

The Paying Guests Study Guide

The Paying Guests by Sarah Waters

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Plot Summary

Frances Wray is a young woman living on the outskirts of London in 1922. Her father has died, leaving Frances and her mother to live as best they can in the large family home. Soon after his death, Frances discovers they are in serious financial trouble and she comes up with the idea of taking in boarders as a means of making ends meet. She accepts a young couple, Lilian and Leonard Barber, who make use of several rooms upstairs. The rooms have been outfitted so that the Barbers have their own kitchen, bedroom, and sitting room. The two families share the “water closet” outside and the room with the bathtub.

Frances is a lesbian and was deeply in love with a young woman named Chrissy. She broke off her affair with Chrissy when her parents discovered the situation. Frances and Chrissy remain friends and Frances hides their friendship from her mother.

Frances' mother is very proper and Frances tries to follow her mother's dictates. There are some things that have changed. Because of the financial situation, Frances takes care of all the duties once attended by servants. Her mother is embarrassed by this and Frances tries to handle the heaviest and most demeaning chores while her mother is away. Frances and her mother are not certain what is proper in their interactions with the Barbers but Frances eventually finds that she is romantically attracted to Lilian. She and Lilian begin a sexual affair and their love grows to the point that they are struggling to keep it hidden.

Meanwhile, Leonard Barber is having an affair with a young woman named Billie. Lilian discovers this about the same time she learns that she is expecting a baby. She doesn't tell Frances about Leonard's affair but does tell her about the pregnancy. She assures Frances that she knows how to go about aborting the baby and promises that she will leave Leonard as soon as the abortion is complete. Frances reluctantly agrees to help Lilian and she obtains the pills necessary for the abortion.

Lilian's abortion occurs while Leonard is away from home and she and Frances are filled with plans for the life they plan to build together. Then Leonard arrives home and it's obvious he is in a bad mood. He had planned to spend the evening with a good friend, Charles, but said Charles had given up on the evening too quickly. Leonard picks an argument with Frances and Lilian, leading Frances to confess about their love affair.

Leonard attacks Frances, strangling her. Frances is unable to free herself until she hears a cracking sound just as Leonard goes limp. She rises to discover that Lilian has hit Leonard over the head with a heavy ash tray, and that Leonard is obviously near death.

Frances suggests they call the police but Lilian urges her to find some other option, saying that people will believe she killed him on purpose. What she doesn't say is that Leonard has a large insurance policy. Frances allows Lilian to persuade her and she decides that they must take Leonard's body outside, then stage it to look like an



accident. They get the body to a nearby lane and pose him, then rush back inside where Frances tries to clean up traces of the struggle and the blood.

Leonard's body is found the next morning but police don't believe it's an accident. The focus of the investigation turns on Leonard's friend, Charles, leaving Frances and Lilian wondering what they should do next. Each considers turning themselves in but neither does. The investigation then turns to a young man believed to be jealous of Leonard's affair with Billie. There is a trial and Frances fully expects the young man to be found guilty. She knows if that happens, she'll have to turn herself in.

The young man is found not guilty after all. Frances and Lilian meet a distance from the courthouse and ponder the situation. Their relationship has undergone many changes. Frances is no longer certain that Lilian's love for her was ever real but wonders if they might find happiness after all.



Chapters 1 - 2

Summary

As the story opens in Chapter One, Frances Wray is awaiting the arrival of Leonard and Lilian Barber. Frances and her mother own a large house and the Barbers are planning to rent a suite of rooms. The house is located in a neighborhood called Champion Hill, a couple of miles from London. The neighborhood is generally very quiet. Frances expects them to arrive in a cart but they are in a van driven by Leonard's best friend, Charles Wismuth.

Frances struggles with how to act toward the Barbers. She can't bring herself to be happy about the situation but knows there is no other option open to her if she wants to keep paying the household bills. Frances insists on helping the Barbers with their things and carries in a "hideous" stand ashtray. Frances' mother, Mrs. Wray, greets them in the hall. Lilian hesitates at the entry, says the house is a beautiful as she remembered, and immediately locates a loose tile in the entryway. Frances escorts Lilian to their rooms and Lilian says she is very pleased with their new home. Frances returns to her own room, which had once been a servants' quarters.

Frances hands Lilian the keys to the front door and receives the rent money in an envelop. That evening, Frances goes about her routine until everyone has gone to bed. She then checks in on her mother and they talk about the Barbers. Mrs. Wray says the one good thing about the situation is that the Barbers are so young they won't know the Wrays have no idea how to be landlords.

Frances stops in to say goodnight to the Barbers and they talk briefly about the details of sharing a house, including a lamp that has to be extinguished each night. She moves to her own room, removes her clothing, and has a cigarette before going to bed.

The following day, Frances begins to figure out what bills should be paid first with the Barbers' rent money, and to look toward the next few months. She sets out to do some cleaning while her mother is away for the morning. Lilian emerges from her room and asks to take a bath. Frances helps her light the "geyser" for the water. When Mrs. Wray returns, she's shocked at the idea of a bath in the middle of the day. The Wrays hadn't considered the expense of mid-week baths and briefly wonder if they'll have to address that subject, but the bath turns out to be an anomaly.

