

The Nanny Diaries: A Novel Study Guide

The Nanny Diaries: A Novel by Nicola Kraus

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Plot Summary

The Nanny Diaries by Emma McLaughlin and Nicola Kraus was a New York Times Bestseller for many weeks in 2002. Part of the pop genre, chick lit, The Nanny Diaries is about the experiences of a college girl, Nan, as she nannies for a wealthy family on the upper east side of Manhattan. The main characters in The Nanny Diaries have names that suggest this story is the prototype of the New York City nanny situation. The main character's name is Nan, or Nanny as her charges call her, and she is a nanny. The family that she works for are Mr. and Mrs. X, and the protagonist refers to her boyfriend as H.H. (for Harvard Hottie).

Nan gets hired by Mrs. X after a chance encounter at the park. During the interview, Mrs. X suggests that her current nanny, Caitlin, will need to cut back her hours for personal reasons. Nan soon discovers that Mrs. X is firing Caitlin because she asked for time off to travel to see her sister who is ill. Even though Nan—who is a NYU senior—has agreed to two afternoons a week, she is soon at Mrs. X's house looking after Grayer and running errands nearly every day of the week.

As the year progresses, Mrs. X relies more and more on Nan to take care of Grayer and complete projects, plan events and manage many tasks that Mrs. X should be doing herself. While Nan is juggling a full workload with the X family, she is also trying to finish her semester at NYU and her senior thesis project on child development. She also meets her H.H. who lives two floors above the X family. Nan struggles to balance her full life, but always she puts Grayer's needs and the X family first. Nan's friends and family warn her of the dangers of working so many hours for Mrs. X, who is treating Nan worse and worse.

Tension is building between Nan and Mrs. X. Nan is getting more and more resentful of being taken advantage of and of Mrs. X coming home late, often causing Nan to be late to classes. Also, Nan is frustrated that Mrs. X wants so little to do with her son, Grayer. Though Nan considers leaving the job, she stays because of her relationship with the little boy, Grayer.

Nan discovers that Mr. X is having an affair with a colleague in Chicago. Soon his mistress is also asking Nan to run errands for her. As tension mounts between Mr. and Mrs. X, Nan and the new mistress, the X family takes a vacation to Nantucket. They ask Nan to accompany them to help with Grayer. While in Nantucket Mr. and Mrs. X fight, rely on Nan to watch all of the children of their friends, and Mr. X's mistress continually calls and Nan is asked to field them. Nan is faced with the moral dilemma of keeping Mr. X's secret.

After a rough night of watching all of the children of Mr. and Mrs. X's friends outside of a restaurant, and a massive fight between Mr. and Mrs. X, all Nan wants to do is to go back to the city so that she can pack and look for a new apartment. She asks Mrs. X if she can leave one night early and Mrs. X fires her, telling her to leave right then. Nan

has to face what she has been avoiding the entire story: abandoning Grayer. She leaves in the night without being able to say goodbye.



Prologue and Chapter One: Nanny for Sale

Prologue and Chapter One: Nanny for Sale Summary

The prologue begins with the protagonist, Nan, summarizing what all nanny interviews are like. The women are thin and sylph-like, designer outfits perfectly in place, hair coiffed, and nails manicured. Their houses resemble hotel lobbies, stately and desolate. Even though these women have children there are no signs of them in the house—no toys, no fingerprints, no snacks. In fact, the kitchens are completely empty because the women do not cook. In the refrigerator are gourmet foods that the women will expect the hired nanny to prepare for their children, while the freezer will host the secret convenience foods that only the mothers are allowed to prepare.

There are three phases to the nanny interview: Phase I is the collusion phase. The woman will lower her voice and complain about how hard it is to raise children and how busy her schedule is and it is the job of the nanny interviewee to collude. Phase II is the Play-with-Child phase. The woman will lead the interviewee into the designated play area where the child will already be and watch as the interviewee spins spastic wheels trying to get the potential new charge to think they are fun, funny and entertaining while alleviating their fears that the nanny they have now—whom they love—is not threatened. Phase III is the Play-with-Mommy phase where the woman will ask if the interviewee has a boyfriend and share an overly intimate detail about her marriage or sex life. This demonstrates that they can be friends and share "girl talk."

In Chapter One, Nan goes to the Parent's League to post an ad for a nanny for hire. She notes that most of the other ads denote that the poster's native language is not English. She feels confident that her ad, which is riddled with enthusiastic exclamation points, will earn her a nanny job, quickly. Later, as Nan is walking through Central Park, a wealthy family is posing for family photos. The mother spots Nan and they begin chatting, Nan mentions that she is a nanny looking for a job and gives the woman, Mrs. X, her phone number.

Nan gets the nanny job with Mrs. X. Nan wants just a part-time afternoon job so that she can continue to work on her studies and her senior thesis at NYU. On Nan's first day she is to meet Grayer, her charge, at his pre-school. The other nanny, Caitlin, is there and is under the assumption that Nan is being hired for help on the weekends and evenings. Nan realizes that Caitlin has been lied to and that she is her replacement. Grayer is rude to Nan—he calls her names, tells her he doesn't like her and refuses to cooperate. Nan leaves her first afternoon on the job feeling dejected and overwhelmed.



Prologue and Chapter One: Nanny for Sale Analysis

The protagonist, Nan, repeatedly points out how condescending the interview process is, but the reader is left to wonder why then she wants to be a nanny in New York City. Nan also describes how lousy and unreliable the pay is and how erratic the work hours—so then, why is this her only option for a part-time job? Even her parents suggest that she get a university research assistant job, or work at a school part-time, but Nan ignores and dismisses all of their suggestions. Some women take these jobs on since they are destitute and have few other options, but based on Nan's description and that of her family, including her wealthy grandmother, she is not desperate.

