

Practical Magic Study Guide

Practical Magic by Alice Hoffman

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Plot Summary

Practical Magic by Alice Hoffman is the story of Sally and Gillian Owens. The Owens family is comprised of witches but being magical doesn't solve their problems. Sally and Gillian must come to terms with who they are in order to rid themselves of the ghost that now haunts them. This story focuses on the relationships between the women in the family and how they learn to appreciate each other and their own lives.

Gillian and Sally are sent to live with their aunts when their mother and father die in a fire. The girls are certain that they are a burden to the aunts and try not to be in the way. They are tormented by the other children in the town and when Gillian turns eighteen, she elopes with a boy whom she has been dating for a few months. Sally and Gillian promise not to be apart for long but it will be years before they see each other again.

Sally gets married and has two daughters, Antonia and Kylie, but her husband is killed by a drunk driver. Sally grieves for her husband and then takes her daughters and leaves for New York in order to have a normal life. Sally has lived in her home for many years and Kylie is about to turn thirteen and Antonia is sixteen when Gillian shows up at their house one night. She explains to Sally that she has accidentally killed her boyfriend, Jimmy, by giving him nightshade. Sally helps Gillian bury him in the backyard.

Sally and Gillian soon find that they are being haunted by Jimmy's ghost. Sally continues to try and control things herself when an investigator shows up from Arizona looking for Jimmy, who is responsible for the death of three college students. They had thought they were buying drugs from Jimmy which had been, in fact, only jimsonweed and the herb had killed them. Sally and the investigator, Gary, fall for each other and Sally cannot lie to him. She eventually tells him that Jimmy is dead although it had been an accident. She tells him that the important thing is that Jimmy cannot hurt anyone any more and Gary tells her that he has to think about this. When Sally arrives home she finds that Jimmy's haunting is continuing and Gillian tells her that they need to call their aunts.

The aunts arrive and help to rid the house of Jimmy's ghost and the girls realize that the aunts do love them and had enjoyed having the girls around all those years; they had just shown it uniquely. That Thanksgiving, Sally and Gillian spend the holiday with the aunts and the family has grown together and become complete. Sally has received a letter from an investigator from Tuscon explaining that a body had been found in the desert and identified as Jimmy. While at the aunts, Sally is surprised to find that Gary has come back to her. Sally knows that you should fall in love whenever you can.



Superstitions: Page 1-47

Superstitions: Page 1-47 Summary

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Sally and Gillian Owens must go live with their aunts, Jet and Frances, after their parents die in a fire while on a second honeymoon. The aunts never tell the girls to brush their teeth or when to go to bed or any other aspect of their well being. The girls are completely different in nature and appearance but are very close, often having the same dreams and finishing each others sentences. When the girls start school, no one will play with them because they are Owens children and the family is blamed for anything that has gone wrong in the town for the past two hundred years because they are thought to be witches. Sally tries not to fight back and to blend in but one day while she is in the sixth grade all of her aunt's cats follow her to school. Sally doesn't realize that the black cats have followed her until she is in class and they come up to her. Sally tries to shoo the cats away but they refuse to leave. One child sets one of the cat's tails on fire and Sally says she hopes something awful happens to him. Just as Sally finishes speaking, a tile falls on the child's head and everyone accuses Sally of making it happen.

While all of the children in the town make fun of Sally and Gillian, most of their mothers have gone to see the aunts for love remedies. While watching from the upstairs, the girls can see how love could control a person completely. Both girls swear to each other that they will never be ruled by passion. The girls see a young woman named Irene come to the aunts for a love potion. The aunts warn her that she might get what she asks for but the girl demands that they help her. The girl returns to see the aunts a short time later to tell them that the one she loves loves her back but is sure he can't leave his wife. The aunts help her make a second potion. The man leaves his wife and they are married. Irene returns to the aunts and tells them that she can't get away from her husband and that he never leaves her alone; he has even taken the lock off the bathroom door. When Irene screams and curses at Sally and Gillian, the aunts do a spell that takes away the girl's voice.

When the girls are older, Gillian becomes beautiful and dates boy after boy while Sally reads books, cooks nutritious meals, and hardly ever goes on a date. Gillian dates a boy for three months and decides to run away from home and get married to the boy. As Gillian stands saying goodbye to Sally, they vow to only be apart a short time but in fact it will be years before they see each other again.



Sally marries a clerk from the hardware store and they move in with the aunts. Sally's first child is named Antonia and the aunts dote on her and she is selfish and spoiled. The second child is Kylie and the aunts predict that she will see what others cannot. When Kylie is just beginning to sleep through the night the deathwatch beetle begins to sound next to Sally's husband's chair. Soon after, he is killed by a drunk driver. For a year after, Sally is unable to get out of bed to do anything. Gillian calls and talks to her but it is not until a year to the day after her husband's death that Sally gets out of bed. That night, Sally packs her clothes and the children's clothes and leaves the aunts to move to New York to start a new life. It takes years before the girls forgive Sally for taking them away. Each summer Sally takes the girls to see the aunts and stays until the night when Sally wakes from her bed and sees her daughters standing outside in the moonlight alone. The next morning Sally takes her daughters back home.

Superstitions: Page 1-47 Analysis

Sally and Gillian are in fact very different but they do love each other. This relationship that they have is very stressful for them because they cannot stand the way that each other lives. It will be shown later on that Gillian firmly believes that Sally is wasting her life and Sally believes that Gillian is ruining hers. Despite the way that they view each other's choices they will eventually realize that they need each other. When this time comes, it will be seen that much of what they despise in each other is based on the things that they cannot forgive about themselves.

From the time that she is little, Sally believes that she needs to be responsible. The aunts never ask her to cook, clean, be in bed on time, or to take care of anyone, and yet Sally takes on this role as if it is all she has. Later on in the story, she will realize that she is not needed in the capacity that she had believed she had been needed. This will cause her a second fit of depression.

Part of the reason that Sally is so eager to leave the aunts appears to be because she had wanted their help to save Michael after she had heard the deathwatch beetle begin to sing. The aunts had tried to help but there had been nothing they could do to stop it. There is a recurring theme of fate in the story. It is never discussed that it had been Michael's fate to die, but it seems that there is nothing that could have been done to have stopped it. If Michael had not died, the story would have been very different in all aspects.

