

Picture Me Gone Study Guide

Picture Me Gone by Meg Rosoff

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Plot Summary

When 12-year-old Mila and her father go to America to help locate her father's best friend, Mila never dreams how her perception of life will change. In the novel "Picture Me Gone" by Meg Rosoff Mila's life is turned upside down when she realizes her father, who she believed was honest to a fault, lied to her about being in touch with Matthew all along. When she meets Matthew in person, Mila is drawn into the dark world of his pain and hopelessness. Despite her youth and her hope that she and her father could help Matthew, Mila comes to the realization that Matthew is the only one who can save himself.

When they begin their trip from London to America, Mila is excited at the prospect of being able to help her father find his missing friend. She hopes they will be able to reconnect Matthew with his wife, Suzanne, and infant son, Gabriel. Mila believes she's going to watch over her father and to help solve a mystery. At her birth, Mila was given the same name as her grandfather's dog. Mila believes she inherited some of that dog's qualities of perception and tenacity. She has a good sense of her surroundings and is able to read situations and people easily. She hopes these abilities will come in handy when she's helping her father look for Matthew.

Once in America, Mila notices right away that the house in which Matthew and Suzanne live together does not appear to house much happiness. She suspects Suzanne is having an affair. Mila also learns their relationship is stressed because Matthew was driving the car the day that Owen, he and Suzanne's first child, was killed in a traffic wreck. Owen had been riding in the backseat, an arrangement Mila finds strange, and was killed when a tractor trailer smashed the back of the car. His father was not injured.

Mila and her father drive to a camp Matthew owns near the Canadian border. They find that Matthew's ex-girlfriend Lynda is living there with Matthew's teenage son Jake who is almost exactly the same age Owen would have been if he had lived. The more Mila learns about Matthew, the more she dislikes him even though he was her father's friend.

Mila's trust in humanity reaches a breaking point when she finally realizes what she believes she should have known all along. Her father has been in touch with Matthew the whole time. Once she has this information Mila understands why she did not really feel that her father was as worried about Matthew as she thought he should be. Mila is devastated by the realization that her parents, the one set of people she depended upon to tell her the truth, have lied to her. She is also distraught as she listens to her father try to communicate with his old friend without ever really asking the right questions or realizing how deeply set his friend really is on ending his life.



Chapters 1-4

Summary

In Chapter 1, Mila has the same name as her grandfather's dog, a Bedlington terrier. She believes she has some traits in common with the dog. Mila and her father, Gil, are preparing for a trip to America to visit Gil's oldest friend, Matthew. Matthew's wife has called to say that Matthew has disappeared but asks Gil to come anyway. He agrees. Marieka, Mila's mother, believes Matthew's timing is peculiar. Even though Marieka questions if it is a good idea for Mila to go with Gil since Matthew is now missing, they decide it will be best. Mila has already been thinking through the clues, trying to determine why Matthew left his home. Although she met Matthew once, she doesn't remember him. She does remember the stories she's been told about how Matthew saved her father's life.

In Chapter 2, Mila has an old photo of Mila the dog that she studies to see if she can deduce any clues about what the dog and her owner were like. Mila feels sad when she looks at the picture. When Mila and her father leave to go look for Matthew, who has walked away from his home and left behind his wife and baby, Mila's mother tells her to take care of her father. As they ride on the train, Mila smells her father's smell. She and her mother believe her ability to recognize people by their smells makes Mila at least half dog. Gil translates books for a living. Marieka plays violin in an orchestra.

In Chapter 3, Mila wonders why Matthew decided to leave home even though he knew they were coming to visit. Mila asks her father where he thinks Matthew went. Gill says he doesn't know but that his friend had always been a wanderer. Mila relates the story of Gil saving Matthew's life. They were both 22 when they went to Switzerland to climb the Lauteraarhorn. Temperatures rose as they climbed and avalanches began. They hunkered down to wait. After the second day of their attempted climb Matthew noticed Gil was getting sick. Matthew tried to get Gill to go back down the mountain with him but Gil refused. Finally Matthew insisted that they descend. He pushed and cajoled Gil down the mountain to safety even though Gil wanted to sit in the snow and die. Secretly, Mila wonders if they are going to American to find Matthew so they can repay him for his act of saving Gil's life so many years ago. At the airport they get a text from Suzanne saying she has still heard nothing from Matthew.

In Chapter 4, Suzanne and Gabriel meet Gil and Mila at the airport. In the car on the way to Suzanne and Matthew's house Mila can't hear what the adults in the front seat are saying. Mila falls asleep. When Mila wakes both the adults are silent but Mila believes she can hear Gill's silent thoughts of Matthew and Suzanne's thoughts like a skipping CD saying "damn, damn, damn" over and over again. Mila thinks about what she knows. Matthew works at the university. He left five days ago and took nothing with him, not even money or a passport. She thinks he must be desperate, angry or afraid in order to have left his baby.



Analysis

One of the first things to notice about this story is that it is told by 12-year-old Mila. She never tells directly how old she is but the reader can deduce her age by clues she leaves in her writing. She says she met Matthew only once when she was four years old. That visit was eight years ago meaning that Mila is about twelve. Mila tells the story in the first person point of view in the present tense. Notice, however, that even though Mila is telling the story in the present tense, it appears she's telling it after it has already happened. At the end of Chapter 1 Mila points out that she never really gets a chance to thank Matthew for saving her dad's life. This indicates that Mila already knows how the story will turn out. It also foreshadows that when they find Matthew he is no longer alive or not in a state of mind that allows Mila to thank him for his actions.

One of the major themes touched on in this first section of the novel is the theme of friendship. Mila shares that her father, Gil, and Matthew have been friends since they were children. At one time Matthew even saved Gil from dying when Gil got sick while they were climbing a mountain. The perceptive Mila, of course, notes that if Matthew hadn't encouraged Gil to climb the mountain in the first place, he wouldn't have needed to be saved.

Perception is another major theme in the novel. Mila enjoys interpreting people and situations based on the almost imperceptible clues. She also tells her reader that she's good at solving puzzles. She's already begin to put together clues that might lead her and her father to where Matthew is. Mila notes that even though she doesn't believe in incarnation, she believes she might have inherited some of her ability to perceive clues from people's body language because she has somehow inherited some dog-like traits.

From the beginning of the novel where Mila says she was named after a dog, then on through the course of the book, dogs are woven into the story. In this section, of course, the idea of dogs is significant because first, Mila shares her name with a dog and second, because Mila believes she shares some traits, like her ability to recognize people by their smells, with dogs. Notice also that when describing the nationality of her family Mila compares them to mongrels, dog with such a mixture of breeds that don't really classify as any specific breed. Mila indicates that her family, like mongrel dogs, don't have the inbred illnesses and weaknesses of some pedigreed dogs.

Notice also Mila's statement at the end of Chapter 1. She indicates that it seems like it has been a long time since her trip with her father to London began. She describes herself as a child when her trip to London began. In the next sentence Mila points out that she is "still, technically speaking, a child" (p. 3). These statements indicate that something will happen to Mila to make her feel as if she has grown up or become more like an adult during her trip. These sentences indicate to the reader that Mila will have a coming of age experience during the course of the novel.

In the text of the novel, notice that the author doesn't use any quotation marks to notate when one person is speaking to another. Sometimes this quirk makes it difficult to determine which character is speaking or if a character is speaking. Keep in mind, of



course, that it is actually Mila telling the story in her own voice so technically she is speaking through the course of the entire novel, even relaying the words of other characters as she remembers them. Notice also that the author does differentiate text messages from other parts of the novel by putting anything sent through a text message in bold type.

Discussion Question 1

What is the significance of Mila having the same name as her grandfather's dead dog?

Discussion Question 2

Discuss Matthew and Gil's friendship. Do you agree with Mila's belief they will be participating in some sort of "cosmic leveling" (p. 10) by going to help Matthew?

Discussion Question 3

Why do you think both Mila's mother and father seem concerned about whether or not Mila should go to America since Matthew is missing?

Vocabulary

resentful, reincarnation, subtle, diagrams, nationalities, gazing, altitude, cajoles, disoriented, determination, centrifugal



Chapters 5-7

Summary

In Chapter 5, when Suzanne stops in front of her house in New York, Mila's first thought is that she would never run away from a house that beautiful. Inside the house is a white German Shepherd dog whom Suzanne ignores. Mila pets her. Her name is Honey. She was Matthew's dog. Mila feels loneliness coming from the dog. Although the house is beautiful, Mila gets a first impression that the house is not happy.

In Chapter 6, Mila and Catlin, her best friend in London, had a clubhouse in the top floor of Catlin's house. They designed code books and made plans to hide out when Camden was attacked by the enemy. Mila described Catlin's father as a man who shouted a lot and was best avoided. One day on the way to school Catlin had told Mila her parents were probably going to get a divorce. Catlin claimed she hated her parents but Mila doubted that was true. She had noticed how dulled Catlin's house looked. Because she and Catlin weren't in the same class together, Mila noticed Catlin had begun acting wild and hanging with a different group of friends. She wouldn't even make eye contact with Mila anymore. Mila missed her

One day Catlin walked up behind Mila and began talking to her just like nothing had happened. She seemed upset to learn Mila would be out of town over Easter. Catlin didn't even say goodbye to Mila when they got to Cat's house but a few minutes later Mila got a text from her asking Mila to bring her an Easter egg from America.

In Chapter 7, it is not until Mila wakes the next morning that she realizes that Suzanne had put her in Owen's room. Mila showers then has breakfast. She notices that while Suzanne and Gabriel's things have been put away neatly, Matthew's are strewn where he left them. She feels like Suzanne and Matthew are living in the same house but on two different planes so that their things and their lives don't touch. Mila also senses another man, one who smokes, has been spending time there. Gil mentions to Mil that Matthew has a camp near the Canadian border where he might be staying. When Mila takes Honey out for a walk she wonders why Suzanne hates the dog.

Analysis

In this section of the novel Mila begins using her unusually strong sense of perception to interpret the situation that she encounters at the house where Matthew lived with his wife and infant son. Notice she compares the atmosphere of that home to that she feels in her best friend's home. Mila knows that Catlin's parents don't get along together. She feels that the house in which Catlin and her family live is dark, stale and the colors muted because of the unhappiness there. Mila gets these same vibes from Suzanne and Matthew's house. Overall, she feels it isn't a happy house. Mila also notices that while Suzanne keeps her things and the things belonging to Gabriel neatly stacked and



organized, Matthew's things lie about the house where he left them. To Mila it seems as if Suzanne and Matthew live in the same house but don't live there together. She senses they seem to operate on different planes.

In the theme of dogs, Mila meets Matthew's dog in this section of the novel. She notices first that the dog seems terribly lonely and also that Suzanne seems to hate the dog. She wonders why Suzanne would hate the dog so much.