Leonard returns home after work and talks to Frances, telling her that he's an insurance agent, or "assessor of lives." He also asks how much of the work around the house is done by Frances and her mother, and he offers to help. Frances assures him they can manage.

In Chapter Two, Frances evaluates the situation. Though she's not happy to have renters, she realizes nothing they've done so far outweighs the rent money they are



paying. Frances and her mother attend to movies each Wednesday. Frances suggests they invite Lilian but Mrs. Wray asks where they would then draw the line between landlord and friendship. Frances agrees and they don't issue the invitation.

Frances takes a trip later in the week to London. She often walks the streets of London alone, and relishes the feeling. She has tea then goes to visit her friend, Christina, who Frances calls Chrissy. Christina lives with a woman named Stevie, who is a teacher and an artist. The conversation eventually turns to the "paying guests." Christina asks Frances if she's placed a glass on the wall to listen in on conversations. Frances says she hasn't. Christina asks more about the couple and about how Frances and her mother are handling the situation.

Mrs. Wray cancels their regular Wednesday movie the following week in favor of meeting for a charity planning event. Frances is heartbroken though she knows it's foolish to be so sad.

Frances and Leonard encounter each other several times and Leonard seems to be overly-friendly. Frances is uncomfortable with him and says so to her mother. One evening, Frances is passing by the rental suite when she hears the Barbers arguing. She believes there is something wrong in their marriage after hearing the tone of the conversation. She and her mother continue to discuss the Barbers and their marriage, though always as quietly as possible so they won't be overheard.

Analysis

In the opening pages of the story, Frances stands at the window of the rooms she has rented out to Lilian and Leonard Barber. She is thinking about the current situation and the reader gets the first look at the fact that Frances must be in some distress. She is awaiting the arrival of the people who will be renting several rooms in Frances' home. This is a new endeavor and the couple are the first to rent the rooms. This could be thought of as a new phase of Frances' life, but she feels it's the end. The reader later learns about the financial problems that bring Frances to this place and it's obvious that Frances is actually feeling sadness because her financial situation has fallen to this level.

Frances tries to view the presence of the Barbers as kindly as possible, but she hates the situation from the beginning. Soon after their arrival, Lilian gives Frances the rent money and Frances hands Lilian a key to the house. Frances tries to act as if the entire situation is of little consequence, but it's obvious that it hurts her terribly to think that she is now sharing her home with these people, who are almost complete strangers. At one point, Frances hears Lilian and Leonard moving about in their rooms and thinks to herself that they are "making themselves at home." It then strikes her that they are doing exactly that and she's faced again with the reality of the situation.

The term "paying guests" is used as a means of avoiding the word "boarders." This is an example of the social stigma attached to poverty throughout the book. Because Frances and her mother are no longer able to maintain their previous lifestyle, they rightly fear



the neighbors will look down on them. The use of the term “paying guests” is meant to alleviate at least some level of that stigma though it doesn't seem, in modern terms, to make any real difference.

The Wray home is described in detail, mainly as a means of pushing the action in various scenes. When Lilian first arrives, Frances has polished the floors in the rental rooms and Lilian notes this, taking time to remove her shoes so that she doesn't scuff the floor. Fairly early in Chapter One, the characters begin to work out the embarrassment of using the “WC,” or “watercloset.” This is apparently a basic outdoor bathroom with a porcelain toilet.

As Frances and her mother are settling down for their first night with the Barbers, Frances notes that the noises coming from upstairs are not all that unfamiliar. She mentions that “it might be Noel or John Arthur up there.” These are Frances' brothers, both killed in the war. This kind of loss is seen throughout the book as various characters deal with the many men who died during the war. In addition, soldiers begging on the street is a common sight in the city during this time.

Frances often goes alone to London to visit with Christina. She hides the friendship from her mother because she and Christina were once lovers. When her parents found out, Frances broke off the relationship to remain at home, leaving Christina to move on with her life. During the visit to London just after the Barbers' arrival, Christina does things differently. She has a little money in her pocket because of the Barbers' rent. She usually buys tea in some crowded place where she can quietly eat a bun she brings from home. This time, she doesn't do that but buys her entire tea meal. While she's visiting Christina, they hear an organ grinder and Frances throws down some money for him. This is another thing she would normally have avoided. It's only later, when she evaluates how much money she spent, that she regrets having done so and knows she should have been saving the money to pay the household bills. Ironically, her mother believes that the addition of the rent money will elevate the Wrays back to their former lifestyles. She asks Frances almost immediately if they can now afford to hire servants to take care of the house again.

When Stevie arrives at Christina's, the atmosphere changes. The dynamics are bound to be strained, at least to some point, because Frances and Christina were once lovers. But there is also a class difference that's more evident when Stevie adds her opinions to the conversation. Frances and her mother live in a rather opulent neighborhood. Though they are poor now, they are still of a different class than Stevie and Christina.