The aunts will be spoken of again in the story, but not until the last chapter. When the aunts are shown in the last chapter, the truth of how they view Gillian and Sally will be shown.



Premonitions: Page 48-97

Premonitions: Page 48-97 Summary

As the chapter "Premonitions" begins, Antonia is sixteen years old and is extremely beautiful while Kylie is rather plain at the age of twelve. The two sisters do not get along and Antonia always says something rude to Kylie whenever they are in the same room. In the neighborhood where Sally now lives, she is a secretary at a school and is well respected. She has taken the job so that she can have the same hours as the girls and strives to have a normal life. Sally finds that she is on edge lately as if she is waiting for disaster. Although she tells herself that she is imagining things, she cannot get over the tense feelings she is having. Meanwhile Kylie is looking forward to her upcoming thirteenth birthday certain that it will change everything about her life, and Antonia is beginning to doubt how long her beauty will last.

There is a group of signs that present themselves to Sally foreshadowing the coming trouble, but Sally has a rational explanation for all of them. One night, Sally is laying in bed when there is a knock on the door. When Sally opens it, she finds Gillian looking rather weak and nervous. Sally has just mailed a letter to Gillian's latest address. When Gillian comes in, she tells Sally that she is in a mess. In the past eighteen years Sally and Gillian have only seen each other three times, but Sally sees that Gillian is just as beautiful as ever though she has lines on her face from the Arizona sun. Sally tells Gillian that she has her own problems realizing that Gillian looks great because she believes that the world revolves around her. Gillian then tells Sally that Jimmy, her current boyfriend, is in the car and he is dead. Gillian says she cannot go to the police because she has been giving Jimmy nightshade as a sleeping sedative. Jimmy is abusive and when Gillian can get him to go to sleep, she misses his temper. Gillian explains that she must have overdone the dosage because he died while they had been at a rest area in New Jersey. Gillian explains that they had to leave Arizona in a hurry because Jimmy had been selling jimsonweed to college kids telling them it was LSD or peyote and some of the kids had died. After Gillian has explained that she is responsible for Jimmy's death, Sally notices the bruises on Gillian's arms. Calmly, Sally tells Gillian that the police don't have to know about Jimmy's death.

Sally and Gillian go out to the car to look at Jimmy's body and Sally has to admit that he is very attractive although he is dead. Gillian tells Sally that she had been crazy about Jimmy and that she had acted like some of those desperate women who used to come see the aunts. They take him out to the back yard and plant him in the garden. Gillian tries to close his eyes as they bury him but, no matter what she does, they won't stay closed. Sally and Gillian go in the house to go to sleep and the lilacs where Jimmy is buried begin to grow.

It is the morning of Kylie's thirteenth birthday and she is excited knowing that her life will be more enjoyable as a teenager. She has been sharing a room with Gillian and Kylie has decided she wants to be just like Gillian. Antonia says that Gillian is a loser. Gillian



works at the Hamburger Shake and there are teenage boys who come in just to be near Gillian. Meanwhile, the lilacs have continued to grow and are affecting everyone. Kylie has woken in the night to hear crying and finds Gillian out beside the flowers in the darkness crying.

Gillian thinks about Jimmy and how much she misses him. He seems sweeter to remember now that he is gone. Gillian is so consumed with her grief that she is grateful she is sharing a room with Kylie because she is frightened to sleep alone. Sally has been dreaming of the ground outside under the lilacs turning to blood. To add to Sally's anxiety, Kylie and Gillian are bonding which makes Sally feel jealous. Sally gives Kylie a gold locket for which she had saved to buy for her daughter. Kylie looks the locket over and looks to Gillian for a nod of approval. Gillian gives Kylie a bracelet that she bought for twelve dollars and Kylie is elated over the gift. Sally takes Gillian out and tells her to back off, that Kylie is her daughter and Gillian agrees to think before she acts. While they are standing talking, Ben Frye, from Sally's school, comes up to talk to Sally about a meeting at the school. When he sees Gillian, he thinks that she must be the most beautiful woman he has ever seen.

That night Sally has Antonia and Kylie's best friend, Gideon, at the pizza place for Kylie's birthday party. They wait for more than half an hour for Gillian and Kylie to show up. When they walk in, no one recognizes Kylie for a moment. Gillian has cut and dyed Kylie's hair. Kylie looks far too old now to be only thirteen, although she is pretty. Sally is furious that she had not been consulted before hand. Antonia tells Kylie that she looks just like Gillian and what a mistake it is. Gideon tells Kylie she has ruined everything as he leaves. Kylie can see colors around everyone as they are shouting and recognizes what they mean, such as the green tinted jealousy that is around Antonia. Sally takes the girls and drives home leaving Gillian alone in the booth. As Sally is leaving, she sees Ben Frye walk over to talk to Gillian. Sally feels sorry for Ben but knows that there is nothing that she can do to explain to him what a mistake it is getting involved with her sister.

Kylie and Sally fight the whole way home and, when Sally goes in the house, Kylie stays outside. She looks at the lilacs in the back yard and sees that they also have a color although it is dark. Suddenly, Kylie sees a man standing under the growth of Lilacs and Kylie knows that the man is angry and he wants to make someone pay.

Premonitions: Page 48-97 Analysis

Sally is stressed for a variety of reasons. She wants badly to connect to her daughters. She feels that Antonia is too self-centered and had been closer to Kylie. Now that Gillian is in the house, it seems that Kylie is looking to Gillian for her every move. This concerns Sally, since Gillian has made so many awful mistakes. She has had to have her sister's help hiding a body, but Sally is also hurt because she wants her children to look up to her. The rift between the two sisters will continue to grow as the story continues.



When Gillian first arrives at the house, Sally is thinking about the letter that she has written to Gillian that Gillian will never get. The letter, although not seen in its entirety, is very important later in the story and plays a pivotal role. Jimmy had been a mean character who enjoyed tormenting people and animals. In the next chapter, Gillian expands on the horrible things that Jimmy had been doing. It isn't until the last chapter of the book that the truth of how awful he was comes to light. Even Gillian had not been fully aware of the things in which Jimmy was involved.

Ben Frye is seen throughout the story. There is a brief amount of background given on him, but not until the next chapter; then, it is only given to explain his relationship to Gillian.

