

The Nest Study Guide

The Nest by Cynthia D'Aprix Sweeney

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Plot Summary

The novel *The Nest* by Cynthia D'Aprix Sweeney demonstrates how the lives of others can spin out of control as the result of one person's mistake. All of Leo Plumb's siblings suffer after he crashed his car severely injuring a young waitress he had just seduced. Much of Leo's sibling's anger came when they learned their mother had cashed out a good deal of her children's trust fund, left to them by their father, to pay for and cover up Leo's accident. The novel addresses the idea that one shouldn't count on a financial payout before they actually have it in their hands. Other themes include family relationships, the lengths to which some will go to keep up appearances, and the struggle to find one's identity.

The grown Plumb siblings that had been counting on their inheritance payout to help them get out of the financial jams they had gotten themselves into were most enraged when they learned their mother withdrew almost all of the inheritance fund their father had left for them in order to pay for the wreck Leo had when he was drunk and high. Leo's sister, Melody, had been counting on the money from her inheritance not only to help her pay down the mortgage on her family's house but also to fund her daughters' college educations. A brother, Jack, needed the money to pay off a home equity loan he took out against he and his husband's summer home. Leo's second sister, Bea, was most frustrated because she had always considered Leo to be her mentor. She wanted him to return to being the big brother she remembered. The siblings arranged a lunch meeting with Leo to confront him about the money he owed them. Leo made a promise to his three siblings that he would meet with them in three months with a solid plan to pay them back.

Having no one else who would take him in, Leo called on Stephanie, an old girlfriend and fellow employee in the literary world, who agreed to let him live there even though she had her doubts about his intentions. The two soon reignited their old relationship. Meanwhile, Jack made an interesting discovery when he tried to visit Leo one day at Stephanie's apartment. He learned the man who lived in Stephanie's basement apartment, named Tommy, took a Rodin statue from the wreckage of the World Trade Center. Tommy believed the statue was a sign from his wife who was killed in the attack and Tommy had kept it hidden in his apartment ever since. Jack tried to broker a sale of the statue believing he could use the commission he would make to relieve his financial situation.

After Leo first made the promise to his brother and sisters that he would find a way to repay them their money he seemed intent on finding a new job in the online magazine business, but he was soon discouraged when Nathan Chowdhury refused to hire him. To make matters worse Leo's sister Bea showed him a story she had written about his wreck. When Leo told Stephanie about the story she didn't seem to understand why Leo was so upset.



Leo decided to flee the United States and live on a secret bank account he had hidden away in the Cayman Islands. Even though he had enough in the account to pay his siblings back, he chose not to do so.

It was at Melody's fortieth birthday party that the entire family learned from Stephanie that Leo was gone and that Stephanie was pregnant with his baby. When they tried to track down the last time any of them actually saw Leo, Jack and his husband, Walker, began to fight because Jack had been telling Walker that he was meeting with Leo when he was actually meeting with Tommy to discuss the sale of the Rodin statue. Walker told Jack his plan to sell the statue is both illegal and unethical, and then walked out on him. Melody's future didn't look much brighter as she and her family were forced to sell their home. She was also in shock because she learned that one of her daughters is gay.

Meanwhile, Bea and her boss, Paul Underwood, tried to locate Leo. Leo had been a mentor to Bea when she was a young writer. She wanted to prove to herself that the Leo she admired so much really existed. During their ten days in the Caribbean Bea and Paul formed a bond and realize they loved one another. Although both of them saw Leo just as they were about to board a ferry to go back to the United States, they both pretended they didn't see him. Melody's life began to look up when she realized that even though she had to sell her house, she still had her family, the most important thing that came from the home. In conclusion, Stephanie's baby serves as a means to unite the family. They could see Leo in the little girl's expressions. Jack learned to be a father to the girl and Bea began writing again.



Prologue and Part One: Snowtober

Chapter 1

Summary

In the Prologue Leo Plumb, drunk and high on cocaine, left a family wedding with a waitress. He had persuaded her to go with him because he told her he knew people in the music industry and could get her started on a career. She was giving him a hand job when he closed his eyes for a moment hoping to slow down his body's response. Just at that second an SUV came from a street on Leo's right, slamming into his leased Porsche.

In Chapter 1, because they had agreed not to drink in front of Leo, his three siblings were drinking at different bars prior to a lunch meeting. An early autumn snowstorm had hit the area. Despite the weather, Melody Plumb had no problems with her train commute to Manhattan. She was drinking a glass of the cheapest wine they offered at the Hyatt Hotel. She watched as a woman wearing red ballet flats tried to jump over a puddle and instead landed in it. Melody thought the woman was foolish for wearing those expensive shoes on such a messy day.

Melody used her smart phone to track the location of her twin daughters at an SAT tutoring center. She had given them strict directions on what route to take and where they were allowed to go while in town for tutoring. She thought about earlier that morning when the members of her family had parted ways. Her husband, Walter, had warned her that Leo would never pay her back the money he owed her. She'd been counting on the money she and her siblings referred to as "the nest" to help them keep the historic building that was their home and fund her daughters' college. The first credit card she handed the waiter to pay for her drink was denied. She handed him a card she had taken out without her husband's knowledge in order to pay for the girls' SAT tutoring.

Meanwhile in Campbell Apartment, Jack Plumb was waiting for a new drink to be mixed for him because the original wasn't mixed to his specifications. He was sitting with Walker, his husband of seven weeks. Even though he knew his family preferred to be around Walker, Jack wouldn't let Walker attend the family meeting because he didn't want his family to know he'd gotten married and hadn't invited them. Even though Walker tried to convince Jack they'd be okay no matter what happened at the lunch meeting Jack had debts that Walker knew nothing about.

Jack just wanted Leo to give him what he was owed. The brothers didn't like one another and rarely spoke. The narrator indicates that Jack had always felt like an inferior version of Leo especially so when their Leo's friends in high school had called Jack by the nickname Leo Lite. A group of people entered the bar and among them was



the ballet flat wearing woman that Melody had seen earlier. Jack thought the shoe, which she was telling others was completely ruined, looked cheap and ugly.

Walker looked at the Cartier tank watch Jack had given him as a wedding present and told Jack he'd better go. Walker loved the watch but all Jack could think of when he saw it and anything else was how much it had cost. As he made his way to the Grand Central Oyster Bar where they were to meet, Jack heard Bea calling his name.

Bea had her drink at Murphy's, a commuter pub. She was nervous about seeing Leo. She'd called him at rehab but he'd never returned her calls. The last time she'd seen him they were in the emergency room after his accident. The ER personnel were stitching up Leo's chin. Bea hoped to keep the meeting between her siblings from becoming confrontational. She worked at a literary magazine but had once put out several short stories and had advertised she was working on a novel. The novel had never materialized. She had with her a leather satchel that Leo had bought her. It was full of the pages she had finally begun writing again. Even though she thought the writing was good, she felt terrible.

Bea had gotten her literary start when Leo had convinced her to work on the staff of "SpeakEasy" a gossip/news magazine he'd helped launch. Even though the print magazine lasted only a few years Leo had kept the magazine going on the internet. After three years he sold the magazine for a small fortune. Leo had encouraged her writing and had even edited her stories during the early days before turning them over to her current boss Paul Underwood. Leo had liked her writing because she wrote about him disguised as a character named Archie. Leo's friend, Stephanie agreed to be Bea's agent and surprised her with a two-book deal. She hadn't seen Stephanie since a meeting with her and Leo when Leo asked her not to write any more Archie stories and Stephanie told her not to send her any more work until Bea came up with something new and fresh. The narrator indicates that Bea was writing about her life, which included Leo's car wreck in July. She believed Leo owed her that.

Even though their phones were in the building in which the SAT tutoring class was being held, Melody's girls were actually exploring Central Park. Nora decided they should visit the Strawberry Fields Memorial. Meanwhile, Leo realized he was lost in Central Park. He'd scheduled a time to meet Rico near the Strawberry Fields Memorial. Unable to find any landmarks he recognized, Leo began walking in a direction he thought was west. At the Strawberry Fields Memorial Louisa and Nora weren't terribly impressed with what they saw but continued exploring the park because it seemed lively, completely different from the dangerous place their mother described.

Leo had finally found his direction in the park but the path he was following was closed. He decided to follow the path anyway and slipped on ice, falling hard on his backside. He thought about his meeting and heard the voice of his counselor telling him to call things what they were. He admitted to himself it was a drug deal. He saw two girls head down the path toward him. When they saw him one looked at him as if she recognized him. Leo waved and warned them about the ice but they only ran away.



The twins were surprised to see Leo, the uncle they usually only saw on the paper's society pages, sitting on his backside on the ice, especially when he was supposed to be meeting his siblings for lunch. They hid behind a tree watching him and wishing they had a normal family. Louisa pointed out he might be there to buy drugs.

Leo wondered by the girls he'd seen had been so spooked by him. He wondered if they were going to tell a cop about him. He remembered his lawyer telling him to keep his nose clean until his divorce was final. Leo had begun walking and had finally reached a place in the park where he knew exactly where he was. He could go straight and get a taxi to take him to lunch or go to the right to meet Rico for the drug buy. The sound of crows screeching made him look up. He saw a nest in the branches of the tree and then started walking.

Analysis

The prologue for the novel *The Nest* includes the details and circumstances of the traffic accident the results of which are the basis for the actions of the main characters through the remainder of the novel. At this point all the reader knows about the wreck is that Leo was drunk and high when he invited the young waitress to go driving with him. The author hasn't included information about what happened to the waitress. It is known that Leo received only minor injuries and that he had to go to rehab.

The very long first chapter in this novel outlines the financial situations and lives of Leo's one brother and two sisters. Even though he seemed to have a close relationship with his one sister, Bea, at one point in their lives it appears that Leo has been trying to separate himself from his family for some time. In fact, Bea tried to call Leo while he was in rehab but he never returned her phone calls. He was a mentor to her because he got her a writing job at his magazine and also helped to get her a book deal. Bea seems to be doing well in her life even though she is struggling with her writing. She has begun writing again but her writing is about Leo's accident. She believes she is horrible for writing about the wreck but also believes that Leo owes her the good story she is getting out of his misfortune.

Melody, the youngest of the siblings, has gotten her family's financial situation overextended by buying a historic house and trying to buy the best for her daughters. The family already has trouble making its mortgage payments and the interest on their home loan is scheduled to go up soon. Melody has been expecting money to come from what she refers to as "the nest" to help ease their financial burdens and pay for college tuition for her twin daughters. She is the typical overprotective mother as she keeps track of her daughters using a smart phone app and warns them to stay out of Central Park.

Jack, Leo's younger brother, is a good deal like Leo. He hates his family and did not even invite them to his wedding seven weeks ago because he didn't want them there. Even while his husband, Walker, tries to console Jack, Jack only gets more irritated by Walker's attempts to calm him. He is angry with his brother, Leo, and seems to believe



that Leo won't pay him back the money he believes he is owed. Jack hopes to use the money as his contribution to his relationship with Walker. Walker is the only member of the pair who is making a decent salary in his job as a lawyer. Jack's antique shop is barely breaking even. He had counted on the money from "the nest" to pay off a home equity line of credit.

Some important symbols in this section of the novel include the bird's nest that Leo sees at the very end of the first chapter. He seems to think it is a sign that helps him to come to a decision about whether he should go on to his meeting with his family or go to meet his friend to buy drugs. Obviously, the nest is a visual symbol of "the nest," the financial payout, that Leo's siblings - especially Melody and Jack - have been anticipating to help relieve their financial troubles.

Another symbol that is important because of the way it illustrates the theme of monetary value is the red ballet flat that both Melody and Jack see. The significance of the flats is that when Melody sees them she believes they are expensive, a luxury she would love but could not afford to get for herself. If she did have a pair she would not have been foolish enough to wear them on such a messy day because they would be ruined. When Jack sees the flats, however, he assesses them as being cheap and ugly. He and his spouse agree that it is probably best the woman wearing them did step in a puddle and ruin them. Another item introduced in this section of the novel that signifies monetary value is the Cartier Tank watch that Jack bought for Walker. Even though he'd wanted to get Walker an expensive gift he realizes how foolish he was in getting a gift that cost as much money as the watch did. Since he's gotten himself into such bad financial shape all he can think of is how much money the watch cost him.

A final symbol of importance in this section is the leather satchel that Leo bought for Bea. It is a symbol of the affection that once existed between the two siblings but seems to have cooled, at least on Leo's side.

The interaction between Leo and Melody's twins is worthy of observation. Although Louisa and Nora recognize Leo, Leo has no idea that he has just seen his nieces. They wish that he was the sort of uncle they could run to and laugh with but instead they wonder why he is in Central Park at all when he was supposed to be meeting their mother for lunch. Louisa is perceptive enough to wonder if her uncle is there to buy drugs.

One of the themes of this novel revolves around the idea that there are very few sure things in life. For starters, the Plumb siblings — especially Melody and Jack — have spent money with the belief that they will get the money they are owed from "the nest." Although the particulars have not yet been ironed out it can be assumed by the reader that their brother Leo, who is not the most responsible of the family, has done something that has put their certainty that they will get this money into jeopardy.

While she is intending for the money from "the nest" to solve her financial problems Melody also believes that she can keep track of her twin daughters through a smart phone app. Melody thinks it is a sure thing that the teenagers will always have their



phones with them. This “sure thing” falls through when the twins realize they can explore New York without their mother suspecting anything as long as they leave their phones in the building where they are supposed to be receiving tutoring for the SAT.

The weather also is not a sure thing. This is demonstrated by the freak October snowstorm. This snowstorm is a visible symbol of the idea that things aren’t always going to happen by a prescribed scheduled. Everything, even the weather, has the possibility of chance built in.

Discussion Question 1

Discuss why Bea might think that Leo owes her the story that she is writing about his unfortunate accident. How does one determine ownership for an event when it comes to literary rights?

Discussion Question 2

Do you think Leo went to buy the drugs or do you think he went on to meet with his siblings? Discuss your opinions. Use information from the first chapter to support your opinion.

Discussion Question 3

Discuss the structure of this prologue and first chapter. How does the author give the details of Leo and his relationships with his siblings but still maintain the feel of a story, not a history lesson?

Vocabulary

lambent, diffident, ludicrously, keen, furtive, foliage, arcane, palpitations, meticulous, rife, particulate, dour, debauchery, arrhythmically, naifs, stalwart, undulating, admonitions, bonhomie, rankled, denigrating, idyllic, repertoire, placate, diversionary, amortized, feigned, patina, insular, salacious, nepotism, inaugural, caustic, ebullience, fervent, evanescent, nefarious, ebullient, scrim, treacherous



Part One: Snowtober Chapters 2-5

Summary

In Chapter 2, the children's father, Leonard Plumb Sr., had wanted his children to have a small trust that would be given to them when Melody, the youngest, turned 40. The children weren't even sure when they had begun calling their inheritance "the nest." Leonard Sr. had made his fortune on synthetic polymers used to help consumer products like diapers and feminine hygiene products thinner and better. The narrator goes on to explain that Leonard Sr. had also invested his money well. He'd had his second cousin, George Plumb, work through his estate just two years before Leonard Sr. died. Before the markets fell in 2008 George had put the money in bonds and the funds grew. Francie, Leonard Sr.'s first wife and the mother of the Plumb children, was the only one who had access to the funds before they were to be distributed. She had refused all requests for loans prior to the distribution date until Leo had his traffic accident.

In Chapter 3, after he'd gotten out of rehab Leo hadn't even been able to go home because his soon to be ex-wife had the locks changed. He was paging through the contacts on his cell phone and watching panhandlers compete for change near the subway when he decided to call Stephanie. When Stephanie answered, she suggested things must be really bad if he was seeking her out. He asked and she said she'd heard very little about his situation. She asked him a variety of questions until he finally demanded an answer on whether or not she'd allow him to stay there.

After Leo called Stephanie, Stephanie realized she'd been waiting for him to call. She'd learned about his divorce when she saw Victoria at a bistro. Stephanie disliked Victoria because she represented the glib and careless part of Leo's personality. Even though she believed he was the same person who had left her behind when he sold SpeakEasyMedia she allowed him to stay with her because she wanted to know for sure. When he arrived in Brooklyn Stephanie told him he was not allowed to take drugs, that she wouldn't loan him any money and that she wouldn't have sex with him.

In Chapter 4, Leo's siblings had met with Francie after they learned she had nearly drained "the nest" after Leo's accident. George told them there was still about \$50,000 in the account for each of the them. Jack pointed out that amount was only about 10% of what they had expected to receive. The narrator indicates that Melody felt Jack wanted her to join the conversation but wasn't sure what to say to their mother. As children they'd always thought she was a mean drunk. She stopped drinking when she married her second husband. At this time her children had realized she was just mean. Francie scolded her children for being unhappy she'd used the money to help their brother out of his emergency. They argued the emergency was of his own making, caused by his own mistakes.



Francie wondered how the children she had raised had turned out to be so horrible. She'd read Bea's stories and was surprised to find herself described as being distant and cruel. Melody was the youngest but also the most worn looking. Francie almost wished she could give her some money for Botox. She'd like Leo the best because he'd been the least needy of all the children.

She had helped Leo because Harold, her new husband, had insisted she take care of the situation. She'd also thought it would be a chance for her to make a motherly gesture. As she looked at her children one more time she told them they'd have to talk to Leo about the situation. She complimented George on the job that he had done to negotiate the settlement with the waitress and keep the accident out of the paper.

As Melody watched Francie wrap a lavender scarf around her neck, she complimented her mother on it. Francie unwrapped the scarf, folded it and handed it to Melody. She was briefly happy with Melody's pleasure in the scarf but that faded when Jack asked if Leo understood the gift was a loan. As a way of placating them Francie told her children she'd have Leo call them when he got back into town. When he got in touch with them she advised that they invite him to lunch.

In Chapter 5 at the Oyster Bar Leo was late and the maître d' would not seat the other three siblings until all members of their party had arrived. While they sat at the bar waiting they discussed how they should start the conversation with Leo. Bea warned them that if they become offensive Leo would just avoid them. Melody wondered aloud why Leo hadn't fought Victoria harder in the divorce to get something for himself. Bea told Melody that if she had been there the night of the wreck she wouldn't ask that question. Jack voiced his opinion that Leo had money hidden somewhere. Just as Jack had decided Leo wasn't coming Bea noticed Melody fluff her bangs nervously as Jack beckoned to someone. Before she had a chance to turn around Bea felt Leo's hand on her shoulder.

Analysis

The author builds the story on the foundational blocks laid out in Chapter 1. A little more information about the circumstances surrounding Leo's accident and "the nest" is given here. The reader learns that "the nest" is a trust fund set up by their father. His children, however, have done the opposite of what he hoped they would when they found out they had money coming. He had not want them planning their financial futures based on the amount of money they might receive from the trust, which is what they have done. Leonard Sr. also had not wanted his children to amass a fortune from his trust. If it had not been almost cleared out to help Leo, the children would have gotten about \$500,000 each. That would total \$2 million dollars. George tells the children they will each be getting \$50,000 after the funds were taken to cover the costs of Leo's accident. That means about \$200,000 is left in the trust fund. If one does the math it took \$1.8 million to take care of Leo's accident. The reader still doesn't know what happened to the waitress, if she was killed, severely injured or uninjured.