Another aspect of the novel that is touched on in this section is the story of Owen. Mila tells the reader that Owen was the oldest son of Matthew and Suzanne. He would be about fifteen. When Mila wakes the first morning in the house in upstate New York she notices that Suzanne has put her in Owen's bedroom. Mila indicates there are still keys and a bowl of change on the dresser as if Owen was going to return. Although it hasn't yet been clarified where Owen is, it appears from the way that Mila describes his room and his things that he will not be coming back.

Also in this section that Mila talks about her best friend, Cat, who lives in London. At first it appears that the stories Mila tells of her relationship with Cat do not have much to do with the plot of the novel. They appear to be side stories or tangents that Mila goes off on. However, these stories about Mila's changing relationship with Cat will become more and more important in the novel's developing theme of friendship. Cat tells Mila her parents are getting divorced. The next year they are in different classes in school. Mila notices that Cat begins to act differently. She is getting in trouble, doing drugs and hanging around a different group of friends. Mila is hurt and misses her friend. Suddenly, just before Mila is to go to America Cat reconnects with her. Remember Mila's promise to bring Cat an Easter egg from America.

A final important thing to note in this section is that Mila indicates that her father's traits include excessive honesty. She also believes it is strange that her father doesn't appear to be very worried about his friend. She feels she is more worried about what might have happened to Matthew than he is. She assumes he may be acting the way he is in order to keep from worrying her.

Discussion Question 1

Do you notice anything strange so far in the novel? If yes, what is strange? Use examples from the book to back up your answer.

Discussion Question 2

Discuss the relationship between Cat and Mila as described in this section of the novel. Why do you think Mila includes this information about her friend from London?



Discussion Question 3

Explore Mila's conclusion that Matthew and Suzanne's house is not a happy one. Have you ever gotten the feeling that a house or building had an emotional energy about it?

Vocabulary

architect, logistics, disembodied, tentatively, obvious



Chapters 8-10

Summary

In Chapter 8, Mila describes herself and her friend Cat as being complete opposites. She describes a time when Cat stole a pair of rats from the school's science lab. She planned for the two to train the rats to carry messages through the sewers of London, however, the rats got loose. Cat's mom complained she heard rats chewing in the cupboards and her father told her mother she was crazy. Cat indicated the rats were the final straw that ended her parents' marriage. At that time, Mila and Cat stopped spending as much time at Cat's house and more time at Mila's. In retrospect Mila believes that Cat had begun acting out because she didn't want to go back to her sad lonely house.

In Chapter 9, Mila discusses her father's career. He translates books from Portuguese into English. She finds people who have no native language disturbing but realizes how close she is to being one of those people as her parents speak so many languages between the two of them. Gil met Marieka when he went to a concert. The first thing he noticed about her was her head of wild red gold curls. He went backstage to meet her. They didn't live together before they had Mila. Although her mother interprets the world in a way that doesn't include a good deal of drama, Mila is able to read people's emotions. She believes other people would be able to understand people and situations better by their nonverbal communication if they just began paying attention.

Mila remembers Marieka and her father discussing if Mila needed to go along with Gil when he went to America. She remembered that her mother didn't like Suzanne much. She'd heard stories of Matthew and Gil's relationship. That the only time their relationship was tested was when they both loved the same girl. For a while when Matthew's mother was sick, Matthew had lived with Gil and his family. They both were accepted into Cambridge. When she talks on the phone with Marieka, Mila misses her so much she wants to cry.

In Chapter 10, it was Catlin's dream to run away so she could set up a spy ring and save the world. She even made a map that she told Mila came from the catacombs of the British Museum. Mila considers how her relationship with Cat showed her things about herself just as Gil and Matthew's relationship showed her things about each of them. Matthew was a leader and Gil was a follower. Mila was an anchor while Cat flitted about in her own fantasy world.

Analysis

The theme of friendship continues to develop in this section of the novel. Mila shares with the reader more information about her friendship with Cat as well as her father's friendship with Matthew. Just as Mila described her father and Matthew in Chapter 3 as



being opposites in the sense that Matthew was a leader while Gil was a follower. Mila describes herself as being an anchor while Cat was one who was flighty and easily lost in make belief. As Mila thinks about her friend's situation she wonders if Cat had not begun acting out because she was so unhappy at home.

Mila also shares more information about her father and Matthew's relationship. They had been as close as two friends could be. Matthew had even lived with Gil's family for a year while Matthew's mother was sick. They'd even gone to the same college together. Mila had heard from her father that the only real trouble they had in their relationship was when they both fell in love with the same girl. Mila has seen a picture of the three of them where the girl is smiling at Matthew but Gil's face is in the shadows.

Notice the descriptions of the relationship between Marieka and Gil. Mila points out that they did not live together before they had her. It appears that they are not married. Despite the legalities, Marieka, Gil and Mila seem to be a very happy, healthy family as compared to Cat's family and Matthew's family. Notice how Mila describes her how her father's "whole body uncurls" (p. 42) when he talks to her on the phone. The image is one of opening up almost like a flower does to the sun from which it gets its light and food. Mila misses her mother so much she wants to cry but remembers from the times the family has been separated that Marieka has told her that even when they are apart they are together.

Notice also in this section that Mila talks more about her ability to read people and situations. She believes other people rush in and begin asking questions too quickly when they could figure things out for themselves if they just put their minds to it. For some time Mila had thought everyone could read the signs given off by a person's body language, their clothing and the movements they made. Her mother has helped Mila to realize that she has an unusual gift for being able to read other people.

In an earlier section of the novel Mila has mentioned that her father worked as a translator. She expounds upon translation and his job in this section of the novel. Her father translates from Portuguese, his second language, into English, his first. These comments about translation and the number of languages some people speak adds to the theme of communication in the novel.

Discussion Question 1

Compare and contrast Cat and Mila's friendship with that of Gil and Matthew.

Discussion Question 2

Discuss the significance of Cat's desire to run away along with her hope she could one day save the world. What do these desire indicate in Cat?



Discussion Question 3

Are you able to read a person using their body language and other nonverbal clues? Do you think some people, like Mila, are better at it than others?

Vocabulary

colleagues, nomad, syntactic, semiotics, typologies, linguistics, eccentric, baroque, catacombs, forensic, operatives



Chapters 11-12

Summary

In Chapter 11, Suzanne starts a video for Mila to watch but Mila wants to listen to what Suzanne and Gil are talking about. She hears Suzanne say Matthew might be having an affair. Mila thinks if she were a woman with a baby whose husband was missing she would be screaming and panicked. Mila mentions that to Gil who says he's noticed Suzanne's unusual calm as well. He says it might be different for them and tells her that most couples who lose a child don't stay together. Knowing time moves differently for people who speak different languages, Mila wonders how time moves for Suzanne. As she studies her, Mila decides Suzanne is an angry person trying to pretend to be normal. Mila plays with Gabriel until he begins to cry and Suzanne rescues him. She looks at the books and picks out one titled "Caravanserai."

That afternoon Mila goes with Suzanne and Gabriel to town. Suzanne gets a phone call and Mila notices her expression and smile changes. When she notices Mila Suzanne says she has to go and hangs up quickly. She says it was a friend from a book club but Mila believes she was lying. Mila sits on a bench and sends a text to Cat. Cat sends a text back saying it is raining. Halfway through dinner that evening Mila gets tired and lays down on the sofa. Believing she is asleep, Gil covers her with a blanket. She is able to hear when Gil and Suzanne start talking. Suzanne describes how unhappy Matthew was and how he blamed himself for Owen's death. They had thought Gabriel would make things better but hadn't. She hears Suzanne asking Gil to take the car as she doesn't need it. Mila goes to sleep. When she wakes, Gil is helping her to her bed.

In Chapter 12, Gil says they are going on a trip. Mila will miss Gabriel. She tells her father that she doesn't understand how someone could leave him. They talk some and Gil says he thinks Matthew's bad times began because of Owen's death but that he could be wrong. Suzanne comes in the room and takes Gabriel from Mila. She says his diaper is dirty and goes to change him but Mila thinks to herself that she didn't smell anything bad.

Analysis

Mila tells her reader in this section of the novel that Owen is dead. In fact, Mila's father tells Mila that Matthew's problems might have begun when Owen died. When Mila points out to him that Suzanne is strangely calm for a woman whose husband is missing Gil says he's noticed the same thing. He tells Mila that it may just be because the relationship between Matthew and Suzanne has changed since Owen died.

Meanwhile, notice that when Mila pretends to sleep on the couch but is instead eavesdropping on what the adults are saying she hears Suzanne suggest that Matthew might be having an affair. Remember that when Mila was in town with Suzanne earlier



that day that she caught Suzanne talking on the phone with someone. Suzanne hung up quickly and told Mila it was someone from her book club but Mila insinuates that she believed it was another man because Suzanne was smiling happily while she was talking. Mila has also mentioned in an earlier section of the novel that she had picked up scents of another person being in the house with Suzanne at some point. From the clues she has picked up Mila believes this other person is a man. Even though Suzanne is pointing fingers and accusing Matthew of having an affair, it could be Suzanne who is having an affair.

In addition to trying to get a read on what might have happened to Matthew, Mila also tries to get a grasp on Suzanne's personality. It has already been discussed that Mila believes Suzanne might be having an affair. It appears that Mila also believes that Suzanne is angry because of her son's death. She thinks it might be because Suzanne is pretending to be normal and covering the anger that she has such trouble getting a read on her personality.

In the theme of communication, notice in this section that Mila mentions she's been thinking about the connection between language and thought. She tries to read Suzanne's mind by trying to decide how time passes for her. She considers that some people interpret the passing of time as if things were happening from the left to the right. In some cultures and languages time is demonstrated as moving from the right to the left. Mila wonders if time has stopped for Suzanne at the death of Owen or if she lives in some distorted time frame because of her sorrow.

Discussion Question 1

Based on the things that Mila has noticed about Suzanne do you believe Suzanne is having an affair? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 2

Earlier in the novel Mila mentioned that her father did not seem as worried about his missing friend as Mila thought he should have been. Now she notices the same lack of worry in Suzanne. Do you think the adults are acting in an unusual fashion? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 3

Why might Owen's death be significant to Matthew and Suzanne's relationship?

Vocabulary

sparingly, rationed, keen, endearing, nappy



Chapter 13

Summary

In Chapter 13, Mila considers her job for the day to be a translator, like her father. Only she says she will be translating from American to English and vice versa. They will be driving to Matthew's camp. It will take about seven hours. Suzanne tells them about a picturesque road they can take. Mila thinks her suggestion that they take the scenic route is strange. As she is taking her suitcase to the car Honey comes up behind Mila and touches her. Suzanne quickly suggests they take the dog with them. Before Gil can refuse Suzanne has Honey's things in the car.