Mrs. Wray is critical of Frances when Frances is really only making the best of their situation. Frances does the housework, which embarrasses Mrs. Wray. However, Mrs. Wray is quick to criticize when the housework isn't done well. Mrs. Wray also criticizes Lilian for seeming to rush through her own chores in order to spend the rest of her time leisurely. Frances, however, wishes she could be more like Lilian. There is a strain between Mrs. Wray and Frances that is seen clearly in their attitudes about the housework. At one point, Mrs. Wray says she always kept the house clean for her husband and family. Frances counters, saying that the servants had done all the work



but Mrs. Wray responds that managing the servants had been a serious job as well. She then says that Frances would know that if they had ever had a servant for Frances to manage. Her tone and words seem to imply that she blames Frances for their current financial situation when it's actually poor planning on Mr. Wray's part that led to the state of affairs.

Discussion Question 1

Describe Frances' attitude toward the Barbers in the early day of their living arrangements.

Discussion Question 2

Describe the relationship between Frances and her mother.

Discussion Question 3

What are some of the hardships Frances is facing?

Vocabulary

chastened, brasher, redundant, conundrums, titivate, facetious, whimsical, disconcerted, eccentric, spinsterish, dithered, panache



Chapters 3 - 4

Summary

In Chapter Three, Frances and her mother make their annual pilgrimage to her father's grave site. It's Mr. Wray's birthday and the two women clean the gravestone and take a wreath to the grave. When Frances and her mother arrive home, there is noise from the Barber's rooms. A little boy appears on the stairway and Mrs. Wray fears he'll fall. Frances and her mother go upstairs to find several members of Lilian's family are visiting. They meet Lilian's mother, Mrs. Viney, who introduces herself and two of her daughters to Frances and Mrs. Wray. They are outgoing and Mrs. Viney is particularly outspoken, embarrassing her daughters.

Frances notices that Lilian has moved one of the Wray's chairs from its normal place in the house. Outside the rooms, Lilian apologizes, saying her mother's "back and her legs are bad," and that she needs to sit in an armchair. Lilian says she doesn't want the Wrays to think she'll begin using all their possessions indiscriminately. Frances says she doesn't mind but Lilian is certain the Wrays will be upset about the visitors. Frances reassures her several times, saying they won't be a disturbance and that Lilian should entertain them for as long as she likes. Frances and her mother then return to their own rooms.

When the family leaves, Frances looks out the window, counting them, and says she didn't realize there were seven visitors, including an infant. Her mother comments that they might have "bred another" during the visit. Mrs. Wray then suggests Frances go count the spoons to be sure none have been stolen. Frances says it's more likely that the family felt sorry for the Wrays and quietly left some money for them in the hallway.

Lilian returns the chair to its place and apologizes again for having used it. Frances invites her to visit for a moment and the two women take a seat in the kitchen. Frances offers tea and cake but they settle for a cigarette instead. Lilian reveals that her family was very poor until her father died and her mother remarried. She also says that Leonard had predicted the Wrays would think Lilian's family to be "common." She talks more about Leonard, saying his family believes Lilian is a "heathen." Lilian then says the Wray home is much calmer than anywhere she's lived before, and that she likes it that way.

Frances talks at length about her relationship with her father. She says her father supported the war effort and "bullied" John Arthur into joining the military. She also says that her father left them in a poor financial situation. Then Frances says her father wasn't a bad person, but was merely a coward, though everyone is cowardly sometimes. The talk then turns to Frances and she says she had plans of her own but those were put aside, partly because of her father's death and partly because the times have changed. Afterward, Frances feels that she bared more of herself than she should have, and is embarrassed. However, they agree before going their separate ways that



they will be friends and Frances invites Lilian to join her for a walk on Wednesday. Lilian agrees.

In Chapter Four, Frances is excited about her plans for a walk in Ruskin Park with Lilian. Frances wishes she had gone somewhere else but they soon pick up their “intimacy” right where they left off with their visit in the kitchen. They have a picnic on a bench and Frances notes that a man seems interested in them. They wander on through the park and end up at a bandstand. Lilian performs a few steps of a waltz.

In answer to Frances' question, Lilian says she and Leonard met at the shop owned by Lilian's stepfather. Leonard had seen Lilian through the window and came inside, pretending he was going to buy something. They began to talk and then wrote to each other after Leonard went back to his military assignment in France. Lilian says she and Leonard didn't really mean to marry, but that everything was “more serious” in war time. Lilian then apologizes for talking so much about Leonard, saying they'd argued the previous evening. Lilian says she'd expected they would get along better once they moved out of the home of her in-laws, but that she and Leonard still argue.

The man who noticed them earlier approaches them while they are on the bandstand. Frances wants to leave but Lilian says they should ignore him. Frances confronts the man, telling him to go away. After the man is gone, Lilian says that men will usually go away if she just ignores them. Frances says ignoring them is a waste of time. She then reveals that she had once been arrested for throwing a shoe at a military police officer during a demonstration.

