleach and straightener. Because she and her brother have to get clothes from a charity clothes closet, they make fun of her clothes. When she wears nicer clothes that Ginger got for her, the girls still make fun of her and abuse her. She is beaten up by a group of girls a few days after she showed up for a party in a blouse and skirt that Ginger bought for her.

Velvet falls in love with a boy who is nearly four years older than she. He admits that he has feelings for her as well but has to break off the relationship because he gets his girlfriend, Brianna, pregnant. Velvet is hurt by Dominic's rejection of her because it feels like the same sort of rejection she has felt all of her life. A friend tries to convince Velvet that she needs to respect Dominic and let him take care of his girlfriend the same way he respected her and did not force her to have sex with him. Velvet does not tell the friend that she gave Dominic oral sex.

When she is only 12, Velvet's friend Shawn is killed just because he happened to be in the wrong place at the right time. Velvet is very upset by the murder and it is only because Ginger convinces her that she can get through what has happened that Velvet begins going back to school.



Velvet's life reaches a climax of stress and anticipation when she is invited to participate in a horse riding competition. Because her mother does not want her riding horses at all, Velvet knows she cannot get her mother to sign a parental permission consent form. She signs it herself and lies to Ginger when she asks if Velvet's mother really gave her permission. The weekend of the competition, Velvet's mother learns that her daughter is riding in the competition even though she had forbidden it. Velvet's mother hits her and screams at her but Velvet still leaves intent to compete.

At the competition, Velvet is distracted by the fight she had with her mother. Pat helps her to get herself under control. Velvet rides her best and wins the competition. Afterward when she sees her mother is there she is scared because she is afraid that her mother will beat her. Instead, Velvet can tell that her mother is proud of her for proving herself. It is this pride and feeling that her mother loves her that is Velvet's best gift from the competition because it is what Velvet has been craving all of her life.

## Ginger Roberts

Ginger Roberts is 43 when the novel starts. She is a woman who is desperately trying to prove she has worth. She imagines herself an artist but has never been able to get a footing in that type of career. She has recently married Paul, a university professor, whom she met at an AA meeting. Even though she wants to have children of her own, they do not get pregnant as quickly as they want.

They decide to host a Fresh Air child to see what it might be like to adopt an older child. Once Ginger meets Velvet, she fixates on her. There is no hope of Ginger and Paul being able to adopt Velvet but Ginger imagines herself being able to make a better life for the girl. It almost appears that Ginger feels she can right past mistakes by helping Ginger. Ginger feels her success with Velvet will be determined by Velvet's performance in the competition.

One of the things that Ginger seems to be hoping to make reparations for is her relationship with her sister, Melinda. Even though they had once been close, Melinda's life had been torn apart by men and drugs. Ginger had seen her sister change drastically after she was sent to a psychiatric hospital where she told Ginger that the head psychiatrist had abused her. Before she died, Melinda had become so crazy and unpredictable that Ginger did not even want to be around her. Ginger still tried to take care of her sister and spent time talking to her on the phone but she knew that Melinda could sense she was not sincere in her affection. Ginger may be fixated on Velvet because she senses how much the girl is like Melinda, from her love of horses to her lying.

## Silvia Vargas

Silvia Vargas is the mother of Velvet and Dante. She came from the Dominican Republic when she was pregnant with Velvet. She believed the man who got her





pregnant was going to come to America to join her but he did not. Instead he called and said his wife was pregnant and that he would not leave her.

Because Velvet's father left her when she was pregnant, Silvia associates his worthlessness with Velvet. She often tells Velvet that she has bad blood. It is obvious in her actions that she likes her son, Dante, better than Velvet. Silvia often hits Velvet and yells at her because she does not know another way to handle her daughter.

Because of a bad experience that she had with a horse, Silvia does not want her daughter riding horses. When she first learns that Velvet is riding horses while at Ginger's house she forbids Velvet from riding. Ginger and Velvet lie to Silvia and pretend that Velvet is no longer riding. Silvia is furious during a visit to Ginger's house when she finds out that Both Ginger and Velvet lied.

When Silvia learns from Dante that Velvet is thinking about riding in a competition, Silvia tells her daughter she does not have her permission to do so. The day before the competition Silvia calls Velvet and tells her that if she rides without her permission she should not come home again.

When Silvia finds a shell she gave her daughter and realizes that her daughter does love her, Silvia has a change of heart and decides to attend the competition. She is so caught up in Velvet's performance that she even cheers her on as she rides. After the competition, Silvia goes to find her daughter and Velvet is afraid her mother plans to beat her so she runs away. When her mother catches up to her she surprises Velvet because she also talks to her in a way that lets her daughter know that she is proud of her.

## Melinda

Melinda is Ginger's sister. Ginger seems to see her sister in Velvet and believes that she can redeem the way she treated her sister by helping Velvet.

As a child, Melinda loved horses and was confident when she rode, just like Velvet. Melinda also had the reputation of being a difficult child and lying almost pathologically, just like Velvet.

Ginger had been close to her sister when they were younger. As an older teen, their mother had sent Melinda to a psychiatric hospital when she ran away with an older man. Many years later, their mother admitted to Ginger the psychiatric hospital might not have been the right choice but that she had not known what else to do.

Melinda fought with others in the hospital and came home looking frightened. She told Ginger that one of the doctors had abused her. Melinda told her mother about the abuse but her mother never did anything about it.

Melinda died just a short time before Ginger and Paul decided to host Velvet. She'd had a stroke and was not found for several days. When they went to clean out her



apartment Ginger was surprised by the filth in which her sister was living. Even though Ginger had been trying to help her out by giving her money she felt she had failed her sister.

## Gaby Alabre

This woman, whom Velvet's mother calls the Haitian, connects with Velvet during the few times that they meet on the street. One time when the lady asks why Velvet is so sad, she tells the lady that her mother hit her and did not care if she died. The woman is able to sense that Velvet is much younger than she appears. She convinces Velvet to go home and tells her that her mother will not hurt her any more. She tells Velvet that she is blessed.

The next time Velvet sees the Haitian, she is surprised that the woman recognizes her. She tells Velvet she had been thinking of her because of a dream she'd had. She thought something good was coming Velvet's way.

One day Velvet goes to visit Gaby. She discovers she lives in an apartment with her mother and two cats. Velvet tells Gaby about her heartbreak over Dominic. Gaby asks if Velvet had sex with him. When she says no, Gaby tells Velvet she should feel better about herself because of that and because Dominic had respected her body. Gaby advises Velvet to respect Dominic in return and let him take care of the girl he had gotten pregnant.