Kylie's gift continues to be shown in the story. It gives moments of foreshadowing but it is never explained in depth as to the reason why or how it works. It is shown to be a curse to Kylie in some ways.



Clairvoyance: Page 98-123

Clairvoyance: Page 98-123 Summary

As "Clairvoyance" begins Sally and Gillian are not speaking. If they had been talking to each other they would know they are all very unlucky. Things are being taken and hidden, which they blame on each other, broken, suddenly ripped to shreds and much more. Even Gillian's car is suddenly moved from the house to the Hamburger Shack. Meanwhile Gillian is getting multiple calls a day from Ben Frye. Gillian is not sure what is wrong with Ben that he doesn't realize that she is worthless. Gillian had stayed with Ben at the pizza place until midnight. She learned that he is a biology teacher and that he puts on magic shows for sick children at the hospital. All the women in town who know Ben think Gillian is crazy for sending his flowers back since they are all enchanted by him. In order to try and keep herself from Ben, Gillian lights a black candle and repeats the phrase "Single forever" three times and has been able to refuse Ben's offers although she doesn't want to refuse anything from Ben.

When Ben calls, he hears Gillian telling him no and to go away, but he also hears something in her voice that makes him call and try again. Once Ben had had his fortune read and had been told when he fell in love it would be forever. He had laughed at the notion but now feels that it had been absolutely correct. Ben goes to ask Sally her advice on how to get Gillian to go out with him, but Sally just tells him to forget Gillian and find a nice woman.

Antonia has been watching as Ben tries and tries to get Gillian to agree to see him, and Antonia is outraged. She has a crush on Ben but now feels that there is no hope in a world without love. Antonia breaks her mirror, puts away her high heel sandals and decides that she will concentrate on tangible things such as working as many hours as she can at the ice cream parlor. Antonia doesn't want any let downs. That night, while Antonia is at work, Scott Morrison asks her if she is having a nervous breakdown. Scott is a college student at Harvard and is delivering syrups and other items to the ice cream parlor. She begins crying and Scott comes to console her. When Scott leaves, he is thinking that Antonia is much different than he had thought, remembering a spoiled snotty brat from school.

When Antonia gets home Kylie is there. She has been sad since her birthday because she is not speaking to her best friend, Gideon. Kylie is watching two women in the yard who are looking at the lilacs and weeping for the same man. Kylie can sense what it is that they have lost and it causes her to cry with them. Kylie is unable to go anywhere without getting the emotions of others mixed with her own. She finds that being around someone in a foul mood makes her mood foul and if someone is truly eaten with grief Kylie has to sit down. To add to her depression, Kylie can't go anywhere without men rolling down their windows to honk at her and yell obscenities. The man in the back yard is still there and every time he exhales horrible things come out of his mouth. Kylie has



tried to put things out to keep the man out of the house but he gets in when everyone is asleep. He causes them to have bad dreams.

The next morning Sally gets up to find that her diamond earrings are missing and she accuses Gillian of taking them to pawn. Gillian accuses Sally of ripping up her paychecks. Kylie stops them and tells them that the man under the lilacs enjoys it when they fight. Sally is livid thinking Gillian has told Kylie about Jimmy, but Gillian insists that she has not said one word and does not talk in her sleep. When Sally asks if the man outside is real, Kylie answers that she doesn't know if he is real or not, that he is just there. Sally suddenly realizes that she cannot be normal. Kylie is nothing like other girls and will never be normal. Kylie starts crying and Sally tells her that she and Gillian will take care of this and she takes Gillian outside.

Sally and Gillian discuss digging Jimmy up but know that is not the best idea. Gillian assures Sally that no one will come looking for Jimmy because no one cares about him. When Sally points out that Gillian had looked for him, Gillian says she thinks she had gotten what she deserved. This hits Sally because she knows that Gillian really feels she deserved what Jimmy had been doing and she and Gillian have both judged themselves harshly. When everyone goes out for the day, Sally takes the clippers and cuts down the lilacs to the ground.

Clairvoyance: Page 98-123 Analysis

The man underneath the lilacs will never be seen by anyone other than Kylie. The aunts will eventually have to be called in to help with this issue.

When Gillian says that no one cares enough about Jimmy to come looking for him, she may be right in one sense. Gillian forgets to take into consideration the fact that someone may want to find Jimmy for reasons other than concern about his well being. It is unclear how much damage Jimmy could actually do. Sally smells a burning cigarette after Kylie says the man under the lilacs had just lit a match. Sally thinks that he could burn their house down while they sleep. The truth of this statement is never known.

Sally cuts down all of the lilacs and believes that this puts an end to it. When Kylie is watching Jimmy, she notices that he has no color around him but that he takes the color from the lilacs and spreads it all over himself. It may be that Jimmy gets strength from the growing bushes. Jimmy may be feeding them with hate and they in turn give him power. This is also something about which the reader will have to speculate but will never be confirmed.

The fact that Gillian is being hard on herself makes Sally become a little kinder to her. In the next part of this chapter Antonia and Kylie also have a moment which draws them closer together. Each horrible event that has happened in the book eventually is the basis for something positive that happens to the family, including the death of Jimmy.

Gillian does see herself as a mess. This is largely the reason that she wants nothing to do with Ben Frye. Eventually she changes her mind. Even after she is with him, and



happy to be with him, she wonders if she is going to mess it up. Her own emotions concern her because she is unsure how to fight them and how to do what needs to be done. When Sally tries to pull her outside to the lilacs, Gillian explains that her initial reaction is to run far away. As the story continues, this reaction in Gillian changes until she no longer thinks of running, but of taking action and helping those whom she loves.



Clairvoyance: Page 123-162

Clairvoyance: Page 123-162 Summary

When Maria Owens had come to Massachusetts she brought attention to herself because she was unwed, pregnant, had a collection of diamonds sewn into her dress, and dressed all in black. There had been rumors that Maria was a witch and people often avoided her. Maria had been blamed for everything that went wrong regardless of how it turned out. She had often been seen outside traveling at night which increased the belief that she had been up to evil. The truth is that Maria had followed her lover to Massachusetts even though he had sent her a large sum of money to make her go away. She had continued to go out to meet with him but he had never shown up at their meeting place. Maria had finally gone to his house one night to confront him. She had banged on the door until she had broken her arm but he had refused to come to the door. The person who had opened the door was the man's wife and Maria had run the entire way home. For the rest of her life, Maria had worn the sapphire the man had given her as a symbol of what was important and what was not.