The Plumb children have had bad relations with their mother in the past as shown in Chapter 4. Even though Melody seems to still have some respect for her mother her other siblings call their mother by her first name, Francie. The reader learns in this section that Francie was a drunk most of the time her children were growing up. She had felt overwhelmed by her children and had fallen into a deep depression when she learned she was pregnant with Melody when she'd just gotten her other three children to the point they were sleeping through the night.

Notice that Leonard Sr. had prided himself in being a self-made millionaire. He believed that if a person didn't work for what they had they would become depressed. The narrator explains Leonard Sr. didn't want this to happen to his children so he had ordered that the trust fund not be distributed until Melody turned 40. Even though he had not wanted his children to count on that money as being a surety, they had done so anyway and are fighting against each other in their greed.

Notice also in this section of the novel that Francie stresses how pleased she is that George was able to keep Leo's accident out of the newspapers. She believes it is more important that the details of the accident not be made public than for her children to get the money to which they feel they are entitled. The narrator notes that it was Harold who had told Francie to make sure the wreck was taken care of quickly. He worried that a lawsuit would be publicly humiliating and would cost him money because he ran the danger of losing clients. It was because of Harold she had taken the money out of the trust fund - not due to any motherly feelings of wanting to help.

There is only one symbol of note included in this section of chapters. That is the expensive lavender scarf that Francie gives to Melody. The giving of the scarf is an attempt by Francie to show her love to Melody. Even though it isn't Melody who questions her if Leo understands the forward on the money was a loan and needed to be repaid, the question makes her angry enough that she regrets having given the scarf to Melody.

Notice also in this section when Leo goes home to find that the locks have been changed it is not to one of his family members that he goes seeking a place to live but instead to a friend who used to work with him at SpeakEasy. Stephanie had been expecting Leo to get back in touch with her and wonders if he has changed.

This novel is written in the past tense from the viewpoint of a third person narrator. There appears to be no focus on any character in particular. So far the focus has switched between Melody, Jack, Bea and Francie. This changing point of view allows the reader to know the emotions and thoughts of all of the characters as the author chooses to share them.

Discussion Question 1

If Leo was only due a portion of the trust, do you think more than his part should have been pulled out of that trust, even if it was for an emergency?



Discussion Question 2

Do you think the Plumb siblings are acting immaturely about not getting their fair share of their inheritance? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 3

Do you think the third person point of view was the best choice for this novel? Why or why not?

Vocabulary

vociferously, scrupulously, vernacular, lassitude, indolence, prescient, collateral, regenerating, avarice, exuberantly, exhorting, consigliere, monsoon, purported, vituperative, preternaturally, bereft, voracious, magnanimous, nuanced, diaphanous, nostalgia, dubious



Part One: Snowtober Chapters 6-7

Summary

In Chapter 6, Stephanie gave Leo the job of moving firewood closer to the house. When he was outside Rico returned his call. Leo arranged the drug deal. Back inside Leo admired Stephanie's house, particularly the marble mantelpiece with the carving of a young girl. He learned that Stephanie had named the carving Lillian. They talked first about Stephanie's old boyfriends. Leo then told Stephanie he couldn't believe she'd sold her business. He remembered that when he sold SpeakEasy it had been the beginning of the end for him. Stephanie told him he could have stayed, Nathan had wanted him to stay.

Later, after they'd eaten, Stephanie asked Leo if he wanted to talk about the wreck. Instead of answering he commented that the stone girl looked like Bea. Stephanie groaned because Bea had called her but she'd been avoiding her calls. In the kitchen she told herself she would not get caught up in Leo again. Leo came up behind her asking Stephanie if she wanted to dance. She tried to resist Leo but her lip yielded when he touched it. At that moment there was a crash in the backyard and the electricity went out.

In Chapter 7 Leo was the only one of the siblings who was calm during the meeting. He hadn't really thought about the meeting that much, hadn't really even realized at first that his mother had drawn funds out of "the nest" to pay off the Rodriguez family. He was surprised when he learned his brother and sisters hadn't had any say in the matter or the payout. The narrator notes that Leo thought about the account he had in the Grand Cayman. He'd never told Victoria about it. There was enough money there to pay back "the nest" but he planned to use the money to just disappear one day. He lied to his siblings telling them he wished he had the money to pay them back. Leo said he had several options on which he was already working to get the money. He asked for three months to get together a solid plan.

Analysis

The author's choice of the third person point of view plays a significant role in this section of the novel. Many of the characters — Stephanie, Bea, Jack and Melody — are holding onto hope that Leo has changed for the better. The third person point of view allows the reader to know what all four of these characters are thinking about Leo. Stephanie really hopes he's changed. She sets out the ground rules for him and expects him to follow them but still fights with herself whether or not she should give in to her desire for him. Bea hopes only to keep the fighting between her siblings to a minimum. She is perhaps the one who likes Leo the most. Jack doubts his brother has changed at all and believes Leo has money hidden away somewhere. Melody is hopeful that Leo will do right by them.



Due to the story being written from the third person point of view of an omniscient narrator, the reader also knows that Leo has not changed. The reader is aware that even though Stephanie has asked him not to do drugs while he's living with her he receives a phone call from his drug supplier and sets up a meeting for a deal. The reader also knows that Leo has enough money to pay back "the nest" in an overseas account but that he doesn't want to give that money to his siblings. He instead wants to use that money to disappear. These insights into Leo's thoughts let the reader know how selfish and self serving Leo is. He has no regard for the pain and inconvenience he's caused for his siblings even though he assumes at first that they had willingly given their parts of the inheritance to help him out. Notice he seems surprised that his brother and sisters were given no chance to dispute the use of "the nest" to bail Leo out. He briefly believes his mother's decision to cash out "the nest" for him might indicate she loves him more, but when he thinks about her actions more closely he realizes she probably had pressure from Harold to make Leo's problem go away.

One symbol of significance in this section of the novel is the marble mantelpiece in Stephanie's apartment. She and Leo discuss it the first night he stays with her and it becomes a symbol of their relationship. Remember that Stephanie tells Leo she named the girl whose face is featured on the mantel Lillian. This will be significant later in the novel.

Discussion Question 1

Do you think Leo might have treated his siblings differently in his promises to repay them if he thought they had willingly donated their portions of "the nest" to help him out? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 2

Knowing what you do about Leo's act of setting up a drug buy even though Stephanie has told him he is not allowed to do drugs while he is staying with her, what do you think about the longevity of their friendship? Do you think Leo is as serious about Stephanie as she is about him?

Discussion Question 3

Discuss the way the author uses the timeline of the novel as a way to build the story.

Vocabulary

frugally, décolletage, devoid, conglomerate, incongruous, patrician, anomaly, dissonant, obligatory, berated, sabbatical, prodigious, decimating, libertine, fervent



Part Two: The Kiss Chapters 8-10

Summary

In Chapter 8, in the late 1990's Paul Underwood had bought the building that had formerly housed Plymouth Paper Fibers Inc. It became home to his literary magazine "Paper Fibers." Even though he lived in the apartment on the fourth floor of the building Paul never went to the office in apparel that wasn't suited for work. He liked his life of routine and habit. One of his habits was his daily walk along the Fulton Ferry Landing. Recently he'd begun meeting Leo Plumb during his walks.

When Leo had ended "SpeakEasy" magazine and hadn't invited Paul to be part of the Internet version Paul had been very angry. He was also hurt that no one else seemed surprised that Leo wasn't taking Paul with him. When Paul asked Leo about his decision Leo lied to him telling him he would hate the writing he would have to do and that the pay wasn't good. After Leo came back from rehab Paul noticed Leo did quite a bit of nosing around the "Paper Fibers" office saying he was looking for Bea but asking about scheduling, deadlines and finances. Paul assumed Leo was working with Nathan but Leo claimed he wasn't. Paul had heard Nathan was thinking about investing in a literary magazine and thought perhaps he was considering "Paper Fibers." The magazine was receiving most of its funding through the rent from his apartments and donations made by his two aunts. Recently, however, their donations had dwindled. They'd apologized to Paul telling him their accountant was making them cut back on charitable donations because their retirement account was dwindling so quickly.

This new relationship with Leo also rekindled in Paul his love for Bea. He imagined himself kissing Bea trying to plan out the perfect setting. He'd lost interest in Bea when he saw her interest in writing fade. Recently, however, she'd seemed to have caught a new interest in writing. He knew if she did get something new published it would do good things for his magazine because she worked there.

In Chapter 9, Bea agreed to go with Paul to a dinner party at Celia Baxter's because she heard Stephanie would be there and hoped to run into her. It had been almost three months since the lunch at the Oyster Bar and Bea wondered when the time would be right for her to show Leo, Paul or Stephanie her new work. She knew Jack was planning a meeting with Leo and told him that Leo appeared to be working with Nathan again in order to give him some hope their brother was making positive progress. To herself, Bea noticed there were still times that Leo seemed anxious and far away, a different person from the brother she loved so much. She knew she had to make a move with her writing soon or Leo's divorce would be final and he'd be free to flee if that was what he wanted.

Bea headed for the powder room when she heard Lena Novak's hyena laugh. Lena and Bea were part of an official group a journalist had named the Glitterary Girls. Unlike Bea Lena had published a book a year. When Bea finally worked up the courage to leave the powder room Lena pounced on her. Lena bragged to Bea about her life, husband and



young daughter. After Bea escaped from Lena and was trying to leave the party she overheard Lena and Celia gossiping about her. They criticized Bea's writing, saying she hadn't succeeded as a writer because she lacked the ability to transition to mature material. The two women even made fun of Bea's clothes and her hairstyle. Bea made her escape through the kitchen where she saw a plate of expensive cookies. She dumped all of them into her purse. Celia walked in just as Bea was covering the cookies with napkins. Bea sensed Celia eyeing the empty cookie plate but only made her apologies for not being able to stay.

In Chapter 10, at Stephanie's brownstone Jack saw an upstairs light go off and was happy to discover someone was at home. Leo hadn't been answering his phone calls or emails and Jack was becoming frantic. Walker didn't know about the home equity line of credit that Jack had taken out on their summer house so he could pay the rent on his store. Because they'd talked about similar home loans people were being encouraged to take out on their homes Jack knew Walker believed the loans were unethical and almost fraudulent. Walker was also the type person who didn't build his hopes on what they could do after Jack received his share of money from "the nest." Jack knew that if he wasn't able to pay off the home equity loan as he'd planned to do with his part of his inheritance that Walker would never forgive him.

No one answered when Jack rang the bell so he looked through the window believing he saw someone moving around inside. A man in a policeman's navy shirt looked back at him from inside the garden apartment. When the angry man, Tommy O'Toole, came outside Jack explained he was Leo's brother and was looking for him. The man said he thought Stephanie and Leo were gone for the day. Jack asked for Stephanie's phone number and the man grudgingly allowed Jack to come inside the front hall of his apartment while he looked for Stephanie's number.

Instead of staying where he was told to stay Jack looked over the contents of the apartment. He saw what he believed was a copy of Rodlin's statue "The Kiss." Going for a closer look Jack saw the right side of the man's body was missing while the woman's leg appeared to have melted below the knee. Jack thought at first it was plastic but when he touched it he realized it was a bronze cast that had been badly damaged. When Tommy discovered Jack looking at the statue he was angry again. He would tell Jack only that it was a gift that had been damaged in a fire. Jack believed there was something strange about the statue. He snapped some pictures with his cell phone while Tommy tried to call Stephanie. There was no answer.

Analysis

Two different kisses are described in this section of the novel. The first kiss described is the kiss that Paul Underwood one day hopes to give to Bea. He has been interested in her for some time but his interest has reignited since Bea has begun writing again. The second kiss is the statue that Jack finds in Tommy's apartment. Jack believes this statue is of value and wonders how it came to be in Tommy's possession. Jack senses there is



something strange in the story that Tommy tells him and believes that he has heard something about a similar statue but can't pinpoint what he heard.

Interpersonal relations begin taking a front seat in this section of the novel. When Leo begins hanging around "Paper Fibers" Paul assumes he is working with Nathan, apparently a big name in publishing. Even though Leo denies any association with Nathan notice that Paul believes Leo is lying. Even though Leo never liked Paul, called him terrible things and didn't hire him to work at his Internet magazine when his paper version of "SpeakEasy" folded, Paul strikes up a new friendship with Leo. Although Leo has never helped him in the past, Paul somehow believes that Leo can get Nathan to put money into his literary magazine.

When describing the amount of money Nathan has to put into a literary magazine the author continues to expound on the theme of the different values people of different backgrounds assign to the same things. In this case a friend had told Paul that Nathan had some money he wanted to invest in a literary magazine. "The money he's willing to throw at someone is chump change for him but probably massive by your standards," 74) the friend told Paul. Nathan is so rich that his donation seems like nothing to him while it would be a lifesaving amount for Paul and his publication.

Notice also the different opinions of the dress that Bea wears to Celia's dinner party. To Bea the dress is her favorite. Even though she bought it from a secondhand store, she is happy she has chosen to wear it until she hears Celia and Lena gossiping about her. They correctly guess that she bought it secondhand but deem it is from another time and place.

Notice Lena seems to have securely formed a new identity for herself now that she is a celebrated writer. The narrator notes that Lena had identified strongly with the title "The Glitterary Girls" that a journalist gave her, Bea and some other writers. Lena has done her best to live up to this reputation. Even though Bea knows that Lena has come from a single parent family and that she lived in a trailer park in Ohio as a child. She has changed her name and changed her appearance. The narrator notes that Lena brags about her husband, whom she says is listed in the blue book.

Meanwhile, because Jack has counted on getting his share of "the nest," he's worried about the future of his relationship with Walker, whom Jack knows would not approve of the home equity line of credit he has taken out on their summer home. Jack's fear backs up his father's belief that one should not count on anything, particularly money, as being a sure thing. Even Walker, who works with families dealing with estates and inheritances, has tried to tell Jack how often people don't get the inheritances they expect. He has made fun of Jack's promises about all the things they will be able to do once they receive the money from "the nest." The narrator notes that Jack's guilt is growing because Walker does not know about the credit line Jack took out against their summer home. Jack is afraid if Walker does find out about the credit line that Walker will leave him.



Finally, notice here the interpersonal relations between the Plumb siblings. Bea is apparently writing a story about Leo's accident. She wants to show it to him before he has a chance to leave but hasn't made up her mind if the story is the right one for her to share. When she talks to Jack she tries to keep him from pressuring Leo because she's afraid he'll spook Leo and cause him to run away without paying any of them back. Notice the difference incentives the two have. Jack is desperate for money while Bea desperately wants to revive her talent. Both believe they depend on Leo to help them achieve their goals.

Discussion Question 1

Notice how both Bea and Jack hold Leo responsible for their successes in life. Bea needs Leo's approval of her work while Jack needs money so he can pay off the loan he's taken out and keep his relationship with Walker out of hot water. Are either of these siblings less selfish in their desires? Give reasons to back up your answer.

Discussion Question 2

Discuss the relationship between Paul and Leo. If you were Paul would you be able to trust Leo? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 3

Discuss the interaction between Jack and Tommy. Do you believe Tommy's story about the statue? Why or why not?

Vocabulary

warren, defunct, placard, pristine, ostensibly, voracious, eccentricity, tenuous, serendipitously, infuriatingly, libidinous, ardent, assuage, lurid, voluptuous, defecate, abashed, derelict, precipitously, furtive, tableaux, disembodied, surreptitious



Part Two: The Kiss Chapters 11-12

Summary

In Chapter 11, Tommy had gotten the sculpture “The Kiss” the last day he worked on the pile at the World Trade Center site. He’d been able to work there because he had previously been a firefighter. His wife had been killed in the attack and he hoped to find some memento of her in the rubble. He had hoped she would send him some sign in the form of a memento of herself. Even though he knew it was irrational, he still held out hope.

On his last afternoon of work one of his friends called him to see what they had found. Tommy knew from the moment he saw the sculpture that it was a sign from Ronnie. Even though it was badly damaged, the couple sat with the wife draped over the man, just like Ronnie would drape herself over Tommy’s lap. Tommy had wheeled the sculpture to the Port Authority trailer but no one was there so it was easy for him to wheel it into his truck instead. He didn’t think anyone would even miss it.

In Chapter 12, Melody sat in her car outside a consignment shop trying to will herself to go inside and show the woman the pictures of all of the furniture in her house. The narrator changes the subject from Melody’s sale of her furniture to her relationship with her daughters by pointing out that Melody knew her daughters called her The General behind her back. She’d wanted to be a better parent to her children than her parents had been to her. For two years she’d searched out the perfect house in which the twins could grow up. The house she’d found had been too expensive for all the work it needed but Melody had pressed to be allowed to buy it and fix it up on her own. Walt had finally given in because he loved her. She had spent her years scrimping and saving getting them through to what she believed would be the lifesaving time when they would receive “the nest.” Melody thought about how she’d enjoyed being a mother unlike all the other mothers she knew who seemed to just put up with their children.

Analysis

In this section of the novel the author inserts the story of a man, Tommy O’Toole, who lost his wife in the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center. Tommy took a Rodin statue from the wreckage of the site because he believed it was a sign from his wife. Remember when Jack questioned Tommy about the statue Tommy had said only that it was a gift and that it had been in a fire. In Tommy’s mind the statue was a gift from his wife and it had been in a fire; a massive disastrous fire. The inclusion of the attack on the World Trade Center lends a touch of history to the novel but not enough to qualify it as historical fiction.

The foundation for this book seems to be that one decision made by one person can snowball affecting the lives of everyone around that person. The main choice in this



instance is that made by Leo to invite a 19 year old into his car and drive around while drunk and high. The result of that decision has affected his entire family. There are other, seemingly more minor decisions, made by other characters that result in adding to the predicament in which the characters find themselves.

In Melody's case it was her decision to buy a house she and her family couldn't afford based on the idea that one day she'd get the money from "the nest" that is causing her unneeded stress. Although she is willing to sell whatever she has to in order to fund her daughters' futures she is unwilling to part with the house she has put a good deal of energy and time into. She is so determined to hold onto the house that she has become blind to the fact that the stress she's feeling is making her sick and damaging her relationship with her husband. Significant to note in this section is that Melody's daughters call her The General because she is so good at organizing and making the best of their lives. This identity as The General will become important later on in the novel.

Discussion Question 1

Why do you think the author includes the story of Tommy and his wife in the novel? How do you think his story might fit in with the story of the Plumbs?

Discussion Question 2

Research the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center. Are there any reports indicating any statues by Rodin might have been lost in the attack?

Discussion Question 3

How has Melody built her life based on "the nest"? What problems has she caused for her and her family because of the decisions she has made?