## Estella Kadner

Estella Kadner is the owner of Wildwood, the stables where Velvet works. Velvet does not meet Estella until the day that her mother is visiting the stable. She is also the half-sister of Beverly, the trainer at Wildwood.

Estella prohibits Velvet from coming back to Wildwood after an incident in which Beverly is almost hurt by Joker when Velvet tries to distract her from tormenting the horse. When Velvet tells Estella that she endangered Beverly because Beverly was whipping the horse, Estella looks concerned. Beverly told both Velvet and Estella that a disobedient child like Velvet should be beaten. Estella seems even more concerned when Velvet tells Beverly that her mother does beat her.

When Estella watches how Velvet is able to convince Fiery Girl to go into the trailer, of which the horse was afraid, she tells Velvet that she had done a good job. It is Estella who wants Velvet to compete in the horse show because she is doing so well in her riding. Estella believes having Velvet ride in the competition will make the stables more attractive to students.



## Dominic

Dominic is the boy with whom Velvet falls in love. Dominic tries to stop himself from being attracted to Velvet because he knows that she is too young for him. He is about four years older than she is. Dominic is attracted to the way that Velvet is different from the other girls in the neighborhood. He says that he sees that she is special by the way she carries herself. Dominic shares with Velvet that he had once sensed a difference in himself from other boys his age. He had imagined himself being an actor and had even played Romeo in a play. To prove to her that she is special to him, Dominic shows Velvet a picture of himself when he was in the play.

Because Dominic gets his girlfriend Brianna pregnant, he breaks off the relationship with Velvet. Velvet is angry with herself because even though she did not let Dominic have sex with her, she did give him oral sex. At first, she continues to look for him to talk to him even though he asks her to leave him alone. He finally arranges for them to meet at Riverside Park so that he can explain to her why he cannot see her any longer.

## Paul Roberts

Paul Roberts is Ginger's husband. He was previously married to Becca. They had a daughter named Edie. Even though Paul encourages Ginger to have Velvet come for her first visit because he thinks it is a way to try out what it would be like to have an adopted child, he becomes less supportive the longer Ginger's relationship with Velvet lasts.

He recounts at one point how Becca accused him of being jealous of Edie. He seems even more jealous of Velvet because she is not Ginger's biological child yet his wife feels the need to foster her. Because he feels so unhappy and unloved, he has an affair. He winds up feeling unfulfilled even in the affair because Ginger does not even seem to recognize that Paul is having an affair. After Paul finally watches Velvet ride, he admits that Ginger was right in encouraging her talent.

## Fugly Girl aka Fiery Girl aka Funny Girl

Fugly Girl is a horse that belongs to Pat. She rescued the horse because its owner was abusing it. As a result of the abuse, Fugly Girl is dangerous. Her stall bears a sign warning people not to try to touch her. When Velvet visits the barn for the first time, the horse touches its nose to her hand right away. Pat notices the horse seems calmer when Velvet is around. She thinks it is because Velvet reminds her of the girl who owned her before she was abused.

Pat tells Velvet that Fugly Girl's name was originally Funny Girl though she did not think that name fit her very well. It is after Ginger tells Velvet that Velvet has a fiery personality that Velvet decides that her horse is fiery as well. She decides to call the horse Fiery Girl because she sees her spirit. She also does not think the horse is ugly.



## Shawn

Shawn is one of the boys who tries to get Velvet in trouble by asking her to smoke weed with him. After Shawn keeps the mean girls at Velvet's school from attacking her, she goes to Shawn's grandmother's house with him where she smokes weed and lets him fondle her. At one point, Velvet gives Shawn oral sex because she thinks it would make Dominic jealous.

When Shawn learns about Velvet's relationship with Ginger he tells Velvet that Ginger must think Velvet is some "lil' Orphan Annie" (258). He also tells her that Ginger can be nice because she could get other people to do her dirty work for her. Shawn is killed on the street because he is in the wrong place at the wrong time.

## Pat

Pat is one of the women who works at Wildwood. She gives riding lessons and also helps take care of the horses. She agrees to give Velvet lessons in exchange for work at the barn. Pat notices that Fugly Girl, the horse that no one else can touch seems to make a special connection with Velvet, that the horse seems calmer when Velvet is around.

When Velvet retaliates after seeing Beverly tormenting Joker and is expelled from the stable, Pat lets Velvet go to her house and ride her horses. She also arranges for Fugly Girl to be brought to her house so Velvet can continue to work with her. Pat tells Beverly that she feels that Velvet needs to ride horses in order to remain sane.

## Gare Ann

Gare Ann is a girl who works at Wildwood whom Velvet does not like at first. It is after Gare Ann comments to Velvet that she will be "deported" from the barn if she does not start paying attention to the rules that Gare Ann is criticized by Pat.

After Velvet sees Gare crying as she watches Beverly tormenting Joker and then Gare helps her get Fiery Girl out to distract Beverly from her abuse of Joker that Velvet decides that she likes Gare. When Velvet is allowed back at Wildwood, the two even ride horses together. Velvet invites Gare along to the competition in which she participates so that she can serve as her groom.

## Strawberry

Strawberry is the new girl in school whom Velvet believes to be cool. She thinks that if she can be Strawberry's friend, she will have the approval of the other popular girls.



Strawberry came to Brooklyn from New Orleans where she was in Hurricane Katrina. She misses her home and many of the friends with whom she lost touch because of the hurricane. Velvet reminds Strawberry of her friend Maciella and tries to get Velvet to act like Maciella and to let Strawberry put makeup on her so that she resembles her friend.

## Lydia

Lydia is the woman who lives down the street from Velvet and her mother. After her mother abuses her one day, Velvet goes to Lydia hoping that she will get some protection and sympathy. Lydia calls Ginger because she believes that she is Velvet's godmother. After talking to Ginger about Velvet and that fact the Velvet's claims of abuse had been questioned previously, Lydia is not so quick to feel sorry for Velvet. Lydia is also surprised to learn that Velvet is only 12 when most people in the community believed she was at least 15.

## Beverly

Beverly is the trainer at Wildwood. She believes that there is no damage in hitting a horse or using a whip on a horse. Velvet dislikes Beverly because of her standing on physical abuse.

At the competition, Fiery Girl is unsettled because Beverly is there. Velvet is able to calm the horse and get her to concentrate on the competition but not before the horse gets so worked up that it throws Velvet during a warm up.