They stop for breakfast. Mila notices the waitress is pregnant and wonders if she know yet. They take their leftovers for Honey. Mila sees the waitress has added four pieces of bacon along with some hash to the bag of leftovers. They stop at a phone store and buy Mila a cheap prepaid phone so she can call her mother. She puts Suzanne and Matthew's numbers into her phone. She sends Matthew a text telling him they are in America looking for him and that Honey misses him. She doesn't get a response. They stop at a place called Lena's Curiosities and Cafe for lunch. The owner lets them bring Honey inside with them. When they tell her the name of the town to which they are headed she tells them they still have a long way to go.

Analysis

In this section of the novel Mila talks more about her father's job as a translator. She says her father has told her that translation is often a one-way process. Notice how he describes his job as finding the similarities between the mind of the one who speaks one language and the mind of one who speaks the second language. Notice that Mila tried to do this when she thought about Suzanne and the way her mind worked because of Owen's death.

Despite her father's belief that translators rarely translate in a two way process that she will be translating from English to American and back again as they travel. The way she describes American speech patterns it is almost as if Mila believes it is a different language even though the English and Americans technically speak the same language.

The theme of dogs is also discussed in this section of the book. Honey touches the back of Mila's leg as they are leaving. It is almost as she knows Gil and Mila are going to look for Matthew. She appears to be asking if she can go along as well. Suzanne appears relieved when Gil and Mila agree to take Honey with them. Notice that when Mila offers to sit in the back seat with Honey that Suzanne was forceful when she told Mila to sit in the front. This will be important later in the novel.



Discussion Question 1

Discuss Suzanne's apparent relief to be rid of Matthew's dog. What do you think this means?

Discussion Question 2

Discuss Mila's description of the work her father does and compare it with her indication that she will be translating from American to English and back. Why is it significant that Gil wants to be able to translate without losing the meaning of what he is translating? How is translating more than just interpreting words?

Discussion Question 3

Why does it bother Mila that Suzanne suggests they take the scenic route while going to Matthew's camp near the Canadian border? Does her suggestion strike you as strange? Why or why not?

Vocabulary

fluency, idioms, calamitous, empathy, genuine



Chapters 14-15

Summary

In Chapter 14, just like the terrier she is named after Mila sets to work putting together a flow chart describing what might have happened to Matthew. She's made a list of what might have happened to him if he is dead, and why he might have left home if he is still alive. Mila realizes because of her age, she is limited on the knowledge that she has of the world and the way it works. She wishes she had a middle aged person to help her out. For instance, she doesn't understand why her parents have never gotten married. She doesn't understand why Matthew didn't get married until he was 42. She tries to talk to Gil about thinking methodically about Matthew's disappearance instead of just letting his thoughts bounce around hoping they'll fall into the right sequence.

Mila asks her father to tell her everything he knows about the accident that killed Owen. He tells her that Matthew had picked Owen up after swim practice. A tractor-trailer had skidded and slammed into the back of the car. Matthew was not injured but Owen, who was sitting in the backseat, was killed. Mila wonders why Owen had been sitting in the backseat. Gil doesn't know but throws out some suggestions. He also tells Mila that Matthew was exonerated at the time from any fault in the accident. This statement interests Mila. She tries to think through the accident and determine what might have happened.

In Chapter 15, Mila questions Gil when he decides to take the scenic route that Suzanne mentioned. They enter a town and Gil pulls off at an ice cream shop. They still have 90 miles to go. They drive awhile longer but after it begins to get dark they decide not to drive straight through. They stay in a motel at Lake Placid for the night. Mila sends Matthew another text. They do some shopping. Mila finds a cowboy themed Easter egg she believes would be perfect for Cat but the owner of the deli won't let her buy it. He says it is only for display.

Analysis

Notice in this section of the novel that although Mila is very mature and very intelligent for her age, she realizes that her lack of life experience works against her. Notice she wishes she had a middle aged person with her who could help her to interpret that adult behaviors that she doesn't understand. Notice also that although she has her father with her that she doesn't believe he is the proper type of adult to help her with interpreting adult behavior. As they drive toward Matthew's camp, Mila tries to put together the information she has collected so far to come up with a theory of what might have happened to Matthew. She tries to get her father's help but knows he doesn't believe in thinking in an organized manner. She describes the way he thinks about something as letting his thoughts float around in his head and hoping they would eventually connect with each other.



Mila finally learns the details of the traffic accident in which Owen was killed. There are a couple of things about the wreck that seem to intrigue Mila. This first is that Owen was in the backseat. Remember the strong order that Suzanne gave to Mila when Mila suggested she could sit in the backseat with Honey. Suzanne told Mila to sit in the front as Honey would be fine. Mila is additionally intrigued when her father tells her that Matthew was exonerated for any wrong doing in Owen's death. The idea that he had to be exonerated makes it appear there was some question that Matthew might have had some responsibility in the wreck.

Notice also that in the theme of dogs Mila compares herself to a tenacious and dedicated terrier as she searches out information about Matthew. Another thing to notice in this section of the novel is Mila's excitement when she finds the perfect Easter egg to give to Cat. She is disappointed when the person who owned the deli in which the egg was displayed would not allow her to buy the egg.

Discussion Question 1

What questions do you have about the wreck in which Owen was killed?

Discussion Question 2

Discuss Gil and Mila's decision not to drive all the way to Matthew's cabin on their first day. Why do you think they make this decision?

Discussion Question 3

What does it mean that Mila finds the perfect Easter egg for Cat but is unable to buy it? Why is it so important to Mila that she keep her promise to Cat?

Vocabulary

rational, accomplice, presuming, retrogrades, methodical, skew, articulated, exonerated, contemptuous, furtive, contraband, placid, quaint, incongruous, scenarios, artisan



Chapters 16-17

Summary

In Chapter 16, Mila, Gil and Honey settle into the hotel. She sends Cat a text telling her they haven't found Matthew. Cat's return text is sarcastic but then she texts back saying her father has moved out of the house. They feed Honey, who refuses to eat the dry dog food, then walk to a Thai restaurant. Later at the motel Mila falls asleep with the television on. She wakes and sees that Gil is still awake. She sends her mother a text and then sits up with Gil for a while. They watch a nature program together. Back in her room, she sends Matthew another text message. Then she asks if they can call Marieka. After they talk, they agree to go to sleep. Before she goes to sleep Mila sends Matthew another message asking where he is. She receives a response saying that he is nowhere.

In Chapter 17, Mila wonders if Matthew has a secret so dark he believes it would change the world if it were known. She wonders what he meant when he texted the message to her that he was nowhere. She considers waking Gil to show him the message but decides against it. In the morning Mila still doesn't tell Gil about the message. She wonders if she is trying to protect him from what she has learned. They eat breakfast before heading out to Matthew's camp. They find the road and have to get out of the car to walk to the cabin on a footpath. Honey sniffs the air then heads down the path. It appears that someone is living in the cabin but they aren't at home. Mila sees a well-fed cat that she believes proves there is someone living there. Gil also thinks someone is living there. They know for sure when they find the remains for breakfast in the compost pile. In her strange way, Mila knows it is a woman who is living in the cabin. She compares the way she is able to put together subtle details to come to a conclusion to the way that a horse called Clever Hans could pick up on his owner's body language so well that it appeared the horse knew how to do math.

Analysis

Two significant things happen in this section of the novel. First, Mila gets a text message from Matthew. She'd sent him text messages throughout the day but did not receive a message in response until she asked where he was. His response was that he was nowhere. Mila is chilled by his response and chose not to tell her father about it even when she had the opportunity. She seems to think that she is protecting her father from the possibility that Matthew has something really bad going on in his life.

The second significant thing that happens in this section of the novel is that Gil and Mila reach Matthew's camp and discover that someone is living there. From the clues that Mila picks up on, however, she believes the person who is living there is not Matthew. She believes it is a woman.



Notice also in this section of the novel that Mila learns that Cat's home situation has worsened. Cat sends her a sarcastic and hurtful text but shortly sends a text telling Mila that her father has moved out of the house. Even though Mila sends her sympathy and love, Cat responds she doesn't care that her father has moved out. Mila is perceptive enough that she realizes this means that Cat does care and that she's reaching out to Mila because she is hurting.

Discussion Question 1

Discuss the messages that Mila has been sending to Matthew. Why is his response to the one text significant? Why does Mila decide not to tell her father about the text?

Discussion Question 2

Discuss the story about Clever Hans. How does this story relate to Mila's situation and her abilities?

Discussion Question 3

What clues tell Mila that someone is living at Matthew's cabin? Why does she think this person is not Matthew?

Vocabulary

mortified, shrapnel, abyss, confrontation, validate



Chapters 18-19

Summary

In Chapter 18, Mila and her father decide to go back to the camp later. They return to town and do more shopping. Mila is homesick but feels oddly comfortable in the small town where they are staying. She sends Cat a text but doesn't get an answer. She finds her father in a bookstore looking at book that he says is an old translation of the book on which he is working. She thinks about the text that Matthew sent. She isn't sure how to respond to him.

In Chapter 19, as they eat lunch, Mila nearly chokes when she sees that it is snowing. The waitress tells them snow in April is not unusual. Mila sends Cat a text telling her it is snowing. They drive back to Matthew's camp in the snow. There is a red car parked near the footpath. As she watches Honey jump out of the car Mila is struck again wondering why Matthew left her behind, especially since he knew that Suzanne didn't like the dog and treated her badly.

When they walk up to the cabin a woman comes to the door. When she recognizes Gil she runs and gives him a hug. She drags them into the house where Gil tells his daughter the woman is Lynda, a friend of both he and Matthew. After Mila finishes drying Honey with a towel she wonders if Lynda was the girl that both Gil and Matthew had a crush on. Lynda tells them she's been living there since she got back from Scotland. She is not aware that Matthew had disappeared and tells them that they hadn't seen Matthew in months. As she looks around Mila picks up on hints that there is a child living there with Lynda.

Lynda confirms Mila's suspicion that she was the girl who was in the photograph with Gil and Matthew. She tells Gil she isn't aware if Suzanne knows she's living at Matthew's camp or not. This strikes Mila as a bad idea. Lynda says that Matthew sends them money sometimes and doesn't charge them to stay in the cabin. She teaches English at the high school. Lynda puts a blanket down in front of the stove for Honey and asks why they have Matthew's dog. They discuss why Matthew might have left Honey behind. Lynda tells Gil that Matthew disappeared once before, right after Owen died. He was gone two days. He couldn't account for where he'd been or what he'd done during those days. Mila thinks how cruel this was to Suzanne.