Vocabulary

concourse, delineate, transmuted, contentious, fastidious, carnage, talisman, intrinsically, appease, indulgent, cacophony, capitulation, fixate, parity, engorged



Part Two: The Kiss Chapters 13-15

Summary

In Chapter 13, Simone had taken over Nora and Louisa's outings during their SAT tutoring. They went only to Simone's apartment or the American Museum of Natural History. Simone was highly intelligent, but she made Louisa nervous. One day while they were at the museum after Louisa had been interrupted several times while trying to draw she accidentally came upon Nora and Simone in a dark hallway in an intimate embrace. Nora's shirt was unbuttoned and Simone was stroking her breasts.

In Chapter 14, Corporal Vinnie Massaro imagined himself tormenting one of the children who came into his pizza shop and called him Robocop because of his prosthetic arm. He reminded himself to rewind the scenario because he was supposed to manage his anger. He imagined himself going over to the kids' table and showing them how his arm worked and telling the kids he was one of the lucky ones.

Vinnie realized he was one of the lucky ones because his partner had been left in a vegetative state by the IED explosion that took Vinnie's arm. Vinnie got a little calmer when the boys left but his anger flared again when he saw Matilda Rodriguez walking on her crutches as if she were wanting others to have to wait on her. He'd met her at rehab when he was learning to work his new arm. She'd been upbeat and flirtatious with him as well as the other residents. Matilda greeted Vinnie at the front door of the restaurant. Vinnie tried to concentrate on greeting her in a nonjudgemental manner. She knew how he felt about her not using her prosthesis. When he did approach the table he demanded to know where her foot was.

Chapter 15 jumps back in the time soon after Leo's car accident. Leo and Matilda had been in adjacent rooms at the emergency room after the wreck. Matilda's right foot had been nearly severed at the ankle. George had told Leo he needed to pretend like he didn't remember anything about the wreck. Meanwhile, Bea was trying to listen to the discussion going on in Spanish on the other side of the curtain. The doctors talked about reattachment but said it was doubtful the surgery would be successful. Matilda's father said the family had no insurance and was in the country illegally. Matilda told her mother the man from the car was going to help her get a career in music but her mother berated her.

Meanwhile, Leo told Bea he wished he could rewind his life to 2002. He asked her how he had gotten to that point in his life. She believed he was bordering on self reflection and regret something she hadn't heard from him in a long time. Because he seemed so pitiful, Bea told George she'd heard that Matilda and her family were in the country illegally. He was pleased and said they could use that information. From the other side of the curtain they heard Matilda speak out in Spanish above the argument telling them to take the foot. The doctors promised to leave as much bone as possible.



Analysis

This book is written in a very nonlinear format with the author skipping back and forth through time to share what she feels is important with her reader at the exact point in the novel she believes it is important. In this particular section the reader finally learns what happened to Matilda Rodriguez, the girl who was in the car with Leo at the time of the wreck. Her right foot was nearly severed in the car wreck. The injury was so bad the doctors feared they could not successfully reattach the foot. It was decided by Matilda that they should amputate her foot. Notice the doctor's promise to Matilda that they would leave as much bone as possible. This promise and the indication that more bone is a good thing will be significant later in the novel.

In this section notice Vinnie's anger when he sees Matilda walking on her crutches. He was wounded by an IED explosion and seems to be angered by everything from the young adults who he believes are making fun of him because he has a prosthetic arm to Matilda walking on crutches. He seems to believe she's walking on the crutches because she wants the attention of having people carry her bags and open doors for her. Notice in this section that despite his frustration with Matilda for not using her prosthetic foot he seems to be attracted to her, an attraction that started when they were in rehab together.

Significant also in this section is the discussion that went on between Matilda and her family in the emergency room as well as the interactions between Bea, George and Leo. Because Bea believes that Leo is finally feeling regret for what he has done she shares with him and George that Matilda and her family are illegal immigrants, information she learned from eavesdropping on the conversation going on in the other room. While Leo has only a cut on his chin that will probably leave a scar Matilda and her family face the decision of whether or not to amputate her foot. It is Matilda who ultimately orders the doctors to take her foot off.

Louisa learns in this section of the novel that Nora has been searching for her own sexual identity when she happens upon Nora and Simone, a black girl they met in their SAT tutoring sessions, making out. This is the third kiss to which the title of this part of the novel might refer. Instead of interrupting her sister and Simone, Nora had run from the private scene. While Simone has apparently challenged Nora to do some exploring Simone also encouraged Louisa to explore her college choices based more on her interests and talents than on what her mother wants for her. Simone notices that Louisa has a talent as an artist and challenges her to explore her options in art.

Discussion Question 1

Discuss Vinnie and his anger. How does he fit into the story?



Discussion Question 2

Are you relieved to know what happened to the girl Leo had in the car with him? Why do you think the author waited for so long to let the reader know what happened to her?

Discussion Question 3

Why was Bea hesitant to share with Leo and George that she'd learned Matilda and her family were illegal? What might you have done in her position?

Vocabulary

coerce, diaphanous, lexicon, vernacular, blanched, profusely, utilitarian, eviscerate, genially, platitudes, regimen, adjacent, vintage



Part Two: The Kiss Chapters 16-18

Summary

In Chapter 16, Bea was up early. She couldn't sleep first because of the memories of the party at Celia's house and second because she'd had a dream about Tuck. She met Tuck during a poetry class. He'd died three years ago, after having a stroke that took his voice. They hadn't begun their sexual relationship until after Bea was no longer his student. He bought the apartment on the Upper West Side in which she now lived so they could have a place to meet. She asked him not to leave his wife because she needed solitude. She'd finally given up on her coming-of-age novel she'd been trying to write when he died. She had asked for a loan on "the nest" at that point but she'd gotten notice from Tuck's lawyer that he had left her the apartment. Tuck had been suspicious of "the nest" to begin with and Bea considered her home to be her nest.

In her dream Tuck had been trying to tell her something important but she couldn't determine what it was. She started cleaning off her table. Thinking about "the nest" had made her think about her writing. Her latest pages were good work. She smoked a joint as she considered showing what she'd written to Leo. She remembered how Leo had reacted when she had let Conor Bellingham have sex with her because she liked the story he'd written. Conor was hateful to her the next time she saw him. When Bea cried to Leo he told her Conor was lucky he hadn't turned him in for plagiarism because his story came straight from "The Great Gatsby." Leo also wrote an embarrassing limerick about Conor by an author called "Anonymous." No one was willing to take credit for the limerick nor was Conor willing to speak out against it even though it was obvious it was about him because it described him as a premature ejaculator. Bea believed the limerick had been the beginning of "SpeakEasy."

In Chapter 17 after he managed to graduate college Jack went to Greenwich Village with the idea that he wanted to have lots of sex. At the time AIDS was an issue that caused a great deal of fear among the gay population. It was only a few months after he'd begun his life in Greenwich Village that he met Walker Bennett. Walker had gone into the bar where he'd met Jack on a whim. Jack had offered Walker a drink and they'd hit it off. They moved into the apartment in which they lived 20 years ago. He remembered how relieved they'd both been when they had gotten checked for AIDS before they moved in together and found they were both negative. He believed Walker had saved his life but at the same time wondered what his life might have been like if he'd spent more time messing around before settling down.

At his shop after his attempted visit to Leo Jack realized after doing some research why the Rodin statue he'd seen at Tommy's apartment was significant. He remembered reading how a cast of "The Kiss" had been recovered from the debris but had disappeared. He wondered if he could offer to sell the statue for Tommy and earn a commission from the sale, one that would be big enough to help out his financial situation. He'd even gone so far as to contact a seller who dealt in the illegal sale of art.



In Chapter 18, Leo was sitting alone in his office in Stephanie's apartment. He was spying on the neighbors more than he was working. They were calling their living arrangements temporary but the things Leo had gotten from the apartment he'd shared with Victoria were stored in her basement. Stephanie had suggested that Leo call Nathan when she heard he was working on a new project. Leo had managed not to react when Stephanie described what she knew of the project but recognized it as one of his old ideas. Leo had suggested the idea to Nathan but Nathan had snubbed him. Leo complained about how his business acquaintances had changed since he'd last worked with them.

Even though Leo had at first used his interest in Paul Underwood to make everyone think he was doing something he had come to realize there was real potential there. He believed he could present Nathan with a proposal to grow "Paper Fibers" that would catch Nathan's attention. He started to have fun with the project and imagine that it was possible he could pay his family back the money he owed them. When the doorbell rang Leo was surprised to see Bea standing there. She handed him a leather satchel containing the pages she'd written. She asked Leo to read what she'd written and then pass it along to Stephanie. He had an urge to hug Bea but it was replaced quickly with anger. Bea noticed the change in him. Leo told her he'd get to the pages as soon as he could. He planned to put an emphasis on his meeting with Nathan.

Analysis

A good deal of background information about the relationship between Bea and Leo, and Walker and Jack is shared in this section of the novel. When sBea was a young writer Leo had been a mentor and almost a father figure to her. She remembered him sticking up for her after a man with whom she'd had sex had embarrassed her publicly. Her desire for Leo is not so much to get the money she is owed but to restore her relationship with him.

Also in this section of the novel the reader learns how Jack and Walker met. It was at the time that AIDS was a disease spreading quickly among gay men. Walker had insisted that Jack not sleep around while they were together. For this reason Jack believed that Walker had probably saved his life because Walker's demands had kept him from sleeping around and getting the fatal disease.

Meanwhile, just as his siblings counted their chickens before they hatched with "the nest," Leo seems to be counting his chickens before they hatch with his belief that Nathan will want to work with him in building up "Paper Fibers." Leo seems to believe he has a leg up on working on the project with Nathan because the project sounds very much like one that Leo once tried to get Nathan to agree to but Nathan refused to see the value in the idea.

In this section of the novel Leo seems to be really trying to change his ways. He's looking for a job and trying to get back into the literary world. He has real hopes for being able to earn the money to pay his siblings back. Everything seems to be looking



up in his world. After much thought, Bea gives Leo the story she has written about his wreck. Because he is not focused on Bea, she is not the one whom he expects to bring him success at that moment, he pushes the satchel she brings him aside and concentrates on Nathan. Remember that the satchel is a symbol of Bea and Leo's relationship. Leo had given her the bag as an incentive to write. Bea even considered it her lucky bag. Even though Bea hopes to rekindle their old friendship Leo pushes the bag aside, symbolically pushing her aside.

Discussion Question 1

Do you think Leo should put all of his emphasis into trying to get a job with Nathan? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 2

If you were Paul would you have trusted Leo when he started nosing around "Paper Fibers"? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 3

How do you think Leo will react to Bea's story? Do you think he was ever the admirable brother she believed he was?

Vocabulary

capitulated, abraded, malleable, preposterous, alchemy, bildungsroman, nebulous, metaphorically, placated, doltish, plagiarizing, miscreants, aphrodisiac, intone, karmic, genial, umbrage, purview, philanthropic

Part Two: The Kiss Chapters 19-21

Summary

In Chapter 19 Melody fell asleep in her car and was woken when two mothers from the twins' school tapped on her window. When Melody stepped out of the car one of the mothers told her they missed her at the college financial aid meeting while another commented Melody didn't need to be there. One commented the financial aid people would look at Melody's scarf (she was still wearing the one that Francie gave her) and kick her out. The women, who made Melody angry because they were so rich compared to her, mentioned to Melody they'd just seen Walt in Vivienne's office. Melody felt betrayed as she walked to the office of the woman who had sold them their house. She knew she would rather find Walt and Vivienne in an embrace than sitting across the desk from each other.

In Chapter 20 Simone had first kissed Nora in the kitchen of Simone's apartment. Nora thought all afternoon how she wished Simone would kiss her again. Later that week in a dressing room Simone kissed Nora. This time Nora kissed her back. They learned they could lose Louisa easily at the Museum of Natural History. They explored each other in restrooms, dark hallways and even the IMAX theater. After the theater incident Louisa noticed Nora's knees were dirty. Simone and Nora made up an excuse about losing an earring. Louisa realized they were lying to her.

Nora didn't like lying to her sister and tried to find a way to tell her what was happening between her and Simone. When Nora tried to talk to Simone about her frustration Simone had made fun of her. Simone explained to Nora she was "worried about being everyone's mirror" (172). She said everyone was looking for reflections of themselves in other people, especially those who are close to them. They want to see themselves reflected positively but that it wasn't Nora's job to be that reflection. Nora understood what Simone was saying but still wanted a word to define herself. Simone said she should tell others she was bicurious. Meanwhile, Louisa wondered that if Nora was gay if it meant she was gay as well.

In Chapter 21 Stephanie tried to pinpoint her identity with four words during a team building session. Even though she wasn't supposed to make any changes from her original thoughts she changed her choice of "literary agent" to "reader" and wondered why she had chosen to describe herself as "single." She thought of the employee orientation with the new firm to which she'd sold her company as bullshit. Stephanie's cell phone rang and she excused herself from the session saying she had to take the call. It was Bea. Bea asked if Leo had given her the new pages she'd written yet. He hadn't but Stephanie assumed they were some redone old work. Back in the meeting she checked the app she'd downloaded that tracked her baby's development. She was surprised that at 41 she had gotten pregnant by Leo Plumb who was probably the worst candidate for a father she'd ever met. She had hope that Leo had changed. He was helping her clean house, appeared to be working with Nathan and didn't seem to be



back on drugs. As she thought about her list, she crossed out “single” and wrote “mother.”

Analysis

The author has a way of slipping information into her work in a way that surprises the reader but also seems almost expected. For instance in the section where the reader learns Stephanie is pregnant the author mentions Stephanie’s nausea and her thought that she will need something to eat soon. Nausea from morning sickness is one of the few types of nausea soothed by eating so the reader may get a suspicion of what is happening with Stephanie but in the following paragraph when she pulls out her cell phone to check the app showing her baby’s development the reader is sure that Stephanie is pregnant. This habit of introducing information also slips it in under the reader’s radar and makes him wonder if it had been mentioned before and he just missed it.

As they discover new things about themselves Nora, Louisa and Stephanie all try to come to terms with their changing identities. Nora struggles to find some way to define herself now that she is seeing a girl and participating in sexual exploration with that girl. She believes she needs a word to define what she is. Simone tries to explain to Nora that it is up to her to decide her own identity, not to try to follow the patterns of others. Meanwhile, Louisa wonders if Nora’s sexual exploration with a girl makes her a lesbian as well. She has always keyed off Nora in the past and considers that sexual orientation might be another aspect of her life that she will follow Nora’s lead in.

Stephanie also struggles to put her identity into words during a team building conference for her new employer. It is interesting that she thinks of herself as single even though Leo is still living with her. Her subconscious may be telling her that even though Leo is working hard to impress her, he’s liable to leave if he gets spooked. Stephanie also prepares herself for a new identity. She is pregnant by Leo. It is noted Stephanie hasn’t told Leo yet about the pregnancy, it seems that Stephanie is still trying to come to terms with it.

Because of comments she has made in the past about her girls’ college funds Melody is identified by two mothers of students from her daughters’ school as being rich. Melody is upset when one of the ladies motions toward the scarf that Francie gave her as a gift and notes that if the college financial aid people were to see her scarf they would kick her out of the financial aid meetings. Melody is stung by the women’s comments because in her opinion they are truly rich while she only feels she is putting on the facade of being well to do.

Discussion Question 1

Discuss Simone’s comment to Nora about mirroring. Do you understand what Simone is trying to say? Do you think she is correct?



Discussion Question 2

Do you think Leo's interest in his relationship with Stephanie is real? Do you think he has really changed?

Discussion Question 3

Discuss Melody's determination to keep her home at all costs. Do you think she is acting in a way that is unrealistic when she thinks she would rather see Vivienne and her husband having sex than talking about putting the house up for sale? Why or why not?

Vocabulary

stratifications, indecorousness, pompous, furtively, acquiesce, precursor, extemporaneous, elucidate, ballast, concurrent, infuriating, obligatory, behemoth, candor, ideation, burnished, vestiges



Part Two: The Kiss Chapters 22-24

Summary

In Chapter 22, when the rehabilitation workers told Matilda that her living arrangements with her parents weren't ideal for new needs, Matilda didn't take their warnings seriously. Once she got home to the tiny third floor apartment with no elevator, she began to see the challenges her living arrangement provided. Additionally, her parents watched her carefully and never left her alone. After she saw what she believed was a sign she bought herself a handicap accessible condo as well as a regular condo for her sister. Even as frugal as Matilda tried to be with her money it went fast, especially with her family members asking for loans.

She knew she had to find a job and find some way to be more mobile. She thought about taking classes at the community college but she was always in pain. At rehab she had been told her amputation was a bad one and that she should consider a new amputation below the knee as she would have access to better prosthetics. Her therapist had frowned at her stump and told her that sometimes saving too much bone was a bad thing. Regardless of what precautions she used after wearing her foot for only an hour or two she'd begin to hurt, with the throbbing eventually working its way up to her neck.

Vinnie dropped by her apartment one day carrying a full length mirror. He knew how much her prosthesis as well as phantom pains from her missing foot were bothering her. He used the mirror as therapy, lining it up with her left foot so that it appeared her right foot was back and she could imagine moving and scratching it. He told her the mirror was only a temporary fix, that she needed to address the real cause of the problem. Matilda explained to him that she didn't have enough money for a new amputation and didn't have insurance.

Before Vinnie had taken the mirror to Matilda he had pressed Fernando for information about any deal to which Matilda might have agreed concerning the wreck. Vinnie tried to convince Fernando that he just wanted to talk to Leo about the accident. When he promised to do nothing to hurt Matilda or her family Fernando agreed but told Vinnie that he had to tell Matilda what he had planned. Vinnie plan was to try to get Leo to put them in touch with someone who could provide financial assistance for better prosthetics or another amputation if needed. Matilda refused when Vinnie told her his plan. Vinnie was angry asking her why she wasn't angry enough to ask for what she deserved. She told him she believed she had gotten exactly what she deserved.

In Chapter 23, Nathan had been angry with Leo when Leo sold SpeakEasyMedia but Leo had been tired of being broke and he was tired of gossip. Leo was so hyped about his new meeting with Nathan that he almost walked past the man. They gave each other an affectionate hug before they began talking. Leo was disappointed to learn Nathan had only 20 minutes before he had to leave. Nathan expressed his condolences



on Leo's divorce but Leo said he should have listened to Nathan's advice not only about Victoria but about other things as well. When Leo suggested he was ready to start working again Nathan said he'd heard that Leo had been telling others they were already working together. Leo tried to explain how he'd heard about Nathan's plan from Stephanie and was interested. Nathan cut him off by telling him that he couldn't hire him but Leo countered telling Nathan the idea was originally his. Leo began presenting his ideas to Nathan but Nathan stopped him telling him that he did not want to work with him and needed someone young.

Because Leo felt Nathan trying to get away from him Leo begged him to reschedule the meeting. Nathan asked if Leo remembered Ari Rothstein, the brother of Peter Rothstein, the CFO of Nathan's company. Leo could not place the man. Nathan reminded him of the job applicant who had sent in such a bad video resume that Leo had put the clip on the website. Even the "Today" show had used it as an example of how not to get a job. Ari had overdose a few years ago. When Nathan had joined the company it had taken Nathan a long time to earn Peter's trust and convince him he wasn't part of that. Before Nathan left him Leo warned him away from "Paper Fibers." Nathan called Leo a prick and asked him not to ever mention his name again. While Leo was still sitting at the bar trying to interpret what had happened his phone rang. It was Matilda.