## Beth

Beth is a girl who worked at Wildwood when Velvet first began going there. Velvet liked Beth until one time when Beth was let in charge of the stables while Pat and Beverly were away. Velvet went into the barn to discover that even though the horses had been fed, all of the stalls were dirty. Fiery Girl's stall was so dirty that the horse was begging Velvet to help her and allowed Velvet to clean the stable without making any move to hurt her.

## Helena

Helena is one of the girls at school with whom Velvet had been friends before they became preteens. In later elementary school, Helena began talking badly about Velvet's clothes.

One day at school Helena gets in Strawberry's face because she believes that Strawberry is trying to take her man from her. Velvet dumps her tray of food on Helena because she thinks that Helena is being cruel to Strawberry.



## Eliza Lopez

Eliza Lopez is the social worker at Velvet's school. She tells Ginger that she had once gotten child protective services involved because Velvet told her that her mother was beating her. When she was questioned by the authorities, Velvet recanted her story. For that reason, Eliza will not take Velvet's claims of abuse unless she sees bruises. At one point Eliza tells Ginger that Velvet's mother is like a brick wall and that no one can understand her.

## Michael

Michael is Ginger's lover from the time before she was married to Paul. She knew Michael during her time of drinking and using drugs. Ginger begins thinking about Michael again when she begins suspecting that Paul is having an affair. She goes to an old AA meeting she suspects he might attend and is surprised to see him. They make out but nothing comes from the reunion. In fact, Michael seems to lose interest in Ginger more quickly than she loses interest in him.

## Marisol

Marisol is the girl at Velvet's school with whom Velvet remains friends even though Velvet pretends like she does not know who Marisol is at times. Marisol is not part of the popular crowd. When the other girls are being mean to Velvet because of a picture said to be Velvet having a sexual encounter with Kwan, Marisol is the first to tell Velvet that she knows the girl in the picture is not her.

## Heather

Heather is a snobby girl who starts boarding her horse, Totally Crushed, at Wildwood while Velvet is working there. Heather and Beverly got along well. Velvet hates Heather and is glad when Heather lets Joker out of his stall accidentally. Heather is criticized by Beverly for her mistake. Heather is eventually forced to leave the barn because she does not clean one of the horses' feet right and the horse gets sick.

## Becca

Becca is Paul's ex-wife. She is the mother of Edie. It is Becca who belittles Ginger when she talks about Velvet. Becca says that she believes that working with Velvet was a good way to play at being a parent.

Becca later is the one who gets Velvet involved in working at Spindletop and watching a horse show. Velvet believes that Becca intended to discourage Velvet's love of horse riding and her desire to compete.



## Danielle

Danielle is the woman who helps her husband run the children's theater in which Ginger participates. She is the one who criticizes Ginger's attempt to portray a poor woman just learning the man to whom she owes money has died. She even goes so far as to call Ginger a "goody two shoes" (195).

## Dante Vargas

Dante Vargas is Velvet's younger brother. Their mother obviously loves Dante more than she does Velvet. Dante is immature. Either his sister or his mother does everything for him. Even though Dante does not seem to care anything for Velvet, when he learns that she is riding horses, he admits the news to his mother and seems sincere in his fear that she will be killed.

## Kayla

Kayla is Ginger's real friend. She encourages Ginger to keep going even when she is afraid that she and Paul are moving toward a divorce. She also discourages Ginger from giving money to Velvet's mother because she believes that once Ginger does stop giving Silvia money, she will no longer allow Velvet to visit her.

## Alicia

Alicia is the girl at Velvet's school who seems to be the leader of the bad girls. She knows that Velvet is desperate to be one of the popular girls and will do anything to part of that group. Alicia plays on Velvet's desire for attention by pretending to be friendly to her and inviting her to parties where she knows Velvet will get into trouble.

## Brianna

Brianna is the beautiful girl who attends Velvet's middle school. Velvet describes her as the "baddest bitch in the school" (197). Brianna dislikes Velvet and tries to make life hard for her. Dominic tells Velvet that he cannot have anything to do with her because he got Brianna pregnant.

## Rasheeda

Rasheeda is the one woman whom Silvia considers her true friend. Rasheeda suggests to Silvia that she try to handle Velvet's behavior some way other than just beating her since beating her did not seem to be working. Silvia follows Rasheeda's example when she tries to pray for Velvet's safety during the horse show.



## Cookie

Cookie is a boy who lived in Velvet's neighborhood in Brooklyn. He was shot by a cop. It was the first time that Velvet had heard the phrase suicide by cop. Even though Cookie told Velvet that he would kill her if he was told to do so, he also said that she was a good girl and that he liked her. She remembered that he once gave Dante a part of the cookie he was eating.

## Edie

Edie is the daughter of Becca and Paul. When she meets Velvet, Edie tells her father that she is glad that he is helping Velvet. Later, it is Edie who tells Paul how much trouble Velvet got into because of the clothes that Ginger bought her.

## Miguel

Miguel is the brother of Jesus, the man Silvia loved. He took Silvia to the beach along with his son, Raul. When Jesus told Silvia that he would not be able to leave his wife because she was pregnant, Miguel offered to marry Silvia so that she would be legal.

## Lexy

Lexy is one of the snobby girls whom Velvet meets at Spindletop. Lexy is the one who gets angry with Velvet when Velvet beats her at the competition.

## Maciella

Maciella is the girl who was Strawberry's friend in New Orleans. Strawberry did not know what happened to Maciella and had not heard from her since the hurricane.

## Polly

Polly is the woman with whom Paul has an affair. She is a student at his school. After she gets her degree, she moves away and puts an end to the affair.

## Manuel

Manuel is the friend of Velvet's father who sexually abuses her while he is renting a room from Silvia in their apartment.



## Lorrie

Lorrie is one of the snobby blond girls who boards her horse at Spindletop.



# Symbols and Symbolism

## Ginger's Ring

Ginger's ring symbolizes Velvet's relationship with Ginger. Even though Ginger asked Velvet if she wanted one of her rings, Velvet did not take one right away. She instead went behind Ginger's back and stole it.

## Blond Keychain Doll

This small doll, which is the only one that Velvet ever had, represents Ginger. It has blond hair, like Ginger, and Velvet puts the ring she took from Ginger on the doll. When she puts the doll inside her cotton box full of items that are special to her, Velvet feels like she has Ginger in her box. Later, when Velvet realizes that Ginger will never be able to fully understand her life in Brooklyn, she throws the doll down the sewer.