As they are leaving the bandstand, Frances offers Lilian her arm in a show of gallantry after sharing the story of being arrested. They continue to walk, arms linked, as they watch part of a tennis match and look at the flowers. They return home and agree, for the first time, to call each other by their first names, dropping the formal “Miss Wray” and “Mrs. Barber.”

That evening, Frances tells her mother she doesn't really believe Lilian and Leonard are happy in their marriage. Mrs. Wray predicts they've argued and will soon be happy again. Later that evening, Frances hears the Barbers' gramophone and believes they might have already made up. When Frances and Lilian encounter each other the next day, they are shy and their conversation is awkward. Later, however, they sit in Lilian's room and talk about the book “Anna Karenina” while shelling peas. Over the coming days, they meet up regularly and talk about the book. They help each other with housework and laundry.

Each time they are apart, Frances wonders why they are becoming friends when they seem to have little in common. With these thoughts, she resolves not to be so overly-friendly with Lilian. When they are back together, Frances enjoys Lilian's company and lets her guard down even though Frances knows they really know very little about each other.



By early summer, Leonard is more at home and spends time outside the rental rooms. He seeks out tasks to do around the house, such as fixing a dripping faucet and a loose tile. Frances isn't certain whether to feel gratitude toward Leonard or "piqued" by his efforts.

One day Frances opens a cupboard and a pile of her brothers' things fall out. Knowing that her brothers aren't going to return, she pushes her mother to give away some of the items, but Mrs. Wray argues about every piece and Frances gives up.

Lilian invites Frances to her sister Netta's birthday party. She says Leonard has plans that evening with Charles. Frances says she has nothing to wear but Lilian asks to see Frances' clothes. They go to Frances' room and she's very aware that her spartan room is very different from Lilian's rooms. Frances doesn't have any modern clothes but Lilian finds a dress that she says can be altered. Frances finds herself caught up in Lilian's excitement. Lilian then says Frances should have a new hair-do. Frances resists but finally gives in.

While Lilian is cutting Frances' hair, Frances decides it's time to tell Lilian the truth about her life. From their conversations, Lilian has formed the opinion that Frances was in love with a young man and Frances hasn't corrected her. But now she tells Lilian that she was actually in love with a woman. Lilian is obviously caught off guard by the revelation and Frances fears she has ruined their friendship. Lilian continues to work on Frances' hair but stops chatting and smiling. She won't meet Frances' eyes and is blushing. When she's finally done, she asks if Frances likes her new hair cut and wave. Frances is amazed by the transformation.

Frances goes downstairs and dreads her mother's reaction, but Mrs. Wray says the style is "charming." Frances returns to her own rooms and wishes that Lilian would call out to her as she passes the Barbers' rooms, but she doesn't.

Analysis

The annual trip to the grave of Frances' father brings up memories and anger. Frances knows that the gravestone is very expensive. She and her mother chose it in the "bewildering days" following her father's death. At that point, they didn't realize that the family finances were in serious trouble and that they would later be struggling to pay the household bills. Frances also compares her father's grave site to that of her brother, John Arthur, who died in the war. She says John Arthur's grave was in a desolate place "like a scene from hell." Her other brother, Noel, died at sea and has no grave site at all. Frances is obviously angry with her father for his poor handling of their money because Frances is now left to deal with the situation. When they finish tidying the grave site, Frances says that it's more than her father deserves. This time she doesn't even try to hide the comment from her mother and says she would say it to her father, if he were alive to hear it.



Loss is a recurring theme in the story and many of the characters deal with the deaths of loved ones. Frances obviously has trouble dealing with the deaths of her brothers, but Noel's death seems especially difficult for her. Noel's ship went down in a battle and there is no way for Frances to be certain what happened to him. She wonders if he was killed in the initial blasts, meaning he didn't have to suffer or be afraid, and it seems that knowing that might bring her at least some minor level of comfort. She remembers a trip to the sea when they were youngsters. Noel was very young and had been hit by a large wave. Frances recalls that she made fun of him when he became upset and that memory is especially painful now that Noel died at sea.

While Frances' anger at her father isn't a laughing matter, although there is a humorous scene in the early moments of the arrival at the grave site. It's very hot out and Frances is about to take off her hat when she catches a glimpse of her mother's disapproval. Frances tries to smooth the situation over, saying that her father always hated being overly warm. Mrs. Wray counters, saying that her father also knew when it was appropriate to keep one's hat on. Frances doesn't remove her hat, apparently out of deference for her mother's sense of propriety, but she quietly says, "I'll bet he's warm just now," indicating that she believes he has gone to hell. When Mrs. Wray asks Frances what she said, she doesn't repeat the comment, but says she'll go get the water to wash her father's headstone.