In Chapter 24, at first Tommy had kept the Rodin in a closet covered with a pillowcase. It felt like a shameful secret. The house didn't feel the same without Ronnie and he decided to move to Stephanie's basement apartment. The apartment was far enough away from his children they had to call before they visited. Now that Jack had seen the statue Tommy wondered what might happen if he were to get caught with it. During her last visit one of his daughters had questioned him about his locked china cabinet, the place he kept the statue when he was expecting company. Ron, one of Tommy's youngest grandchildren, cried that the apartment wasn't friendly and that there was a ghost there. Later, his daughter, Maggie, told Tommy that if there was a ghost there it was him.

Analysis

The reader learns the background behind Nathan and Leo's relationship in this section of the novel. This background affects the relationship between Leo and Nathan and helps the reader to understand why Leo shouldn't have counted on getting a job from Nathan. Just as Leo had treated Paul poorly and lied to him, Leo also didn't treat Nathan fairly when he decided to sell SpeakEasyMedia. Nathan hadn't wanted to sell but Leo forced him to do so. Although Leo doesn't seem to understand that this might keep Nathan from trusting Leo as a work partner and wanting to work with him again it seems that Nathan wants nothing to do with Leo. Nathan tries to tell Leo from the beginning of their "meeting" that it isn't a meeting and he can't hire Nathan, but Nathan won't listen.

Notice how much Nathan has changed and grown up while Leo remains childish. Even when Nathan reminds Leo of the way they vilified a man who had tried to get a job with



SpeakEasyMedia Leo could not be serious about what Nathan was saying to him. He made a crude comment about the man, who had eventually taken his own life, that offended Nathan. Even though Leo had used Paul Underwood and his publication as a way to get Nathan to notice him Leo even lowers himself to belittling Paul and his leadership skills after he realizes that Nathan is serious about his refusal to work with Leo.

The value of Matilda's life and her right to have a pain-free life is an aspect in the theme of values as discussed in this section of the novel. Remember that when the doctors amputated Matilda's foot they promised to leave as much bone as possible. In this section the reader learns that a good deal of bone is not necessarily a good thing. If the doctors had taken more of Matilda's lower leg off she would have had a better chance to get a more comfortable prosthetic. Vinnie is angry with Matilda because she is in pain and is not willing to fight for what she deserves. In Matilda's mind she has gotten what she deserves because she went off in the car with a married man. She believes she deserves the pain, handicap and inconvenience that she suffers because she listened to a man who was lying to her even though she didn't know he was lying at the time.

In an earlier section of analysis it was determined that probably about \$1.8 million was paid to Matilda to compensate for the wreck. While this seems like a good deal of money remember that Matilda and her family have no insurance. The money she received from Leo's family paid for her operation, recovery and rehabilitation including the prosthetic foot. None of these are small expenses. Additionally, Matilda is unable to continue to live with her parents because their apartment is so incompatible with her handicap, so she uses some of her money to buy herself an apartment. Her money is going fast but Matilda is afraid she won't ever be able to hold a job in her condition.

Notice that even though the Rodriguez family has so little, they still have appearances to keep up. Their major concern with Matilda's accident is that immigration will be alerted that they are in the country illegally and they will be sent back to Mexico. For this reason, they do not ask for more than what Leo and his lawyer offer. When Fernando finally trusts Vinnie enough to talk to him about what happened, Vinnie gets the idea the family has been threatened with being turned in to immigration and sent back to Mexico if they don't cooperate with the terms of the agreement that George, the lawyer, presented them.

Interesting in this section is the mirror therapy that Vinnie uses on Matilda to help her deal with her pain. It seems to work on the idea that the brain can rewire itself if it thinks that the missing foot is being scratched. Also interesting in this section is the idea that Tommy's grandson senses a "ghost" in Tommy's apartment. The young child is perceptive but no one with the exception of Tommy realizes that the ghost is embodied in the statue.

Discussion Question 1

Is Matilda right in believing she got what she deserved? Why or why not?



Discussion Question 2

Discuss Matilda's belief in signs, particularly in regard to the wreck in which she was injured. Do you believe in signs? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 3

Discuss the way that Leo and Nathan approached the idea of working together. Why did Nathan think they wouldn't make a good team? Why did Leo think Nathan needed him? How did Leo's attitude decline during their time together?

Vocabulary

coveted, volatile, ludicrous, platitudes, deportation, travesty, petulant, morphed, parody, besotted, appraise, apportioned, sanctimonious, cavernous



Part Two: The Kiss Chapters 25-27

Summary

In Chapter 25, Walter and Melody were at war over the house. He told her they had no choice but to sell unless they could find a way to bring in more money each month. Walter also didn't want the twins to look at anything but state schools but Melody continued to take the girls school shopping. When she was told that there were two offers on the house she put in an outrageous counter offer without asking Walt. She was determined not to surrender her house until she talked to Leo again.

In Chapter 26, because Tommy wouldn't answer any of Jack's phone calls Jack finally showed up one day at Tommy's house. Tommy began telling Jack the story of how he got the statue but when Jack insinuated it was stolen Tommy pinned Jack against the wall. When Tommy caught himself, he let Jack go and they both sat down and Tommy told Jack his story. Jack felt sorry for Tommy. He and Walker had collected plenty of mementos from dead friends over the years. He explained to Tommy he understood if he wanted to keep the statue but also offered to help Tommy if he wanted to get rid of it.

In Chapter 27 the day after Leo had his meeting with Nathan he began to feel the old darkness that used to fill him each morning. He'd thought from the beginning his ideas about a new life were too good to be true. Now he had to think about if he wanted to leave or stay. If he stayed, he'd have to figure out how to pay back "the nest." He hadn't given Stephanie the whole story about his meeting with Nathan. In fact he'd lied and told her they were going to meet again later. Before she left for work Stephanie reminded Leo about the pages he was supposed to read for Bea.

As he avoided the thought of going to his office, Leo's phone rang again. It was Matilda. He had been avoiding her calls as well as e-mails for Jack about a birthday dinner for Melody and messages from Melody wanting just the two of them to talk. He went upstairs and settled down reading Bea's story, hoping it would be good. Soon he realized it was the story of his car wreck.

Analysis

Remember in an earlier section of the novel about Melody it is noted that she is aware that her twin daughters referred to her as The General behind her back. In Chapter 25 the author expands on this military terminology by insinuating that Melody decides she is at war with her husband not only about the sale of their house but also concerning their daughters' college educations. The author describes how Walter is "advancing on two fronts: mortgage and college tuition" (211). Meanwhile, Melody tells herself that as a general she knows "when to deploy a strategic maneuver, when to retreat and when to advance" (212). The narrator also indicates Melody has no intentions of "surrendering" (212) until she has talked to Leo again.



Meanwhile, Leo is feeling desultory after his meeting with Nathan. He has returned to wondering if he's going to stay with Stephanie, what he will do if he is going to stay, or if he wants to just disappear. He's already feeling disillusioned when he reads Bea's story and realizes it is about his wreck. Leo's surprise at discovering the story is about him is described in the section but his reaction to the story is not included in this section.

Notice how Leo's mood is defined in the way that the author describes the kitchen in which he sits as well as his morning interaction with Stephanie. As the sun comes up its light on the countertop is described in negative terms, as it is said to illuminate every discoloration and imperfection in the marble. Later, when Leo chides Stephanie for running down the stairs too quickly she attempts to flirt with him asking if she is moving too quickly for him. He recognizes her comment as a reference to marriage and the speed at which their relationship is moving.

The discussion about the value of Tommy's statue illustrates the idea that an object can be valuable in a sentimental way as well as a financial way. Jack sees the statue as a source of money for himself. After he hears Tommy's story he realizes how much the statue represents Tommy's wife and the love they had for each other. Notice Jack thinks about the things he and Walker have collected over the years as their friends passed away. All these things are kept on a shelf which Jack describes in this way: "The shelf held nothing of value and it held everything of value" (216). Although these mementos have no monetary value to anyone, they are priceless in the sentimental value they hold, just like Tommy's statue.

Discussion Question 1

What affect do you think Bea's story will have on Leo? Do you think he'll feel more pressure to run away or do you think he will understand the need for him to stay?

Discussion Question 2

Discuss the way the author uses military terms to describe Walter and Melody's financial fight.

Discussion Question 3

If you were Tommy would you want to keep the statue or get rid of it? Give reasons for your decision.

Vocabulary

contingencies, despondent, unfeigned, denuded, opalescent



Part Two: The Kiss Chapters 28-31

Summary

In Chapter 28, Stephanie came home to find Leo had not even taken a shower because he was so angry about the story Bea had written. Although Leo thought everyone would know the story was about him and they would use the information in it against him, Stephanie was interested when she learned it was an Archie story. She convinced Leo to take a shower and then they'd figure out how to talk to Bea about the repercussions the story might have on Leo. When he left the room Stephanie thought about how she was better at solitude than relationships where she had to be responsible for another person's happiness. Even though she realized that was mostly was a child-parent relationship involved Stephanie thought that it had to be different in some way.

While Leo was in the shower he suspected she was reading the story that Bea had written. He thought about how much damage the story could do to the new career he was trying to revive. When he went downstairs Stephanie asked about the girl who lost her foot, where she was and how she was doing. He explained he was not allowed to contact because of the conditions of the agreement but Stephanie argued he wouldn't call even if he were able. When Stephanie prompted him he admitted "the nest" was used to pay for the girl's medical bills and fund the pay off. It was because the inheritance was gone that his siblings were looking for him hounding him to get their money back.

Stephanie continued to question him about the girl and he finally told her that the girl's name was Matilda Rodriguez and that she was 19. When Stephanie commented that she was only a teenager Leo replied the girl had been old enough to make her own decision. Leo sensed he'd crossed a line with that statement because he saw Stephanie cringe. Later in the argument when Stephanie asked who would care if it was Leo's story being told through Bea she knew she had crossed a line with him, that he no longer believed she was on the same side as he.

In Chapter 29 Leo sat on the Brooklyn waterfront holding Bea's satchel in his lap. He stood walked to the railing to smoke a cigarette leaving the satchel on the bench. Things were bad with Stephanie and he was falling back into his old ways. He had a packet of drugs in his pocket. The narrator indicates that Leo knew what would happen to him if he stayed with Stephanie and he didn't like what he was seeing. He'd also had no luck with any of his old work contacts though he knew he'd have to get a job. Jack also felt something was up with Leo because his brother kept asking him questions about off shore accounts and covering up illegally made money. He also seen the way Stephanie had watched a mother carrying a baby and wondered if she was thinking about changing her mind about having children. Since their argument Leo believed Stephanie looked at him like she was waiting for him to run away. For all of these reasons he'd made up his mind to leave.



Meanwhile, a young girl walking a dog asked for a cigarette. He obliged her. She reminded Leo they'd met a few times at a theater in Tribeca. They decided to go for breakfast. When the girl asked Leo if it was his bag on the bench he told her it wasn't. He remembered buying it for himself and then deciding it was too antiquated so he gave it to Bea. The woman asked if they should just leave the bag there. Leo said they should, and motioned for them to leave. He had just noticed Paul was on his way to the bench.

In Chapter 30 while Vinnie dialed Leo's phone number he asked her to let him do the talking. He was upset she'd tried to call Leo on her own. She told her the phone had gone directly to voice mail each time. The first time Vinnie dialed the phone did go to voicemail. The second time a woman answered. When Matilda introduced herself and said she wanted to talk to Leo, Stephanie said that she did as well.

In Chapter 31 Melody knew that Walter was irritated with her because she was looking forward to her fortieth birthday but it was the first real birthday party she'd ever had. She remembered her mother attempting to give her a birthday party when she turned 12 but Francie was drunk when the girls arrived at the house. The party had been saved only by Leo who made snacks for the girls and played games with them.

Melody had been surprised when Jack and Walker told her their plans to host her birthday party. The siblings had received emails from Leo and Melody told Walter she thought he'd surprise them by repaying their inheritance money that night. Walt, however, was afraid Leo wouldn't come through for his siblings. He dreaded the ride home when Melody would be upset and disappointed. The narrator continues to narrate Walt's line of thinking as he considers how they will have to put the house back on the market but Walt believes that Melody will be able to get through the stress.

Walker thought about "the nest" as he prepared dinner. He wondered how a group of adult siblings could put so much faith in a monetary fund. The narrator continues by indicating that Walker wanted to be able to talk to them and make them understand there were more stable things than money to consider their safe place. He also thought all the siblings had some God complex concerning Leo while Leo was actually just a loser. Walker was happy to see that Jack's siblings had begun to communicate with each other again. He thought that if they could stop obsessing over the money they might be able to be friends.

As Jack helped Walker prepare for Melody's birthday he thought about the buyer he'd found, a man from Saudi Arabia who lived in London. He hoped to talk to Leo that evening about how he could hide the amount of money that he hoped to make from the sale of the statue. Leo thought that if he could pay off the home equity loan he'd taken out he could go on to become an honest person, one who was no longer worried about "the nest."

Bea, meanwhile, was worried because Leo had not been back in touch with her at all after she'd given him her story. She hadn't been able to get in touch with Stephanie to find out if Leo would be at the birthday party but knew that her siblings would be crazy



with anger if Leo wasn't there. Paul had fixed her a cup of cappuccino and he gave it credit for opening Bea up. She told him the whole story of Leo's wreck and her fear that he'd left town because of the story she'd written. As she talked Paul realized it was her satchel and letter he'd found on the bench.

Paul handed her the satchel telling her that he thought Leo might have left it for her. As she looked through her pages she noticed that Leo had made editing marks on the pages. She believed the editing was his way of saying it was okay to publish the story. He had even marked out the name she'd chosen for the main character and replaced it with the name "Archie" and instructions to use that name.

Analysis

All of Leo's good intentions fall apart in this section of the novel. His meeting with Nathan has already thrown him off course in his attempt to get a job in the literary business. Now he fears that if Bea publishes the story that she has written about him everyone will know what he did with the waitress and it will affect him negatively as he tries to get a new job.

Leo's concerns about the repercussions of Bea's story indicate that he is just as worried about keeping up appearances as others in the novel. He seems to believe that he can turn over a new leaf but doesn't seem to understand that his past actions will haunt him for the rest of his life. Paying off an accident victim doesn't make the accident go away. When he reads Bea's story he is forced to face what happened, what he did to another person. He may not be so much angry with Bea as he is angry with himself and what he has become.

Leo also worries that if the truth of the story comes out he won't be able to take the backlash. The quote: "If Bea published this story, he insisted, the truth would be out and everyone who had it in for him would not hold back," (224) indicates Leo is not the person he'd like everyone to think he is. He is afraid of what might happen to him and the little respect he is trying to build for himself if the truth about the accident were to come out.

Consider also that injuring Matilda in the accident was not the first selfish action that Leo had done in his life. Even though Paul has been willing to put the past behind them Leo hurt Paul by not giving him a job at SpeakEasyMedia and then lying about the reasons why he didn't take Paul with him. Nathan, who seems to be the biggest name in literary publishing and Leo's best hope for getting a job, doesn't want to work with Leo again because of Leo's reputation for being careless and hurtful. Although Leo finds it easy to place responsibility on Bea for letting people know what he did to Matilda, he is actually using her as a way to cover up his guilt.

Notice Stephanie's line of questioning once she learns that Bea's story is about Leo's wreck. Her first concern is for the girl. She knows that when Leo tells her he's not allowed to contact Matilda that he is only using the legal requirement as an excuse. He



does not want to know how she is doing and does not care. He thinks because he gave her money she should be satisfied. The author indicates in this section of the novel that it is when Leo tells Stephanie that Matilda was old enough to know what she was doing that he lost a good deal of Stephanie's respect. For Leo felt Stephanie had turned on him when she asked him why it would matter if people did realize Bea's story was about him. This is a turning point in the novel where Leo decides to stop pursuing a job and trying to be a respectful person and decides to think only of himself.

In past chapters the relationship between Bea and Leo has been represented as one that was close when Bea first started writing. Bea referred to Leo as her mentor as he read and edited her stories for her and tried to help her get published. It appears in this section, however, that Leo's interest in Bea was only from a financial standpoint. He knew she was a good writer and wanted to take advantage of her talent. When Bea lost her ability to produce good work, Leo lost his interest in her. In fact, it appears he only read the story she'd left him because he thought it might be something that could help spark a new career for him.

Perhaps the most telling sign that Leo never cared for Bea the way she thought he did comes with Leo's thoughts about the satchel. In this section the reader learns that Leo didn't really buy the satchel specifically for Bea as she had always thought. He instead bought it for himself. When he decided it was too trendy and he didn't really like it as much as he had at first he gave it to Bea.

Walker is perhaps the only rational person as he considers the way the Plumb siblings should learn to focus on things other than money as he prepares Melody's birthday dinner. Because Walker is a lawyer he has seen multiple instances where people's lives were ruined because they had not gotten the inheritances on which they had counted. Walker wishes he could work with the family and teach them that their relationships were more important than money.

Interestingly, Walker also identifies that in terms of family relationships all of the Plumb siblings seem to believe that Leo is a deity while Walker sees him as nothing but a loser. Walker's observation is correct as Jack, Bea and Melody all believe that Leo will come through for them despite the massive wreck that he's made of his life.

Discussion Question 1

Do you think Leo intended for the story Bea wrote about his car wreck to find its way back to her? Do you think he intended her to publish the story?

Discussion Question 2

While Melody, Leo and Bea are worried about whether or not Leo will show up at Melody's birthday party the reader already knows the information in the email he has sent to his siblings is false and suspects he will not be at the party. How does this



information influence the way the reader reacts to and interprets this section of the novel?

Discussion Question 3

Discuss the significance of Leo's note in the margin of Bea's story that he wanted her to use the name Archie for the main character.

Vocabulary

apoplectic, divot, euthanized, privy, harbinger, conjured, sentiment, bifurcated, monologue, desiccated, embryonically, denizens, capitulation, versatility, inebriating, rancid, incantation, ebulliently, infantile, mediate, forays, provenance, duping, communal, complicit, saunter



Part Two: The Kiss Chapters 32-35

Summary

In Chapter 32, Nora and Louisa liked the way they were the center of attention when they arrived at Jack and Walker's house for their mother's birthday. In the living room Walker announced he'd give Stephanie and Leo ten more minutes than they would eat. As the adults watched a storm brewing over the Hudson River Nora went into Jack and Walker's bedroom. She was surprised their room was so ordinary looking. When Louisa walked in, looking for Nora, she was looking at Jack and Walker's wedding photo. Nora sat on the bed next to Louisa and began to introduce her relationship with Simone but Louisa cut her off by telling her she already knew. Louisa cried asking her sister if she was mad at her. Nora thought it was Louisa who would be mad at her for not telling her what was happening sooner. They agreed it was strange that they did not feel the same about their sexuality. When Louisa worried that Nora was upset with her for not feeling lesbian urges Nora gave her Simone's mirror talk. When Melody went to look for the girls and found Louisa had been crying Melody immediately panicked, demanding to know what was wrong.