## Big Rusty Horseshoe

This horseshoe represents the time that Velvet spent learning how to ride horses her first summer at Ginger's house. Velvet took it home with her as a souvenir and her mother threw it out of the window because she said it was dirty. Velvet was mad at her mother for throwing the shoe out the window but forgave her when her mother got up in the middle of the night to retrieve it from the street.

## Pictures of Ginger and the Horses

The pictures of Ginger and the horses represent Velvet's life upstate. Velvet has a set of photos of herself with the big horses that makes her feel proud of herself and a set of photos with smaller horses to verify the lie that Velvet and Ginger have told Velvet's mother that Velvet is riding only small, non-dangerous horses.

## Sea Horse

The sea horse represents Velvet's grandfather and his love for her. Before he died, her grandfather sent this sea horse to Velvet as a gift. Because Velvet told Strawberry about the sea horse her grandfather gave her, Strawberry told Velvet she would think of her every time she saw a sea horse.



## **Dates with Powdered Sugar**

These dates with powdered sugar symbolize Velvet's mother's attempt to help her daughter make friends at school. Instead of making the girls more friendly toward Velvet, they only make more fun of her and her gift.

## **Ginger's Doll**

Ginger's doll symbolizes Ginger's sister to Ginger but to Velvet it symbolizes the privilege in which she believes Ginger and her sister lived as children. Velvet, who only had one doll as a child, is not sure what to think of the offhanded way that Ginger tells her about the entire box of dolls that she and her sister had.

## **Bullwhip**

This bullwhip is a symbol of Beverly's power over the horses. It is also a symbol of her cruel attitude. She uses the whip because she knows it intimidates both her students and the horses on which they ride.

## **Dominic's Picture**

This picture of Dominic is a symbol to Velvet that Dominic was once in a Shakespearean play and that he once aspired to be an actor. He was once an outcast like she is. He says she is the only one he has ever shown it to. He gives her this picture when he explains to her why they cannot be together.

## **Blue Shell from the Beach of Providence**

The blue shell from the Beach of Providence is a symbol of Silvia's love for her daughter. She brought the shell back as a gift for her daughter. It was not until she found the broken shell in the couch where Velvet slept that she realized Velvet kept it as a special item. Velvet had broken off part of the shell so that she could take it with her as a good luck token when she rode in the competition.



# Settings

## Wildwood

Wildwood is the name of the stables near the house where Ginger and Paul live. It is where Velvet begins taking riding lessons and where she meets Fugly Girl.

## Brooklyn

Brooklyn is the borough of New York where Velvet lives with her little brother and mother.

## Crown Heights

Crown Heights is the neighborhood where Velvet attends school. She lived there with her little brother and mother before they moved to a different neighborhood.

## The Cocoon Theater

The Cocoon Theater is the children's theater where Ginger performs in A Christmas Carol.

## Spindletop

Spindletop is the high class stable that Velvet visits. When she returns from her visit there she is not sure if she wants to ride in the competition or not.

## Riverbank Park

Riverbank Park is the place where Dominic invites Velvet to meet him so that he can explain to her why he cannot date her.

## Grace Meadow

Grace Meadow is the name of the place where Velvet competes in and wins a horse show.



# Themes and Motifs

## The Negative Power of Abuse

Because of the abuse they have suffered in their pasts, both Fiery Girl and Velvet are jaded and stilted in their ability to show love. Velvet looks for love wherever she can find it while Fiery Girl runs everyone away from her with her hateful behavior. As the two develop a bond they begin to heal from their abuse but they still bear both physical and emotional scars.

When Velvet first sees Fiery Girl, the horse is in a stall by herself. A sign attached warns people not to try to touch her. Velvet's attention is drawn to the horse because she hears the mare banging around in her stall and kicking the walls, making herself as unpleasant as possible. Pat, who owns Fiery Girl, warns Velvet that the mare has been abused as she points out the scars on her face and her twisted ear. As Velvet looks at the scars, she thinks to herself, "your scars are like the thorns on Jesus's heart" (25). Despite Pat's disbelief, Velvet is able to tame Fiery Girl and even rides her in a competition.

Just as Fiery Girl has been abused, Velvet has also been abused. Because Velvet's father abandoned her mother, Velvet has been told all of her life that she has bad blood. Her mother forecasts that Velvet will be a failure in her life. She does not encourage Velvet to do well in school but instead tells her that book learning will not do a woman any good. In addition to emotional abuse, Velvet's mother also physically abuses her. Velvet recalls a time when she was put in foster care after her mother beat her with a belt and the wounds became infected.

Just like Fiery Girl has learned to protect herself from abusing by keeping people away from her, Velvet has learned her own techniques to defend herself from her mother's abuse. When she hears the hurtful words that her mother says to her in her head, she tries to think about other things and drown them out. Velvet has even learned to physically protect herself against her mother's blows. For instance, "She hit me with her shoe, panting so hard spit flew. I hit too, I cried and hit wild, just to keep her off, to keep her words out of me with knife words of my own" (402).

Even though the abuse they have received has caused both Fiery Girl and Velvet to retreat into themselves, once they are together, they learn to become stronger than their abusers. Velvet talks back to her mother when she tries to keep her from attending the horse competition in which she will ride Fiery Girl. She tries to reason with her mother when her mother asks her why she thinks she is special. Velvet asks if she is considered to be acting special "Because I don't think I'm shit? Because I don't want to think I'm shit? Ginger doesn't think I'm shit, Pat doesn't think it, only you, my own mother!" (402).



Through the competition, both Velvet and Fiery Girl have to struggle with the ghosts of their abuse. Velvet hears her mother telling her in her head that she is alone and that she will always be alone. Fiery Girl is upset by the presence of Beverly, a woman who once worked at Wildwood who would torment and abuse horses there with a whip. Once they connect with one another, however, they use their united strength to win the competition.

## The Healing Power of Love

Both love given and love received can have healing properties as demonstrated by the novel *The Mare*. Fiery Girl and Velvet are both characters in need of love. They are able to help each other heal with the love they learn to share. In a much larger sense, Velvet longs for her mother's love. With no children of her own, Ginger longs to have a child she can love in a maternal way. Because Ginger behaves as a mother should, Velvet tries to substitute Ginger for her mother but she only feels confused. In the end, it is when Velvet's mother admits to Velvet that she loves her and Velvet is able to receive that love that Velvet's need is fulfilled.

Right away, Velvet and Fiery Girl take to one another. Velvet sympathizes with Fiery Girl because of the way the other stable hands make fun of her. Velvet tells the horse she is not ugly despite her scars. She says to the horse the words she longs for her mother to say to her. Because Velvet reminds Fiery Girl of her previous owner, a girl who had acted in a loving way toward her, Fiery Girl begins to calm in Velvet's presence.