Mrs. Wray is polite in Lilian's rooms but obviously upset once she and Frances return to their own sitting room. Lilian has decorated the rooms in an array of mismatched items that she likes but Mrs. Wray says Lilian has too much clutter without any theme to tie it all together. The conversation then turns to Mrs. Viney. Frances likes the outspoken woman. Mrs. Wray says she likes her as well, but that "a little goes a long way." She then comments about Mrs. Viney's "class" of people and it's evident that she doesn't think much of Mrs. Viney.

There is some symbolism seen at the bandstand at Ruskin Park. There are several colors of paint layered on the handrails at the bandstand and Lilian compares that to the events in life. She compares one color to an argument that happens. Then that color – or argument – is covered by another. The bottom colors are covered, but remain, just like the arguments or harsh words remain in a relationship.

The fact that Frances is a lesbian colors many of her actions and makes it apparent that many of her actions are not exactly as they appear. For example, Lilian confronts a man at Ruskin Park and tells him to leave them alone. On the surface, it seems that Frances was probably embarrassed by the man's attention and wanted him to leave them alone. Considering that Frances is a lesbian and is attracted to Lilian, it becomes more obvious that Frances is angry that the man is paying attention to Lilian. That idea continues as Frances and Lilian are walking home from the park after their first outing together. Frances notes that Lilian "takes the wall," meaning she walks on the inside of the sidewalk and leaves Frances to walk closest to the street. Frances' position is one that would normally be taken by a man as a means of protecting a woman from the passing traffic. It's not clear whether Lilian takes this position on purpose or does so without thinking, but Frances sees it as Lilian intentionally allowing Frances to take on a



traditional male role. When Frances reveals her sexual orientation, she fears Lilian is then looking back on every action and evaluating it with this new information.

Frances and her mother have a conversation after Frances and Lilian spend the afternoon together in the park. Mrs. Wray is not pleased that Frances and Lilian are becoming friendly. She seems perturbed that Lilian might have confided in Frances about her marriage. She then says that she hopes Frances hasn't been overly familiar with Lilian, obviously indicating that Frances shouldn't be sharing family information with Lilian. Mrs. Wray wants to keep up appearances, even to someone she doesn't particularly admire, and this desire is among the themes seen in the book.

Frances has told Lilian a story about being arrested when she was a young woman. She and Christina had been protesting the war and Frances had thrown her shoes at a military police officer. The story seems very out of character, considering that Frances is now living such a mundane life. Lilian recalls that story several times, using it as a means of urging Frances toward adventurous endeavors. When Frances is reluctant about a new hair cut, Lilian says that Frances is the young woman who once threw her shoe at a military policeman. Frances is aware that her life has changed dramatically since those days and seems to be destined to continue her lonely lifestyle until Lilian appears.

Discussion Question 1

Describe the emerging friendship between Lilian and Frances and the effect of Frances' revelation.

Discussion Question 2

Why is Frances angry at her deceased father? Do you believe the anger is justified?

Discussion Question 3

What happened to Frances' brothers and why does she seem especially guilty about Noel's death?

Vocabulary

surreptitiously, tittering, mortification, chortle, foisted, mirth, treacle, reticent, alembic, suffragette, insinuating, piqued, furtively



Chapters 5 - 6

Summary

In Chapter Five, Frances wakes the following morning to discover that her hair is impossibly mussed. Mrs. Wray suggests Frances ask Lilian for help but Frances discovers that Lilian is still distant. Over the coming days, Lilian distances herself from Frances, bringing an end to their picnics and conversations about literature. Lilian doesn't mention Netta's party again. Frances also notices that Lilian and Leonard seem to be getting along better. It all serves to make Frances even lonelier than before and she wonders if there is any point to her life at all. As she pulls herself out of the depression, she tells her mother that they have to find some new interests.

A neighbor, Mrs. Playfair, invites Frances and Mrs. Wray for dinner. They arrive to find a fourth guest, a young man named Mr. Crowther, is present. Frances and Mr. Crowther are urged to spend time together. Mr. Crowther talks about his time in the war and Frances notes that he seems to be without "any sort of passion" on any topic. Frances knows her mother and Mrs. Playfair are hoping a romance will evolve and she hates the predictability of the situation. Frances makes an excuse and goes home with her mother.

At home, Leonard invites Frances in to celebrate his promotion. He's excited and pushes her to have a drink. Frances can tell Leonard and Lilian aren't on good terms with each other. Frances searches for a reason to leave but is soon feeling the effects of the gin. Leonard and Lilian are acting silly but Frances feels it's all a show, and that they would be silent if she left the room.

Leonard suggests they play Snakes and Ladders. It's a board game that Leonard and Lilian have modified to be something like strip poker, only Lilian is the only one who is forced to undress in this game. Leonard says Frances would be welcome to remove clothes as well. Frances can't tell if Lilian is upset or excited by the prospect of the game. Lilian removes her bracelets as her first article, prompting both Leonard and Frances to call her a cheat. Frances is initially excited by the game but the atmosphere turns less jovial despite Leonard's frantic efforts to keep it up. Frances finally insists on leaving. She finally makes it to bed only to discover that the bed is spinning. She can't get rid of the image of Lilian removing her stockings.