During these interviews Nan wonders how women become this—"this" being affluent, cold and distant. Her descriptions of these women are the antithesis of motherly. That they "pancake" and "spatula" their children's affections away, they don't cook, or play with their children, they don't read to them, instead shouldering all of the motherly responsibilities to outsourced paid hands. But, one has to question Nan's character because she is the one willing to be a surrogate mother.

Once Nan is hired by Mrs. X in Chapter One, Nan notices how condescending the woman is. Despite this, Nan accepts the job with gratitude. When Nan discovers that Caitlin has been lied to, she feels uneasy and assumes that Caitlin has done something that necessitates a replacement. However, Grayer loves Caitlin so any mistreatment or mistake, Nan assumes, must be perceived by Mrs. X. This should serve as a forewarning for Nan and foreshadowing for the reader. If Mrs. X can so easily dismiss and replace a nanny that her pre-school aged son loves, then what makes Nan think that she will be treated any differently?

In the prologue the narrator, Nan, is speaking generally about nanny-job interviews and the women who lead these lives. In Chapter One the lens focuses on a specific family, the X family. All of the generalizations that Nan spoke of in the prologue are now being applied to a specific family, though a legitimate last name is not given, but rather the moniker 'X.' The effect of the family essentially remaining nameless makes it feel as if one is reading not a fictional narrative, but an expose of a real family. Further, the letter "X" is symbolic of danger, suggesting that that is what this family is—dangerous, dark, and mysterious.



Chapter Two: Multitasking

Chapter Two: Multitasking Summary

Once Caitlin is dismissed, Nan is on her own. She shows up to the school and is immediately reprimanded by Mrs. X, who drives by in a car, that she is late. Mrs. X hands her a list of errands that she needs Nan to complete, in addition to taking Grayer to a playdate. Nan is overwhelmed and isn't sure with whom Grayer is supposed to have a playdate, but before she can ask Mrs. X any questions, she drives away. Nan figures out the playdate scenario and successfully runs all of the errands in preparation for the dinner party that Mrs. X is throwing.

That evening, she makes a gourmet meal of exotic vegetables that Grayer refuses to eat. Grayer has made peace with Nan and they even share a few tender moments cuddling.

Nan's day ends and she is overwhelmed and tired from the week. She is working twice as many hours than she agreed to, but is happy to be earning the money. She goes to a dive martini bar by herself and runs into the man whom she saw on the elevator at X's apartment building. She is mocked by his friends for being a nanny, and is asked if she ever sleeps with the husbands. Nan is suddenly insecure about what she does and disgusted by the suggestions. She leaves, angry.

Chapter Two: Multitasking Analysis

It is Nan's first full week alone with Grayer and already Mrs. X is asking her to do more. Nan does so without complaint to Mrs. X, though she is feeling resentful for being taken advantage of. Once Grayer and Nan sort out who is in charge, they begin to get along well and share some special moments of cuddling and affection. The juxtaposition of Mrs. X treating Nan poorly, but Nan loving Grayer is what will provide tension for the story. Already, Nan feels like she cannot abandon Grayer to his mother who pays very little attention to him.

On page 50, Nan is at the playdate with Grayer, and Grayer's friend, Alex. The nanny, Murnel, is also taken advantage of and when the mistress comes home, she asks if Murnel has completed her tasks for the day. The mistress complains about her husband—whom she is divorcing—and how she doesn't have any money, yet asks if Murnel has picked up her La Mer, which is skin cream that is over \$100 dollars. The hypocrisy in this example is grotesque and shocks Nan, who feels even more protective of Grayer, but this is foreshadowing for what Nan will soon have to deal with.

When Nan runs into the Harvard student at the bar, she is glad to see him until things quickly turn sour with his friends. They ask what other types of services she offers for a fee and ask if she also sleeps with the husbands. They tease her suggesting that the job she does is akin to prostitution, but this also demonstrates just how willing the

wealthy upper-east side women are to outsource their life. No, Nan is not sleeping with their husbands, but she is mothering their children.



Chapter Three: Night of the Banking Dead

Chapter Three: Night of the Banking Dead Summary

Mr. X's company throws a Halloween party and Mrs. X orders elaborate costumes for her and Mr. X from the Lion King musical. He fails to show up to get dressed for the party and they attend not wearing any costumes. But, Mrs. X insists that Nan still wear the costume that she ordered for her. Nan and Grayer attend the Halloween party at Teletubbies. On the ride to the party, Nan finally meets Mr.X in the car. He is reading a newspaper and does not pay her any attention. Additionally, he ignores his wife and children.

At the party Nan is taking Grayer to the bathroom when they walk in on Mr.X and his assistant, Lisa Chenoweth, having an affair. Grayer does not understand what is going on and Nan acts as if she has seen nothing.

Nan's H.H., short for Harvard Hottie, invites her out with some of his college friends. He mentions the places that he will be at that night, but Nan leaves the Halloween party so late that she cannot find him and goes back to her apartment.

Chapter Three: Night of the Banking Dead Analysis

Nan notices at the Halloween party that all of the nannies are dressed like their charges, and all are in equally unattractive costumes. By the wives forcing the nannies to wear childish costumes that match their children, it de-sexualizes the nannies. This is ironic because in this scene, the father is having an affair, but not with the nanny, with his colleague.

Nan chooses to ignore the affair for the present time. She feels that it is not her responsibility to tell Mrs. X. This strengthens her resolve to stand up for and protect Grayer.

Nan desperately tries to find H.H. after the Halloween party. She spends most of her money taking taxis around New York visiting all of the places that he said he was going to be at. She is tired, drunk and wasting money. This situation brings into question how reliable she is as a narrator. She allows Mrs. X to take advantage of her and belittle her, she desperately tries to meet up with a guy despite being tired and drunk and so far has spent little effort on her school work.