The door opens and a boy whom Lynda refers to as Jake enters. Mila wonders almost immediately if Jake is Matthew's son. Mila does the math and realizes that if Jake was Matthew's son he would have been conceived about the same time that Owen was. Mila needs to think so she asks to use the outhouse. She is happy to be out of the cabin. When her feet start getting cold Mila heads back to the house but is surprised when she sees Jake about ten feet away from her. He'd been sent to make sure she was okay. He asks what she was doing and hurries her back to the house but doesn't



seem annoyed. Back inside the cabin, Lynda invites them to lunch the following day. As they drive home Mila sends Matthew a text asking if Jake is his son.

Analysis

The questions about Matthew continue to mount as Gil and Mila discover that it is Lynda, the girl with whom both Gil and Matthew were in love, who is living in Matthew's cabin. Lynda tells them that Matthew lets her and her son live there at no charge and sometimes sends them money. Lynda knows that Matthew is married, but doubts that Suzanne knows that she is living at the cabin. Although it appears that Matthew is having, or has had some sort of relationship with Lynda, he doesn't appear to keep very close tabs on Lynda. Lynda says that she was unaware that Matthew was missing and had not seen him for quite some time. When Jake, Lynda's son comes into the cabin, Mila wonders if Jake is Matthew's son. She sends Matthew a text asking him this question.

Honey, Matthew's dog, even raises questions about where Matthew is and why he left as he did. Before they even arrived at the cabin Mila wondered once again why Matthew had left his dog behind, especially when he knew that Suzanne hated the dog so much. Even Lynda believes it was strange that Matthew would leave the dog behind. She suggested perhaps he went somewhere that he could not take the dog.

Lynda also gives Mila and Gil something to think about when she tells them that Matthew had disappeared for two days after the car wreck in which Matt died. Mila considers how cruel this disappearance was to Suzanne. She was not only having to deal with her dead son, but also her missing husband.

Notice in this section how excited Gil is when he finds an old translation of the book on which he is working. Mila believes this was a gift on the part of the town, kind of like a sign that they were on the right track in finding Matthew.

Discussion Question 1

What does it mean that Matthew is letting Lynda and Jake live in his cabin at no charge?

Discussion Question 2

Discuss your opinions of Matthew at this point in the novel. Has your opinion of him changed since the beginning of the novel? Why or why not?



Discussion Question 3

Why is Honey a significant character in the novel? What does it mean that Matthew left her behind?

Vocabulary

inundated, cordoned, inquest, refrain, pertinent, extraneous, nonplussed, obscurely



Chapter 20

Summary

In Chapter 20, in the car on the way back to their motel Mila tries to get Gil to explain what happened at the cabin. He claims he didn't know they were going to run into Lynda and that he didn't know if Jake was Matthew's son. He asks Mila if she thinks Matthew told Suzanne about Lynda. Mila doesn't say anything, but guesses that he didn't. Gil admits the story is getting messier and messier. Mila suggests there is some conspiracy between the adults to make it appear as if their strange and complicated lives were perfectly normal. Gil tries to explain it isn't a conspiracy, just a series of bad choices that pile up until a person can't find his way out from all of the consequences of the bad decisions they've made. Mila sends Matthew one last text asking him why he left.

After breakfast the next morning Gil and Mila head back to Matthew's camp. Lynda calls them to come inside. Jake arrives at home shortly afterward showing off the money he'd earned shoveling driveways. He sits and asks Mila how the search for Matthew is going. Mila asks Jake if Matthew is his father. He says that Matthew is technically his father. Jake says he's going out to do more shoveling. He invites Mila to come and help. She goes along. After they are finished, Jake gives her half the money they earned. As they walk home Mila asks Jake if he has a theory on Matthew. Jake says he doesn't have one. He does say that it is strange being someone's dirty secret. The more and more Mila learns about Matthew the more she doesn't like him. She wonders why they are even wasting their time looking for him.

Mila does enjoy getting to know Jake. She feels that they are on the same wavelength. At the cabin Lynda's friend Joy has joined Lynda and Gil. Jake makes room for Mila on the sofa. He hands her one of his earphones. They listen to one of the songs that Jake has recorded. As she's listening to the music with one ear Mila eavesdrops on the adults with the other ear. She hears Gil ask why Matthew disappeared after the car accident. Mila is surprised because he's finally asked the right question. Joy says he disappeared because he doesn't care about anyone but himself. Mila notices that Jake observes quite a bit, but doesn't let what he hears bother him. Jake whispers to Mila that he knows why Matthew disappeared after the accident. He mimics someone drinking. Mila realizes that if Matthew had been drinking the day of the accident that he would have to go away until all the alcohol was out of his system so he wouldn't get charged for drinking. Joy leaves. Gil and Lynda seem to have begun thinking of Matthew in a different light.

After lunch Mila steps outside and sends a text to Matthew asking what happened the day that Owen died. Back inside, Gil is preparing to go. Before they leave Mila gives Jake her phone numbers. He puts his Mets cap on her head and refuses to take it back.



Analysis

One of the major reveals in this section of the novel is the information that Matthew might have been drinking before the accident that killed his son. If he was drunk, it would possibly explain why he swerved into the lane in which the semi truck was driving. It would also explain why he disappeared for two days immediately after the accident. This two day disappearance would have given him enough time to get the alcohol out of his system so he wouldn't be charged with causing the accident that killed his son.

In this section of the novel Mila also struggles to understand what she learned about Matthew. In the past Matthew had always been described to her as a hero. Now it appears he might have some villainous traits. It appears he'd hiding his ex girlfriend and his live child at his cabin. Although they don't know for sure both Gil and Mila suspect that Suzanne knows nothing about Lynda living at the cabin or that Jake even exists. To make matters worse Mila realizes that Jake was born within the same month that Owen was born.

In the theme of coming of age, Mila asks her father if adults are involved in some sort of conspiracy where they lead complicated double lives but try to pass off their existence as normal. At this point Mila even questions her own father's loyalty to Marieka. She has learned that Lynda was the girl with whom Matthew and Gil were both in love. She wonders if Gil still has any residual feelings for Lynda and if Lynda is really trying to flirt with her father.

In the theme of friendship, notice the friendship that quickly springs up between Jake and Mila. They share some of the same traits. They are both hardworking. Mila notices that Jake observes and understand the things that go on around him just like she does. She also notices that Jake chooses not to let a good deal of these things bother him.

Discussion Question 1

How do things change if Matthew was drinking the day that Owen was killed in the car accident?

Discussion Question 2

Describe the relationship that is developing between Mila and Jake. What traits do they have in common? What are their differences?

Discussion Question 3

Joy, who is an outsider in Matthew's story, believes he is completely self-centered and irresponsible. Lynda and Gil, however, don't see him this way. Which of these



characters do you believe has the most correct opinion of Matthew? Do you think perhaps his real personality is somewhere between being fatally flawed and flawless? Explain your answer.

Vocabulary

conspiracy, escalate, paragon, incompetent, feigns, riveting, banter, veers, hypnotized, discourse, serene



Chapter 21

Summary

In Chapter 21, instead of calling Suzanne Gil sends her an email telling her they didn't find Matthew at the camp. As Mila thinks about Matthew's life she wonders how he will handle all of the lies and secrets that he has. She thinks about the transition that will change her from a child to an adult and wonders how it will happen. She wonders if there would come a point when she will run away from everything in her life. They pack up to leave. Before they set out on the road they stop for winter gear and food. They drive for a while in the falling snow before Mila crawls into the backseat and falls asleep.

When Mila wakes her father tells her he plans to get off at the next intersection and find a place to stay for the night. A few minutes later traffic comes to a complete stop. An ambulance and police car with lights and sirens pass them. Gil assumes there's been a wreck. After they've waited awhile Gil turns off the engine. They eat dinner from the food they bought and settle down under blankets to wait. Finally a policeman comes to check on them. As he's talking to them he hears on his radio that traffic will be moving soon.

They see the wreck, a people mover and a small car. Gil tells Mila he's thinking about Owen and the accident. When Mila asks how long ago the accident was, Gill tells her it was three years ago, that Owen must have been the age Mila is now. Mila also questions her father as to why he and Matthew fell out of touch. Gill said they were both busy. He added Matthew wouldn't have told him about Lynda and his affair anyway. When she asks, Gil also tells Mila he hasn't done anything he would consider a mistake in a long time and that he didn't have any other children anywhere. They stop at a gas station for Mila to use the restroom and to walk Honey. Mila is sad when she realizes they'll have to leave Honey alone with Suzanne when they go back to London. At the motel Mila sends Cat a text but doesn't get an answer. She dozes and hears Gil talking to someone on the phone. He tells them that he will see them soon. Mila wonders who he is talking to.

Analysis

As Mila and her father drive away from Matthew's cabin, Mila begins to think about what her own life might hold. She wonders about the mystery of becoming an adult and the things she might do as an adult. She thinks about what the future might hold for her, Jake and Gabriel. Although Mila is mature for a twelve year old, she has learned about things that she couldn't fathom before she came to America. She's realized it is possible for young people, people her age to be killed in car accidents. She also realizes that people even she knows are capable to living double lives and making their lives so messy and complicated that there is no way to completely reverse the damage they've done.



In the theme of dogs, Mila wishes her life were simple like Honey's. Honey wants her master back. If that aspect of her life were right, all of Honey's life would be right. Mila also recognizes that as a dog, Honey lives in the present. She doesn't worry about the future or regret the past.

As far as finding Matthew goes, Mila and Gil seem to have come to a dead end. Gil tells Mila that if he doesn't come up with some other idea they will probably go back to Suzanne's house. Mila isn't sure what idea he thinks he might come up with. Notice that as Mila is beginning to go to sleep she hears Gil talking to someone on the phone. She knew he'd gotten an email and that he'd called someone on the phone just after receiving the email. Mila hears him tell the person on the phone that he would see them soon. As she is going to sleep, Mila wonders to whom her father was talking.

Discussion Question 1

At this point in the novel Mila begins thinking about the point at which a child transitions to an adult. Do you think there is a specific point in one's life that changes one from a child to an adult or is it a series of events? Do you think this happens at the same age for everyone? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 2

Discuss the significance of the car wreck that Mila and her father see to the plot of the story. How does the actual seeing of a wreck, similar to the one that killed Owen, affect both Mila and her father?

Discussion Question 3

When Gil tells Suzanne that they didn't find Matthew at his camp, he does so by email. Why do you think he chooses this means of communication?

Vocabulary

equilibrium, influx, appraising, blathering, carnage



Chapters 22-24

Summary

In Chapter 22, Mila dreams about Matthew and Gil. In her dream they are sitting on a tree branch together. Matthew falls off into a pond. Mila screams that Matthew can't swim but Gil says he can breathe under water. When Mila wakes and thinks through her dream she wonders why it had taken her so long to realize what the dream was trying to tell her. She thinks about how Gil hasn't been very worried about Matthew. She knows that when Gil is worried he can't sleep but that he has slept fine during their time in America. She comes to the conclusion that Gil isn't worried about Matthew because he knows his friend isn't in real danger.