Even though her relationship with her horse does fill a gap in Velvet's life, it does not fill her need for a maternal figure to show her love. Her own mother abuses her both emotionally and physically. Velvet wonders what she would have to do to win her mother's affection.

Because Ginger does not have children and wishes she had a child to care for, she throws her entire being into caring for Velvet. Paul fears that Velvet will break his wife but instead Ginger overcomes some tough obstacles because she believes she needs to be the best she can for Velvet. The stress of caring for Velvet makes Ginger want to drink. In fact she does drink one time during her relationship with Velvet but realizes what a serious mistake it was. It is also because of her responsibility to Velvet that Ginger decides not to have an affair with Michael, a former lover whom she looked up. Finally, Ginger wills herself to stay in her relationship with Paul, even though he did cheat on her, so they can support Velvet through her riding competition. The love that Ginger has for Velvet has led her to make healthy decisions about her life and relationships—aspects of life that Ginger has had trouble with in the past.

Meanwhile, Velvet still craves attention from a mother figure. During one of her first riding lessons, Ginger comes with her camera to take pictures of Velvet on the horse. Velvet realizes that Ginger is acting like a mother to her even though Velvet has not yet decided if she likes Ginger or not. Velvet tries to imagine her mother in Ginger's spot, taking pictures and encouraging her. At another time she imagines what it would be like



to live with Ginger all of the time. Even the love that Ginger gives Velvet, however, is not what Velvet craves because it does not come from her biological mother.

Velvet's relationship with her mother comes to a head during the riding competition. Silvia attends the competition even though she does not decide to go until the last minute. When Velvet sees her mother after she has won the jumping part of the competition, Velvet is hopeful that her mother will congratulate her. Instead, her mother belittles her in Spanish. Velvet runs away from her.

The two face off when Silvia catches up with Velvet. She asks Velvet why she disobeyed her but she is crying instead of yelling. She convinces Velvet that she did not want her to ride because she was afraid that she would get hurt, not because she wanted to hold her back. When Silvia hugs her daughter and Velvet feels in her mother's hug that she is proud of her, Velvet finally finds the acceptance she wanted all along.

## The Therapeutic Power of Riding

For Velvet riding is therapeutic because it keeps her out of trouble, helps to improve her body awareness, and allows her an activity in common with other girls in which she can participate without having to talk. Although Ginger and Paul keep Velvet away from horses for short periods of time as punishments, it is Pat who warns Ginger not to keep her away too long. She argues that Velvet needs to ride in order to remain sane. In the same way, Velvet is not chasing boys when she goes upstate nor is she getting into trouble on the streets.

Just as Pat argues, riding horses and being around them helps to keep Velvet sane. When Velvet needs to calm herself in Brooklyn, she imagines herself with Fiery Girl. She craves the warmth and sturdiness of the horses when she is scared or lonely. Even Ginger feels this calming effect the horses have on a person when she visits the stables one day after Velvet left. Ginger says: "I thought, No wonder Velvet likes it here. It was safe and secret with them [the horses]" (373). Even after Fiery Girl snapped at her when Ginger tried to pet her, Ginger "stood there some moments, feeling the animals, calming" (373).

One of the reasons Velvet's mother signed her up for the Fresh Air program was because she thought it would help keep Velvet out of trouble. While Velvet is with Ginger and Paul she does not get into much trouble. She stays busy working in the stables, earning her lessons and learning how to respect the horses.

Riding also gives Velvet a way to build relationships without necessarily having to talk. Even though her relationship with Gare Ann got off to a rocky start, the two are able to build a friendship based on riding. Velvet feels embarrassed because she lied and told Gare that she was in a gang. When Gare asks her to ride with her, Velvet realizes they can interact while riding but not talk. It gives Velvet a chance to be herself and to not feel as if she has to impress Gare.



## Confronting Bullies

Confronting a bully is an action that takes a good deal of courage and does not always work out favorably. Several of the characters in this novel take on bullies with mixed results. When Velvet takes on Beverly, she is initially punished for her actions. Ginger's small encounter with Becca and Laura does not appear to have much effect on the women, but it is enough to boost Ginger's self-esteem. Velvet's act of riding Fiery Girl in the competition is in reality a way for her to stand up to her bullies. She is able to show all of the people who believed she could not ride well because of her color or socioeconomic status that she is just as good as they are.

Because she has been abused herself, Velvet is very upset when she arrives at the stables one day to find Beverly tormenting Joker with a bull whip. Even Gare, the slightly dumb stable hand, is crying because of the way Beverly is confusing the horse and making her scream in frustration. Velvet tells Pat what is happening but Pat refuses to do anything to stop Beverly. For this reason, Velvet takes the situation into her own hands. She has Gare help her get on Fiery Girl, and she rides past Beverly and Joker as a distraction. Velvet gets Beverly to stop tormenting the horse but is expelled from the stable because she endangered Beverly's life. A short time later, however, Beverly gets fired from the stable for her cruel training techniques and Velvet is allowed to return.

On different occasions, both Becca, Paul's ex-wife, and Laura, her best friend, have made judgmental comments about Ginger's work with Velvet. The comments have angered Ginger but she has never responded to the women's hatefulness to their faces. It is when Ginger confronts Becca alone in a restaurant that she decides the time has come for her to speak her mind. Laura joins Becca as Ginger is talking to her and the two accuse Ginger of making a scene. They pretend not to know what Ginger is talking about though the look in Becca's eyes tells a different story. When Ginger arrives home and Paul makes fun of her attempt to even the score, Ginger slaps him for allowing his ex-wife to make fun of Ginger openly for so long.

Finally, Velvet's act of riding in the competition is a way for her to symbolically stand up to all of bullies whose looks and comments have indicated she was not good enough to win a competition. This includes Lexy from Spindletop who treated Velvet like a person of lesser class when she went to the competition to serve as Lexy's groom. Velvet is vindicated when Lexy throws a fit because Velvet places higher in the competition than she did. The competition also gives Velvet a chance to show her mother that she is able of achieving her goals even if she does so in a disobedient way.

## Cultural Differences

Throughout the course of her mentorship of Velvet, Ginger is criticized for choosing a child of such a different culture than hers with which to deal. There is a good deal of difference in Ginger's life and Velvet's life. It is the basis of the Fresh Air program. The mentors are to show the children from disadvantaged, inner city homes that there is a





different way to live. Because their ways of life are so different, Ginger is sometimes unable to help Velvet when Velvet needs a mentor the most.