Chapter Four: Holiday Cheer at \$10 an Hour

Chapter Four: Holiday Cheer at \$10 an Hour Summary

It is Christmastime now. Mrs. X has put up a tree in the house and it is littered with gifts. Grayer wants to decorate the Christmas tree but Mrs. X is having a professional decorator decorate the tree. Nan sees that Grayer is disappointed that he doesn't get to drink hot cocoa and decorate the tree with his family, so Nan takes him to her Grandma's house. At Nan's Grandma's house they listen to holiday music, drink cocoa and decorate the tree.

Nan helps Mrs. X get the Christmas gifts for all of the hired help. The other women are getting expensive designer handbags and bonus checks, but Nan only gets earmuffs. She is infuriated.

Chapter Four: Holiday Cheer at \$10 an Hour Analysis

Mrs. X having the Christmas tree decorated by a professional demonstrates how the X household is not a household where a family lives. Mr. X is never there, Mrs. X is unattached and Grayer isn't allowed the comforting rituals and traditions of family life. Nan recognizes this and whisks Grayer off to her grandma's where is he able to experience what he so desperately wants to do with his family.

As Nan is helping Mrs. X buy and prepare expensive handbags with bonus checks for the secretaries, housemaids, cleaners, and party planners, Nan thinks that since she is Grayer's nanny, presumably the most important hired help, that she'll get a beautiful bag and a large bonus. When she does not and simply gets earmuffs, she is infuriated. For the past month she has been accepting Mrs. X's mistreatment gladly in the hopes that it would pay off and it does not. Since she makes very little money as well, really the only benefit of the job is her relationship with Grayer—which will also be the hardest thing for her to walk away from because that is irreplaceable.



Chapter Five Downtime

Chapter Five Downtime Summary

Nan is at her dad's fiftieth birthday party/New Year's Eve party at her grandma's house. Her grandmother's house has been transformed with a band, room for dancing and catered food. Nan's father is hanging out in the closet and Nan is in there complaining to him about her Christmas present from the X family, the earmuffs. Nan's grandma waltzes in, literally, and berates them both for not enjoying the lovely party. She coaxes them out of the closet and they enjoy the evening.

Mrs. X repeatedly calls Nan on what is supposed to be her vacation. When Nan finally answers the call, Mrs.X asks Nan to go the house to check and make sure all of the humidifiers have enough water in them. Nan reluctantly agrees. When she gets to the apartment, Ms. Chicago, Mr. X's mistress is there. Ms.Chicago (what Nan calls her) expects that Mr.X will leave his family holiday early. She has candles lit and walks out of Mr. and Mrs. X's bedroom. Nan is horrified, explains what she's doing and leaves, but before she does Ms.Chicago tells Nan that there is no point in telling Mrs. X because she is leaving some of her panties behind anyway.

The X family returns early from vacation with Mr. and Mrs. X in a fight and Nan takes care of Grayer while he is sick. For days, Nan is not sure where Mrs. X is.

Chapter Five Downtime Analysis

In this chapter, Nan's disenchantment with the family is mounting. She's still frustrated by her lack of what she deems to be a proper Christmas present. She's angry that Mrs.X has no respect for her personal boundaries and now she carries the burden of Ms.Chicago being in Mrs. X's apartment waiting for her husband.

She fears that Ms.Chicago really has left panties in the apartment and feels that it is her duty to find them. This is ironic because this also shows that though Mrs. X has an issue with personal boundaries, so does Nan, though Nan's intentions may be on a higher moral ground.

As Nan's disenchantment with Mrs. X mounts, her attachment for Grayer grows. She tends to him while he is sick and realizes that he does not have a mother to care for him, that she is the best thing that he has. She does her best to take care of him and resolves that she will not leave him, that she will not abandon him, no matter how poorly she is mistreated.



Chapter Six: Love, Park Avenue Style

Chapter Six: Love, Park Avenue Style Summary

Nan returns to her normal schedule of work and school. She goes on one official date with her H.H. and then he leaves to travel for a medical internship. They commit to a long-distance relationship by calling each other frequently.

Mrs. X tries to rejuvenate her relationship with Mr.X by making romantic Valentine's Day reservations. All of the places that she has Nan call have already been booked. Mrs. X is incensed. At home on a Saturday morning, she calls Nan again to have her check for reservations. Nan has her grandma talk to one of the owners of the restaurant to get the X's a reservation. It is a late reservation and Mrs. X isn't thrilled about it but she says she will take it.

On Valentine's Day, Mrs. X gets all dressed up and Mr. X does not show up. Mr. X calls and tells them that he is snowed-in in Chicago, but Nan knows that no flights have been canceled. Nan calls the receptionist who tells her that Mr. X is not coming home this evening.

Chapter Six: Love, Park Avenue Style Analysis

Again, Nan is caught in the middle by having to relay information between Mr. and Mrs. X. Nan is disappointed because she had hoped that they would get the chance for a romantic evening. Though Nan does not like either Mr. or Mrs. X, she wants them to work things out so that Grayer has a family.

Nan's mother is increasingly worried about how much of Nan's time these people consume. Even when Nan is not with the family, she is talking to and thinking about them. Nan hardly has time for her own relationships or her schoolwork. But, Nan allows it. She never stands up for herself, or even Grayer. She accepts whatever Mrs. X tells her without reservation. Nan allows herself to be treated poorly and Mrs. X continues to do so.



Chapter Seven: We Regret to Inform You

Chapter Seven: We Regret to Inform You Summary

Nan goes to Grayer's school to pick him up but the teacher informs her that Grayer had not been in school today. A woman named Sima finds her and reminds Nan that Grayer, and her charge, Darwin, have a playdate today. Nan knows nothing about this but walks back to the apartment with the other nanny and her charge.