Mila tells her father she is going to tell him about her dream. After she tells him she's come to the conclusion that Gil knows where Matthew is. Gil acknowledges that she is right. He says he's been in contact with Matthew through email. Mila is so angry she yells at her father. He tells her that he couldn't tell her that he'd spoken to Matthew because then she would have to lie to Suzanne. Mila is even angrier when she learns that Marieka had also known that Gil was in contact with Matthew. He tells her he didn't actually know where Matthew was until they'd spoken on the phone the night before. Matthew wants to see Gil and talk to him, Gil tells Mila.

Mila asks Gil if he planned to tell her eventually about being in touch with Matthew. He tells Mila that he didn't know for sure that Matthew wasn't at the camp. He didn't, however, know that they were going to find Lynda and Jake at the camp. Mila is so angry she goes outside. When she finally knocks on the motel room to go back in Gil hugs her but she won't hug him back. He tells Mila he doesn't know what it was that made Matthew leave and wouldn't know until he talked to him. Gil seems surprised when Mila tells him what Jake said about Matthew drinking. She suddenly realizes that Gil had said something about them seeing Matthew. When she asks, Gil tells her they would be seeing him that morning.

In Chapter 23, Mila tells about a time when she and Cat did run away from home. They went to the Eurostar terminal. Cat planned for them to go to Brussels. Mila was ready to go home by midmorning. Cat asked her to wait just a little bit longer but when it came to actually getting on a train Cat said someone had stolen her passport. Mila knew Cat didn't have a passport. Cat went off telling Mila she could find someone who could make her a fake passport. She came back later when Mila sent her a text saying she was tired. Before they went back home Cat sent Mila a text that said "I love you." Mila wasn't sure what to say. They walked home and Cat went inside her house without saying anything to Mila. Mila never mentioned that day or Cat's message again.

In Chapter 24, Mila realizes she let her belief about her father's honesty influence her opinion and perceptions about Matthew's situation. Mila realizes she lied to Gil as well when she didn't tell him about Matthew's text to her. Mila also realizes that even though



she would like to be transparent and have someone know her completely, she also has things she doesn't want anyone to know about her. She knows it is because of her experience with Gil and Matthew that this unwanted knowledge about herself has surfaced.

Analysis

Chapter 22 marks a major point of transition in the novel. One of the rocks upon which Mila grounded her interpretations of the world has crumbled. She has learned that her father, whom she believed was honest to a fault, has lied to her. She'd had a sense that something had been wrong the entire time they were trying to find Matthew but didn't want to see that it was her father who was not giving her all the information she needed. Mila feels hurt and betrayed.

It is not until Mila begins to calm down that she realizes that even though her father lied to her, she also lied to her father by not telling him about the text she got from Matthew. She didn't tell her father about this text because she thought she was protecting him. Similarly, Gil and Marieka did not tell Mila they had been hearing from Matthew because they wanted to protect her from having to lie to Suzanne. From her experience, Mila is surprised when she comes to the realization that she would not want someone to know her completely. There are bits of herself that she wants to keep private and have others find out about.

In the theme of friendship, Mila shares with her audience an experience she had with Cat. The point of the story seems to be Cat's act of reaching out for affection and acceptance from Mila. On the day they ran away from home, Cat sent Mila a text message telling Mila that she loved her. Mila chose not to respond to the message. Mila noticed that Cat seemed down after Mila didn't respond but was embarrassed and unsure how to respond.

This incident addresses a theme of communication in the novel. Or perhaps more properly, how humans go about telling people things they don't want to say to them face to face. Cat sent Mila a text message telling her that she loved Mila because she was probably unsure what Mila's reaction would be. It was less public and probably felt less embarrassing to Cat to have Mila not respond to a text message than to have told Mila she loved her out loud and have Mila not respond. Similarly, Matthew allowed Gil and Mila to make the trip to his cabin knowing they would find Lynda and Jake there. He hoped they'd figure out this mistake on their own without him having to tell them.

Discussion Question 1

Discuss Mila's dream. Why do you think it was only through her dream that she was able to understand and accept what was happening in the hunt for Matthew?



Discussion Question 2

Why do you think that Matthew didn't tell Gil where he was before Gil went to the cabin?

Discussion Question 3

What does Mila learn about herself when she thinks through the hurt she felt when her father lied to her. Why is her self realization significant?

Vocabulary

aghast, complicit, rucksacks, infiltrate, skiving, encryption, obscene, posh, forge, impose, nostalgic



Chapters 25-27

Summary

In Chapter 25, Mila learns the hotel where Matthew is staying is less than 90 miles from his home. She sends a text to Jake letting him know they'll be seeing Matthew that day. When they get to Matthew's motel door, Gil reaches for Mila's hand. Matthew opens the door and Honey is ecstatic. As Mila studies Matthew, she realizes he is not what she expected. He seems sad and quiet. She had expected him to be desperate. Even though she tries, Mila can't get a good read on Matthew. Matthew finally asks Mila if she'd mind sitting in the lobby for a while so he and Gil could talk. In the lobby Mila is a little upset because Honey chose to stay with Matthew. She sends Jake a text letting him know Matthew wasn't what she expected. Gil comes out and tells Mila they will stay there for the night. He apologizes to Mila for lying to her. She realizes that she has been refusing to help him since she learned he lied to her just because it was the only power she felt she had. Mila realizes how false she has been. She takes Gil's hand.

In Chapter 26, Mila admits she's no longer enjoying the trip at all. Gil comes back from talking to Matthew but doesn't know any more than what he did before. Mila tells him he should just ask outright. When Gil tells Mila that Matthew has backed himself into a complicated corner Mila compares their relationship to that of she and Cat. She suggests that Matthew can't stand for Gil's life to turn out better than his. Mila realizes that if it was just Owen's death Matthew might have been able to recover but additional circumstances have made it impossible for Matthew not to twist under the pressure.

Mila calls Marieka. Marieka tries to comfort her by telling her that Matthew was adamant that Mila not be told they were in communication with him. When Marieka asks Mila if she wants to come home Mila does, but also wants to stay with Gil to see their mission through. Marieka asks Mila what she's noticed about Matthew. Mila mentions that he drinks a lot. When Gil comes in with Chinese takeout Mila hands the phone to him. When he hangs up, Gil tells Mila they will go home the following day. It turns out, however, that they don't go home the next day.

In Chapter 27, the next morning Mila notices how Honey shadows Matthew. She is afraid of being separated from him again. Mila sits at a different table during breakfast and pretends to read a book but actually eavesdrops on the men talking. Gil tries to convince Matthew he can start over but Matthew insists it is too late. Gil begs Matthew to come back with them. Matthew instead tells Gil to go back to London as there is nothing more that he can do. Mila silently begs Gil to ask Matthew what happened the day of Owen's death. She tries to focus harder on Matthew when Gil walks away. As she does she realizes that Owen was in the backseat of Matthew's car because Honey was in the front seat. Matthew would have had to turn to talk to Owen, all it would have taken to make his car stray into another lane. She realizes that is why Suzanne hates Honey so much. She wonders if it was Suzanne's idea to send Matthew away after the wreck to keep him from being put in jail for manslaughter.



As Mila finally makes contact with Matthew, she realizes that he wants to die. He left Honey with Suzanne because he didn't plan to come back home. When Gil comes back he realizes something has happened between Mila and Matthew but isn't sure what. Matthew, who Mila has learned can manipulate emotions, makes Gil feel at ease. Gil tells Mila they'll leave in an hour.

Analysis

In this section of the novel Mila catches a glimpse into the darkness that is her father's best friend. It is not until Gil left them alone for a few minutes that Matthew actually opened his mind so that Mila could see what was inside. She is frightened by the darkness she sees there.

Notice also the novel makes a statement about blind loyalty. This statement ties into the theme of dogs. Mila notices that while Honey had once followed her everywhere, she now will stay close only to Matthew. Even though Mila and Gil were the ones who took care of her during their road trip, gave her good things to eat and eventually reunited her with Matthew, Honey's loyalties lie with her master. Honey seems to sense that something has passed between Matthew and Mila. When Mila gets up too quickly from the table and knocks over her chair, Honey makes a move as if to attack Mila. She seems to think Mila is some sort of a threat to Matthew. In a similar way, the people who loved Matthew were blindly loyal to him. Gil cannot seem to believe that his friend would actually be so frustrated with his life that he would want to kill himself. Mila listens as they talk and is frustrated with her father because he doesn't ask Matthew the right questions. It may also be interpreted that Gil didn't want to ask Matthew the right questions because he didn't want to know what the answers might be.

Other pieces of the puzzle finally fall into place for Mila when she sees Honey and Matthew together. She realizes that Owen was riding in the backseat of his father's car when he was killed because Honey was riding in the front seat. This explains why Suzanne hates the dog so much. She figured if the dog had been in the back and Owen in the front, Owen would have survived. This also explains why Suzanne was so adamant that Mila sit in the front seat with her father instead of in the back seat with Honey when they first left Suzanne's house to look for Matthew.

In this section of the novel Mila pulls from her experience with her friendship with Cat to help her and her father to understand why Matthew might be acting the way he is. Mila suggests that Matthew can't stand that his friend turned out to have a better, mess free life than he. Being around Gil makes Matthew realize the number of wrong decisions that he has made. Similarly, Mila believes that Cat may have trouble being around her because Cat is looking at all of the bad decisions she has begun making.

Notice in this section that Mila suggests she may one day need her father to lie for her. This will be significant in the final section of chapters.



Discussion Question 1

Why is Honey's reaction to Mila knocking over her chair significant?

Discussion Question 2

Why do you think that Matthew waits until he is alone with Mila to let her see inside him? Do you think he is able to manipulate other's emotions as Mila suggests?

Discussion Question 3

Why do you think Gil won't ask Matthew outright about the wreck that killed Owen or his situation? Do you think he doesn't know the right questions to ask or is he avoiding the truth?

Vocabulary

conspicuously, cajoled, incandescent, melancholic, abashed, pretense, cogs, adamant, fathomless, resignation, trivial, cloying, conjurer



Chapters 28-31

Summary

In Chapter 28, Gil calls Suzanne and then Marieka. Gil is still in denial believing that Matthew won't do anything desperate. Mila silently begs him to see the truth. She does beg Gil to make Matthew come home with them. Gil's phone rings. Mila is surprised that it is Cat. Cat says her father has moved to Leeds with his girlfriend. As they compare their miseries, the two begin to laugh. Before she hangs up, Mila has the urge to tell Cat she loves her.