The differences in Ginger and Velvet's lives are seen most clearly when Ginger visits Velvet at her school. Ginger is shocked to see that the children at an elementary school are forced to go through metal detectors every day. She has never experienced that before and wonders what it must be like for Velvet. In Velvet's sections of the novel, she does not even mention the metal detectors since they have become such a part of her everyday life.

Even though Ginger believes that she has had a difficult life because of her sister, she has not encountered the types of violence that Velvet has had to face by the time she was 13. Even before she was 11, Velvet had gotten to know the man named Cookie who used to stand where she could see him from a window in her apartment. She knows that Cookie got shot by the police. Also, Velvet's friend, Shawn, is killed on the street simply because he was in the wrong place. Velvet tells Ginger about Shawn's death but is not really able to find any peace about it until she talks to Dominic, a boy from her neighborhood who can relate to the shock of Shawn's death.

While Ginger remembers her sister getting in fights in the psychiatric hospital, with Velvet, she is the one getting in fights. The girls in school rough her up because she likes the same boy they do or because of the clothes she wears. Once Velvet tells Ginger that students in the school spat on her because she was wearing the shirt that Ginger gave her for Christmas. In Ginger's opinion, there was nothing special about the shirt that would cause the other girls to retaliate.

As Ginger tries to deal with Velvet and her mother, she finally admits to herself that there might be some fundamental differences between blacks and whites. At first, she tried to convince Velvet that it was not true that blacks were failures while whites were prosperous. She says there are plenty of white people who live in poverty as well. As Ginger gets more and more experience with Velvet and her mother, she doubts her beliefs.

# Styles

## Point of View

This story is told from the points of view of several first person narrators. Velvet and Ginger are the main narrators but Paul and Silvia also narrate in some places. Beverly and Dante are characters who are given one section each in which they narrate from their own point of view.

These differing points of view give the reader the opportunity to understand the story from each character's perspective. It is understood why Ginger hopes to make a difference in Velvet's life and why she is so attracted to Velvet in particular. It allows the reader to see the differences in Velvet's life at Ginger's house, life at her own home, and her experiences in school. The reader also knows from a firsthand point of view that Silvia is abusing her daughter; Velvet is not lying about that abuse as some characters suspect.

This story might have worked with a third person omniscient narrator but the different first person points of view allow the reader more personal contact with each character since these characters are differentiated not only by the side of the story they tell but also because each character is given his own voice.

## Language and Meaning

Unique about the language in this novel is the way the reader learns about horse related terms as Velvet learns them. Velvet goes into the stables an 11-year-old from Brooklyn who thinks horses are kept in cages and led around with leashes. As she learns the proper terminology for horses, the reader learns these terms as well. "Pat put a halter on her face and brought her out of her cage — her stall — and "cross-tied" her, that meant she was tied by her face to both walls" (35). In this quote the reader not only realizes when Velvet comes to know that horses are kept in stalls, not cages, but also learns with Velvet what it means to cross-tie a horse.

As each new narrator is introduced, that narrator speaks in his own, unique voice. Velvet, for instance is rough with a voice filled with teen slang. "The way she said it was another way of saying 'You're shit,' and the smell of that shit was starting to fill up the room. I could feel Dante get small inside" (4). This quote is an example not only of Velvet's voice and the language she uses but also the way she is perceptive about how other people are feeling.

It is clear from Ginger's use of advanced words and not much slang that she is well educated. She talks about how she stopped attending AA meetings because she could not stand "the dogma" (8). She also describes the Fresh Air brochure as being "sentimental and flattering to white vanity and manipulative as hell" (12).



It is clear from Silvia's language that she is stressed by her role as a mother and Ginger's interference in Velvet's life. It is notable that when reading Silvia's sections of the novel that Silvia does not speak English so the sections are her translated words. Silvia says of Velvet's relationship with Ginger, "She's conceited, spoiled by that sad rotten-belly woman" (186).

Because the novel involves Spanish speaking people from the Dominican Republic, there are a variety of Spanish phrases incorporated into the novel. Some are easy to understand based on context clues but some are a little more difficult. "Chica," (236) for instance, is the Spanish word for girl while "Bendición, Abuelo" (237) or blessings, Grandfather, are Velvet's words to the old man who says he is her grandfather. Additionally, some curse words are included in the novel as Spanish phrases.

## Structure

The exposition in this novel is basically covered in the first two chapters. Velvet tells about the background of her family and how she came to be involved in the Fresh Air program. Ginger describes in her section of the novel why she and Paul have decided to host a Fresh Air child, as well as her own stressful childhood and adulthood.

The remainder of the novel is the rising action as Velvet and her mother's relationship deteriorates and Velvet struggles to be accepted and loved by anyone. The climax comes when Velvet rides in the competition despite the fact that she does not have her mother's permission. The action falls as Velvet realizes that her mother is proud of her because of how well she did in the competition. The novel's denouement is illustrated through Velvet's hope for the future and her determination that she will one day ride her horse again.



## Quotes

I thought, Your scars are like the thorns on Jesus's heart. She stopped biting and kicking. I could see her think in the dark part of her eye. The white part got softer. The girls behind me went quiet. The wonderful horse came up to me. I put my hand out to her. She touched it with her mouth. I whispered, 'You are not fugly.'"

-- Narrator (Velvet)

**Importance:** The first time that Velvet saw Fugly Girl she was attracted to the horse even though she was warned not to have anything to do with her. She compared the horse's scars to the scars Jesus bore, indicating that Velvet believed the horse had done nothing to deserve the treatment given to her. There were signs warning people not to touch Fugly Girl because she was considered dangerous but Velvet put out her hand and the horse touched her hand with her mouth.

I wondered if they said something racial to her, but I didn't want to embarrass her by asking. I didn't think there would be direct racism in this town. But it might come in a subtler form."

-- Narrator (Ginger)

**Importance:** When Ginger realizes that Velvet is upset after one of her visits to the barn, she worries that someone might have said something racially charged to Velvet, who is a black girl visiting a predominately white town. Ginger shows her lack of knowledge about racism and its prevalence because she indicates she believes racism would not come in a direct form in the town in which she lived.

I missed my mom. I missed lying next to her and hearing her. I tried to think of how I would tell her about all the things that had happened — Ginger, riding Joker, Pat, the purple-haired girl, Beverly, and Fugly Girl. But I just pictured her getting mad and finding some reason to call me stupid."