When Nan enters the apartment the smell of dozens of roses is overwhelming. Mr. X has not yet returned from Chicago and since he missed Valentine's Day, he has been sending dozens of roses every day. Mrs. X has locked herself in her bedroom and Grayer is in his room playing by himself. Nan and Sima take the boys to a place for them to play. On their playdate, Nan learns from Sima that the previous nanny of the X family, Caitlin, has a sick sister in Australia which is why she needed time off. Nan realizes that this is probably why Caitlin had been fired.

Grayer does not get into the private school that Mr. and Mrs. X wanted for him and this also sends Mrs. X into a fit. She blames Nan for Grayer's behavior and realizes that she needs to have higher expectations. Mrs. X then hires a behavioral consultant to assess what is happening in the time with Grayer and Nan.

Chapter Seven: We Regret to Inform You Analysis

The X family is falling apart. The fact that Mrs. X has locked herself in her room and that Mr. X has repeatedly sent roses suggests that he is apologizing not only for his absence, but also for his affair. Though Nan does not know it yet, it seems like Mrs. X knows that Mr. X is having an affair. As the mother is wrapped up in her own crisis, she completely ignores what is happening to her son. Grayer has been demonstrating increasingly bizarre behavior like reverting to having accidents in his pants, peeing on furniture, and insisting that he wear his father's necktie.

When Grayer is not accepted to the private schools that Mr. and Mrs. X want for him, they pin the blame on Nan. Mrs. X feels like Nan has allowed him to wear the Collegiate sweatshirt too much—and someone from the school may have thought that that was presumptuous. This is ironic because it is Mrs. X who bought Grayer the sweatshirt and if she didn't want him wearing it, as his mother, she could have said so. Also, Mrs. X suggests that perhaps Grayer's behavior is not very good because Nan does not have high enough expectations for him.

Mrs. X hires a consultant who also suggests that Nan is not doing enough with him. The fact that Mrs. X pays other people to do what she should be doing as a mother absolves her of all guilt and responsibility. Her attitude is that if she is paying Nan to watch her son, then she—and Grayer—should be getting the maximum benefit. But, Mrs. X does

not consider Nan's affection, protection and love commodities in this arrangement, which is ironically what Grayer needs most of all.



Chapter Eight: Frosting on the Cake

Chapter Eight: Frosting on the Cake Summary

Mrs. X is throwing Mr. X out of the house. While he is in Chicago at work, she has Connie, their long-time housekeeper, pack up his suits and ties and send them down to the door man at 3 o'clock. Meanwhile she is looking for Grayer's bowtie and in a fit because she can't find it. She chides Nan to please keep track of Grayer's clothes and fires Connie, who has worked there for 14 years. After Mrs. X leaves, Connie tells Nan about how there had been a first Mrs. X and that the current Mrs. X had left her panties under the bed for the other woman to find. Nan is shocked by this story.

Connie also describes how quickly the family goes through nannies and that each time one of the nannies seems happier than Mrs. X, especially if they have a boyfriend, then Mrs. X fires them.

Nan receives a letter in the mail from Mr. X's mistress, Mrs. Chicago. She has sent Nan a list of items to procure and \$800 in cash. She needs the items in the apartment the week that the family goes in June on a family vacation. Nan is shocked by this woman's boldness and refuses to buy the items or be any part of the situation.

Chapter Eight: Frosting on the Cake Analysis

There are multiple signs in this chapter that should warn Nan of her fate with the family, the main one being that Mrs. X so easily dismisses Connie, who has cleaned their home for over 14 years. This should show Nan that they will just as easily get rid of her. Mrs. X has already demonstrated that she does not have Grayer's best interest at heart and that even if Grayer loves Nan, she is replaceable.

In this chapter it seems that all of the roles that women hold are replaceable: housekeeper, nanny, wife. Any sympathies that readers may have had for Mrs. X would vanish in this chapter as we learn that she was once the mistress having an affair with a married man. This would also suggest why she knows that Mr. X is in fact having an affair—because she was once on the other side.

Nan still believes that she is caught in the middle keeping the affair secret. This suggests just how naive Nan is. Nan is also shocked that there had been a previous Mrs. X. She is infuriated at her boyfriend, who lives in the building, for not telling her. Again, he does not think that it is a big deal or that it would have affected her, and her indignant attitude about not knowing is lost on him.



Chapter Nine: Oh...My...God

Chapter Nine: Oh...My...God Summary

Nan talks with her friends Sarah and Josh about the threat of Mrs. Chicago's panties being found in the house by Mrs. X. Nan feels because she knows that Mrs. X might find Ms. Chicago's panties that she should find them and try to prevent Mrs. X from knowing. She says that she is doing this all for the protection of Grayer. Nan's friends accompany her to the house and they search the apartment, and find the panties hidden in a tin of cookies.

Mrs. X demands more and more hours from Nan; meanwhile, Nan's thesis and senior projects are also due. She decides to stay up all night one night to get everything done, and just barely manages to do so. She chooses to also send back the \$800 that Ms. Chicago sent her to get supplies for her tryst with Mr. X. On her way to deliver her thesis to her professor, she loses the envelope with the \$800 dollars and the found panties that she had planned on sending back to Ms. Chicago.

The X family is preparing to leave for their Nantucket vacation and Mrs. X has asked if Nan can go with them. She says that she can but that she'll have to arrive a day or so later because of her graduation and graduation party. Mrs. X is insistent that Nan get there as soon as possible even suggesting that Nan skip her graduation and, if not, at the least her graduation party. So, Mrs. X arranges for Nan to be on a private airplane with another family early the morning after her graduation party. Nan agrees and flies to Nantucket.