In Chapter 33, Stephanie realized that when they first began dating and Leo told her how messed up he was he was offering her an escape. When they'd broken up the first time Stephanie had felt prepared for and somehow appreciated the breakup. Another time they'd broken up she'd complained to her assistant Pilar in a bar. He'd written the stages of grief on a napkin and told her he would give her only 48 hours to go through each stage because she was being such a pitiful version of herself.

In their most recent breakup Stephanie did not even realize Leo had left for good because he left his cell phone and wallet behind. When she began looking around and noticed his custom-made shoes were gone as well as the satchel that housed Bea's story she realized he was gone. She was hurt by the fact he'd sent his brother and sisters decoy emails but had not left her any kind of note. Even though she hadn't intended to go to Melody's birthday party she felt she owed it to the family to tell them that Leo was probably gone.

In Chapter 34, Melody made the twins tell the family about seeing Leo in Central Park flat on his back. She told them it was the day he was supposed to meet them for lunch and had said he was late because of the subway. They all wondered why he'd been in the park. Melody believed he'd been there to buy drugs. Bea admitted she hadn't been seeing Leo around the office as much as she had at one time. Walker said Jack had been seeing Leo quite often. Jack had really been making appointments with Tommy and lying to Walker, telling him he was going to see Leo. Jack tried to stammer through an explanation when the door bell rang. They believed it was Leo.

In Chapter 35, disappointment was evident when the family discovered it was Stephanie at the door without Leo. She asked where the bathroom was but the family was too



busy arguing to pay attention to her. Since no one answered she saw a trashcan into which she threw up. She took it to the bathroom and tried to think about what Jack had been saying about Leo buying drugs when she came into the house. Stephanie came back into the room and sat down. She told those gathered in the dining room that she was pregnant, Leo was the father and she hadn't seen him for two weeks.

Melody knew the party was over so she and the girls left. Bea and Stephanie sat in the kitchen listening to argue about where Jack had been the times he'd told Walker he was meeting with Leo. As they heard the men continue to argue in raised voices then the sound of a door slamming Bea and Stephanie decided they should leave as well.

Stephanie remembered after Pilar had left her alone in the bar with the napkin listing the stages of grief she'd drawn a sad face next to the word acceptance. The bar tender, who knew her story drew over it with a red bird. She'd kept the napkin for a long time. It was still sealed up in a box in storage. She'd thought about the bird on her way home. At first she thought it represented Leo. As she thought about the baby she realized she was the bird. She was finally free.

Analysis

At the ending of Part 2 the novel has reached a sort of climax. Despite all the hopes his siblings have for Leo to come through for them and be the person they all hope he is, Leo disappoints them. He not only leaves his siblings with very little inheritance to claim, he also leaves Stephanie alone and pregnant. While the other members of the Plumb family argue or try to deal with their disappointment Stephanie realizes for the first time that she is finally free of Leo.

Notice the way the author uses the weather to help build up to the novel's climax. She describes how the adults watch as a storm comes in from across the Hudson River. The thunder and lightening from the brewing storm represents the storms that are brewing within the Plumb family that will break when they learn that Leo has left without paying them as promised.

On a different note, Louisa and Nora feel the same electrical impulses between the two of them as they finally talk about Nora's relationship with Simone. Notice that Louisa questions her identity both as Nora's sister and her sexual identity when she mentions to Nora that since they have always felt the same about things in the past it is hard for her to accept that they are wired differently sexually.

The napkin as a symbol of Stephanie's relationship with Leo is important in this section. Stephanie's assistant gives her this napkin and writes on it the stages of grief. Stephanie at first indicates her sadness over the loss of her relationship with Leo by drawing a sad face on the napkin. It is not until years later that Stephanie realizes what the bar tender was trying to tell her when he made his own drawing, changing the sad face into a flying bird. She had at first thought it was a symbol of the idea that Leo had



flown away. After Stephanie finally realized what a loser Leo really is, she knows the bird is a symbol of her and her own freedom.

The lack of family relationships between the siblings is highlighted by the fact that so few members of the family even realized that Jack and Walker had gotten married. It has been so long since Jack had seen the twins that he was surprised that Louisa looked so much like her mother when she was a teenager. The others also exclaim over how much the girls have grown and matured. When Nora and Louisa tell the others that Jack and Walker are married, there is surprise at the table. Walker indicates he wanted to invite the family. Remember that it was Walker who hoped to be able to draw the siblings together over the birthday dinner regardless of how things turned out with Leo. Instead of managing to pull relationships together, however, Walker learns that Jack has been lying to him about meeting with Leo.

Notice that even though Leo does turn out to be a loser, he is actually being falsely accused of buying drugs the day of his meeting with his siblings at the Oyster Bar. When Melody learns from her daughters that they saw Leo in the park on that day she automatically assumes that he was buying drugs. The rest of the family follows suit. This is another instance where the point of view of the omniscient third person narrator is helpful to the reader. The reader knows that although Leo set up an appointment to buy drugs, he actually decided against meeting his dealer. At that point he was really considering correcting his mistakes and living a different kind of life. Now that Leo has lied to his siblings about the money and the deal he pretended he had going on with Nathan, they have decided that everything he has told them has been a lie.

Discussion Question 1

Now that Leo has apparently left the area for good, what do you think this means for Jack and Walker? What about Melody and Walter?

Discussion Question 2

Discuss the way the author presents a tone of anticipation for this section of chapters.

Discussion Question 3

In order to not discuss their own questionable behavior when Melody asks the twins what they are upset about they tell her about seeing Leo in the park. Were they right in moving the attention from them to their uncle? How did their false story about why they were upset make the evening even worse?



Vocabulary

mesmerizing, atavistically, visage, demeanor, reticently, cacophony, precoital, contrite, absolving, devolved, ecstatically



Part Three: Finding Leo Chapters 36-39

Summary

In Chapter 36, Melody, Jack and Bea met with George who told them he knew nothing of Leo's whereabouts. Bea suggested they were worried Leo might need help but George assured her that was not so. He told them Leo had money hidden in an account in the Grand Cayman. Melody began crying because she was going to have to sell the house and tell the girls there was no college fund. Jack said he and Walker would probably lose their summer house. Bea confessed she was afraid Leo had disappeared because of the story she had written. Jack, however, told them it was no one's fault, it was just the way Leo was. He was a person who wanted to preserve himself at all costs. When George learned Stephanie was pregnant and Leo probably didn't know about the baby he suggested they could hire a private detective to try to track him down.

George was happy to leave the siblings alone when Bea suggested it. She told them they could split her part of the inheritance since she didn't need it and that they should also split Leo's part. Both agreed that the extra money would help. They all thought about the way they'd thought Leo had really meant it when he'd apologized and promised to pay them back at their lunch meeting.

In Chapter 37, after the family had left Jack and Walker's house after the failed dinner party Jack had told Walker about the statue he was trying to sell. Walker was angry telling him the sale of the statue was not only illegal but also unethical. Because Walker thought Jack was trying to sell the statue only out of greed, the money he might make, Jack had also told him about the home equity loan against the summer house. Walker had not spoken to Jack since except through email. Jack learned only through a mutual friend that Walker had put the summer house on the market.

Walker thought of all the years he had spent compensating for Jack's weaknesses. He had snapped the night of Melody's birthday party. He'd been so angry when he learned Jack was trying to sell a Rodin from the World Trade Center. Walker thought about how they had never had children and realized it was because he had spent their relationship with him being a parent to Jack. At the last moment Walker'd had a moment when he considered reconciling but when he went to the apartment he'd found Jack in the bedroom talking on the phone about being able to find another buyer. Walker assumed he was talking about the statue, the one he'd told Walker he'd decided not to sell. That was all Walker could take and he left.

In Chapter 38, Melody had learned about Nora and Simone only after she received a call from the SAT tutor asking why Nora and Louisa had dropped the program. Walt took charge of the family and organized a refund of the money from the program. It was also to him that Nora admitted she was having a lesbian relationship and both girls said they wanted to look at state schools. He put the house back on the market and found them



an apartment to rent. At a Chinese restaurant the day they sold their house Melody broke down. When she pushed her plate away because she couldn't eat and Walter asked what was wrong she unloaded on him telling him their entire life had gone wrong. He pulled her away from the table telling her he was tired of her choice to be miserable. The narrator continues that Walter asked Melody to apologize to the girls and then to start being the mother she had always been.

In the bathroom Melody looks at herself in the mirror and realizes she doesn't recognize herself. She went back to the table and tried to apologize but couldn't. She tried to eat but couldn't. Instead she got her purse and went to the car. She watched her family through the window. They kept looking around as if they were expecting something. Melody finally realized they were expecting her to come back.

In Chapter 39, Melody brought Jack lunch at his shop. She wanted his advice on how to parent Nora. While she was there she noticed an antique watch in the display case. Jack said it was the watch he'd given Walker as a wedding gift. As they were eating Melody asked Walker if he remembered the group of friends he'd hung around with as a teenager. She'd always tried to be friends with them but they had rejected her attempts at friendship. Jack explained to her that at that time he'd had an erection almost constantly, something he didn't want his little sister to see.

Melody tried to explain herself to Jack but Jack pinpointed her problem, she didn't want Nora to be gay. If Nora was gay, she didn't know how to make her way any easier for her. Jack shared with her Walker's advice on taking care of children which was just to do no harm. Melody laughed as she thought how easy it was to accidentally do harm. She told Jack she'd volunteer to go tell Walker that herself. Jack pulled up the app Melody had loaded on his phone and located Walker. He was at work but when Jack dialed his number there was no answer. Melody erased the app as she explained to Jack the information he got from it was only part of the story. She recognized in Jack the signs of heartbreak and emptiness. Before she left, Jack told her that Nora needed to know her mother loved her the same as she did before she announced she was gay.

Analysis

In this section of the novel the writer sees the author looping back to an occurrence already described in the novel and retelling the story from another character's point of view. The fight between Walker and Jack was included in the final chapter of Part Two with Bea and Stephanie hearing them fighting but not knowing for sure what the fight was about. The reader knew it had something to do with Jack lying to Walker and telling him he was seeing Leo when he was actually meeting with Tommy about the 9/11 statue. In Chapter 37 the narrator circles back and details the fight describing to the reader how badly Walker took the news that Jack was trying to sell an artifact from 9/11 and that he'd taken out a home equity loan putting their summer home in jeopardy.

As Melody tries to recalibrate herself to all the changes she's had in her life she tries to be the person she was before she had to sell the house and before she learned Nora



was gay. She admits to herself she doesn't know how to be that person anymore. In her search for her identity she goes to Jack seeking advice. He tells her what she already knows, that Nora needs to know she'd loved despite her sexual orientation.

Also in this group of chapters Jack realizes how much he and his brother have in common. He admits their similarities during a meeting with his sisters and George because Bea suggests that it might be her fault that Leo ran away. Jack tries to console her by telling her that it didn't matter what she or any of the others had done, Leo would have acted no differently. He believes his brother is interested only in self-preservation at all costs because Jack similarly believes in self-preservation at all costs.

It appears that it is not Jack's act of taking out the home equity loan on their summer house that angers Walker as badly as his decision to help Tommy sell the Rodin statue did. Walker calls this sale both illegal and unethical. Jack sabotages his own relationship when he calls the buyer he has found for the statue even after telling Walker he would called off the sale. It is when Walker overhears Jack talking on the phone that he decides there is really no hope for their relationship. Notice that although Walker does not seem to be one for covering things up, he worries how he would be perceived by his clients if Jack sold the statue and got caught. Walker fears the illegal sale would not only affected him personally but would also hurt his business.

Discussion Question 1

Compare and contrast the importance that Jack and Walker put on money. How have their thoughts differed on "the nest" since Walker learned about it?

Discussion Question 2

Discuss your opinion of the legality of the sale of the Rodin statue. Do you agree with Walker's view or Jack's? What about the ethical issues of making money off the statue?

Discussion Question 3

Discuss Melody's breakdown during this part of the novel. How has she gotten so far from herself?

Vocabulary

imperious, caustic, forfeited, extricate, equivocated, abhorrent, terse, tacitly, subsidized, petulant, crevasse, disgorging, equanimity, unadulterated, subliminal, transom, sardonic, resonated, abashed, blithe



Part Three: Finding Leo Chapters 40-41

Summary

In Chapter 40, Stephanie had arranged to have lunch with Matilda and Vinnie. She believed her client Olivia Russell who ran a nonprofit for amputees and could put Matilda in touch with someone who could help her. She bought flowers from a farmer who questioned her about her pregnancy, assuming she was married to a man. She thought about his comments as she walked home. She was not unhappy that she was a single mother but she was forming bonds with Leo's brother and sisters so that the baby would have a family even if she didn't have a father in the picture.

The bags she was carrying were heavy and she was glad to see Tommy O'Toole sitting on his stoop. She believed he would offer to carry them for her but he just sat on the step looking at a couple approaching from the other direction. When Stephanie saw the woman was on crutches she realized it was Matilda and Vinnie.

In Chapter 41, as Tommy sat on his stoop he wished he had a God to which he could pray. He thought about how he'd become obsessed with the statue and had even prayed to it for a while before he realized how crazy he was getting. The narrator indicates that Tommy had been feeling better about the statue now when he had decided to let Jack broker the sale of it. He was afraid if he died suddenly and his daughters found it in his house it would not only change their opinion of him but also of their mother. When he had learned that Jack was working with a man from Saudi Arabia Tommy put his foot down because he didn't want the statue to be purchased with Middle Eastern oil money. Now Tommy was alone again trying to figure how to get the statue somewhere safe without his daughters finding out what he had done.

Sinatra, Tommy's dog, started barking and Tommy looked up to see a couple walking toward him. As they got closer he realized the woman was missing her right foot and the man was missing an arm. He thought the couple from the statue had come to life and were walking toward him. The narrator describes how Tommy felt like he was having a stroke or a heart attack as the couple got closer and closer to him. They stopped in front of his house and talked to him. Tommy tried to respond but his lips wouldn't work. He remembered the man asking someone to call 911. Matilda asked Tommy what was wrong and just before he fell he asked her to forgive him.

Analysis

Notice in this section how the author uses the focus from different characters to tell two sides of a story. Using an omniscient third person narrator the author is able to tell the story from a variety of points of view. Chapter 40, for instance, is narrated from Stephanie's point of view as she approaches her home and sees Tommy sitting on the stoop. She hopes he will help her carry her groceries. In Chapter 41 the point of view



switches to that of Tommy as he sees Vinnie and Matilda approaching him and believes that his statue has come to life. The chapters overlap on the same time frame as Stephanie and Tommy describe the same events. Stephanie notes, for instance, that as she approaches the house Tommy keeps looking in Vinnie and Matilda's direction instead of paying attention to her. In the chapter dedicated to Tommy it is noted that he sees Stephanie approaching with her groceries but once he sees Vinnie and Matilda he is too fixated on them to go and help Stephanie.

Stephanie and her baby will play an important role in healing family relationships among the Plumbs. Even though she knows she will be raising her daughter with no help from Leo, Stephanie has begun reaching out to his brother and sisters in hopes that they can form a family for the baby. Stephanie seems to understand that it will be family relationships and family support that will help her child through the hard times, not just money or the things that money can buy.

Notice how much Jack is like Leo in his continued efforts to sell Tommy's statue. He is money hungry and doesn't care from where the money comes. He doesn't seem to understand Tommy's rage when he learned that the man who is trying to buy the statue is from the Middle East. Even though Jack argues that the man lives in London and probably didn't make his money off oil, Tommy refuses to sell the statue to a person of the same nationality as the people who destroyed the World Trade Center and killed his wife.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Tommy ask Matilda to forgive him right before he passes out?

Discussion Question 2

Discuss Stephanie's ideas about being a single parent. How is she handling the comments made by the general public when they ask about her baby?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Tommy not want to sell the Rodin statue to someone from the Middle East? What do you think he should do with it now that the sale is off?

Vocabulary

permeate, tacit, gestating, erudite, bemused, mellifluous, stymied, premeditated, undulating, aperture, apathetic, incontrovertible



Part Three: Finding Leo Chapters 42-45 and Epilogue

Summary

In Chapter 42, Mother's Day was the last day that Melody would spend in her home. After they moved their things, the building would be razed. It had been bought by a developer who planned to build on the lot. She was waiting for a salvager to come who would take what was of value from the home to sell. When the doorbell rang she was enraged when she saw the salvager was Jack. When Walt and Jack got Melody calmed down they explained Jack was going to take what she wanted to keep from the house and store it for her. She was surprised and grateful.

While Melody made tea in the kitchen she asked Jack how things were between him and Walker. Jack explained the financial decisions they had made. He also told Melody that while he missed Walker he was also enjoying being alone. While they were talking the girls came downstairs and interrupted their conversation. Nora was holding the piece of wood from the upstairs closet where she'd recorded the girls' heights each year. Walter handed her a list of things he thought she'd want to keep but as she looked at the list it added up to just parts of a home. She surprised him by telling him she only wanted to keep Nora's piece of woodwork. To Jack she suggested he take the things worth selling. They could use the money they made to fix up their new house and Jack would benefit from the commission. Since she'd made the decision to let go of the house, Melody felt lighter. She was The General, in control again. She also realized the actions on the part of her family were an advance, not a retreat.

In Chapter 43, whenever Matilda told the story she told it in exactly the same way. She told their children how Tommy had stared at them and Vinnie had caught him when he fell, keeping him from hitting his head on the concrete, even though he had only one arm. Once they got Tommy inside they saw why he had fainted. They saw the statue of the couple damaged in just the same way that Vinnie and Matilda had been injured. Matilda told the children she had with Vinnie that when she saw that statue she had known that Vinnie was the man for her.

In Chapter 44, Stephanie was five days past her due date and was ready for her baby to come. She was spending her days in her house and could hear Tommy hammering. He was fixing up the apartment. Stephanie was surprised how much he'd changed when he'd gotten rid of the statue that was bothering him so badly. She had gotten her friend to help her rent a truck and drop the statue off late one night at a 9/11 collection site.

She had walked down the block for a gelato and was looking at some free books on a neighbor's stoop when her water broke. Her first contraction doubled her over. When it was finished she tried to walk toward her house but another contraction followed quickly. She felt everything was happening too quickly but she managed to get to her



house before the third contraction hit. Tommy heard her scream and recognized what was happening. He'd helped her inside and gotten her settled on the floor before running upstairs for some things he thought he'd need to deliver a baby. He knew they wouldn't get to the hospital in time. Stephanie called her doctor and he sent an ambulance. As soon as she hung up the phone she felt the urge to push. Tommy ordered her not to but Stephanie felt she couldn't help herself. He dumped some things on the floor next to her. while he was washing his hands Stephanie felt her daughter's head between her legs. She called to Tommy that the baby was coming.