-- Narrator (Velvet)

**Importance:** When Velvet thought about going home, she realized how much she missed her mother. She tried to think about how she could tell her mother about all the things that she had done during the summer but imagined that her mother would not be proud of her but would instead get angry with her and tell her that she was stupid.

There were dish sounds and water running, which didn't sound mad, and I thought that if they were really mad, I would hear it in the dishes: they would bang them around like when my mom is mad, when she's mad, even the water runs mad."

-- Narrator (Velvet)

**Importance:** Velvet eavesdrops on a conversation between Paul and Ginger. Even though she senses they are arguing about her, they do not sound angry in the same way her mother does. Velvet indicates that when her mother is mad, she can hear it even in the way the water runs in the sink.



It seemed an unstable mix of things, combustible, a promise that could not be kept.”  
-- Narrator (Paul)

**Importance:** Paul worries for Ginger that she cannot be what she wants to be for Velvet. He believes not only that the relationship is unstable but also that Ginger will wind up getting hurt in the fall out.

Being this kind of adult was like driving a car without brakes at night around hairpin turns. My body tensed and relaxed constantly. I was always nearly ruining dinner or forgetting to pick something up. I couldn't sleep. I wanted to drink — really wanted to, for the first time in years.”  
-- Narrator (Ginger)

**Importance:** After Ginger passed the first part of her relationship with Velvet where she was completely happy with her role as a mentor, Ginger began to realize there was more to the job than just fun and good feelings. When Velvet misbehaved, she was concerned that she was not correctly dealing with her behavior. She felt overwhelmed and unable to relax. The relationship led Ginger to a bad place for someone who had once been addicted to alcohol. She wanted to drink again.

She knew the way I had lived: blank loneliness broken by friendships that would come suddenly into being, surge through the color spectrum, then blacken, crumple, and die; scene after drunken idiotic scene, mashed-up conversations nobody could hear, the tears and ugly laughter quieted only by the rubber tit of alcohol or something else.”  
-- Narrator (Ginger)

**Importance:** Even though Ginger realized her once friend did know something about how Ginger had reacted to stress in her past life, Ginger thinks that she has changed. She believes that she will not behave the same way when she encounters continuing stress with Velvet.

If it was anybody else I would've said, Fuck you. You think you can use me like that? But she was Strawberry. So I said, 'Okay.'”  
-- Velvet (Velvet)

**Importance:** When Strawberry asked Velvet if she could go with her to Ginger's house some time Velvet wanted to remind her of all the times that Strawberry had refused to talk to or even acknowledge her in school. Even though she wanted to tell Strawberry to leave her alone, Velvet did not because she sensed if she was friends with Strawberry, she could be friends with the popular girls as well. Velvet should have sensed something was wrong, however, when Strawberry ask that Velvet not tell anyone else about the plan for Strawberry to visit at Ginger's or Velvet's visiting at Strawberry's house.

We didn't always do that; we at least a couple of times went to Grand Street, and she showed me how to shoplift from Rainbow and the Gem superstore.”  
-- Narrator (Velvet)



**Importance:** Strawberry is a bad influence on Velvet because she teaches Velvet how to shoplift.

I never even had one doll except for the broken key chain I found on the street — Ginger and her sister had a whole box? And I'm supposed to feel bad about that? I thought, Dante's right: She is a bitch. Or just dumb."

-- Narrator (Velvet)

**Importance:** Velvet gets upset when she learns that Ginger and her sister had a whole box full of dolls to play with when they were children. Velvet had only one doll as a child. It is the broken key chain doll that she keeps in her cotton ball box. It is this difference in her life and Ginger's to which Velvet can really relate. She feels angry when Ginger talks sadly about the dolls because they were hers and her sister's. Velvet sees only that Ginger had things as a child that Velvet never did.

She looked like a completely different person than she did when she came to see me; it was like there was a sign over her head reading 'Come close and I will fuck you up.'"

-- Narrator (Ginger)

**Importance:** Ginger does not recognize Velvet when she sees the girl in her classroom. This is not only because Velvet's hair has been damaged because her mother bleached and straightened it but also because Velvet has such a bad attitude that it changes her from the hopeful, pure girl whom Ginger believes she knows.

She's got no kids and has to borrow somebody else's and I don't know why she picked you. Probably she feels sorry for you. Well, I feel sorry for her. So be nice to her. Show her manners, respect her house. Don't let her see what you're really like."

-- Silvia (Velvet)

**Importance:** Because Ginger is sending Silvia money to help her pay the bills since she lost her renter, Silvia takes a more relaxed attitude toward Ginger. She warns Velvet to be nice to Ginger but at the same time not to let Ginger know what she was really like.

It's all psychological. It doesn't really hurt, but it hurts a little. They're sensitive. That means they get all messed-up easy."

-- Beverly (Velvet)

**Importance:** Beverly tries to explain to Velvet why she believes it is good to use a whip on a horse as punishment. She explains how it disturbs the horses psychologically but does not really physically hurt them.

When I hung up I thought, Now we are really in it. We can't go back. It was the first time it occurred to me that Paul had been right."

-- Narrator (Ginger)

**Importance:** After Ginger finishes talking to the social worker at Velvet's school and



leans that the social worker believes Velvet lied about abuse in the past, Ginger realizes that she may have gotten herself into something over her head. Even though Ginger considers for the first time that Paul might be right that they were in trouble, she never tells Paul that she believes he was right.

Besides, when Velvet put them on, she just looked conceited, a bitch royale, and she looks like that anyway. Maybe where Ginger lives girls can go around looking like that, but here you're gonna get hurt and I knew it."

-- Silvia (Silvia)

**Importance:** Silvia explains why she let Velvet go out in the clothes that Ginger had bought her even though she knew they were going to get her daughter into trouble. She believed that Velvet would learn her lesson more quickly if she were to experience the jealousy and hatred from the girls first hand instead of trying to tell her what was going to happen.

It wasn't until a month or so into these conversations that I realized, while telling Polly about Velvet, I was using the pronoun I instead of we."

-- Narrator (Paul)

**Importance:** Even though Paul has many times discouraged Ginger from getting involved in Velvet and letting her come to their house, he realizes that when he talks to Polly, the woman with whom he is having an affair, about Velvet he talks about her as if her visits were his idea.

I hate to admit it, but in retrospect it's clear: I didn't put up enough of a fight about her plot to get the family upstate because I was sure it would never happen and also because I wanted her focus on something else besides us."