Chapter Nine: Oh...My...God Analysis

Though Nan nearly has a nervous breakdown in this chapter from the stress of her workload at the X's, her school work, impending graduation and the fact that she needs to find a new place to live, it still seems that she has learned nothing. Though she refuses to miss her graduation or graduation party, she still agrees to meet a family she doesn't know to take a private airplane to Nantucket as insisted. She does this at the cost of finding housing for herself since she has been asked to move out of her apartment because her roommate's boyfriend is moving in.

So far, little character growth has happened for Nan. Though she gets angry in this chapter and inappropriately takes it out on an employee at a print shop, she does little else to stick up for herself. In fact, Mrs. X has had more character changes than Nan has. Mrs. X is increasingly demanding of Nan and absent from Grayer's life; clearly she is also facing a crisis of sorts. She is exerting more power—by taking it out on Nan and removing herself from her home. Her changing and erratic behavior is indicative that she is aware that Mr. X is having an affair, yet Nan does not recognize this.



Chapter Ten: And We Gave Her an All-Expenses Paid Vacation

Chapter Ten: And We Gave Her an All-Expenses Paid Vacation Summary

Nan takes the plane ride with the Horners to Nantucket, whom she discovers are nothing like the X family. Their daughters are polite and friendly. Mrs. Horner is motherly and intelligent and Mr. Horner kind. They even have a dog. This surprises Nan. She thinks that maybe relaxing in Nantucket on the coast with Grayer won't be so bad.

The X's pick her up in their car and because of an antique boat that Mrs. X has purchased there is little room for Nan to fit in the car. When they arrive at the X's rental, Nan realizes that it does not live up to anyone's expectations, including hers. As Nan is unpacking, she hears car doors slamming and thinks that the X's are having a party, but she quickly learns that she is being left with 12 children to watch while the parents go out to dinner. She is left with no introductions to the children and little to feed them.

The following day, Mr. X announces that he has to go back to New York the next day to remedy a work problem. But, Mrs. X seduces Mr. X and he decides to stay. They go on a bike ride and for an hour Nan relaxes outside. But, when the X's return, they are fighting and Mr. X has said again that he must get back to New York and Mrs. X secretly calls his mother.

Mr. X's mother arrives and foils his plan to head back to the city where Ms. Chicago is waiting at their apartment. Mr. X's mother complains about everything. In Mrs. X's attempt to seem like a normal, happy family, they buy Grayer a puppy that he hates.

Chapter Ten: And We Gave Her an All-Expenses Paid Vacation Analysis

The mistreatment of Nan continues and she continues taking it, though she is angry. In their absence, she secretly drinks the alcohol in the freezer which is the most covert and untrustworthy thing she has done so far. Nan realizes that the Horners are a good example of a family who has everything and is still happy. When they go to dinner at the Horners, the kids are involved, the mother cooks and the father barbecues. This family serves as a character foil to the X family. No doubt, Mrs. X buys Grayer a puppy emulating the fact that the Horners have a Labrador retriever, even though owning a dog is out of character for Mrs. X.

Mrs. X manipulates Mr. X first with sex to prevent him from leaving her, and then she resorts to calling his mother. Her manipulative tactics are not lost on him and he becomes even more angry with her. Mrs. X is desperately trying to keep her husband

from continuing his affair. She wants him to choose her. Her hostility is mounting toward Nan, especially when she finds out that Nan is dating her H.H. who lives two floors above the X's apartment.



Chapter Eleven: A Bang and a Whimper

Chapter Eleven: A Bang and a Whimper Summary

Nan wakes up in the morning to an angry Mrs. X. She's asked to get groceries but Mr. X volunteers in an attempt to leave the house. Nan busies herself getting Grayer ready to watch his father play tennis at the Yacht Club. But first, Nan is forced to schlep all of the beach stuff to the beach only for it to be closed. Then Mrs. X demands that she load up all of the stuff and carry it back to the pool.

Ms. Chicago repeatedly calls the house and Mr. X's cell phone. Finally, Nan answers the call asking why this woman would want anything to do with this situation or this family. Ms. Chicago laughs at her and calls her a child. Nan hates being in the middle of this family secret and has reached the apex of her frustration.

Mr. and Mrs. X are fighting again and Mrs. X announces she is pregnant, though she has not taken a test—she just knows is what she tells Mr. X.

Nan, tired from the drama, the lack of respect and privacy, asks if she can leave an evening early so that she can look for housing in New York City. Mrs. X tells her that it is fine and asks her to leave now, firing Nan. Nan tries to back peddle and tells her that it is fine, she can stay, but it is too late. Nan is forced to leave Grayer without saying goodbye.

Nan quickly packs up her belongings and Grayer wakes as she is making her way down the stairs. He screams her name over and over again. Nan is then dropped off at the ferry to go back to New York.

Chapter Eleven: A Bang and a Whimper Analysis

So far, Nan has said that she doesn't just leave the X family because she doesn't want to leave Grayer with his parents. She feels that if she continues to put up with the mistreatment then abandoning Grayer can be avoided. In this chapter, she learns that this isn't true. Even though they treat her even more terribly in Nantucket, Nan continues to take it. She is dismissed from the family after asking to leave early, but quickly back peddles which demonstrates that she still hasn't changed. In the end, she is forced to abandon Grayer. And both she and Grayer must face what they fear the most. The fact that Nan thought she had a say in the matter further demonstrates just how naive she is, as suggested by Ms. Chicago and Mrs. X.

Mrs. X seals her role as a villain in this chapter by faking a pregnancy to manipulate her cheating husband, mistreating a poor puppy and taking away the one person in her son's life who nurtures and cares for him. But, all she is concerned about is keeping her husband and sadly trying to create a life that seems perfect and happy, but is the farthest thing from it.