In the weeks following Kylie's birthday, Kylie receives her birthday gift from the aunts, a portrait of Maria Owens. Although Gillian doesn't like the picture, Kylie refuses to get rid of it. Even though Gillian doesn't like the painting, she has been sleeping more peacefully since it arrived. Kylie says that the man in the back yard is no longer there and Gillian has started seeing Ben Frye.

Gillian goes over to Ben's house one day after work and Ben immediately starts kissing her. Gillian sleeps with Ben and while they lay falling asleep, she hears Ben say something about Fate. When Gillian awakens, she intends to leave. She goes to the living room but Ben's rabbit, Buddy, has come to her and refuses to leave. Gillian cries and talks to Buddy. By the time Ben awakens, Gillian is feeling better and has decided to stay. Since that night, Ben and Gillian have been together almost every night. Ben talks to Gillian like she is smart. Gillian signs up for classes at the community college and studies Kylie's biology book whenever she gets the chance.

Kylie feels that she has been pushed aside since Gillian has started seeing Ben but doesn't say anything to Gillian. Instead, she sends large orders of anchovy pizzas to Ben's house, puts ashes in Gillian's shoes and other things. It isn't until Kylie sees Gillian and Ben together that she sees the love that is around them and realizes that she can't be mad at them. Kylie is lonely and confused and is desperate to become a normal person again so she decides she will bake a cake. Kylie goes and gets the ingredients she needs; it isn't until the cake is well underway that she realizes that it is Gideon's favorite cake. Kylie finally decides to take the cake to Gideon. Before she is out of the house, a toad comes in the window and spits a ring out. Kylie doesn't look at the ring closely; she simply picks it up and puts it beside the sink in a cactus jar as she leaves the house, setting the toad back outside.



Kylie is walking to Gideon's house when she is followed by two men. She feels the air around her change and knows that they intend to do her harm. She drops the cake and begins running while the men scream that they are going to rape her. Kylie is finally able to get to a place where there are other people and she runs into the ice cream parlor where Antonia works. Antonia looks at her sister and knows what has happened. Scott is there and offers to take Kylie to the hospital but Kylie and Antonia assure him it is not necessary. Scott drives them home and, once inside, Antonia helps Kylie get cleaned up to hide the incident from Sally and they laugh together. This changes everything between the sisters.

Over the next few days, Sally notices the difference in the girls. When she says something about it to Gillian, Gillian's response is that the girls are growing up. Sally becomes outraged at Gillian and tells her that they are still just kids. Sally has spent so much of her life focusing on the girls she is not sure she will exist if they don't need her. Sally goes to bed and stays in bed that day waiting for someone to need her. No one comes in to talk to her and Gillian says Sally must be sick. The next day Sally stays in bed again and refuses the food that the girls offer her. By the third day Antonia and Kylie are worried but, after looking at her, Gillian realizes that it is nothing more than self-pity and despair. Gillian sends Kylie and Antonia to bed after cooking for them. She goes to get Sally and makes her go outside in the moonlight where they have margaritas. Gillian assures her that, no matter what, the girls will always need her just as Gillian has. Sally isn't so sure but is cheered up. They both look up at the sky and it is the night for which they had wished when they were little, to be able to look up at the stars and not be afraid.

Clairvoyance: Page 123-162 Analysis

Ben has asked Gillian to move in with him. She is not sure about this and is really evaluating herself at this point in time. She is in love with Ben, but she is afraid of what committing to him will do. She also has begun to wonder if she actually needs someone who will hurt her like Jimmy had in order to be happy with someone. She knows that she hadn't asked to be hit verbally, but she has begun to wonder if she had asked for it in other ways. It will take a lot for Gillian to be able to come to terms with her feelings for Ben and put what Jimmy has done to her behind her.

Sally becomes outraged at the thought that the girls are growing up. It will always make Sally sad to think that her girls are going away, but she will eventually come to terms with it much more easily than she thinks possible. Sally's going to bed seems rather childish in many ways, showing that she is not as practical as she seems to be in regards to so many other situations. The fact that she goes to bed seems to force Gillian to take a much more adult role. For the first time, it is Gillian who has to get everyone to bed on time, and it is up to Gillian to make sure that things in the house are taken care of. Gillian will really start to change when more is expected of her.

The man is no longer seen by Kylie and he won't be physically seen again. It is not clear why Kylie can no longer see him but it is clear that he is not gone. The ring that the toad brings in the house is pivotal to the story in the next chapter.



Levitation: Page 163-200

Levitation: Page 163-200 Summary

As "Levitation" begins, Gideon is approached by his mother and told that she is getting married although Gideon has only met the man a couple of times. Gideon will be moving, getting new step siblings, and have to go to a new school when school starts. Gideon gets up and decides that he is going to go see Kylie. When he arrives at her house, she is sitting outside on a blanket under a tree. Gideon challenges her to a game of chess. Gideon pays close attention to the game. He knows that if Kylie goes easy on him then they are no longer friends, but if she slaughters him on the chess board they still have a relationship. Once Kylie wins, the two go for a walk and Gideon tells her of his mother's marriage and the fact that he will be going to a new school. Kylie is certain that Gideon won't find a friend as true as she has been. While they are walking Kylie suddenly realizes that she can't imagine going to the aunts. They spend their summer vacation there every year and yet Kylie realizes that they won't be going although she doesn't know why.

Gary Hallet had been raised by his grandfather since his parents had both drunk themselves to death. Gary is now driving through New York knowing that his grandfather wouldn't have liked this area at all. Gary is known for the fact that he enjoys homicide cases. Gary has come to New York from Arizona looking for James Hawkins because Hawkins had sold some college students some drugs that had killed three of them. Gary is sitting at Jimmy's last known address when the postman arrives with a letter for Hawkins' girlfriend. The postage has fallen off and the letter is opened. Gary reads the letter and decides to try and track the girlfriend down at her sister's house. Gary makes immediate plans to go to Sally's house after reading her letter. He feels like he knows her and he reads the letter over and over again while making the journey.