In Chapter 45, even though Paul Underwood didn't like the beach, boats or street food he was in the Caribbean sun waiting to board a ferry and eating chicken from a street vendor. He was, however, happy to be with Bea. They'd spent the last ten days looking for Leo. Despite their errand Bea had been writing nearly every day. Paul also had some hope that Bea might make the first move toward a relationship. She shared an email she gotten from Stephanie praising her work and encouraging her to keep going.

Because he has a headache Paul went across the street for some aspirin. It was at the market that he heard Leo's laugh. Paul ducked behind a cardboard sign and studied the man. It was Leo. Even so Paul did not try to talk to Leo. He had paid for his things and left. Walking back to the ferry he realized how much he hated Leo. Even though he'd be angry when he learned about what Leo had told Nathan about him he knew it was Leo's mistake that solidified Nathan's decision to fund Paul's literary magazine.

Bea thought about how disappointed Paul had been when she decided against publishing the story she'd written about Leo. She admitted to him she had enjoyed their trip. Putting her hands on his shoulders she asked if he knew what else she liked.

Leo had seen Paul before Paul had spotted him. Leo wondered what he should do. He wondered who had come with Paul. He felt sure Bea was there but wondered if Stephanie had come as well. He saw Bea and a woman with long red hair that he believed was Stephanie. When she turned, however, he was disappointed. Leo watched as Bea and Paul embraced and then kissed for the first time.

When Bea opened her eyes after the kiss she recognized a man walking toward her. She was surprised. Leo saw her surprised and stopped walking. He noticed that she stiffened when she recognized him. Bea closed her eyes trying to calm herself. Paul asked her if she was ready and she looked again. Leo was gone. She wondered if she had really seen him or if it was just another hallucination. The narrator concludes the book with Bea telling Paul she was ready to go home.

The Epilogue is set on Stephanie's baby's first birthday. The baby, whom Stephanie named Lillian Plumb Palmer, had been born 42 minutes after Stephanie's water broke. Since Lillian's birth Louisa had moved into Stephanie's spare bedroom and was studying art at Pratt. Nora had brought Simone to the party. Nora would be going to a state school. Melody told Stephanie while the idea of Nora being a lesbian was still strange, she appreciated that Simone had pushed Nora and helped her get into an honors program. When Jack arrived he sought out some shade, but the tree Stephanie



had planted in the back yard to replace the one that had fallen during the snowstorm wasn't big enough yet. The narrator notes Lila would later be married under that tree. Jack, who had been a father figure to her all of her life, would escort her down the aisle. Back at the party Bea was insisting that Lila open gifts. She loved Lila but wanted to be back home writing. She was working on a story about an artist who lost her desire to paint, but through the losses of life began working again. Bea had also finally sold her apartment and had moved in with Paul.

As Lila was entranced by the adult faces around her and the cupcake being presented to her Stephanie knew the family gathered there was looking for signs of Leo in Lila's face. Stephanie could see them plainly. When Lila grew tired and called for someone to pick her up all of the adults rushed toward her trying to be the one to get to her first.

Analysis

In this final section of the novel the author ties the beginning of the novel in with the ending by describing the effects the odd October snowstorm is still having in the New York area ten months later. There has been a rash of babies born all of whom are referred to as Snowtober babies. The author notes that the babies came instead of corn because the corn crops had been stunted by the dry weather after the first freak snowstorm. The babies are compared to the corn that doesn't come. Metaphors compare their hair to corn silk while their fingers and toes are compared to kernels of corn.

In Chapter 43 the author picks back up the story of Tommy, Stephanie, Matilda and Vinnie on the day that Tommy saw Matilda and Vinnie walking toward him on the sidewalk. This time the story is told by Matilda and Vinnie at a point in the future when they are married and have children. They tell their children about Tommy passing out when he saw them and Vinnie keeping him from hitting his head on the concrete even though he had only one arm because he wasn't wearing his prosthesis that day. They describe to their children how they knew they were supposed to get married when they saw the Rodin statue in Tommy's apartment.

It is not until she is moving out of her house in this section of the novel that Melody finally recognizes that her family is what is most important to her and holds the most value in her life. Through the course of the novel she'd been holding onto the house in which she lived with her husband and had raised her children as if her life depended on it. She held so tightly to the house that she forgot that it was really the family inside the house, not the house itself, that matters most. Nora helped Melody to realize this when she brought her mother the piece of wood on which she had kept up with the girls' changing heights through the years.

Important to notice in this section as well as the Epilogue are the changes in Jack. Remember that one of the problems between Jack and Walker was that Walker wanted children but Jack did not. He was afraid of taking on that responsibility. Despite his fear Jack becomes a father figure to Leo's daughter. In this way, Jack is different from Leo.



Even though he is fearful of fatherhood, he does not turn his back on his family, in this case his niece. When Jack walks Lila to her partner on her wedding day in the future, Stephanie looks at the two and thinks about all that Leo has missed by running away.

Significant also in this section is Bea and Paul's trip to the Caribbean to look for Leo. It is not until the last day that they both spot him, each of them at different times. Although they had gone specifically to look for Leo neither of them mentions to the other that they saw Leo. It is almost as if they realized that what they were looking for they had found in one another. As they are waiting for the ferry Paul finally gets the kiss from Bea he'd been waiting for for so long. Leo watches them, seeming to be happy they are finally getting together. The narrator does note, however, that Leo seems both surprised and disappointed that Stephanie did not come with them to look for him. It is almost as if Leo wanted as many people as possible to be caught up in the drama he had created.

Discussion Question 1

Why does the author compare the Snowtober babies to corn? How does this help to tie the novel together?

Discussion Question 2

What emotion strikes Leo when he realizes Stephanie has not come with Paul and Bea to look for him? Why would it matter to Leo if Stephanie came at all?

Discussion Question 3

How does Lila help to unite the members of the Plumb family?

Vocabulary

raze, monstrosity, salvage, sentimental, denizens, desultory, balustrade, aplomb, primal, assiduously, prehensile, recompense, tensile, intrusion, despondent, simpatico, mediocre, pigment, portent, competence, beatific, emollient, incessant, stalwart, monstrosity, resplendent



Characters

Leo Plumb

Leo Plumb is the older brother of Melody, Jack and Beatrice Plumb. He could be considered the main character of the novel because he is the one who makes the original mistake that snowballs into the troubles experienced by the rest of the characters in the novel.

In the Prologue of the novel Leo seduces a young Mexican waitress at his cousin's wedding. The girl realizes he's married but goes with him because he tells her that he can get her a job as a singer in the music industry. Leo is drunk and high, and concentrating more on the hand job the waitress is giving him than on his driving when the car is t-boned on the passenger side by an SUV. Leo is not seriously injured by the waitress' foot is nearly severed at the ankle requiring an amputation.

Leo is sent to drug and alcohol rehabilitation but doesn't really seem to make any progress toward dealing with his problems. He spends much of his time complaining about his ex-wife. When he gets out of rehab he begins living with Stephanie, his old girlfriend. Even though she tells him she doesn't want a sexual relationship and doesn't want him doing drugs while he's living with her he not only seduces her the first night he stays there but also sets up an appointment to buy drugs.

Leo soon learns his siblings are angry with him because their mother took almost all the money from their trust funds and used it to pay for Leo's car wreck. They confront him wanting to know when he will pay them back. He asks them to give him three months to come up with a plan. As Leo tries to get back into the literary world, a world in which he once owned an online magazine, Leo's unfair dealings with people in the past come back to haunt him. Nathan, the man with whom he'd wanted to work refuses to hire Leo because of Leo's reputation.

When Leo reads a story that his sister wrote about his wreck things seem to break down for Leo. He fears those who read the story will know it is about him and will think less of him. It is also perhaps through reading this story that Leo is forced to come face-to-face with what he has done. He doesn't like the person he sees in the story and doesn't know how to deal with the mess he has made of himself other than to run away.

Even though he has not told his lawyer who conducted his divorce or his siblings, Leo has an overseas account with nearly two million dollars in it, enough that he could pay his siblings back and help spare them their financial misfortunes. Instead, Leo keeps this money for himself as a safety net. He sneaks away sending his siblings emails indicating his plan to pay them back is going well. Stephanie, his girlfriend, does not realize he is gone until she notices his Italian shoes are missing from the house. He has left his wallet and cell phone behind. Stephanie, pregnant with Leo's child is the one who breaks the news to Leo's brother and sisters that he has run away.



Beatrice Plumb

Beatrice Plumb is the younger sister of Leo and Jack, and older sister of Melody. She is not as concerned about the financial aspects of Leo's accident but wishes that she could reignite the relationship with her brother that she remembered they had previously.

Until the night of Leo's car wreck Beatrice was plagued with an inability to write. She had signed a two-book deal but had been unable to produce anything. She knows that a story she has written based on Leo's wreck is good but wonders if she should let him read it first or just have it published.

Beatrice remembers a close relationship with her brother and wants that relationship back. A leather satchel that Bea believed Leo had bought specifically for her seems to symbolize their relationship best. The reader knows that Leo had not bought the satchel with Bea in mind. He bought it for himself. He gave it to Bea only when he decided it was too trendy for him.

Leo's mentorship with Bea seems not to have been about affection but instead about the hope on Leo's part that Bea could help his own career. Once Bea lost the ability to write and make money for Leo, Leo lost interest in her. He only read her story about his car wreck because he thought it was something he could publish and use to make money. A good deal of Bea's journey through the novel concerns her realization that Leo is not the man she thought he was.

Although the reader is left not sure if Bea ever really realizes how despicable her brother is it does seem that she realizes he is not a good influence on her. When Bea sees Leo the last day she is in the Caribbean, for instance, she closes her eyes and pretends not to have seen him. She almost seems relieved when she opens her eyes and realizes he is no longer there.

At the conclusion of the novel Bea is writing a novel based on her own life. She has also moved in with Paul Underwood, her boss.

Melody Plumb

Melody Plumb is the younger sister of Leo, Jack and Beatrice. She has dedicated most of her life to her twin daughters and her husband. When she learns that she will possibly not be getting her portion of "the nest" she is afraid her daughters' college educations will be threatened and that she will lose the home she has worked so hard to renovate.

If any character in the novel is worthy of pity it is Melody. She identifies herself by her role in her family and her ability to hold things together. She believes she can give her daughters the childhood she never had by raising them in the perfect house, giving them the perfect opportunities and sending them to perfect, expensive colleges.



Unfortunately, Melody and her husband don't make enough money to support the lifestyle Melody believes her daughters deserve.

Melody works hard pinching pennies to keep her family afloat but she has based her lifestyle on the idea that she will one day get a large chunk of money from "the nest" that will help pay down their mortgage and fund college for her daughters. She is thrown completely off course when she realizes she won't be getting the amount of money from the trust fund she'd originally thought she would. About the same time she learns that one of her daughters is a lesbian. Melody feels like her life is coming apart around her.

On the day that she and her family are preparing to move out of their house one of Melody's daughters comes to her with a piece of wood work on which Melody had marked the girls' heights once during each year. Even though Jack had offered to store the things of value Melody wanted to keep from the house, which was going to be demolished, Melody realized looking at that piece of wood that her family was what mattered most to her.

Jack Plumb

Jack Plumb is the younger brother of Leo and older brother of Bea and Melody. He is petrified when he learns that he might not be getting his part of his inheritance because he has counted on that money to pay off a home equity loan that he took out in secret on a summer house owned by him and his husband, Walker.

While they were growing up Jack always felt like an inferior version of Leo. In fact Leo's friends even called him Leo Lite as his nickname. The nickname is ironic because Leo is actually quite a bit like his older brother. He is not mature or responsible. His goals revolve around pleasing himself and looking out for himself. A bit of his demanding personality is shown when he send back the drink he had mixed for him in Chapter 1 of the novel because it was not made to his specifications.

During Melody's fortieth birthday celebration Jack's husband, Walker, learns Jack has been lying to him about having meetings with Leo. Instead of meeting with Leo Jack has been meeting with Tommy, trying to find a buyer for the statue Tommy had taken from the World Trade Center site. Walker leaves Jack not only because Jack had taken out a home equity loan on their summer house and had lied about his meetings but also because he continues to look for a buyer for the statue even after he tells Walker he will call off the sale of the statue.

Even though Jack has never wanted children because he is afraid he might cause them harm, Jack becomes a father figure to Lillian, Leo's daughter. When it is time for her to get married it is Jack who escorts her to her husband. Jack also makes up for his shortcomings in some way by first talking to Melody about how to interact with her gay daughter. He also offers to salvage and store things from the house that his sister loves so much when her family has to sell it.



Tommy O'Toole

Tommy O'Toole is a former firefighter whose wife was killed when the World Trade Center was attacked by terrorists. Because he had been a firefighter Tommy was cleared to work in the wreckage of the center. He sifted through wreckage finding belongings of people who had been killed in the attack and hoped to find something that had belonged to his wife. He never found anything that was hers but did see a statue that had been found that he believed was a sign from her. The statue, Rodin's "The Kiss," depicted a couple sitting in the same posture that he and Ronnie had once sat. Because there was no security guard at the Port Authority's trailer Tommy had put it in the back of his truck and kept it for himself.

Tommy manages to keep the statue hidden at his apartment until Jack Plumb walks in one day looking for Stephanie's phone number. Jack recognizes the statue and tells Tommy that if he wants to get rid of it Jack can set up a deal to get the statue sold. Tommy at first agrees to the sale because he is feeling bad about having the statue hidden in his home. He worries what would happen if he dies and his children find the statue in his apartment or if someone discovers he had taken the statue from the debris field. When Tommy learns that the man Jack plans on selling the statue to lives in Saudi Arabia Tommy calls off the sale because he believes the man will be buying the statue with Middle Eastern oil money.

Tommy is trying to figure what to do with the statue when he sees Vinnie and Matilda, a living version of the statue, walking toward his home. Tommy passes out, believing he is having a heart attack. When Stephanie, Matilda and Vinnie get Tommy inside his apartment they understand why he passed out. Stephanie helps arrange for the statue to be dropped off anonymously at a 9/11 collection center.

When Stephanie later goes into labor outside Tommy's garden apartment he is the one who helps her deliver the baby.

Corporal Vinnie Massaro

Corporal Vinnie Massaro lost his right arm during an IED explosion while he was serving in the military. He met Matilda when the two of them were in rehabilitation together. Vinnie has been equipped with a robotic arm that he can actually control with his brain. Because of the arm he knows the kids who eat at his father's pizza joint call him Robocop behind his back.

Vinnie has an anger problem. He is angry that his military buddy Justin, who also got caught in the IED blast, lives in a vegetative state because of his injuries. He is angry that the boys in the pizza parlor call him names. He's angry with himself that he can't be nicer to them. He's also angry when he sees Matilda using crutches instead of her prosthetic foot.



Vinnie is the one who teaches Matilda about mirror therapy and encourages her to contact Leo for help in getting a new amputation or a better prosthetic. Although he won't admit it to himself, Vinnie has been in love with Matilda since they were in rehabilitation together. When Vinnie confronts Fernando about the details of Matilda's agreement with Leo Fernando realizes that Vinnie is in love with his cousin.

Vinnie and Matilda finally get in contact with Stephanie who arranges a meeting with someone she believes can help Matilda with her amputation. When they walk to Stephanie's apartment Tommy sees Vinnie, who is not wearing his prosthetic arm, and Matilda, who is missing her right foot, he believes his statue has come to life. Vinnie believes it is a sign that he should marry Matilda when he sees the statue that is damaged in a way that it matches their injuries.

Paul Underwood

Paul Underwood is the owner of "Paper Fibers" and Beatrice's boss. When Leo shut down the print version of SpeakEasy Paul was at first angry because Leo did not take Paul with him. After that Paul began his own magazine called "Paper Fibers." Even though Paul struggles with funding and wishes he could try more philanthropic ventures he is happy with his life. Even though Leo had treated him so badly Paul strikes up a friendship with Leo when he began to see him on his daily walks.

Paul assumes when Leo begins hanging around his office that Paul is working for Nathan, a man who is said to be planning to give a large chunk of funding to a literary magazine. Paul believes Leo is checking out his magazine for Nathan. Paul later learns that Leo is not working for Nathan and has even discouraged Nathan from funding "Paper Fibers" once he learns Nathan will not hire him. Even though Paul is hurt because Leo has stabbed him in the back, Paul knows that it is because of the way that Leo had talked about "Paper Fibers" that Nathan became interested in funding him in the first place.

Through his working relationship with Bea, Paul has a crush on her and nurses a desire to kiss her. It is only after Leo disappears and the two go together to the Caribbean to try to find him that Paul and Bea begin a relationship together.

Nathan Chowdhury

Nathan Chowdhury is the man with whom Leo first tries to get a job when he considers restarting his career in the literary world. Nathan and Leo had worked at SpeakEasyMedia together. Nathan was angry when Leo originally made the decision to sell the magazine, but Nathan didn't have the money he needed to buy out Leo's part of the business.

Nathan is at first angry with Leo when Leo approaches him with the idea of working together again because Nathan believes Leo has been giving people the impression that he was working with Nathan already. Nathan makes it clear to Leo that he does not



want to work with him again even when Leo accuses Nathan of taking over an idea that Leo had originally pitched to Nathan.

During their meeting Nathan reminds Leo of a man whose video resume Leo had put online during their SpeakEasy days because Leo knew it would garner hits. Because the resume was online the “Today” show had even picked it up and included it in a segment of how not to get a job. Nathan works with the man’s brother. He has worked hard to gain that man’s friendship. He explains to Leo that he no longer wants to work for that kind of publication.

Matilda Rodriguez

Matilda Rodriguez is the waitress who is badly injured when she is in a car wreck with Leo. Matilda allowed herself to be seduced by Leo because he promised her that he could get her connected with a person who could get her a start in the music industry. During the wreck, Matilda’s right foot is almost severed at the ankle. Doctors do not have much hope for reattaching the foot successfully and her family has no insurance so Matilda decides the foot should be amputated. Because she knew better than to go off with a married man Matilda feels she has gotten what she deserves by losing her foot.

Vinnie becomes friends with Matilda when they are in rehabilitation together. When he sees how badly she is struggling with her prosthesis, he shows her how to use mirror therapy and encourages her to try to get another amputation that will allow her to get a better prosthesis. Vinnie is with Matilda when she goes to visit Stephanie and they see the damaged Rodin statue. The both believe it is a sign that the two of them should be married.

Stephanie Palmer

Stephanie Palmer is one of Leo’s friends who got her start as a publisher by publishing Bea’s “Archie” stories, the ones about Leo. She signed Bea for a two-book deal.

Stephanie and Leo had a series of relationships at the time that he owned the original SpeakEasy magazine and SpeakEasyMedia.

Leo contacts Stephanie again when he is released from alcohol and drug rehabilitation because he has no one else he can call. Even though Stephanie tells Leo she won’t have sex with him, she soon loses her will to fight her desire for him. She gets pregnant with Leo’s baby. She gives her daughter the name “Lillian” the same name as she gave the marble engraving of the woman’s head on her fireplace mantle.