Chapter Twelve: It's Been a Pleasure

Chapter Twelve: It's Been a Pleasure Summary

Nan returns to New York and goes back to the X's apartment while they are still in Nantucket. Ms. Chicago is no longer there. Nan goes straight to Grayer's room where she overheard that Mrs. X has a nanny cam. She finds the nanny cam. She then goes to Mrs. X's desk and flips through her appointment calendar and notes that there have been many interviews for nannies for the last few months. Nan learns that Mrs. X has had intentions of replacing her for a long time.

Nan turns on the bear nanny cam and lets out a tirade. She basically says all of the things that she has been feeling the last nine months, calling both parents terrible people, telling them that they should be ashamed and what terrible people they are to work for. She turns it off, nearly satisfied that she is finally able to say what she's been feeling, but she realizes that they probably won't even listen to her tirade. She erases what she has recorded and starts over.

This time she pleads with them to pay attention to Grayer, to provide a loving home for him and happy traditions and rituals. She tells them what an amazing little boy Grayer is and that they are missing it all, missing it all for nothing. She saves the recording and leaves the apartment.

Chapter Twelve: It's Been a Pleasure Analysis

In most novels, the protagonist undergoes a character arc, or character change, but Nan does not change fundamentally from the beginning of the novel. Nearly all the way through the book she is apologetic to the X's, yet seethes on the inside. Even at the very end of the book when she is recording her tirade to the X's—she deletes it and records something milder, something that will benefit Grayer. The lack of character change leads the structure of the book to read like an endless list of misdeeds done to her rather than building toward any kind of tension.

What the reader is left with at the end is that this is a cycle and both the nannies and the wives are replaceable and rotate through in this miserable charade. Sadly, the people who are affected the most are the children.



Characters

Nan

Nan is the narrator and protagonist in the *Nanny Diaries*. She is a senior at NYU studying child development. After graduation she wants to work with a children's program to help children in need. As a college student, she seeks out nanny positions with wealthy families of the Upper Eastside of New York City. From the prologue and Chapter One, it is clear that the X family is not the first family that she has worked for. The reader may ask that if the X family's treatment is par for the course, why Nan keeps seeking out these types of jobs. The pay is low and inconsistent, the hours are more than what she's looking for and erratic, and she has little energy left for her personal time or studies. Plus, she is treated with little respect from the parents.

Nan undergoes very little, if any, significant changes throughout the novel. Things happen to her and she simply reacts, much to the chagrin of her closest friends and family members.

Though the X family treats her horribly, she stays with them because she develops a connection with their son, Grayer. Despite all that this job lacks, this is ultimately why she stays. Her altruism is what allows her to suffer in silence the poor treatment and the stress of essentially working full-time and being a full-time student. Once Nan sees just how ignored the boy is, she knows that she cannot leave him, that she can't desert him. What Nan fails to realize—and this is demonstrated by Mrs. X in the very beginning—is that Nan may not have a choice in the matter — that it will actually never come down to her abandoning Grayer, but rather her being fired, which is exactly what happens.

Mrs. X

Mrs. X is the antagonist in the *Nanny Diaries*. She is the wealthy wife of a very successful businessman who manages offices in both New York and Chicago. Mrs. X begins by being cordial and friendly toward Nan, to make it seem like they might be working toward the best for Grayer together, but quickly Mrs. X begins to use Nan at all times when she is left alone with Grayer. Grayer is either at pre-school, scheduled lessons and playdates or with Nan. The mother spends little, if any, time with him and ignores him when they are alone.

Mrs. X does not work. She sometimes is in charge of organizing parties for Mr. X's office, but pushes these tasks off onto Nan. It is a mystery what Mrs. X does all day while Grayer is busy. She retreats to an exclusive spa when Mr. X does not return and she often returns home with shopping bags, which implies shopping, but aside from this she does little else.

Her ultimate failure as a mother happens when Grayer is very, very ill and she asks Nan to stay with her son. Knowing that her son is sick she goes to a spa where she cannot



be reached. She returns and instead of checking on her son to make sure that he is okay, she chastises Nan for the mess in the house and the fact that Nan has let Grayer eat in his room.

Grayer

Grayer X is Nan's four-year-old charge. Initially, he hates Nan because she is replacing his other nanny Caitlin. Nan learns that the family has been through numerous nannies since Grayer was an infant. Grayer is an affectionate and sweet boy once Nan and him are together for awhile. Grayer wants a normal family which participates in family traditions and rituals. He is deeply disappointed when his mother does not allow him to decorate the Christmas tree, but has a professional decorator do it instead.

Nan's Mother

Nan's mother is a secondary character. She serves as the voice of reason for Nan. She reminds Nan that she does not need the money so badly, that she'll find a decent place to live and that she shouldn't put up with the mistreatment of the X family.

Nan's Father

Nan's father is a secondary character. He is a professor and is a gentle and calm man. Nan and her father have a close relationship. He encourages her to leave her job with the X family.

Mr. X

Mr. X is rarely in the novel. He generally does not speak directly to Nan. He has an affair with a colleague in Chicago and expects his secretary to field calls from his wife when they are together. The current Mrs. X is his second wife. He had an affair with his current wife while he was still married to his first wife. His infidelities and ability to find women easily replaceable makes him a villain in the novel. He does not interact with his son, Grayer.

Ms.Chicago (Lisa Chenoweth)

Mr. X is having an affair with Lisa Chenoweth, whom Nan has nicknamed Ms.Chicago. She initially seems laid back and disdainful of the X family, but then Nan learns that her criticism is for Mrs. X exclusively.

She thinks that Nan's services can easily be bought and expects Nan to run errands for her.



Grandma

Grandma is Nan's grandma. Nan's Grandma is wealthy and educated. She lives in a nice home, but it is not sterile like that of the X family. She provides a comforting foil for Grayer to that which he is experiencing at his parents' home. Nan wants Grayer to experience the same type of love that she receives from her grandma and her parents.