Sally is in the kitchen when someone knocks on the door. When she answers the door, she is surprised at the tall man standing there and the way that he is staring at her. Gary introduces himself but fumbles over the words as he looks into Sally's eyes. As Gary gathers himself and begins to explain that he is from Tuscon, Sally begins to feel panic welling up inside of her. Sally invites Gary in and gives him some coffee. Sally is unable to bring herself to lie to Gary and excuses herself to get Gillian after he tells her that he is looking for Jimmy.

Once Sally has Gillian back downstairs, Gary is able to size Gillian up quickly and realizes that she has been hit often. He asks her about Jimmy, but he can tell that Gillian is lying. Gary thinks that they may be hiding Jimmy. He can't help but hope that Sally won't lie to him, but as he questions her she continues to say that she knows that Jimmy won't be bothering Gillian or anyone else. Gary is heartbroken that Sally is able to lie to him. He goes to rinse his coffee cup out in the sink and sees the ring that Kylie had placed there earlier. He recognizes the ring as Jimmy's ring since it had often been



used as a weapon when Jimmy was fighting. Gillian says she doesn't know where it came from and offers to let Gary take it.

Once he is gone, Gillian and Sally begin to fight. Gillian tells Sally that they have gotten away with it, but Sally tells Gillian that Gary obviously knows, given the way he had looked at them. Sally then says that she is going to go and see Gary and beg for forgiveness and tell him everything. Gillian tries to talk her out of it, but Sally says she has to put things right. Gillian makes sure that there is dinner on the table that night, although she is evasive when the girls question her about where their mother is. Gillian knows that things are about to change and there is nothing she can do about it.

Levitation: Page 163-200 Analysis

Gillian is trying to make the situation go away like it never happened. She doesn't feel that she committed murder since she didn't intend to kill Jimmy. Sally takes a different view and feels guilt over her role in the fiasco. She wants to have the truth come out regardless of the outcome. It is not clear why it is that Sally cannot lie to Gary, although it may just be Sally's nature that she cannot lie convincingly. As the chapter continues, Sally and Gary will both continue to fight with their emotions and feelings for each other.

Kylie knows that they will not go to the aunts but doesn't know why. The reason that they will not go to the aunts is because of Gary and the ghost haunting their back yard. Living in the same house has cured a lot of Gillian and Sally's feelings toward each other and has helped each of them to look at their own lives more closely. The last piece of the puzzle is when the aunts come to visit as the chapter continues. Until the aunts come to Sally's, there has not been a moment during which their point of view has been examined. Their point of view is very important in the story and shows how wrong Sally and Gillian have been about a great many things.

Ben has asked Gillian to move in with him but now she is certain that she does not have a future anywhere other than in prison. Despite this, she does not run away as she knows she previously would have done, and she does not do anything other than try to protect Kylie, Antonia and Ben.



Levitation: Page 200-244

Levitation: Page 200-244 Summary

Kylie and Gillian are looking at the yard and the growth of thorns that has sprung up in the last day. Gillian says that they will just chop it down again, but Kylie knows this will not work. Kylie tells them that they will not be going to the aunts. Antonia tries to argue since she is already packed but Kylie insists they are not going. The girls go outside to look at what is showing through the earth and see that it is a snake skin boot. Antonia begins to pick it up but Gillian stops her. Gillian then asks if either of them had found a ring back there. Kylie tells her that the ring had been brought into the house by a toad, not found outside. Gillian tells them that it was Jimmy's ring and then the girls know that Jimmy is in the back yard. Antonia says quietly that she wants her mother. Gillian takes the girls back in the house, locks the door and fixes the girls some tea to settle their nerves.

Meanwhile, Sally has been driving all around town, getting lost even though she knows where she is going, until she gets to the hotel where Gary is staying. The woman at the front desk is on the phone and tells Sally that Gary is out but that she can wait in his room. Sally refuses and goes to wait in her car. As she waits, she thinks about the fact that she feels that everything is her fault, that this is the reason she had helped Gillian bury the body and why she is in the mess she is in now. Sally feels that she is in a tangle of lies and won't be able to get out if she tells one more lie.

Gary arrives and sees Sally's car. He thinks it might not be her for a moment because he has been seeing her everywhere, but she honks her horn at him and he comes to sit in the car. The first thing Sally does is confess that the ring that Gary had found is Jimmy's ring. Sally says she feels like she might have a stroke or faint, and Gary believes it is because she knows he is going to ask where Jimmy is. She tells him that this is not the reason and tells him that Jimmy is dead. She tells him that it had been an accident. Gary asks Sally if she expects him to forget about Jimmy and she says that the important thing is that Jimmy won't hurt anyone again. Gary tells her that he cannot be impartial because of his feelings for her. Gary thinks of his grandfather and tears begin to flow. Sally reaches over to him and they kiss. They kiss until Sally is able to pry herself loose. She says he should consider that she is desperate and maybe the only reason she is there is to try and get out of any trouble. She tells Gary to get out of the car. The fact that she has told the truth makes Gary certain that Sally is the one for him. He watches as she drives away.

Sally arrives home and Gillian tells her that she can tell by the look in Sally's eyes, and in Gary's, that they have fallen for each other. Sally tells her that Gary has to think things over. Gillian tells her that they have other problems and shows her the garden. Gillian sighs and says that they need to call the aunts for help.



When the aunts arrive at Sally's house, they are thinking about how much it had meant to them to have the two little girls around. They had not counted on having the children come into their lives, and had not anticipated how much having them around would mean to them, but they had loved it. When they get to Sally's house they tell Sally that the house is modern, but nice. This is high praise coming from the aunts and, to Sally, it is them saying that she has done well. They look at Gillian and hug her and realize that she has been through a lot. But the Owen's women are always going through a lot and the aunts think that the lines on Gillian's face make her more beautiful. Gillian tells them about killing Jimmy with nightshade and the aunts tell her that this is impossible. They explain that unless he had been a chipmunk she couldn't have killed him. Knowing that she hadn't killed Jimmy relieves Gillian more than she could explain, although they are not sure what did kill him. The aunt start cooking what will be needed to rid them of Jimmy's spirit.

Ben comes over and dazzles the aunts with his magic tricks while they are cooking their concoction. Each of the aunts tells Gillian not to screw this one up and Gillian swears she won't. When it is time, the aunts tell Ben to leave because they have family business to discuss. They go outside and pour the pot out onto the place where Jimmy had been. They see the vapors rise and know that Jimmy is finally gone. Just to be sure, the aunts put some blue stones that had come from Maria Owens over the place . This place will always be known as a lucky spot for the little girls to have their tea parties.