In Chapter 29, when Matthew shows up at Suzanne's, Suzanne hugs him but pulls away. Gabriel seems happy to see Mila, but even happier to see his father. Suzanne takes Gabriel to put him in the bath. Matthew goes upstairs and closes himself into a room while Mila and Gil eat. Mila wonders if they had really thought their trip would have a good outcome. She suddenly wants her father to protect her. Mila goes to Owen's room and crawls under the covers where she examines the Caravanserai book again.

In Chapter 30, Suzanne has moved out of the house. Even so, she stays and cooks dinner the last night that Gil and Mila are in America. Mila knows that Suzanne already has her eyes on another man. Suzanne apologizes to Mila that the adults have made such a mess out of her holiday. Before Suzanne takes Gabriel away to put him in the car, Matthew hugs him again. Gil follows Suzanne to the car. Mila tries to leave but Matthew stops her. He tells her it will be okay but Mila asks him if he's thought through what he's planning to do. He tells her that she will understand one day but Mila tells him she understands now. She begs him not to do what he's thinking about doing. She goes out and kisses Gabriel goodbye.

In Chapter 31, Matthew and Gil don't talk much the following morning. Suzanne picks up Gil and Mila to take them to the airport. At the airport, Gil hands Mila a bag. When she looks inside, she sees the cowboy Easter egg. Gil had told the storeowner he worked with Frommer's in order to get it. Before the plane takes off Mila gets a text from Matthew telling her goodbye. She sends him back a text and pastes Jake's contact information into the text. After the plane is in the air Gil apologizes to Mila again. Gil tells her the outcome is all up to Matthew. Mila realizes that Matthew is the only one who can save himself.

Analysis

Although Matthew has gone back to the house he once shared with Suzanne, he makes it clear to Mila that he doesn't see that there is any way out of his problems except suicide. As Mila says goodbye to Gabriel she cries because she believes he will be hurt when he learns he was not enough to encourage his father to keep living. In the conclusion of the novel, however, Mila comes to the conclusion that it doesn't matter



what she did, what Gil did, or what any of the children or Suzanne did it was only Matthew who could save his own life. She believes that he has plenty to live for, even sends him a text message containing Jake's contact information, but knows that none of these things can change Matthew's mind.

Also in this section Mila gets the urge to tell Cat how she feels about her. Mila doesn't get the chance because the line has already gone dead but she realizes how late she is in telling Cat that she loves her. Even though she'd thought she was not going to be able to keep her promise to Cat, Mila's father surprises her with the cowboy egg. Ironically, Gil got the egg by lying to the man at the deli counter. In the previous section Mila had indicated that she might need her father to lie for her sometime. She had no idea how soon that need might arise or how his lie would help her to make her friend feel loved and accepted.

Discussion Question 1

Discuss the conversation that Mila and Matthew have the night before Mila and her father leave to go back to London. Do you think Matthew will take her advice and try to find some way to save himself? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 2

Discuss the morality of lying. Is lying always wrong? Are there times when a lie is acceptable?

Discussion Question 3

Although Mila had been self assured and mature when she left London she has lost some of her assurance since she'd learned the true darkness in Matthew's soul. She'd once thought she was going along on the trip to take care of and protect her father. Now she wants her father to protect her. What brought about these changes in Mila?

Vocabulary

preamble, ravenous, conned, trinity, decode, confrontation, dodgy, erratically



Characters

Mila

Mila is the main character and narrator of this novel. She is a 12-year-old who goes along with her father to America to visit his oldest friend. Just before they leave for their visit the friend, Matthew, leaves his home. Mila believes that they are going to help find Matthew and reconnect him with his family. The trip turns out to be a learning and growing experience as Mila learns how complicated adults can make their lives.

When Mila was born her father chose to name her after his father's dead Bedlington terrier. Mila believes she shares some traits with the dog. She is determined, resourceful, can recognize people by their smell and has a keen awareness of her surroundings. Mila also describes herself as having the ability to read people's emotions and piece together their lives using nonverbal clues like body language and clothing.

When Mila finally meets Matthew and is able to concentrate hard enough to get into his mind she learns that he wants to kill himself. She is in agony as her father tries to talk to Matthew but is unable to ask the right questions to get his friend to open up. Mila believes her father is missing what is right in front of him. Even though she is unusually mature and perceptive for her age, Mila desperately wishes her parents had protected her from her experience with Matthew and his family. To make matters worse, Mila learned during the trip that her father had been lying to her. Although he hadn't told her, her father had been in contact with Matthew and knew that he hadn't yet harmed himself. One of the rules Mila had believed was unbreakable was her father's honesty. She feels betrayed not only by her parents but by the world in general.

Matthew

Matthew is the husband of Suzanne and father of Owen, Jake and Gabriel. Matthew is lost in a world of hurt because of the things he has done in his life, intentional and unintentional, that have caused his family to be hurt. He and Gil have been best friends since they were boys. Gil describes his friend as always having been a risk taker and a loner. Once while climbing a mountain together Matthew saved Gil's life by persuading him to go back down the mountain when Gil began getting sick. He convinced Gil it wasn't okay just to sit down in the snow and die even though that was what Gil wanted to do.

When Gil and Mila arrive in America to help Matthew's wife, Suzanne, find her husband, they begin learning more about Matthew than they wanted to know. They go to Matthew's cabin and discover he is letting his ex girlfriend and illegitimate son live there. It does not appear that Suzanne knows about this situation or that Jake, Matthew's son, even exists. Mila does the math and realizes that Jake, Matthew's son by Lynda, and Owen, Matthew's son by Suzanne, were probably conceived within the same one month



period. To make matters worse, Matthew was driving when Owen was killed in a traffic accident. Mila comes to the conclusion that Owen had been sitting in the backseat of the car because Honey, Matthew's dog, was in the front seat. The back of the car had been crushed by a semi truck. If Owen had been sitting in the front, he would not have been killed. Several characters in the book note that Matthew disappeared for a couple of days after the accident. It is never made completely clear if Matthew left on his own or because Suzanne made him leave because she knew he'd been drinking and would have been charged in the fatal wreck.

At the point that Mila and Gil find Matthew, he is tired of being alive and so depressed that he wants his life to be finished. In the conclusion of the novel Matthew sends Mila a text telling her goodbye but it is never known if he decides to go through with his intention to kill himself or if he decides to go on living.

Gil

Gil is Mila's father. He is the one who chose to give her the name of his grandfather's dead Bedlington terrier. Gil is a translator. He translates books from Portuguese into English. Gil takes his daughter, Mila, to America with him to visit his oldest and best friend Matthew. Matthew had once saved Gil's life when they were climbing a mountain. Mila believes they will be able to save Gil's life and somehow level the playing field between the two friends. Even though he doesn't tell his daughter, Gil has been in contact with Matthew since before they left London. Gil talks to his friend, Matthew, but seems to overlook Matthew's determination to kill himself.

Suzanne

Suzanne is Matthew's wife. She is Owen and Gabriel's mother. Even though Matthew disappeared just before Gil was supposed to come for a visit, Suzanne begged him to come anyway. Mila senses right away that Suzanne is having affair. When Matthew did finally come home, Suzanne took Gabriel and left. Even though she was glad Matthew was okay, she didn't appear to want to be married to him any longer. Mila suspected Suzanne had covered up for Matthew's faults for too long.

Catlin

Catlin is Mila's best friend from London. Recently Catlin had been hanging out with a different group of friends, acting out and getting in trouble. Cat begins sending text messages to Mila during Mila's trip to America. Mila learns that Cat's parents are divorcing and her father has moved in with his girlfriend. Mila wonders if that was why Cat had been acting out so badly. Mila's relationship with Cat serves as a point of reference for her study of Matthew and Gil's relationship.



Jake

Jake is Matthew's son by Lynda. He lives in Matthew's camp near the Canadian border with his mother. When Mila does the math she realizes that Owen, Matthew's son by Suzanne, and Jake were probably conceived the same month. Jake and Mila make friends when Jake takes her with him to shovel driveways. Mila likes Jake because he is observant like her. When she and Gil leave, Jake gives Mila his Mets baseball cap.

Owen

Owen is the son of Suzanne and Matthew. Three years before Gil and Mila's visit Owen was killed in a car wreck. His father was driving the car when Owen was killed. Mila finally comes to the decision that Owen was in the back seat of the car because Honey was riding in the front seat. Had Owen been in the front seat, he probably would have survived the wreck.

Marieka

Marieka is Mila's mother. She is a concert violinist. Because she is playing with an orchestra in Holland, Marieka does not go to America with Gil and Mila. She knows that Gil had been communicating with Matthew but agreed that Mila should not know that the two were talking.

Gabriel

Gabriel is the infant son of Suzanne and Matthew. They had the baby in hopes that it would help their marriage. While Mila was staying with Suzanne she got to know Gabriel and realized she liked babies.

Joy

Joy is Lynda's girlfriend. She drops in while Gil and Mila were visiting Lynda and Jake. She makes it very clear that she did not like Matthew. She thought he was immature, self-centered and irresponsible.

Honey

Honey is Matthew's dog. She is a white German shepherd. Mila thinks it is odd that when Matthew left he did not take Honey with him.



Symbols and Symbolism

A Photo of Mila

Mila often studies this picture of the dog who shares the same name as her. The original Mila was a Bedlington terrier. In the picture the dog looks as if she would prefer to be running instead of standing for a picture. She isn't facing the person taking her picture so Mila wonders also about the identity of the person holding the camera. The photo is a representation of Mila, the human's, background and her intense curiosity about what is going on in the minds of both people and dogs.

A Map of Underground Tunnels

This map that Cat made of London's underground tunnels represents both her creativity and desire to have a way to disappear from her unhappy life.

A Guidebook

Suzanne gives Gil and Mila this tourists' guidebook before they set off to try to locate Matthew's camp. Gil stops at several of the places noted in the guidebook and Mila accuses him of having memorized it. The guidebook represents Mila's feeling that the adults are taking Matthew's disappearance too lightly and looking at the trip to America as a fun vacation instead of a search for a missing person.

A Cowboy Egg

Mila sees this cowboy-themed Easter egg is a deli and knows that Cat would love it. The owner of the deli won't sell it to her, however, he says it's just for display. Gil later went back to the deli and convinced the deli owner to sell it to him by saying he worked for Frommers.

The Cat

When Mila spots a well-fed cat outside Matthew's cabin she believes it is a sign that someone is living there.

Mets Cap

Jake gives Mila his Mets cap before Mila leaves the camp. It is a symbol of the friendship that has developed between the two just in the short amount of time they have known each other.



An Antique Book

Gil finds this antique book, a translation of the book on which he's working, at a second hand shop. Mila believes this is a sign that the city in which they staying is welcoming them. She takes it as a good sign.

The Navajo Blankets

Mila and her father get these blankets, along with food, before they start driving back to Suzanne's in the snow. The blankets are a sign of their preparedness. The police officer who checks on them while they are stuck on the road because of the wreck, he comments that it would be foreigners that were prepared for the cold weather.