Grandma likes to dance, go to concerts and travel.

Grandma X

Grandma X makes a brief appearance in the last two chapters. She is Mr. X's mother, upon whom he does not look fondly. Mrs. X summons her in an attempt to keep Mr. X with his family on vacation. Grandma X treats Mrs. X coldly—in a similar way to how Mrs. X treats Nan.

Grandma X is not grandmotherly or friendly to Grayer, her grandson.



Objects/Places

Parent's' League

The Parent's League is an upper-class organization where women attend classes and social meetings. This is where Nan advertises her services as a nanny.

Pre-School

Grayer attends a private, exclusive pre-school. This is usually where Nan picks him up.

Al, Styrofoam Snowman

As Grayer's family is breaking apart they do less and less together. Grayer makes a Styrofoam snowman at school that his mother will not allow him to hang on her professionally decorated tree.

Missing Picture Frame

A frame of Grayer and Mr. X goes missing from on top of the piano.

Cell Phone

Nan gets a cell phone and thinks it is a huge luxury, until she realizes that Mrs. X expects her to be available at all times.

Halloween Party

Mr. X's company has a Halloween Party. This is where Nan learns that he is having an affair.

The Letters

Nan receives multiple terse letters that are condescending and belittling from Mrs. X and then Ms.Chicago. These letters always include a detailed list of items that they want at a certain time and place.



Collegiate Sweatshirt

Mrs. X buys Grayer a Collegiate sweatshirt which is a private school to which they applied. She later blames Grayer's wearing of the shirt as the reason he did not get in.

Nantucket

Nantucket is where the family rents a home for summer vacation.

The Puppy

In an attempt to make them seem like a happy family, Mr. and Mrs. X buy Grayer a puppy. Grayer hates the puppy and neither parent wants to take care of it. They send the puppy with Nan after they fire her.



Themes

Corruption of Affluence

One of the main themes of *The Nanny Diaries* is the corruption of affluence. A question Nan asks herself again and again is how these women who hire nannies and don't work become what they become. The women whom she describes as acting like Mrs. X are very, very wealthy. They don't work, aren't philanthropic, and genuinely have very little to do throughout the day. But they will plan and do things to keep up appearances with their other wealthy and idle women-friends. Mrs. X fits this archetype exactly.

Nan wonders if it is the abundance of wealth and the idleness and competition that creates these women. Everything in Mrs. X's world is expensive, manicured and staged and a child does not fit into this environment. Nan is there to keep Grayer essentially out of Mrs. X's world. Though this woman has everything anyone could want: money, a family, health, time and freedom, she is extremely unhappy. In an effort to be happy, she keeps going to spas and having lunch with friends with whom she competes.

A foil to this example, and the other families that Nan references in the beginning of the novel, are the Horners who are in Nantucket with the X family. It is clear that the Horners are also very wealthy. But Mrs. Horner has a career, they include their children in their gatherings and they aren't afraid to be real people. Their life has not been staged with money.

Family

The idea of family is a main theme in *The Nanny Diaries*. The X family is not a family. The mother wants nothing to do with her child. The father never comes home. Mr. X never enters the apartment where the book mainly takes place. And all Grayer desperately wants, amid the affluence of his parents, is their attention and the traditions and rituals of a loving family.

Nan is Grayer's surrogate family. When Grayer wants to decorate a Christmas tree she takes him to her Grandma's house where he learns what Christmas cheer and caroling are. He is able to have cookies and decorate a tree and not worry about making a mess or ruining a perfectly staged setting. Nan creates moments that are real for Grayer, so that he feels loved.

In the end, when Mrs. X is fighting for Mr. X over Ms. Chicago, Nan notes how miserable all of these people are despite having seemingly everything. What they don't have is what Nan has—a loving family. Nan is reluctant to leave the job as nanny for the X family because she knows that she would be taking this away from Grayer. Because Mrs. X is fighting for Mr. X and she manipulates him by saying she is pregnant, it seems that she does want a family; she buys a puppy to emulate the Horners. But, she doesn't know how to be motherly and Mr. X is not interested in being a father.



Commoditization

Everything in the world of the X family is treated as a commodity in *The Nanny Diaries*. One evening, when Nan goes out and meets her boyfriend's friends, they tease her about sleeping with the husband and suggest that the job she performs is akin to that of a prostitute. In reality, Nan is not only selling her time, but her emotional energy and her love as well. The X's don't cook or clean, or take care of their child; they don't drive, or plan their own vacations or parties—all of this is bought.

When Grayer doesn't get into the private elementary school that they want for him, Mrs. X hires a behavior consultant to evaluate what is going on. The thought of observing her son herself or talking with the nanny herself about his behavior never occurs to her.

One of the main examples of people as commodities is how easily Mrs. X replaces her nannies. She wants a nanny at all times, at all costs and if, like Nan, they ask for time off, she finds someone new. Also, by keeping a rotation of nannies, Grayer is never allowed to get more attached to them than to his mother and if he does, it all changes when a new nanny is introduced. Mrs. X does not consider Grayer's relationship with Nan; to her it is simply a business arrangement—something for which she has paid and can cease at any time.

Mr. X also treats his family as a commodity, an accessory. He is having an affair with Ms. Chicago embarking on the path of replacing Mrs. X as he has done before. He sees his child as part of an image of a family man, an image to which he never himself subscribes.

In *The Nanny Diaries* people are easily replaceable and their services are simply commodities, the relationships never considered or rendered important.

Style

Style

Point of View

The point of view is from Nan, the protagonist of the story and is told in the first-person. The effect of Nan telling the story makes it seem like a memoir rather than a novel. The lack of climax and tension also lends to the point of view being more like a memoir than a novel.