That Thanksgiving, Sally, Gillian, Ben, Antonia, Kylie, and Scott are all at the aunts' house. They receive a letter from an investigator in Tuscon explaining that Jimmy's body has been found in the desert and is identifiable only by the ring that he is wearing. The girls know that Gary had placed the ring on the body. Sally and Gillian go to the drugstore to see about Irene, the girl they remember from their childhood. When they get there they are told that her husband had died about a year ago. Irene has moved to Florida and is remarried already. This makes Gillian and Sally happy and they laugh as they go home. When they get back to the aunts, Sally finds Gary is there. Sally knows that you should throw salt over your left shoulder, plant roses for luck, and fall in love whenever you can.

Levitation: Page 200-244 Analysis

The relationship between the sisters in the family seems to be mended for the most part. Gillian and Sally still do not agree on everything. but it is clear that they are getting along much better. Gillian and Ben are getting married and it seems that Gillian is over some of her relationship issues that had been holding her back from Ben.

When Sally is watching the girls play while at the aunts at the end of the book, she realizes that they are growing up. Sally is sad to see her daughters growing up before her but seems to be much more proud of them now, and capable of seeing a life without the girls at home.



The fact that Irene is remarried and living in Florida makes both of the girls happy although they do not explain why. It seems that it could be because Irene had seemed broken to them the last time they had seen her. The fact that she has moved to Florida and remarried could signify that she still has life and hope in her despite the trials that she had experienced.

Gary is a police officer and had been willing to break the law in order to keep Sally safe. This does not seem to diminish his character from Sally's point of view. It seems clear that he will be with Sally although there is nothing more said, except that she is going to fall in love, or perhaps she is already there.

Characters

Sally Owens

Sally is one of the main characters in the story and the point of view often comes from her. When the story begins, Sally is a small child who has been sent to live with her aunts after her mother and father die in a fire. Sally is the older sister of Gillian. Although Sally is only a child when her parents die, Sally blames herself for their deaths believing that she could have saved them if she had been there. Sally doesn't realize how much her aunts care for her. Sally will spend much of her youth trying to be very proper and keep things in order in an attempt to control the things around her.

When Sally is older, she marries and has two children. When Sally's husband dies, Sally is unable to focus on anything other than her own grief for a full year. After that point, Sally distances herself from her aunts in another attempt to control herself and her children. It isn't until Sally and Gillian have to call the aunts to help them get rid of the ghost of Jimmy that Sally realizes the aunts love her, and that she is not responsible for everything that happens. Sally grows and changes from being someone who is seemingly afraid of who she is, to embracing herself, as well as coming to terms with the characters of those whom she loves.

Gillian Owens

Gillian is the younger sister of Sally. They are very much opposites. While Sally is structured and conservative, Gillian is very free spirited and believes that it is a burden to live in one place for too long. Gillian leaves home at a very young age and moves around the country. She is married several times but never stays with one man for very long. When Gillian comes to visit Sally, it is because she is frightened thinking she has killed her abusive boyfriend, Jimmy. It is later discovered that Gillian did not kill him, which has been weighing on Gillian for a long period of time.

Gillian is been married three times before she comes to visit her sister. When Gillian arrives, she finds a young man with whom she falls in love. Gillian feels certain that if he knew her past that he would not be able to love her. The fact that he cares for her seems to confuse her at times, as if the fact that he loves her might mean that there is something wrong with him. When Gillian is seen from the point of view of her aunts and the detective who comes to investigate Jimmy, it is clear to them that Gillian has been physically abused for some time.

Gillian eventually matures in an emotional sense and, when things become frightening, she stays to help her sister and her nieces as well as to remain with her new boyfriend, although she knows that there is not much hope for a happy ending.



Kylie Owens

Kylie is the younger daughter of Sally Owens. Kylie has the ability to see a person's aura and tell what it is that they are feeling. This often overcomes her own emotions and affects her own behavior. Kylie finds a ring that had belonged to Jimmy and puts it on the sink in the kitchen. Kylie is chased by some men while on her way to her friend's house. The men threaten to rape her and she is just able to get to a public area where she can be safe. This event brings Kylie and her sister closer together.

Antonia Owens

Antonia is the eldest daughter of Sally Owens. Antonia is known for her looks and is decidedly spoiled and always has something mean to say to her sister. Antonia begins to feel less attractive when her sister turns thirteen and begins to look like a beautiful woman. Antonia and Kylie are not able to get along until Antonia comforts Kylie after some men threaten to rape her. Antonia realizes later that a person's attractiveness is relative to their frame of mind.

James Hawkins, aka Jimmy

James Hawkins was Gillian's abusive boyfriend. Gillian comes to see Sally after Jimmy dies to help her hide the body. Gillian is sure that she killed Jimmy while giving him things to make him sleep so that he wouldn't hit her. He is buried in the back yard of Sally's house. The aunts later tell Gillian that she could not have killed Jimmy using the sleeping sedatives that she had been using, although they never discover what it was that killed Jimmy. Jimmy's spirit is seen by Kylie and he haunts the women and their house for a time until the aunts come to get rid of him.

Jet Owens

Jet Owens is one of Sally and Gillian's aunts who takes them in after their parents die. Jet had been extremely beautiful when she was younger, although she had never seemed to realize that she was beautiful. When she was sixteen, two different men had killed themselves because of their love for her. Jet had only loved one man and still thinks of him wishing she could kiss him again.

Frances Owens

Frances Owens is one of Sally and Gillian's aunts who takes them in after their parents die. Frances doesn't believe in tipping and tells the pizza delivery boy not to expect a tip for his services. Frances is given a sapphire colored scarf by Ben when they first meet and, although she pretends not to be impressed, she puts it on while no one is watching.



Ben Frye

Ben Frye is a teacher at the school that Antonia and Kylie attend. When Ben first sees Gillian, he decides that he is in love with her. Ben does magic tricks for fun and has a rabbit that seems to fall in love with Gillian. Ben and Gillian eventually get married.