In Chapter Six, Frances wakes with a hangover. She's ashamed of her actions the previous evening. Frances talks briefly with her mother who says Frances should return to bed so no one will see her in her hungover condition. Lilian asks to sit with Frances later in the day and they both admit that they feel "seedy" over the previous evening. They talk about Lilian's marriage. Lilian says Leonard believes he is a "ladies' man" but would never actually have an affair. She says they are often unkind to each other. The conversation then turns to Frances and Christina. Frances says she has never been attracted to men and that she was surprised when Christina loved her. Their relationship



was heightened by the war era and ended when her parents found out they were more than friends.

Frances says she doesn't have any more love to give and compares it to a vampire with a stake through the heart. Lilian stands over Frances and pretends to pull a stake from Frances' heart. Lilian doesn't look Frances in the eye during the scene, then leaves the room. Frances is confused, wondering what Lilian meant by the gesture. She feels a "stir of heat" after the scene.

That evening, Leonard gives Frances some chocolates and apologizes for his behavior the previous evening. He says he doesn't want to ruin the friendship he has with Frances. Frances says Leonard was cruel to Lilian and should be apologizing to her. He agrees. By his actions following the scene, Frances realizes that Leonard is also lonely and feels a twinge of pity for him. Later, Leonard goes outdoors to work on the lawn mower and Lilian joins him, watching him work. Frances sees them together but believes Lilian is actually leaning toward Frances.

The following Monday, Lilian presents Frances with her altered dress for Netta's party. Over the coming week, they blush each time they see each other. Leonard is pleased the Frances is going, saying she can keep an eye on Lilian for him. Mrs. Wray compliments Frances on her altered dress and Leonard is dressed up for his evening out with Charles. He says the two are going to a dinner where he expects to make some important contacts for his work.

The party at Netta's house is boisterous with lots of guests. A young man talks to Frances but she is constantly aware of Lilian. At one point, the young man says he would "smack Lilian's behind" if he was her husband. Frances says she would as well, but the young man is obviously trying to figure out if Frances has a boyfriend. He invites Frances to join him on an outing but she puts him off.

Lilian dances with several partners before inviting Frances onto the dance floor. The dance becomes awkward as they are pushed together but they are reluctant to part once it's over. Then Lilian asks Frances to take her home and they prepare to leave. As they walk toward home, Frances knows that she and Lilian would kiss if they were man and woman, and she believes it might happen anyway, but it doesn't. When they arrive at home, Mrs. Wray meets them at the door, saying Leonard has been attacked. His nose is bleeding profusely. He says his attacker was an ex-serviceman and that he doesn't know why the attack occurred. He refuses to call for a doctor or the police, and goes upstairs with Lilian.

Leonard goes up to bed and Frances moves about the kitchen. Lilian rejoins her and makes the first move toward their first kiss. Lilian fears Leonard or Mrs. Wray will catch them. They move into the scullery and Frances fastens the door though she doesn't know how she'll explain the locked door if someone finds them there. They have sex and Frances professes her love for Lilian.



Analysis

In the days after her confession to Lilian, Frances becomes depressed. She feels Lilian might have taken an interest in Frances out of pity. Frances then decides that Lilian had lost interest in Frances once she knew that Frances' life hadn't always been so boring. Frances phrases the situation as Lilian attempting to “ginger up” Frances' life. She believes that Lilian thinks Frances' life had been “gingered up rather too liberally” by her lesbian lover.

Frances is uneasy around Leonard. The reasons are never detailed but it seems that Frances' sexual orientation is likely a contributor to the tension. Leonard makes some comments that Frances believes are innuendos for sex, and these make her even more uneasy with Leonard. Despite the recent uneasiness between Frances and Lilian, Frances seems to still hope that their friendship will be resolved. With this thought, she realizes that Leonard and Lilian are something of a package deal, and that she'll have to encounter him sometimes if she's to remain friends with Lilian.

The dinner at Mrs. Playfair's house is strained for Frances. It's obvious that Mrs. Playfair and Mrs. Wray are hoping that Frances and Mr. Crowther will be attracted to each other, and that this will be the beginning of a relationship. Mrs. Wray knows about Frances' sexual preferences, based on her relationship with Christina, but apparently refuses to accept it. Frances is indifferent about Mr. Crowther but it's also obvious that he isn't really interested in her either. It could be that he's suffering from the affects of his military service combined with the poor economic conditions of the day. He seems to want only to have a steady job and a stable lifestyle.

While Frances is visiting with Lilian and Leonard after the dinner at Mrs. Playfair's, she realizes they are making a lot of noise. She knows that her mother can probably hear them from her room downstairs, and that concerns her for a short time. Then Frances decides that she doesn't care if her mother hears them. Frances is obviously struggling to find a happy balance in her life and that, combined with the alcohol, seems to push her into deciding that she doesn't care about her mother's opinion. Another interesting aspect of this scene is that Frances seems to compare the noise and alcohol at the Barbers' with the sedate dinner at Mrs. Playfair's. She notes that the “clerk class” knows how to “make themselves comfortable. Even then, she can't bring herself to admire them. She also notes that they are “completely without culture.”