Even though she is not related to him, it is Stephanie who cleans up a good deal of Leo’s messes after he leaves. When she realizes that Leo has left town for good, Stephanie who goes to Melody’s birthday dinner to tell his brother and sisters that Leo has disappeared. She also tells them she is pregnant with Leo’s baby.



Later in the novel Stephanie answers Leo's cell phone when Matilda calls. She feels sorry for the girl because she is suffering so badly. For this reason, she helps Matilda get in touch with a person who can get her financial help for a better amputation.

Although Tommy's fainting as a result of seeing Vinnie and Matilda because he believed they were the statue "The Kiss" come to life was not technically a mess created by Leo, Stephanie still helps Tommy out. It is because Leo was avoiding Jack's phone calls and not paying his siblings back that Jack goes to Stephanie's house to find Leo. While there, he sees the statue that had been stolen from the World Trade Center in Tommy's apartment. He offers to sell the statue for Tommy and get it out of his apartment because Tommy is worried what might happen if he dies suddenly and his children find it. Tommy, however, doesn't approve of the buyer Jack finds, so the sale doesn't go through. Stephanie helps relieve Tommy of the burden he feels because of the stolen statue by donating it to a collection site for 9/11 items.

Francie Plumb

Francie Plumb is the mother of Leo, Jack, Beatrice and Melody Plumb. She uses her powers to withdraw money early from the inheritance trust fund her husband had set up for all of her children after Leo had a car wreck when he was drunk and high. Francie's children are upset with her because she withdrew money for Leo but has never considered giving any of them an advance on the money. The reader learns that Francie withdrew the money because her new husband had ordered her to take care of the situation.

Francie had not wanted children and had been anxious and distressed while her children were young. She had not had a particularly close relationship with any of her children and spent most of their childhood drunk. She'd liked Leo best because he'd required the least amount of attention.

Louisa

Louisa is one of Melody and Walter's twin daughters. Louisa decides to pursue her love of art and attend Pratt. Louisa seems to be the less impulsive of the two girls. She doesn't like it when Nora decides they should start skipping their tutoring sessions. In fact, she feels guilty about lying to their mother and believes they will be caught soon.

After Louisa sees her sister fondling a girl, Louisa wonders if she is also a lesbian. Louisa is confused because she doesn't believe she is a lesbian and angry because her sister hasn't told her about the relationship. When Nora finally does talk to Louisa about her sexual orientation Nora tries to help Louisa understand that just because they are twins doesn't mean they have to make all of the same choices.



Walker Bennett

Walker Bennett is Jack's husband. The two lived together for 20 years before they decided to take the step and get married. Walker discourages Jack from putting so much hope in "the nest." Walker is a lawyer and has seen many cases in which a person does not receive money or items they have been promised in an estate. Walker hopes he can help to negotiate a cease fire between the siblings and help them build relationships on things other than money. Walker is so angry when he learns that Jack had taken out a home equity loan on their summer home without telling Walker that he calls an end to their relationship.

Leonard Plumb Sr.

Leonard Plumb Sr. is the father of Leo, Jack, Beatrice and Melody. He set up a trust fund for his children that they would not receive until his youngest child, Melody, turned 40. He wanted his children to have to work to earn their own money and not depend on their trust fund for money. Although Leonard did not intend to leave a good deal of money to his children the account grew beyond his dreams. Part of his arrangements with the trust fund stipulated that only Francie, his wife, could agree to disperse any money early.

Walter

Walter is Melody's husband. He tries to keep his wife in check with her spending but often lets her do things of which he doesn't approve because he knows these things will make her happy. One of these things he allows his wife to do is to buy the house that she fell in love with even though they couldn't afford the payments. When he learns "the nest" is in jeopardy Walter insists that the house be put on the market. He also requests that Nora and Louisa begin looking at state colleges.

Vivienne Rubin

Vivienne Rubin is the real estate agent who works with Walter to try to sell the house in which Walter and Melody live. When Melody learns that Walter has gone to see Vivienne she admits to herself that she would rather see them in an intimate embrace than working together to sell Melody's house.

Nora

Nora is one of Melody and Walter's twin daughters. Nora is the one who suggests to Louisa that they begin skipping their SAT tutoring sessions and instead start exploring the town. It is while they are skipping their sessions that Nora meets Simone, a black girl who is also in their class, and the two begin a relationship.



Tucker “Tuck” McMillan

Bea Plumb met Tucker “Tuck” McMillan during a poetry class that he taught. They began an affair soon after the class. They never married and Tucker remained married to his wife. He did, however, buy Beatrice an apartment on the Upper West Side that he left to her after his death.

Fernando

Fernando is Matilda’s cousin. He got her the job as a waitress at the wedding where she was seduced by Leo. It is Fernando who tells Vinnie the story of the accident and how the family members were afraid they would get deported if they tried to push for more money to take care of Matilda.

Victoria Gross

Victoria Gross is the woman to whom Leo was married at the beginning of the novel. Once he had wooed and married her Leo realized he didn’t even like her. His car wreck gave Victoria a reason to divorce him and take everything that they had. Stephanie believes it was Victoria who had brought out the worst in Leo.

Rico

Rico is the man who supplies drugs to Leo. The first drug deal that Leo sets up with Rico after Leo got out of drug rehab, the day of his lunch meeting with his brother and sisters, Leo does not go to the place where they are supposed to meet.

Ronnie O’Toole

Ronnie O’Toole is the late wife of Tommy O’Toole. When Tommy is shown the damaged Rodin cast “The Kiss” that has been dug out of the wreckage of the World Trade Center, he believes it is a sign from Ronnie.

George Plumb

George Plumb is Leonard Plumb Sr.’s cousin. He is the lawyer who does most of the legal work for the family. George was in charge of setting up the trust fund for Leonard Plumb Sr. and also took care of the details of Leo’s car wreck and divorce.

Simone

Simone is the girl with whom Nora is having a lesbian relationship. Simone encourages Louisa to attend an art school and challenges Nora to keep her grades up.



Symbols and Symbolism

The Nest

This bird's nest that Leo sees at the end of Chapter 1 represents "the nest" - the trust fund that Leonard Sr. set up for his children.

Red Ballet Flat

This red ballet flat is symbolic of the way that different characters in the novel assign different monetary values to the same objects. Melody believes the ballet flats are delicate and a luxury she'd never allow herself. Jack and Walker, however, agree the flats are cheap and ugly.

Cartier Tank

The Cartier tank watch is one of the items that Jack has begun to see only in terms of the amount of money he spent to purchase it. He gave the watch to Walker as a gift. Walker loves the watch but since Jack has gotten them into such financial trouble he can only see the monetary value of the piece of jewelry.

Deep Brown Leather Satchel

This leather satchel is a symbol of the friendship that once existed between Bea and Leo. Bea believes Leo bought this satchel for her when she first began writing. The reader later learns that Leo bought the satchel for himself but decided it was too quaint and gave it to Bea. He served as a mentor to her during that time. As time has passed Leo has grown tired of Bea and wishes she would leave him alone. His final abandonment of Bea, after he read the story she wrote about him, takes place when he abandoned the satchel and her story on a park bench, symbolically abandoning Bea.

A Lavender Scarf

This scarf is a symbol of Francie's attempt to be kind to Melody. When Melody admires this scarf during the children's meeting with Francie, her mother gives it to her. When some mothers from the school that Melody's daughters attend see her wearing the scarf, they assume that she bought it for herself. They make the point that if financial aid officers see Melody's scarf they will automatically decide her family doesn't need financial aid.



Marble Mantlepiece

To Stephanie this marble mantlepiece is a symbol of the night that she and Leo conceived her baby. She named her daughter Lillian, the name she had given to the girl who was carved into the marble.

The Kiss

Rodin's statue "The Kiss" not only represents to Tommy O'Toole a sign from his wife who was killed when the twin towers collapsed but also is symbolic of Matilda and Vinnie. O'Toole stole the statue, which he believed was a sign for his late wife, from the site of the twin towers because the couple is embracing in a way that he and his late wife had always done. The statue has been damaged in the fire and resulting collapse of the building. The woman is missing her right foot while the man is missing his right arm. O'Toole is so shocked when he sees Matilda and Vinnie walking toward him because they are the statue come to life. When Matilda and Vinnie see the statue they believe it is a sign they should get married.

Leo's Custom Made Shoes

These shoes are a symbol of Leo. When Stephanie discovers that this pair of shoes that Leo had custom made in Italy is among his things that are missing from her apartment, she knows that Leo has made his escape.

A Napkin

This napkin is a symbol of the course that Stephanie's relationships with Leo have taken. When she and Leo first broke up Pilar had counseled Stephanie on the stages of grief and even written them down on this napkin. Stephanie had kept the napkin and eventually it became packed away in her basement. She believed just as the napkin was put away so was her association with Leo. When he abandons her for a second time she realizes she is the red bird that bartender had drawn on the napkin to replace the sad face she had put there. She finally has the freedom to fly above Leo.

Piece of Woodwork

This piece of woodwork on which Melody has marked her children's heights at during each year of growth symbolizes her family, her children and the love she has for her children. Melody surprises herself and the rest of her family by deciding that piece of wood is the only thing she wants to salvage from her beloved house even though Jack has agreed to provide her a place to store anything she wants to use later.



Settings

Central Park

Central Park is significant setting in the novel because it is here that Nora and Louisa happen to see Jack while he is trying to buy drugs before his lunch meeting with the rest of his siblings. Jack doesn't recognize Nora and Louisa but they know who he is. They don't tell their mother about the meeting because if they do they would also have to admit they have been sneaking out of their tutoring sessions to explore Central Park.

Stephanie's Brooklyn Home

After Leo is released from drug rehabilitation he moves in with Stephanie in her Brooklyn home. It is in this brownstone that Lillian, their baby is conceived. Stephanie also gives birth to Lillian in her living room. Toomy O'Toole, the retired fireman who has Rodin's "The Kiss" that was damaged in the attack on the World Trade Center, lives in Stephanie's basement apartment.

George's New York Office

George Plumb's New York office is an important setting because it is here that Francie meets with her children about her decision to give Leo the majority of the proceeds of "the nest."

Grand Central Oyster Bar

The Grand Central Oyster Bar is the restaurant where Leo's siblings first confront him about the money he owes them from "the nest." He promises them at this meeting that he will find some way to pay them back and present them with a plan in three months. It is also significant because the Plumb family ate together at this restaurant when the siblings were young.

Museum of Natural History

The Museum of Natural History is significant because it is in a dark hallway of this museum that Louisa sees Simone fondling Nora. The three girls have been going to the museum instead of attending their tutoring classes. Louisa spends her time there drawing, while Simone and Nora spend their time exploring one another.



Tommy O'Toole's Apartment

Tommy O'Toole's apartment is where Jack first sees the damaged Rodin statue.

The Emergency Room

It is in a hospital emergency room after Leo's wreck that Bea overhears Matilda's parents telling the Spanish translator that they are in the country illegally. It is also in this emergency room that they overhear the family arguing and hear Matilda telling the doctors to take off her foot.

Jack and Walker's Apartment

Jack and Walker's apartment is the setting for Melody's fortieth birthday party. Although Melody is at first been excited about the party, the celebration starts to fall apart when she finds Nora and Louisa in Jack and Walker's bedroom and notices Louisa has been crying. It is clear there will be no party when Stephanie comes bringing the news that Leo has disappeared and that she is pregnant with Leo's baby.



Themes and Motifs

Differences in Assigning Values to Objects, Sums of Money

As characters in the novel weigh in on their opinions of the value of certain items in the novel it appears that monetary value, just like beauty, is in the eye of the beholder. Differing values are assigned to a variety of items like a pair of red ballet flats of which both Melody and Jack give widely different opinions their worth. The Rodin statue is another object in the book that is given different values by different characters. Finally it is noted that Nathan Chowdhury has money he wisheds to invest in a literary magazine. The value of his intended investment differs depending on who considers the investment.

The pair of red ballet flats seen by both Melody and Jack are a good example of how things can have a different value to different people. When Melody sees in Chapter 1 that the woman has worn the ballet flats, which in her opinion are delicate and beautiful, on such a messy day she thinks the woman is foolhardy. She thinks to herself that if she were able to afford a pair of shoes that nice she wouldn't ruin them by wearing them on a rainy day. When Jack and Walker see the same woman wearing the same pair of ballet flats, however, they have a different opinion of the value of the shoes. They think the shoes look cheap and are an unattractive color. They see the woman's folly in ruining the shoes as a good things. Melody and Jack give the shoes different values because they work at two ends of the spectrum in terms of things of value. Melody lives a life where she has to pinch pennies to keep her above water financially. Jack, however, works in a business where he deals with things of beauty and high value every day. Even though he is facing financial ruin, he has enough money he is been able to buy his husband an antique watch as a wedding gift.

Different values based on terms of monetary value versus sentimental value are also placed on objects included in the novel. One of the items of great sentimental value as well as great financial value is the Rodin statue that Tommy O'Toole took from the site of the collapse of the World Trade Center. The statue is of significant sentimental value to Tommy because he believes it was a sign from his late wife who was killed when the towers collapsed. When Jack sees the statue and recognizes it for what it is he sees the financial value of the statue. He believes that he could make enough money off the sale of the statue that he could relieve the financial trouble into which he has gotten himself.

In addition to physical items, money is also valued at different worths depending on who is considering the amount of money. Paul has learned that Nathan has a chunk of money that he wants to invest in a literary magazine. He has been told that to some people the money is not enough to be significant but to Paul and his business it would be considered a windfall. Another instance where a set sum of money is given different values depending on who is looking at the amount is in the case of the settlement that Leo pays Matilda for her injures. Leo sees the amount as being a fortune, nearly two



million dollars. He looks at the pay off in terms of the bulk figure and doesn't consider that Matilda had to use the money to pay for her amputation, her move to an accessible apartment, her rehabilitation and her prosthesis. Because the amputation was done so poorly Matilda needs another amputation in order to get a prosthesis that she can wear comfortably and return to work. Despite the huge amount of money that Leo believes he's given Matilda, she doesn't have enough left for the new surgery.

Objects and even set sums of money can be given different values depending on who is appraising them. The same shoe can be called both cheap and expensive depending on who sees it. An object can be valuable because it has sentimental value while it also holds a huge monetary value for another person who considers it. Even a set sum of money can hold different values to different people.

Dangers of Believing in Sure Things

Just as the weather in the novel turns out to be unpredictable, the characters learn there are no sure things in life when their inheritance is drained to pay for Leo's car wreck. In the novel snow comes in October and affects lives for months. In the same way the fall out from Leo's car wreck snowballs and affects his siblings for the rest of their lives. Just as there are no sure things either in the weather or in inheritances, electronic devices also don't offer fail proof information as is learned in the novel.

The main conflict in the novel is that Francie, the mother of the Plumb siblings, withdrew a good deal of money from a trust fund the siblings were expecting to receive in just a few months from the time the fund was nearly depleted. Francie withdrew the money from the fund in order to pay for a car wreck their older brother Leo had when he was drunk and high. Although one sibling had not staked her future on the money she expected from the fund her brother and sister had. Because Melody does not receive the money she expects, she and her husband have been forced to sell the house in which they raised their family. She also fears that her daughters' college educations will be jeopardized because of Leo's accident.

Jack, on the other hand, searches for a way to pay off the home equity loan he took out without his husband's knowledge. Although he thought Walker would never forgive him if he found out about the loan, it is actually the illegal sale of a Rodin statue damaged when the World Trade Center was destroyed that turns out to be the determining factor in Walker leaving his marriage. Because Jack has counted on the money from his inheritance as a sure thing, he overextends himself financially and then turns to an illegal sale to try to earn back the money he needs to save his summer house.

Just as the siblings learn that they should never have counted on their inheritance as a sure thing, they also learn the weather is also not a sure thing. The entire population of the New York area is surprised by a freak snowstorm in October. Trees and plants are killed early. Because many of the trees still had leaves on them the weight of the snow and leaves broke many trees. Although this freak snowstorm seems like it would have



been an isolated event the doctors blame a baby boom the following summer on the early snow.

Another sure thing that falls through for a least one character is the novel is a cell phone app designed to let a person know where their friends are. Melody loads this app on her phone in hopes of being able to track the locations of her daughters. Even when they are out of sight she wants to make sure they are safe and doing what they are supposed to be doing. She assumes that because her girls are teens that they will always have their phones with them. The girls, however, outsmart their mother by leaving their phones in the building where they are supposed to be having SAT tutoring while they go out to explore New York.

Whether it is the weather or an inheritance, the novel *The Nest* teaches that there are no sure things in life. Inheritance funds can be depleted and the weather can prove unseasonable. Even electronic apps don't always work like they are supposed to, especially when humans intervene. A person's belief that he can depend on something as a sure thing can have devastating consequences when he learns how uncertain these sure things can be.

Discovering One's Identity

Just as Simone explains to Nora that instead of being a mirror for the other members of her family she must discover her own identity, the other characters in the novel *The Nest* learn that they must discover their own identities as well. The teenagers Nora and Louisa are not the only ones who struggle with coming to terms with who they are in the course of the novel. When Stephanie learns that she is a mother she must also learn to come to terms with her new identity. Fighting to maintain her identity is Melody when she believes that the whole world has crashed around her when she is faced with the threat of losing her home.

Because they are twins and teenagers Nora and Louisa's struggle to find themselves is particularly significant. They are not only trying to discover who they are in their relationship as twins but also who they are as individuals. It is very difficult for Louisa when Nora first realizes that she is gay. Louisa is deeply disturbed by this first difference in their lifestyles because it is the first time the girls have had a major divergence in life choices. In addition to determining who they are sexually the girls are also struggling to decide who they want to be. Their mother pushes them to achieve and attend private schools. Louisa, however, finally admits to her mother she wants to go to art school. Nora, on the other hand, winds up going to a state school instead of a pricey private university.

Stephanie is another character in the novel who encounters a major life change when she gets pregnant and must come to terms with her new identity. It seems that Stephanie comes to terms with the idea of being a single mother much more quickly than the general public. She seems to be most bothered by the way the people around her feel that have the right to offer their opinions about the baby and Stephanie's



situation. Stephanie is also surprised by the people who assume that just because she is pregnant, it means she must be married. Although she is single, Stephanie pursues relationships with Leo's siblings and tries to provide a family for her child through Leo's family.

Melody is also a character who must come to terms with her identity. She admits she never felt she had a solid identity until she married Walt and had her babies. Her identity as the mother of Nora and Louisa is very strong and she has always taken great pride in being able to provide a nice home for them. She picked out the perfect house in which they could grow up even though the house was over she and her husband's budget. When she learns she won't get the money she had expected from "the nest" Melody feels that her life is spinning out of control. She must find some way to continue to identify as the perfect mother even if her family loses their house and her girls can't attend private universities. Her struggle with her identity causes her to lose sight of her family for a short while, but she is reminded by her daughters that what is important is the family that lives in the house, not the house itself.