Gary Hallet

Gary Hallet is an investigator from Tuscon. He is looking for Jimmy in regards to the deaths of college students who had bought bad drugs from Jimmy. Gary is immediately mesmerized by Sally. He is saddened when she lies to him about the ring that he finds on her sink. Sally later goes to his hotel room to tell him the truth. She tells him that the ring is Jimmy's ring and then says that Jimmy is dead although it had been an accident. Gary realizes then and there that he is in love with Sally. Gary takes the ring and puts it on a corpse that could not be identified and closes the case. At the end of the story, he shows up for Sally.

Gideon Barnes

Gideon is a friend of Kylie's. He shaves his head. Gideon becomes angry when Kylie changes her look. When Gideon tells her that he is changing schools, she knows that Gideon won't find another friend as true as her.

Scott Morrison

Scott is the young man who begins to fall for Antonia. He talks to her while she is at work at the ice cream shop. He remembers her as having been a spoiled brat, but realizes that he had been wrong. He spends Thanksgiving with Antonia at the aunts' house while he has a break from college.



Objects/Places

Ring

The ring in the story has a rattlesnake on it. It had belonged to Jimmy and he had been known for gouging people's eyes out with it in fights. The ring is puked up by a toad and Kylie puts it on the sink. Gary takes it and puts it on an unidentifiable corpse.

Lilacs

Lilacs begin to grow in Sally's back yard after she and Gillian bury Jimmy. They grow at an unnatural rate and draw a lot of attention. Kylie can see Jimmy's ghost standing under the lilacs.

Biology

Biology is the subject that Ben teaches. Gillian begins studying the subject because she is so in love with Ben.

Buddy

Buddy is Ben's rabbit. The rabbit is used in Ben's magic shows, but the rabbit seems to attach itself to Gillian.

Dove's Heart

A dove's heart is given to a woman and she is supposed to stick a needle in it every night in order to make a certain man fall in love with her. It is watching this ritual that makes Sally decide to be a vegetarian.

Ice Cream Parlor

Antonia works at an ice cream parlor.

Drug Store

A young girl who works at the drug store begs the aunts to make a married man fall in love with her and leave his wife. This same girl is struck mute by the aunts when she returns because she is being driven mad by the man she had wanted so badly.



Blue Stones

Blue stones had come from Maria Owens. These stones are set into the back yard of Sally Owens where Jimmy has been buried. Little girls tell their mothers that the blue stones are lucky.

Nightshade

Nightshade is the substance used to drug Jimmy so that he would sleep. Gillian believes that it is the nightshade that has killed him.

Witch

The women in the Owen's family are said to be witches. The tormenting over this title causes Sally to leave the town and hide much of her past.

Hamburger Shack

The fast food restaurant where Gillian works is called the Hamburger Shack. It is here that her car is taken while Jimmy is haunting them.



Themes

Family

Family is an easily seen theme in the story. While the story is mainly directed at Sally Owens, the other members of her family are also explored. The bond of sisters is seen between Sally and Gillian. It is not an unrealistic bond in that they love each other, but neither agrees with the way that the other one lives. Sally believes that Gillian has made a horrible mess of her own life through her own flighty behavior. Gillian also believes that Sally is wasting what life she has because she is not willing to take any chances or enjoy herself. The relationship between Sally and her daughters is also seen.

Family is very important in the story. It is clear that they don't always cherish being together, but in the end the characters realize the importance of having each other. They are able to see that there is more love in their family than they had realized. Sally often reflects on the fact that the aunts had not wanted her and Gillian. When the aunts are introduced, they are thinking about what a blessing it had been for them to be given the two little girls and what it had meant to them. Family is easily the main focus of the story.

Love

In the story, there are several different kinds of love. There is the love that is seen between family members, such as the sisterly bond that Sally and Gillian have, and the bond that Kylie and Antonia have. This love is what causes the characters to be there for each other in the story. They don't always like what the others do, but they love each other a great deal. As things become more complex, their love develops into a much stronger bond.

Another kind of love that is seen in the story is the love between a man and a woman. Sally loved her husband before he died and it was easy to see that his death nearly broke Sally. She seems to fall in love with Gary when he arrives later in the story. Gillian also falls in love with Ben. This is different for Gillian, because she has never cared for anyone who cared for her in return. Even the aunts recall the love that they had had when they were younger. Jet had only loved one man although there had been others who had wanted her love and killed themselves when they could not get it.

There is also a love seen within the characters. Gillian often seems to not care for herself. She often shows selfish behavior but she doesn't love herself. She is reluctant to get involved with Ben to a degree that might hurt her because she knows that Ben will see that she is not worth anything. Sally also has not let herself see that she is not responsible for the bad things that have happened. Antonia and Kylie both have to come to terms with who they are as well. Part of the love that they have to find for themselves, and forgiveness, comes from accepting who they are as a family.



Growth

There is growth and change from all of the Owen women shown in the story. The aunts had Gillian and Sally in a way that had made Sally believe that they had not been wanted. As it turns out, the aunts simply hadn't known how to treat children. They explain later on in the story that they have been watching Oprah and know how vital it is for children to know that they are loved.

Kylie and Antonia also both show growth. Antonia is shown as a spoiled brat for much of the story. It is not until she sees how much her sister needs her that she is able to have some compassion and show kindness. It will not be until later in the story that she can show her mother that same love. Kylie also has a hard time relating to her mother. The changes that Kylie undergoes are hard on her and rather frightening at times, since Kylie seems to be shoved into the role of a woman suddenly.

Gillian and Sally also grow and develop. Gillian is used to being beautiful and desired but she has allowed herself to be used by men who don't care for her any more than if she were an object. Gillian eventually has to fall low in order to feel better about herself. Sally also has to mature enough to realize that she does not have the power to control the entire world. She also has to get to the point that she can let her daughters mature and grow up. This takes a lot of change on Sally's part since she wants so badly for them to remain her little girls who need her help.



Style

Point of View

The point of view in the story is third person. The character followed by the narrator most often is Sally Owens although Gillian, Kylie, and Antonia are often shadowed as well. There are other characters who have their point of view shown in the story' but it is limited and only seen in order to view the various Owen women as an outsider would see them. The story is told in present tense but there are allusions to glimpses of the future making the point of view seem omniscient at times.