Mila's Flow Charts

Mila makes these flow charts to help her figure out why Matthew walked away from his home and his family. The flow charts are a symbol of her methodical nature.

Cell Phone

Gill buys Mila this disposable cell phone so she will have a way to keep in touch with her friends. The cell phone is a symbol of communication. Mila used it not only to talk to Cat and Jake, but also to try to connect with Matthew.



Settings

London

London, England is the place where Mila lives with her father, Gil, and mother Marieka. The beginning of the book is set in England.

America

In order to visit Gil's oldest friend Matthew, Gil and Mila traveled to America.

Upstate New York

Matthew and Suzanne lived in upstate New York. Gil and Mila stayed with Suzanne in her house for several days while they were looking for Matthew.

Owen's Room

Mila is a little bit disturbed when she discovers that Suzanne has prepared Owen's room for her to stay in while Mila is staying in Suzanne and Matthew's house.

Matthew's Camp

When Gil and Mila arrived at Matthew's camp they discovered that Lynda and Matthew's illegitimate son, Jake, were living there.

A Motel

It is at this motel, located less than 90 minutes from Matthew's house, that Gil and Mila finally meet with Matthew.



Themes and Motifs

Coming of Age

This novel is a coming of age story. Although Mila doesn't grow completely up in the course of the novel, she does take a big step toward adulthood. She learns that parents lie to their children and realizes that she, too has lied. Mila also learns the depths of despair to which a person's mistakes can take them. In the conclusion, she learns that just as a person gets themselves into a mess in their life, they are responsible for making the decision to stay in their mess of a life or end their life.

Mila is only 12 when she and her father go to America. Although she knows she is only a child and knows that there are instances where she lacks life experience because of her age, Mila is a reasonably mature 12 year old. She is able to pick up on nonverbal cues and read a person's body language in an attempt to pick up on their real story. In Mila's story she hopes to be able to help her father locate his best friend Matthew. Matthew left home just a few days before Mila and her father, Gil, were to visit. Mila works out flow charts of information and researches why a person would walk out on his family in hopes of coming up with some reasonable explanation for Matthew's disappearance.

Mila's research falls in on itself when she realizes that her father did not tell her that he had been in touch with Matthew and knew that he was okay. She had described her father as being honest to a fault and was hurt and betrayed when she learned her father hadn't told her the whole truth. As she thought back over what had happened the past few days, she remembered she'd gotten a text message from Matthew that she hadn't told her father about. In a way she had also withheld information from him, she realized.

When Mila first meets Matthew, she is not able to get a good read on his personality or emotional state. It is only when they are alone together that Matthew lets down his guard and allows Mila to see how broken and desperate he really is. She knows she has no ability to help him fix the problems in his life. She is frustrated and disappointed in her father as she watches him try to talk to Matthew without ever asking the right questions or reading the right things into Matthew's responses. She knows that Matthew plans to kill himself but her father doesn't seem to pick up on the vibes that Matthew really believes there is no other way out of his situation. It is at this point that Mila feels young and unable to do anything to help either Matthew or her father. She feels as if the adults, whom she'd always trusted to do the right thing and to protect her when she needed protection, had no ability to protect her from the ugliness that was Matthew's life.

Mila does come to a sort of resolution of her conflict at the end of the novel. Her father lies for her and gets her the Easter egg she'd wanted to give to her friend Cat. Cat's parents are getting divorced and Mila had thought of her friend many times during her experience with Matthew. About Matthew, Mila realizes that he is the only one who can



turn his life around. Although he had many things to live for, like his sons Gabriel and Jake, neither of these boys could make Matthew stay. It was a decision Matthew had to make and be responsible for on his own.

Communication

Communication is another major theme in this novel. A variety of ways of communicating are discussed in the novel. These include nonverbal cues, text messages, emails and phone calls. Even lack of communication can be considered a form of communication in this novel.

One of the major means of communication discussed in the novel is the way a person can tune themselves to pick up on other peoples' nonverbal cues. Mila often uses the nonverbal cues to help her put together descriptions of a person's life, determine if they are happy or not, and interpret their relationships with other people.

Another form of communication used in the novel is the email or text message. In the description of this theme these two forms of communication are lumped together because they are fairly similar. Both texting and emailing allows a person to send a message in a way that limits the conversation. In text messages, a person doesn't see the facial expressions or hear the inflection of a person's voice as they would if they were speaking to them one-on-one. Mila comments one of the bad things about text messages was that if one didn't get a message back he didn't know if it was because the person for whom the message was intended didn't get it or if they were angry and not speaking. The same is true for an email. Both these forms of communication also get the sender of the information off the hook for a one-on-one conversation. Gil takes advantage of this when he emails Suzanne to let her know that they didn't find Matthew at the camp. By sending her an email instead of calling her on the phone, he doesn't have to deal with any questions he isn't prepared to answer.

It may seem strange that lack of communication is a way to communicate, but Matthew made this form of communication work in his favor. He knew that if he wasn't at home that Suzanne would suggest that Gil and Mila go to look for him at his camp. Matthew knew that once they were there, they would learn that Matthew was allowing his ex-girlfriend to live there and that he had a son by her. Matthew avoids having to tell Gil about all of his failings by allowing Gil to find out about them by himself.

Friendship

Friendship is a theme in this novel as Mila learns how important friends can be in one's life. Mila gives background on Matthew and Gil's friendship as well as her friendship with Cat. She compares and contrasts the friendships and even puts what she learned from Gil and Matthew's relationship to work in her own friendship with Cat.

Mila knows that her father had been friends with Matthew since they were young. They'd grown up together and even gone to the same college together. While Matthew's



mother was sick, he'd even lived with Gil and his family for about a year. Matthew was a hero in their family stories because he'd once saved Gil's life by forcing him back down the mountain after Gil got sick during a mountain climbing trip. Matthew told Gil he couldn't just sit down in the snow and die.

Now, Matthew needs Gil's help and Gil seems unable to communicate with his friend. Mila is in agony as her father doesn't ask Matthew the questions he needs to ask and doesn't really listen to what his friend is saying. In the past in their relationship, Matthew had been the leader and Gil the follower. That structure is not working since in his current condition, it is Matthew who needs leadership. In fact, Mila believes it is Gil's faith in his friend to do the right thing that keeps Gil from seeing how desperate Matthew really is.

In comparison, in Mila and Cat's relationship Mila describes herself as the anchor while Cat tends to float around in her own daydreams. Mila has noticed that since the beginning of that school year Cat was hanging around with a different group of people and getting in trouble. As she began to think about what was going on in Cat's life she wondered if Cat's acting out was not caused by her frustration with her parents. Up to that realization, Mila had thought that Cat just didn't like her any more.

Mila also tells her reader about a situation in which she and Cat ran away from home. They'd only hung around at the train station for most of the day but Mila was disturbed when Cat sent her a text message telling Mila that she loved her. Mila didn't respond at that time because she didn't know how she should respond. As she thinks back on that situation, she realizes she should have told her friend she loved her as well. An epiphany at which Mila arrives when she considers both her friendship and her father's friendship is that Matthew perhaps didn't want to face Gil because he felt he had not lived up to Gil's expectations. Similarly, Cat may have felt at a point that she did not live up to Mila's expectations for a friend.

Perception

Perception is an important theme in the novel as Mila describes herself as being more perceptive than the average person. She has learned to interpret one's emotions, relationships to other people and even their intentions by reading their body language. Mila can pick up on clues in the way a house is arranged and describe the lives of the people who live there. For instance when Mila goes in the house where Suzanne and Matthew live she notices that it appears the two live on different planes. Suzanne keeps her things and Gabriel's things neatly organized and put away while she allows Matthew's things to be thrown around and left where he put them. Mila is also able to pick up on feelings from homes and buildings to determine if the people who live there are happy or not. For instance, she describes Cat's unhappy house as having all of the color sucked out of it. Mila picks up right away on the fact that Suzanne and Matthew's house was unhappy.



One aspect of her life that Mila was not able to pick up on right away was the fact that her father was lying to her. Even though she had noticed things weren't adding up about his attitude toward the trip and his level of concern about Matthew it is not until after she has a dream that she realizes why things have been so strange. Despite Mila's perceptive abilities, she was blind to the motives of one of the people who was closest to her. She was so set on believing that her father would never lie to her that she let it cloud her perception of the mystery behind Matthew's disappearance.

Dogs

There are two dogs included in this novel. The first dog of importance is Mila. Mila was a Bedlington terrier that belonged to Mila's grandfather. Even though he didn't remember where the name came from when Marieka asked Gil what they should name their baby girl the name Mila came to his mind. Mila isn't resentful because she was named after a dog. In fact she thinks she might have somehow picked up on some of the perception and tenacity generally associated with the Bedlington terrier by being named after the dog. Additionally, Mila is able to identify people by their smell. Her mother claims this makes her daughter at least half dog.

The second dog of importance in this novel is Matthew's dog, Honey. Matthew has put the dog above all the other things in his life. Even though it was unintentional, Matthew's son was killed because Owen was forced to sit in the back seat of the family car because Honey was in the front seat. Had Matthew made his dog sit in the back, Owen would perhaps still be alive. Another area of interest, particularly for Mila, is Honey's unwavering loyalty to Matthew. Even though Mila and Gil showed Honey affection, fed her, cared for her and ultimately took her to Matthew, Honey does not appear to show any loyalty to either of them. Mila notices that when she had been delving into Matthew's mind and accidentally knocked over her chair in an effort to get away from the darkness she saw in Matthew that Honey growled and lunged at her. She wondered if the dog would have actually hurt her if it had been allowed to do so.

Styles

Point of View

This novel is told from the first person point of view of 12-year-old Mila. She is both the main character and the narrator for the story. Since it is a coming of age story in which Mila learns some hard realities about the adult world, it is fitting that the novel should be told from her vantage point. Although an omniscient narrator might have worked in the story, the first person point of view makes the reader feel much closer and much more in touch with Mila as she learns that parents do lie to their children and that sometimes adults make such messes of their lives that they want to run away from it all, even the good parts.

Language and Meaning

This novel is not only a coming of age story but also makes a variety of points about language and communication. While the language of the novel itself is not particularly significant, the fact the book discusses the variety of ways in which people can communicate is significant. One of the ways the characters in the novel communicate is through text messages. These text messages are differentiated because they are in bold text.

Translation is an important aspect in the novel. By trade, Gil is a translator. He translates books from Portuguese to English. Often time in the novel Mila will refer to the trouble that she has understanding other characters in the book in terms of translation, almost as if they are speaking different languages. For instance while she listens to Gil and Matthew try to talk to one another she struggles as she tries to understand them and feels as if she is: “trying to read a story written in a language I don’t quite speak. Why can’t Gil translate?” (p. 216). Similarly when Mila tries to get a read on Suzanne she wonders if Suzanne’s language and thoughts are disrupted because of her son’s death.