Leonard makes a veiled comment during the game of Snakes and Ladders. He asks Frances if she is a worldly woman and Frances says that she might have been at one time. Leonard responds that one time is all it takes to change a life. He then calls on Lilian to verify the comment but she doesn't respond. Lilian later tells Frances that she was pregnant when she and Leonard married, and that the baby had died. The pregnancy and the death had resulted in problems between Lilian and Leonard's family. Lilian said some of his family members believed Lilian had become pregnant on purpose to trap Leonard into marriage or that Leonard wasn't the father. They had proclaimed the baby's death was judgment against Lilian. Lilian goes on to say that she



might have a baby with Leonard someday, because it would feel their marriage had been for nothing otherwise.

Frances and Lilian talk about Frances' relationship with Christina. Frances details the outrage when her parents discovered the depth of the relationship. She said she might have left home and moved in with Christina if she had been "bolder." She also says that she felt some bravery at having given up her lover to remain home and help her mother. The fact that it is a post-war era means there were many families who lost men. Frances says that with all that loss, her own willingness to give up a love affair seems like just one more small sacrifice among many.

Lilian eventually questions Frances about her relationship with Christina. Frances says that Christina has moved on to another love affair. She also says that Christina has broken ties with her family and "does just fine without them." This seems to be an indication that Christina's family doesn't approve of her lifestyle, which is probably the case considering the time frame and the social dictates of the day. Historically, lesbians were outcasts during this era and it is likely that Christina's family were as upset about her choices as Frances' family.

The party at Netta's sets the stage for the first sexual encounter between Lilian and Frances. They are both caught up in the atmosphere and are very aware of each other on the dance floor. Though neither seems certain how to go about moving to the next stage of the relationship, it seems inevitable that they will. When they find Leonard has been attacked, the attention turns to his injuries and Frances feels that the evening with Lilian is over. She's surprised to find Lilian returns to her after Leonard is in bed. An important aspect of this scene is seen after they have sex. Lilian asks Frances what occurred, obviously referring to the differences between their sex and the sex between a man and woman. Frances says Lilian already knows what happens and Lilian agrees that she does. It's a statement of Lilian's reluctance to move into this relationship that she has to ask Frances for clarification.

Discussion Question 1

Compare the dinner at Mrs. Playfair's to the hours Frances spends with Leonard and Lilian.

Discussion Question 2

How does Netta's birthday party contribute to the first sexual encounter between Frances and Lilian?

Discussion Question 3

Why do you think Leonard refuses to call the police or the doctor after his attack?

Vocabulary

dubious, mystifying, mired, affable, complacent, simpering, heckled, caste, goad,
ambiguous, alluring, dapper, proprietorial, chaste



Chapters 7 - 8

Summary

In Chapter Seven, Frances wakes the following morning and is surprised that her mother doesn't know what transpired the following evening. As the morning wears on, Frances is on edge and begins to wonder if the entire encounter had meant anything at all to Lilian. She and her mother visit Mrs. Playfair and Frances finds Lilian has left a small bouquet of forget-me-nots in Frances' room. Frances leaves the room and finds Lilian hovering in her own doorway, obviously waiting. They have a whispered conversation and Lilian says she's been waiting for a moment alone with Frances.

Leonard goes to work the following Monday, as usual. They find time to lie on Frances' bed together to touch each other and talk. The mood turns sexual again and they realize that most of the morning has passed. They agree that no one can know about their love. That evening, Lilian asks Frances' opinion about a dress and they kiss ardently on the landing. On another encounter, Lilian professes her love for Frances. Their lives go on, much as before, with Frances attending the theater on Wednesdays with her mother and having cocoa each evening. However, everything is colored by the love between Frances and Lilian.

Frances wants desperately to tell someone about her love for Lilian. Christina is the only possibility so Frances makes a trip into town. They walk and Frances reveals her secret. Christina warns Frances to be careful, citing Lilian's marriage.

Frances finds a small "gaudy" gypsy caravan and pony in a shop and impulsively buys it for Lilian. Frances and Lilian have been talking about the ways they might live openly as a couple and living as a gypsy is one of Lilian's fantasies. Lilian says she'll treasure the gift and places it on the mantle in her sitting room. Frances can't decide whether she's excited or disquieted by the idea that it will be there in Leonard's home.

In Chapter Eight, Mrs. Wray is called away to work on a charity event and Frances goes to Lilian's room for another sexual encounter. They are in the throes of passion when they hear Mrs. Wray on the landing outside Lilian's rooms. Frances rushes out and says she and Lilian were practicing some new dance steps. Back inside Lilian's room, Frances again questions their actions.