The omniscient view in the story makes the magical aspects of the book easier to understand, such as Kylie's ability to see or smell other people's emotions and how they affect her. This point of view also provides a better description or view of the things that happen in regards to Jimmy's haunting of Gillian's family. While the point of view is omniscient, there are times that the author talks about the future and things that might be a later possibility for Sally, Gillian, Kylie, or Antonia. The fact that there are things about which the narrator seems unsure often contradicts the omniscient view, but does not interfere with the reading comprehension.

Setting

The story takes place in modern-day New York City, although the mythical element of magic is added. The setting is easily understood and the author uses common items, emotions and events for comparison. In the beginning of the story, Sally and Gillian live in a house with their two aunts. While this is where they grow up, Sally is certain that she is not wanted here and never truly seems to view this place as her home. The relationship between the family members changes to the point that, eventually, this is where Sally wants to come and visit. The story ends with all of the family members at the aunts' home.

Sally's house is the other place seen in the story and is where most of the events take place. The house is described by the aunts as modern but nice. It is in Sally's back yard that they bury Jimmy and then begin to have trouble with the haunting. There are a few places around the town where Sally lives that are briefly described but little detail is given and most of them are only seen once or twice in the story.

Language and Meaning

The language in the story is straightforward and easily understood. There is a great deal of magic that is the basis for many of the story's, such as Jimmy's haunting, but there are not many phrases or terms given to the rituals that are seen. The blue stones placed in the back yard cover the spot where Jimmy is laying. They have a connection



to Maria Owens and all of the children say that they are lucky stones, but there is never a title given to these stones other than "blue stones."

There are superstitions and old customs talked about in the book. At the end of the book, Sally is talking about throwing spilled salt over your left shoulder, keeping rosemary by your garden gate, and planting roses and lavender for luck. These are all things with which the reader may be familiar even if they are not superstitions in which the reader believes. When the characters speak, their tones are not immediately clear. However, there is a brief dialogue tag or description for each that helps the reader understand if their words are spoken with contempt, love, anger, or regret.

Structure

Practical Magic consists of two hundred and forty-four pages. It is divided into four different sections. These sections are not numbered, but each is given a title: "Superstition," "Premonitions," "Clairvoyance," and "Levitation." The divisions cover the different stages that Gillian and Sally go through, since the story is primarily told from their point of view. Some of the section titles are indicative of things that relate to other characters, such as Kylie's gift for clairvoyance.

Spaces are occasionally added between paragraphs when there is a leap between character point of view, scene, or a climactic event. There is no prologue or epilogue to the story and much of the history of the Owen family is intertwined into the rest of the story. Ben and Gary's history is placed into the story as the author feels it is needed.

The main plot of the story is Sally and Gillian getting rid of Jimmy's ghost, but there are several subplots in the story. All of the subplots relate to the relationships that the Owen women have with themselves, each other, and the men they come to love. The subplots in the story are extensive but do not detract from the conflict that Sally and Gillian face with Jimmy. The subplots add a great deal to the story since Jimmy's spirit is often silent with nothing but instances of foreshadowing showing that his role in the story is not finished.



Quotes

"For more than two hundred years, the Owens women have been blamed for everything that has gone wrong in town." Superstitions, Page 3

"Night and Day, the aunts called them, and although neither girl laughed at this little joke or found it amusing in the least, they recognized the truth of it, and were able to understand, earlier than most sisters, that the moon is always jealous of the heat of the day, just as the sun always longs for something dark and deep." Superstitions, Page 6

"Sally considered her little sister greedy and selfish; Gillian thought of Sally as a prig and a prude, but they were still sisters, and now that they were about to be separated, they stood in front of the open window and hugged each other and cried, then vowed they would be apart for only a short while." Superstitions, Page 26

"Somehow, the lilacs have affected everyone." Premonitions, Page 76

"All evening she has been seeing colors around people, as though they were illuminated from within, just like fireflies." Premonitions, Page 97

"Kylie blinks, but sure enough he's still there, under the arch of the lilacs, and he looks like the sort of man no one in her right mind would want to run into on a night as dark as this." Premonitions, Page 97

"If Sally and Gillian had been on speaking terms, instead of avoiding each other in the hall and at the supper table, where one would not even ask the other to pass the butter or the rolls or the peas, they would have discovered as July wore on, with white heat and silence, that they were equally unlucky." Clairvoyance, Page 102

"They both measured themselves harshly, and they still do, as if they have never been anything but those two plain little girls, waiting at the airport for someone to claim them." Clairvoyance, Page 121

"If she hadn't been in such a hurry to get to Gideon's, if she realized what it was she had, she would have taken that ring out to the back yard and buried it, beneath the lilacs, where it belongs." Clairvoyance, Page 148

"There's never any question about how they will spend their summer vacation, so why is it that Kylie suddenly has the notion that they may not even carry their suitcases out to the car?" Levitation, Page 172

"Gary sizes Gillian up fast-the tattoo on her wrist, the way she takes one step back when he addresses her, as if she expects to be hit." Levitation, Page 188

"He slipped that ring to some dead guy who couldn't be identified." Levitation, Page 241

"Fall in love whenever you can." Levitation, Page 244



Topics for Discussion

Explain the relationship that siblings often have. Do you feel that the relationship between Sally and Gillian is average for two sisters? Why or why not? How does it compare to the relationship that Kylie and Antonia develop?

Look at the four different segments into which the book is divided. Do you feel that the names are appropriate? Why or why not? If you had to rename the four sections, what would you name them?

Discuss fate. Do you think that fate exists in real life? Why or why not? Do you feel that fate could be a theme of *Practical Magic*? Why or why not?

Explain Sally's character. Why is it that Sally becomes agitated when Gillian first says that Kylie and Antonia are growing up? What changes with Sally that allows her to come to terms with this or do you feel that she is not able to come to terms with this? Explain.

Do you feel that it is wrong of Gary to put Jimmy's ring on an unidentifiable body? Why or why not? How does this action impact your view of Gary?

Do you think that Gillian truly is innocent in Jimmy's death or that the aunts are trying to make her feel better? Explain. Does this change your view of Gillian?

Is it significant to know that other people can tell that Gillian has been abused, such as when Gary looks at Gillian when they first meet? Why or why not?

What is the purpose in revealing what has happened to Irene, the girl who had worked at the drugstore? Speculate on what impact this has on Gillian and Sally.

Do you feel that this story could have a Part Two written? What would be the theme of the book? Which characters would be the central characters? Why?