From Nan's point of view readers are exposed to the affluent world of New York's elite. Nan, herself, is not poor and her grandmother is described as a woman of means. It seems that Nan's character needs to include her grandmother in her explanation of the story to prove that not all people who have money act in such a way, just some of them. The Horner family also helps prove this point.

Setting

The Nanny Diaries is set in apartment 721 and the surrounding neighborhood of the upper east side of New York City. The X's apartment is grand with marble floors, expensive art, high ceilings and dramatic lighting. There is no evidence that a child even lives in the house, except in the boy, Grayer's bedroom. The kitchen is rarely cooked in and the house looks like it belongs in a magazine, rather than a home for a family.

Nan also often picks up Grayer from his private pre-school in the neighborhood. From there she usually takes Grayer to a nearby park or someone else's house for a play date. Though it is insinuated that this is a normal archetypal situation for a family and a nanny, only one of the other homes that she visits resembles the X house.

In addition to the pre-school, the 721 apartment and various shops and stores where Nan runs errands, the story also takes place at her shabby apartment in a different neighborhood. It is a studio apartment that Nan shares with her roommate, whose boyfriend often sleeps over, and the room is simply divided by a sheet partition. No doubt the descriptions of Nan's apartment are included to show the discrepancy between how the X family lives and how Nan lives.

The Nanny Diaries was published in 2002 and is supposed to represent modern times.

Language and Meaning

Though the novel has some mature content, the reading and vocabulary levels are that of a middle-grade book. Vocabulary is base and reminiscent of regular people living in New York. Nan knows some education jargon since she is studying to be a teacher, or child social worker, though she uses this language rarely.

The X family, though wealthy, do not exhibit a higher level of education or intelligence. They speak in commands, and rarely do they have actual conversations.

Structure

The book sticks strictly to a chronological timeline, without even a flashback. The book begins in the fall and ends in the summer. The Nanny Diaries is divided into 12 chapters. The only chapter that revolves succinctly around one main event or theme is the prologue. Subsequent chapters are merely a list of incidents that happen during that particular time of year. Instead of reading a novel with building tension toward an event or moment in the book, the reader is simply reading a list of events that are moved forward by time and the seasons.

The monotony of the tasks listed in the book and repetition of what Nan has to do demonstrates how bored the character is. And even when there are dramatic moments in the book, because the narrator/protagonist fails to react in a dramatic way, the dramatic scene falls flat of tension. The only thing mounting is Nan's frustration, but even that leads to an action by another character.



Quotes

"Nanny fact: in every one of my interviews, references are never checked. I am white. I speak French. My parents are college educated. I have no visible piercings and have been to Lincoln Center in the last two months. I'm hired."

Prologue, p.4

"Just how does an intelligent, adult woman become someone whose whole sterile kingdom has been reduced to alphabetical lingerie drawers and imported French dairy substitutes? Where is the child in this home? Where is the woman in this mother?"

Prologue, p.11

"There are essentially three types of nanny gigs...Type C, I'm brought in as one of a cast of many to collectively provide twenty-four/seven 'me time' to a woman who neither works nor mothers. And her days remain a mystery to us all."

Ch.1, Nanny for Sale, p.26

"She disappears down the dark blue hall as I wheel our Emoting Grayer to the stairwell where he will be able to communicate those boundaries while his father's new watch gets the attention it deserves."

Ch.2, Multitasking, p.57

"It starts to snow outside the big windows and I tuck my stocking feet beneath me while she rests her chin on her outstretched arm. Thus I while away the afternoon with a woman who has a higher degree than I will ever receive, in a subject I can't get a passing grade in, and who has been home less than one month in the last twenty-four."

Ch.7, We Regret to Inform You, p.173

"Someday I'd like to be able to help more than one child at a time—children who don't come accessorized with their own consultants."

Ch.7, We Regret to Inform You, p.183

"Somewhere out there there must be people who believe in a middle ground between demanding children to 'feel their rage' and over-programming children so everyone can pretend they don't have any."

Ch.11, We Regret to Inform You, p. 188

"Is it too much to ask that you keep track of Grayer's clothes? Do I have to be on top of everything? The one thing I delegate to you—"

Ch.8, Frosting on the Cake, p.197

"I'm really sorry. If it were anything else. But I really can't miss my graduation."

Ch.9, Oh...My...God, p.236



"She reaches up and smooths her fingertips across her forehead. 'I'm so happy. Really fucking happy,' she says quietly into the darkness."

Ch.10, And We Gave Her an All Expenses-Paid Vacation, p.278

"What is it here that you want? What about any of this is so appealing to you?"

Ch.11, A Bang and a Whisper, p. 291

"I am staggered by the vision of Grayer, waking in a few hours, terrified and alone."

Ch.11, A Bang and a Whisper, p.295

"I really want to know—just where do you get the balls to ask a perfect stranger to be a surrogate mother to your kid?"

Ch.12, It's Been a Pleasure, p.303

"I'll try to put this into terms you can understand: your son is not an accessory. Your wife did not order him from a catalog. You cannot trot him out when it suits you and then store him in the basement with your cigars."

Ch.12, It's Been a Pleasure, p.304



Topics for Discussion

How does Nan change throughout the story? What is the catalyst for her change? What's her turning point and does she come to this on her own?

Why does Nan take the X's abuse despite the low pay and poor hours? Does Nan deserve the treatment?

Describe Nan's relationship with H.H. Is this a developed relationship?

How are the Horners character foils for the X family?

Does Mrs. X know about Mr. X's affair? If so, what suggests this?

What is the effect of the authors using the name "Nan" for the nanny and the surname of "X" for the family? What does this suggest?

Why does Mrs. X buy a puppy for Grayer?

Is Mrs. X a victim or a perpetrator? She's also been the other woman, so why would she think that it could not happen to her?

How can the X family have everything and still be so miserable?

How does Mrs. X "outsource" her life?