Structure

This 216 page book is divided into 31 chapters. The chapters are notated only with a chapter number. They are short on average, with most 10 pages or less. The longest chapter is Chapter 19 which is 24 pages. There shortest chapters, of which there are several, are only three pages in length. The writer chooses to present his novel with no quotation marks around the quotes. This makes it difficult sometimes to determine if a character is speaking or if the words are part of Mila’s narration. This lack of quotation marks sometime makes it difficult to discern who is speaking to who.

The story is told in a linear fashion and is written in present tense. Notice that although it may appear that Mila is telling the story as it happens she is actually relating her story



after the fact. This can be discerned by a comment made by Mila in Chapter 1. She not only indicates in the this chapter that she never really got a chance to thank Matthew for saving her father's life but she also indicates that she was a child when they left London. Her next sentence indicates that she is still technically a child. The reader can infer from this sentence that Mila is writing from some point in time after her experience.

The plot of the novel seems simple at first because Mila believed it was simple. She and her father were on their way to America to help find Matthew and reunite him with his family. The plot gets deeper as Mila and Gil learn all of the secrets and past misdoings that Matthew is hiding in his life. There is also a subplot about Mila's friendship with Cat. This secondary storyline doesn't seem to figure into Matthew and Gil's story at first but Mila is able to take things she learned from her relationship with Cat and apply them to Matthew and Gil's relationship. She also takes her experiences with Matthew and Gil and uses them to enrich her friendship with Cat.



Quotes

Like my namesake, Mila the dog, I have a keen awareness of where I am and what I'm doing at all times. I am not given to dreaminess, have something of a terrier's determination. If there is something to notice, I will notice it first."

-- Narrator (Chapter 1 paragraph 16)

Importance: Mila, who was given the same name as the one given to her grandfather's dog, believes that she has the determination and perception that some people believe are common in a dog.

Mongrels are wily and healthy and don't suffer displaced hips or premature madness."

-- Narrator (Chapter 3 paragraph 1)

Importance: Mila follows the theme of dogs as she describes her family's nationality. Although her family is a mixed bag of nationalities, she notes their diversity may be in their favor.

When I think of the way this trip has turned out, I wonder if we've been summoned for some sort of cosmic leveling, to help Matthew this time, the one who has never before required saving."

-- Narrator (Chapter 3 paragraph 30)

Importance: Mila thinks of the story she had been told about how Matthew saved Gil once when they went mountain climbing. She believes their trip to America may be about giving Gil a chance to repay Matthew by saving Matthew's life

I register every emotion, every relationship, every subtext. If someone is angry or sad or disappointed, I see it like a neon sign. There's no way to explain how, I just do. For a long time I thought everyone did."

-- Narrator (Chapter 9 paragraph 13)

Importance: Mila explains how she is able to pick up on body language as well as other signs of people's emotions and relationships. At one time she thought everyone could pick up on these minute clues but soon realized she had a talent for reading people.

It never really occurred to me that the friends you choose reveal you."

-- Mila (Chapter 10 paragraph 23)

Importance: Mila has learned through her own friendship with Caitlin, as well as her father's friendship with Matthew, that one's choice in friends gives information about that person. In this case, friends often fill in the missing places in each other. For example, while Matthew was a leader, Gil was a follower.

Suzanne is not a horrible person masquerading as a nice one, just an angry one pretending to be normal."



-- Narrator (Chapter 11 paragraph 9)

Importance: Mila seems to be having trouble putting a finger on Suzanne's personality. As she examines Suzanne's personality, Mila comes to the decision that Matthew's wife was not horrible, as Mila had first thought she was, but is instead trying to carefully cover her anger.

I don't hate Suzanne but I can't bring myself to like her either. She's one of those people who thinks that because I'm young I'm blind to what's true and what's not. I see her far more clearly than she sees me, perhaps more clearly than she sees herself."

-- Narrator (Chapter 11 paragraph 20)

Importance: Mila comes to the realization that Suzanne is having an affair. She resents the woman when Suzanne lies to her and tells her she's been talking on the phone to a friend from a book club. Mila, however, had picked up on Suzanne's smile and change of demeanor when she talked on the phone and realized it was probably her lover.

So we're hunting down a missing person via the scenic route? Hello? Tempting though it is, I don't say this out loud."

-- Narrator (Chapter 13 paragraph 7)

Importance: Mila believes that her father's choice to take the scenic route when looking for his friend, who they thought might be hurt or hurting, was inappropriate.

He took her everywhere, says Suzanne, her voice sharp as glass. I avoid looking at Gil, but I can feel the expression on his face. Like me, he has begun to side with Matthew against Suzanne, if such a side exists."

-- Suzanne (Chapter 13 paragraph 22)

Importance: Mila notices that when Suzanne talks about the habit Matthew had of taking Honey with him everywhere he went, she sounded angry. The more she hears from Suzanne the more Mila dislikes her.

Am I imagining things or is everyone treating this trip like some kind of halfhearted holiday thing, like a treasure hunt to keep us occupied as long as we just happen to be in America anyway?"

-- Narrator (Chapter 15 paragraph 4)

Importance: Although she hasn't put her finger on it yet, Mila believes there is something strange about her and her father's trip to America.

He's the adult and I'm the child. I'm worried by the message, but feel protective of my 58-year-old father. Is it my job to shield him from the icy chill in Matthew's message?"

-- Narrator (Chapter 17 paragraph 13)

Importance: Even though she knows she is the child in her relationship with her father,



Mila feels as if she is responsible for protecting her father by not telling him about the unusual text message she received from Matthew.

Seeing them together, I get a funny feeling that Lynda, Jake and Honey have all been discarded in Matthew's wake. Once again, I wonder what sort of person Matthew must be to walk out on the people who love him."

-- Narrator (Chapter 19 paragraph 169)

Importance: As Mila learns more and more about the people that Matthew has abandoned, she wonders exactly what Matthew is like. The stories her father has told her and what she's learning about him in America seem to contradict.

Do you want my theory? I haven't got one. Maybe he's got twelve sons like me hidden away and he can't stand the guilt. Jake stops and looks at me. What's your theory?"

-- Jake (Chapter 20 paragraph 89)

Importance: Mila asks Jake why he thinks his father disappeared. He has little to say that helped her.

The reason he disappeared, Joy says, with exaggerated calm, is that he's a total shit who doesn't know the first thing about responsibility or commitment."

-- Joy (Chapter 20 paragraph 126)

Importance: Lynda's girlfriend, Joy, tells Gil and Mila what she thinks of Matthew in no uncertain terms. She had no respect or affection for the man.

All of a sudden I'm the one who can't breathe. Gil knows where Matthew is. He knows. I am like Clever Hans. For all my powers of perception I have been unable to add up two and two. I've been so busy reading every other situation around us and drawing flow charts that I didn't pay attention to my own father."

-- Narrator (Chapter 22 paragraph 9)

Importance: Mila realizes she's been blind to hints that she should have been getting from her father all along instead of taking him at his word. She is shocked to realize that her father has known where Matthew was since before they arrived in America.

So much relies on one person assuming the other is telling the truth. If a person can lie to you about one thing, he can lie about something else."

-- Narrator (Chapter 24 paragraph 1)

Importance: Mila's trust in her father crumbles when she realizes he lied to her when he told her they were going to America to find Matthew. He had followed the charade that he had not known where Matthew was even though he'd been in contact with his friend the whole time.

And so, perhaps, when I say I long to be a pane of glass, I am lying. I long for partial obscurity at the same time that I long for someone to know me."



-- Narrator (Chapter 24 paragraph 10)

Importance: Mila acknowledges that she is even confusing to herself. While she doesn't want anyone to know everything about her, she wishes there was someone who did know her completely.

I expected desperation, but instead he is quiet and reserved. It is impossible to ignore the fact that he looks unspeakably sad.”

-- Narrator (Chapter 25 paragraph 26)

Importance: When Mila meets Matthew for the first time she is surprised how sad he looks since she had expected him to be a picture of desperation.

We have settled into our motel room and I feel tired and young. Too young to do what Marieka has asked me to do. Too young to look after my father.”

-- Narrator (Chapter 26 paragraph 1)

Importance: It is common to hear people say they feel old and tired but uncommon to hear a person say they feel tired and young. In this quote, the author hits on Mila's feelings with a play on the common saying. For the first time, the unusually mature Mila acknowledges that she feels too young to take care of her father as her mother has asked.

I focus harder. Gil has told me that in order to translate you need to be a chameleon, to put on the skin of another person, to creep inside his head. I have seen this transformation take place within him — his features and sometimes his personality seem to alter with each voice he takes on, with each book.”

-- Narrator (Chapter 27 paragraph 41)

Importance: Mila has to work hard to try to get inside Matthew's mind to see what is going on there. She thinks of the way that her father has told her he must change in order to get inside the mind of the person writing the novels he translates. She tries to follow his example.

But what if she is the hero of the story, the one who has kept all of Matthew's secrets? That's why she never seems to be telling the truth, because it's his lies she's hiding. That's why she looks angry all the time.”

-- Narrator (Chapter 27 paragraph 52)

Importance: With new information in mind about the traffic accident in which Owen died, Mila suddenly gains new appreciation for Suzanne's role in the family. She realizes Suzanne might be covering up for Matthew, which would explain why she never appears to be telling the truth.

Matthew doesn't want some time away, he wants forever. He wants to die. I feel it so strongly it chokes me. He left Honey behind because he didn't plan to come back.”

-- Narrator (Chapter 27 paragraph 56)



Importance: As Mila delves deeper into Matthew's brain and the circumstances of his life she realizes that he left his family and his dog because he wants to kill himself.

"I love you too, Cat, I want to say, even though the phone line is completely silent and my answer is years too late."

-- Narrator (Chapter 28 paragraph 38)

Importance: As Mila's emotions spill over from the drama she's experiencing when delving into Matthew's life, she realizes she should have told her friend Catlin how much she cared about her when she had the opportunity.

"Gabriel is just a baby but eventually he will see the world and his father as they are: imperfect, dangerous, peppered with betrayals and also with love."

-- Narrator (Chapter 31 paragraph 43)

Importance: Through her experience Mila realizes that even her parents aren't perfect, just as she knows that one day Gabriel will realize his parents are not perfect. Despite their imperfections, however, Mila knows that her parents love her.

"I will not always be happy, but perhaps, if I'm lucky, I will be spared the agony of adding pain to the world."

-- Narrator (Chapter 31 paragraph 46)

Importance: As Mila looks back over her experiences in America she believes her life will be okay even if she isn't always happy. What she desires most is to be spared the agony she saw in Matthew's life, the agony that came from bringing pain, although perhaps unintentionally, into the world.