Keeping Up Appearances

Characters in the novel do what they feel they must in order to keep circumstances they consider unsavory from marring their reputations. Francie's new husband, Harold, asks her to take care of Leo's car wreck so it won't affect his career. The Rodriguez family worries they will be identified as illegal immigrants and deported because of their affiliation with Leo, while Leo worries the story Bea wrote about him will have unfavorable future consequences. Similarly, Walker worries what affect it might have on his career if Jack is caught trying to sell the Rodin statue from the World Trade Center.

The reader learns that Francie withdrew money from trust fund set aside for her children by their father because her new husband had told her to take care of Leo's wreck. He wanted it kept out of the court system and out of the newspaper. Francie faced retribution from her children when they learned they wouldn't be getting the inheritance they believed they would get but she managed to keep her husband happy.

Even though Matilda could have stood additional financial support from Leo the Rodriguez family also had its reasons for wanting the details of the accident not to go public. They were illegal immigrants and believed that a police report or court appearance would draw attention from immigration agents. They worried that standing up for themselves meant they would get deported.

When Leo reads the story that Bea has written about his car wreck he goes beyond the accepted realm of actions to keep people from punishing him for his actions that led to the car wreck. He is angry that Bea wrote the story to begin with and feels betrayed by her. Even though she changed the names of the characters he believes those who read the story will recognize that it is his story and will know what he did despite the attempts he and his family have made to cover up the truth. While another person might have



asked Bea not to publish the story, Leo runs away. He runs away from his family and from Matilda and from his responsibilities.

In a case different from Leo's car wreck Walker worries that Jack's attempt to illegally sell a Rodin statue damaged in the World Trade Center attack will reflect badly on him. When Walker learns about Jack's attempt to sell this statue he discourages Jack. He knows that if the sale goes bad and anyone finds out about it it will look bad not only on Jack but also on Walker because he is married to Jack. Walker worries what repercussions the sale of the statue might have on his career as a lawyer. As it turns out, it is not the fact that Jack took out a home equity loan without consulting first with Walker but that he continues to try to broker the sale of the statue even after he told Walker he'd stopped trying to sell that piece that causes Walker to leave Jack.

Family Relationships

As a dysfunctional family the Plumb siblings carry their disfunction into their adulthood. The children seem not to have been very close to one another in their childhood and this lack of bonding shows in their adult years. It is only after Stephanie has Leo's baby and encourages each of the siblings to have a role in Lila's life that the siblings, with the exception of Leo, seem to begin to bond.

Leo is the oldest of the Plumb siblings. He was most liked by his mother because he required the least amount of attention. During their childhood and young adult years Leo gained the respect of both his younger sisters by helping them out of embarrassing situations. For Melody, Leo made her twelfth birthday party, the only one she'd ever had, a happy event instead of the dismal one being directed by her mother. Leo was most close to Bea. He mentored her as a young writer because he believed he could profit from her skills. Bea believed their relationship was one of affection, but it seems that Leo based the relationship only on Bea's usefulness to him.

As an adult Leo has a terrible car wreck in which a young waitress is severely injured. Money from a trust fund set up for both Leo and his siblings is almost drained to pay for the waitress' injuries and keep the wreck out of the news. Leo's siblings confront him after he gets out of rehab wanting to know when they will be paid back their parts of the trust fund they have been expecting. Leo seems to really try to find a job and do the right thing by his family but he ultimately runs away when his past comes back to haunt him. He leaves his siblings with only a small percentage of the money they thought they would get, and he also leaves his girlfriend pregnant with his child.

During his childhood Jack was always in competition with Leo. He believed he was somehow an inferior model of Leo. The competition was so obvious that Leo's friends called Jack "Leo Lite." As an adult Jack still sees aspects of Leo's personality in himself. He knows that he, like Leo, would do anything to save his own skin. He also is willing to take risks and chances where others might not do so. One difference between Leo and Jack is that Jack rises to the occasion when Stephanie has her baby. He acts as a father figure to Lila and is even the one to walk her down the aisle when she gets



married. Jack also redeems himself when he helps Melody sort through being a mother to a lesbian daughter.

Bea is perhaps the least dysfunctional of the Plumb children. She seems to have her identity firmly in place but faces writers block because of her uncertain relationship with Leo. When she was first beginning to write Bea believed Leo served as a mentor to her because he appreciated her writing ability. In reality it was probably only because Leo thought he could profit off Bea's writing ability. When Leo left the literary world and married Victoria, Bea suffered a major case of writers block. She struggled with her ability to write until Leo had his car wreck and Bea imagined they might be able to reignite their friendship. Bea slowly realizes that she cannot find the mentor she used to know in her brother and that the person might never have existed at all.

Melody is the youngest of the Plumb siblings and the one who pulls most at the reader's heartstrings. Melody's mother did not want her - a realization that must have been hard for Melody as a tenderhearted young child. Melody tried to be friends with Jack and his buddies but was hurt when they always avoided her. It was not until she was an adult that Jack explained to her that he avoided her because he didn't want her to see the erection that he had almost all the time. Melody deifies Leo after he salvaged her twelfth birthday party. Unfortunately, Leo never came through for Melody again after that time. Melody and Bea's relationship as children is never discussed but the author but it appears that they were not terribly close.

As an adult Melody tries to make up for the slights she suffered in her childhood by making the childhoods of her daughters as perfect as possible. She moves the family into the perfect house even though it is out of their budget. When buying things for the girls she refuses to buy for one without buying for the other. She wants them to go to the best college and have the best opportunities. Melody's attempt to provide the best for her girls is backed by the idea that she will soon get the money from "the nest" and they will be able to afford the lifestyle she has chosen. When she learns she won't be getting the money she expected Melody briefly falls apart and believes she is a failure because she has been unable to provide what she wanted for her daughters. Despite her delicate emotions, Melody is strong-willed and comes to her senses when she realized it is not the things or the cost of things that is important but instead the people with whom she shares her life.

Although the Plumb siblings had never been close through their entire life Stephanie tries to make her baby, Leo's daughter, a common bond for them all. She encourages them to be part of Lillian's life and invites them to her major life events like her first birthday party. When Stephanie learns that Louisa is planning to attend an art school near her home but can't afford room and board she allows Louisa to stay with her. It seems Stephanie is trying to use her daughter as a way to heal the family. As they gather for Lillian's first birthday, Stephanie knows the others are looking for traces of Leo in his daughter's face. The author notes that Lillian brings an aspect of Leo into their lives even though he is not really there.



Styles

Point of View

This story is told by a third person omniscient narrator. The narrator tells the story from the viewpoint of almost all the characters at one point or another. Some aspects of the story, like Leo's time with SpeakEasyMedia, are told in parts of the novel from a purely informational point of view and then repeated at different points from the viewpoints of specific characters. For instance, Leo recognizes the idea that Nathan is trying to push for "Paper Fibers" as one that Leo came up with for SpeakEasy but Nathan did not like at the time. When Leo brings up that the idea was his originally Nathan blows him off. Characters on whom the narrator focuses on in the novel include Melody, Beatrice, Leo, Jack, Stephanie, Walter, Nora, Louisa, Francie, Vinnie, Tommy and Matilda.

The narrator knows all of the emotions and thoughts of each of the characters of the novel. The narrator shares these thoughts and emotions depending on which character he is focusing. When the focus is on a particular character, the narrator tells the thoughts and emotions of that particular character. Chapter 8, for instance, is told almost entirely with a focus on Paul Underwood while Chapter 9 focuses on Bea.

Language and Meaning

There is nothing really outstanding about the language of this novel. None of the characters are characterized by a speech pattern or any particular unique language with the exception of Simone. Louisa, who believed words should be used according to their accepted definitions, had trouble understanding when Simone was being insulting and when she was giving a compliment. She learned that when Simone said something was "adorable" that was not a compliment. When Simone referred to something as being "popular" that, also, was not a compliment. "Tight," however, was a word Simone used to refer to something that appealed to her.

Structure

The novel is divided into three parts plus a Prologue and Epilogue. The Prologue gives the reader information about the specifics of Leo's seduction of Matilda and their car wreck. The Epilogue focuses on Lillian's first birthday party. Part One is the shortest section at 66 pages. It basically covers the day that the Plumb siblings have their meeting with Leo. They are afraid he won't show up at the meeting. This Part of the novel closes when Leo arrives at the Oyster Bar and tells his siblings he needs three months to come up with a plan to pay them back. In Part Two of the novel the author begins presenting chapters that focus almost entirely on one character and his or her story. This is the longest of the three parts of the novel at 208 pages. The last five chapters of this part of the novel focus on Melody's spoiled birthday party and Stephanie's announcement that Leo is on the run. Part Three, the second longest part



of the novel, deals primarily with the way that the Plumb siblings and others put their lives back together after Leo disappears without paying them back.

The actual bulk of this story takes place in a time span of a year or less but the story is not told in a linear fashion. The narrator skips back and forth through time to present first one character's story and then another character's story in a way so that the reader gets the information he or she needs to understand relations between characters and their background with one another. Most of the movements through time refer to things that happened in the past in relation to the story. There is only one instance in which the author refers to an incident in the future. This occurs when Vinnie and Matilda talk to their children about how they knew they should get married after they saw the damaged "The Kiss" statue in Tommy's apartment.



Quotes

There was no way that one night of Leo's stupidity, his debauchery, was going to ruin her daughters' future, not when they'd worked so hard, not when she'd pushed them to dream big. They were not going to community college."

-- Narrator (Chapter 1 paragraph 14)

Importance: Melody is angry because she had planned for her part of "the nest" to go toward her daughters' college educations. She swears that she will not allow Leo's actions to negatively affect her daughters.

In Leo's company, Jack felt like a lesser version of his older brother. Not as intelligent, interesting, or successful, an identity that had attached to him in high school and had never completely gone away."

-- Narrator (Chapter 1 paragraph 40)

Importance: Leo had always believed he was a not as good version of his older brother. He'd always felt he had the need to prove himself around his older brother.

It was the organizing principle of his life, that money and its concurrent rewards should flow from work, effort, commitment, and routine."

-- Narrator (Chapter 2 paragraph 2)

Importance: Leonard Plumb Sr. did not want to leave his children big inheritances because he believed they would benefit more from the value of earning their money through hard work.

He never imagined that as the fund grew so, too, would his children's tolerance for risk, for doing the one thing Leonard had repeatedly warned them not to do, ever, in any avenue of life, from the time they were old enough to understand: count the chickens before they hatched."

-- Narrator (Chapter 2 paragraph 10)

Importance: The money Leonard Sr. put in the trust fund for his children grew to an amount that he would never have wanted to leave for them. The amount was so large that they began to count on the money before they received it, something he had warned them never to do.

She'd helped Leo because Harold had insisted she take care of the situation as swiftly as possible. He didn't want any of his multiple business partners, already skittish in the current financial environment, to associate him with a publicly humiliating and possibly financially gutting lawsuit."

-- Narrator (Chapter 4 paragraph 46)

Importance: Francie took care of the monetary aspect of Leo's traffic accident because



her new husband, Harold, told her to make it go away so that his reputation was not sullied by a lawsuit and negative publicity.

He'd been so focused on Victoria and the dissolution of their marriage that he'd failed to consider the repercussions of Francie's actions. To be fair, he hadn't entirely understood Francie's actions until a couple of weeks ago. When George first told him that his mother was funding the Rodriguez payout, Leo'd had a brief moment of hope that she was using her own — or Harold's — considerable resources."

-- Narrator (Chapter 7 paragraph 7)

Importance: Leo didn't realize at first from where the money had come that had covered the payout to the Rodriguez family. He was so distracted by his divorce from Victoria that he didn't even consider the reaction his sibling might have when their inheritance was used to pay for his folly.

He had nearly two million dollars hidden away, almost exactly what he owed 'the nest.'"

-- Narrator (Chapter 7 paragraph 17)

Importance: Even though Leo has a bank account that totals nearly the amount that he owes "the nest," he does not want to cash it out to repay his siblings because it is the funding he intends to use if he ever feels the need to disappear.

Jack was concealing an enormous debt from Walker, a tangled thicket of money and deception."

-- Narrator (Chapter 10 paragraph 5)

Importance: Jack is concerned about Leo's plans to pay back "the nest" because he plans to use it to pay off debt he has been hiding from Walker.

Walker was dismissive of The Nest. He'd spent too many hours with clients who showed up at his door outraged because something they thought they'd inherit didn't materialize."

-- Narrator (Chapter 10 paragraph 9)

Importance: Because so many people with whom he worked do not receive an inheritance they expect, Walker has learned not to depend on the promise of a monetary gift.

The minute he saw the hulk of metal emerge from the dirt and dust, he knew it was from Ronnie. In spite of its damage, he could see the tenderness of the couple's embrace."

-- Narrator (Chapter 11 paragraph 21)

Importance: When Tommy sees the way the couple in this stature are embracing he believes the statue is the sign from his late wife for which he has been looking.

That sounded good to Bea — 2002, the year before he sold SpeakEasyMedia and met Victoria; Tuck still alive; her book newly published. The year that was the dividing line, in



Bea's mind, of the Leo she loved, the Leo who was one of her closest friends, gradually disappearing and morphing into someone unrecognizable."

-- Narrator (Chapter 15 paragraph 25)

Importance: Bea believes that 2002 was a dividing line between when her life was good and when it began to sour. When Leo suggested if he were Superman he would rewind time to that date Bea agreed she liked that idea.

She'd begged off the phone quickly, telling Bea she wanted to talk but was in a meeting (true) and couldn't stay on the phone (true) and that, yes, Leo had mentioned something about new work but they'd both been incredibly busy and maybe they'd talk about it tonight (lie)."

-- Narrator (Chapter 21 paragraph 20)

Importance: This quote is significant because Stephanie follows the pattern of the ice breaker in which she'd previously been asked to participate where she had to tell two things about herself that were true and one that was a lie.

When she returned to her parents' cramped apartment in the Bronx, Matilda started to understand what she was up against."

-- Narrator (Chapter 22 paragraph 2)

Importance: Matilda is positive about her disability until she gets home from rehabilitation and realizes how difficult her life without two feet will be.

It was that last sentence she would call back if she could. That was the one where she saw the shift, the slightest narrowing of his gaze, the moment when she had — inadvertently and slightly, but clearly in Leo's eyes, concisely in his mind — positioned herself on the wrong side of a dividing line."

-- Narrator (Chapter 28 paragraph 63)

Importance: When Stephanie asks Leo why it matters if Bea's story about his wreck is published, she turns him against her.

Leo understood the nasty pull of the regrettable familiar, how the old grooves could be so much more satisfying than the looming unknown. It's why addicts stayed addicts. Why he'd walked away from buying cocaine before the family lunch at the Oyster Bar but now had a neat glassine envelope in his pocket."

-- Narrator (Chapter 29 paragraph 4)

Importance: Even though Leo walked away from his opportunity to buy cocaine before his lunch with family, he recognizes the pull to return to his old habits. Since he feels that Bea has betrayed him with her story and Stephanie has turned her back on him he decides to go back to his old drug habits. This quote lets the reader know that Leo tries to at least stay clean for his family's sake and did fight against the urge to buy drugs the day he was to have lunch to his siblings.



The things money could buy weren't the reward; the reward was to feel lifted above everyone else, to get a look at the other side of the fence where the grass was rarely greener but always different and what he loved was the contrast — and the choice. The ability to take it in was what mattered; the ability to choose was what mattered.”

-- Narrator (Chapter 29 paragraph 6)

Importance: When Leo thinks about money he realizes that it is not the money he likes so much but the opportunity that money gives him to choose what he wants in life.

That is definitely not mine,' he said, relieved to note his ebbing anxiety, his elevated mood. He probably shouldn't leave the case sitting there. But then he saw Paul Underwood approaching from less than a block away, right on schedule, set to arrive at the bench precisely at 8:55 A.M., as he did every weekday.”

-- Narrator (Chapter 29 paragraph 57)

Importance: When Leo abandons Bea's leather satchel, containing the story about his wreck, he is also symbolically abandoning her.

Then a gentle discussion about kindness. Accommodation. A different and sturdier kind of nest.”

-- Narrator (Chapter 31 paragraph 63)

Importance: Walker has an idea that he will be able to talk to the Plumb siblings and help them realize there are more sturdy nests than the inheritance they had thought they would get from their family.

If he could sell the statue, pay off the loan, he would be a changed man. He wouldn't even care about The Nest. If he could save the summerhouse, he would forgive Leo about the accident. Tabula rasa and so on. He would be a better person, a kinder and more responsible person, a person of integrity and honesty — the type of person Walker deserved.”

-- Narrator (Chapter 31 paragraph 69)

Importance: Jack incorrectly believes that if he sells the statue illegally, he will be able to pay off the home equity loan he took out against the summer home he and Walker own, and he will be able to magically turn into an honest person after the deal is done.

The pages in her hands, marked with Leo's edits, had to be his way of giving her — if not approval — permission.”

-- Narrator (Chapter 31 paragraph 91)

Importance: Bea believes that since Leo took the time to edit her story about his wreck that it means he approves of her work and is giving her permission to try to get her story published.

What he didn't say out loud was that he knew who Leo was because he was that person, too.”



-- Narrator (Chapter 36 paragraph 33)

Importance: When Leo's siblings realize that he has left without repaying them their inheritance Jack tries to console them by saying none of them are responsible for Leo's actions. Jack doesn't tell them he knows it is Leo's basic personality to save himself at any cost because Jack has the same personality traits.

But if he exposed himself — accidentally or on purpose — he'd harm her memory for his kids. And that was the never-ending loop he'd been caught in for weeks."

-- Narrator (Chapter 41 paragraph 11)

Importance: Since he has had time to think more rationally about his decision to steal the statue, Tommy believes that if he is caught with it in his apartment or if he chooses to turn himself in it will destroy the memories his children have of his mother and her death.

A tall muscular man with one arm and a long-haired woman with a missing foot walking together down his street. It was his statue come to life."

-- Narrator (Chapter 41 paragraph 13)

Importance: When Tommy sees Vinnie and Matilda, with their respective missing limbs, walking together down the sidewalk toward him he panics so badly that Stephanie, Vinnie and Matilda all believe he is having a heart attack.

And just like that, she felt like the General again. Their family might look like they were in retreat, but she knew better. She was the General and if anything was an advance, this was it."

-- Narrator (Chapter 42 paragraph 46)

Importance: After Melody decides she can give up her house but keep the best thing that came from the house, her children as they have grown up, she is able to take back over her role as the leader of the family.

It belongs to Leo and Matilda and someone who hasn't even been born yet. It's not the story I need to tell."

-- Beatrice (Chapter 45 paragraph 22)

Importance: Bea explains to Paul why she decides not to try to publish the story she has written about Leo's wreck.

Lillian Plumb Palmer, called "Lila" for short (her first name was a sweet secret to Stephanie, just between her and her mantel), was born in her mother's living room exactly forty-two minutes after Stephanie's water broke."

-- narrator (Epilogue paragraph 3)

Importance: Stephanie's baby, given the same name as the one by which Stephanie called the girl carved in her mantle, is born in her mother's living room.