-- Narrator (Paul)

**Importance:** Paul admits that he let his affair get in the way of what was best for Ginger and for Velvet in this quote. When Ginger began talking about encouraging Silvia to move upstate, Paul did not discourage it much because he knew it would take her focus off their relationship. He believed it would keep her from suspecting that he was having an affair.

Velvet says the girl's lying, but the mother believes the one she doesn't know over her own child, and she's been hitting the child and calling her a ho in front of her brother."

-- Lydia (Ginger)

**Importance:** When Lydia calls Ginger about Velvet's story of abuse, she says that Velvet's mother believes a girl she does not even know over her own daughter. Velvet has also told Lydia that her mother called her a whore and hit her. Believing that Velvet has lied in the past, Ginger is not sure if she should believe the story or not.

Velvet's shrunken mother looked at me and her eyes said 'Judas.' 'Forgive me,' I said in a low voice. 'Por favor.'"



-- Ginger (Ginger)

**Importance:** When Silvia learned that Velvet was riding horses even though Ginger had sworn she was not, Silvia looked at Ginger as if she considered her to be her betrayer. Ginger apologized but Silvia did not respond to the apology.

She humiliated her mother. It wasn't her fault. It was mine. The look on her face when she looked back at us, walking with that obnoxious woman! I didn't blame her. Her mom was a bitch, and she was getting back."

-- Narrator (Ginger)

**Importance:** Ginger tries to understand the dynamics between Velvet and her mother after Velvet's mother learned that Velvet had been riding big horses despite Ginger's promise that she would not ride. Ginger did not blame Velvet for what was happening between the mother and daughter, she thought it was her fault. But she also believed Velvet was acting the way she was because she wanted to get back at her mother for the way her mother treated her.

Three, that girl is a genius horsewoman. That kind of talent should not be ignored; in my opinion, ignoring her talent will be putting her more at risk than letting her ride. Because that girl needs to ride for her sanity."

-- Pat (Ginger)

**Importance:** When Pat tells Ginger how Velvet needs to be able to ride horses to keep her sane, Ginger agrees. She believes it would be a bad thing to keep Velvet away from horses very long.

And Ginger had to know — she had to — but instead of being mad at Paul, she was mad at the women that talked to us, the nice ones. On the way home from the party, she was telling Paul what a bitch the dancer lady was, and then he was annoyed at her."

-- Narrator (Velvet)

**Importance:** In this section, even Velvet recognizes that Paul is having an affair with one of the newest teachers at his college. Velvet cannot believe that Ginger does not recognize what is going on but instead focuses on the women who did talk to them about the activities in which their children were involved.

I'm sorry. But you are old enough to know the truth. I haven't seen your father since I left DR. He said he would come for me, but he didn't. Now you know what I mean when I say 'bad blood.'"

-- Silvia (Velvet)

**Importance:** Silvia finally tells Velvet that Velvet's father and Dante's father are two different men. This is the reason why the man Velvet believed was her father only send birthday cards to Dante. She explains to Velvet that it was because Velvet's father never came for Silvia after she left DR that she says that Velvet has bad blood.





Okay. In that book it says once you tame something, you are responsible for it. You tamed that horse, you understand?"

-- Pat (Velvet)

**Importance:** Pat was angry with Velvet when she skipped a weekend of lessons with Fiery Girl. She talked to her about the book *The Little Prince* and that because she had tamed Fiery Girl she was responsible for her.

I think it felt like an ambush to her, but that's what she did to some fool — I could just picture the guy — and I wanted to do the same to her, both of us get right on top of her, jab our fingers at her, call her names, see how it felt."

-- Narrator (Paul)

**Importance:** Paul and Ginger both lectured Velvet about the way she had treated the substitute teacher in her class. Paul indicates that when he thought about the experience from Velvet's point of view they had probably ganged up on her but that was how he wanted her to feel. He wanted her to understand what the teacher she had belittled felt like.

I hung up and thought, Maybe they really are different from us. More violent, more dishonest — nicer in some ways, yes, warm, physical, passionate. But weak-minded. Screaming and yelling all the time, no self-control. Do her homework with her on the phone, she doesn't turn it in and lies about it. Give her all the special treatment in the world and she throws it away because she can't follow through."

-- Narrator (Ginger)

**Importance:** It is after Ginger admits to herself after Velvet is involved in a fight that perhaps black people really are different from whites that she believes she is racist for admitting there is a difference between whites and blacks.

And still, it was her child, the lovely girl that she doesn't even want, the child I finally loved, who somehow allowed me a way in, who made me feel what everyone else felt; finally I could join, be part of the play — except everybody thought that was wrong too, that somehow I still wasn't doing it right."

-- Narrator (Ginger)

**Importance:** Ginger thinks about the way Velvet's mother was surprised that Ginger was able to get a husband and probably not surprised to learn that Paul was cheating on her thought she was going about living her life wrong, how everyone she had ever known thought she was not living her life right.

You were right to do this,' I said. 'It's incredible.'"

-- Paul (Paul)

**Importance:** When Paul sees Velvet riding for the first time, he admits to Ginger that she was right to mentor Velvet and encourage her riding.



But I did dream, so how can I complain about ‘cheating’? I didn’t get physical with Michael, or at least not genital; we made out like kids. But I tried to start it up again with him; for days, weeks, I e-mailed with him, trying to make it happen again even as he lost interest.”

-- Narrator (Ginger)

**Importance:** Ginger realizes that since she did imagine herself having an affair with Michael that she has no right to judge him for having an affair.

A good mother would stop her, a good mother — A good mother wouldn’t let her daughter get turned into a pet for a few hundred dollars a month.”

-- Narrator (Silvia)

**Importance:** Silvia criticizes herself for taking Ginger’s money and letting Ginger do with Velvet as she wanted to do. She believes she has allowed Ginger to ruin Velvet.

I don’t know why I felt glad they were coming. This whole thing — Ginger’s ‘project,’ as Becca called it — had ruined my marriage, or allowed me to ruin it, and the ruin had just begun.”

-- Narrator (Paul)

**Importance:** Despite himself, Paul is glad that Velvet’s mother and brother plan to come see Velvet ride in the competition. He also admits that he took advantage of Ginger’s preoccupation with Velvet to have an affair, an action that will probably lead to the ruin of his marriage.

My mami rocked me and said deep and rough: ‘Your ribbon. Your horse.’ And I knew: She was proud.”

-- Silvia (Velvet)

**Importance:** Although Velvet’s mother is angry with her for her disobedience, she is also proud of her. It is at the moment that her mother hugged her that Velvet realized that her mother was proud of her, an acknowledgement that Velvet had been working for years to get from her mother.