One night, Lilian sneaks into Frances' room. They have sex and afterward Frances questions Lilian about her relationship with Leonard, asking if the sex is the same and how often they have sex. Lilian says she hates her relationship with Leonard but has no choice about it if she wants to keep Leonard's suspicions at bay. She goes on to say that she often thinks of Frances while in bed with Leonard. They again go over the possibilities for living a life as a couple but to Frances, Lilian's ideas are all fantasies.



In September, Lilian and Leonard prepare for a holiday trip. Lilian asks Frances to go out with her prior to the trip. Lilian keeps their destination a secret until they arrive at the Brixton Roller Skating Rink. They have a good time, especially since they are able to hold hands and touch each other without anyone thinking anything about it. Afterward, Frances turns the conversation to the serious question of them living together. Lilian says she admires that Frances is willing to go against traditions, but that she isn't. Frances asks if Lilian is willing to stay in a loveless marriage. Lilian counters, saying she fears leaving Leonard, beginning a relationship with Frances only to have Frances leave her alone. Frances swears she won't but Lilian points out that Frances left Christina.

Analysis

When Lilian and Frances find time to talk the following Monday, Lilian confesses that she's heard of women who prefer female lovers, but had thought it would be "indecent." She says she hadn't really considered it to be a real-life preference until her encounter with Frances. It seems that Lilian is really unhappy in her marriage, and that may be a big part of her attraction to Frances, though Frances doesn't seem to consider this as a possibility. Lilian addresses the fact that she's married, saying her attraction for Frances doesn't really feel like it has anything to do with Leonard.

Another topic of conversation during this scene is Lilian's reaction to Frances' initial announcement. Frances had believed Lilian to be horrified that Frances had been in love with another woman but Lilian now admits that she'd felt stupid for not realizing the kind of person Frances really is. She said she'd felt tricked when she learned that Frances is a lesbian.

Frances feels that her love for Lilian is greater than her love for Christina had been. She believes that if she had loved Christina as much as she loves Lilian, she would never have been able to give up their relationship, regardless of the cost. This is not surprising, considering that Frances is now older and probably more capable of love, but it is also a statement of Frances' current situation. She's not happy and is likely fearful that she will never find true love and happiness. It's also a statement of the problems to come. Frances and Lilian agree to keep their love secret but this will become increasingly difficult as they naturally want their relationship to develop and will eventually want to make it public.

When Frances tells Christina about her love affair, the conversation turns to Christina and Frances. Christina is obviously hurt that Frances was willing to give up their love but Frances insists that she was the bigger loser in their broken affair. She says that Christina went on to have a life with Stevie while Frances is stuck in her mother's home. She says that she lies constantly. For example, she denies herself new clothes so that her mother can feel they have more money than they actually have. This is all about Frances' character and her desire to meet her parents' expectations, despite how out of sync they are with her own desires and dreams.



After being almost caught by her mother, Frances questions her relationship with Lilian. She tells Lilian that her mother is smart and can figure things out, but admits that she is also willing to be blind to situations that she finds distasteful. Frances points out that it's the middle of the morning and that it's a wonder they haven't been caught at some point. Frances is apparently struggling to figure out where their relationship will go and is already dissatisfied that there is no room for growth. When Frances mentions that they are bound to be caught eventually, she says it might be Leonard who discovers them. Lilian counters, saying that her relationship with Frances has nothing to do with Leonard. She says "it isn't as though I'm going with a man." Lilian seems to be pointing out that Leonard wouldn't really look on their affair as cheating but Frances is hurt by the comment. For Frances, the love is as serious as any male-female relationship and she doesn't like that Lilian apparently doesn't see it that way. Scenes and comments of this nature make it seem as if Frances is much more serious about the relationship than Lilian.

Mrs. Wray says Frances and Lilian are spending a lot of time together, meaning she doesn't approve. She says someone asked how Frances spends her time and that Mrs. Wray hadn't known what to say. Frances counters, saying she cares for the house. Mrs. Wray says Frances hasn't been doing a good job lately, and it's true that Frances has been spending a great deal of time with Lilian, leaving less time for the housework. This is a continuing problem between Lilian and her mother because Mrs. Wray hates that Frances is forced to do the housework, but she wants the house to look as if a group of servants are keeping it pristine.

Discussion Question 1

Compare the relationship between Lilian and Frances to the relationship between Frances and Christina. Why might Frances believe that her love for Lilian is greater than her love for Christina had been?

Discussion Question 2

How does Frances feel about Leonard? What aspects of her life might be affecting her attitude toward Leonard?

Discussion Question 3

What do you believe is the most important theme of the book up to this point?

Vocabulary

dervish, squalid, livid, squeamishness, barristers, discreetly, intrigue, convoluted, sprawled, sedulously, clambering, enigmatic



Chapters 9 - 10

Summary

In Chapter Nine, Lilian and Leonard leave. In some ways, Frances is relieved that she doesn't have to hide her feelings for Lilian. She sets out to clean the house and is horrified to see that many chores have gone undone. Frances visits Christina and laments that Lilian is gone but swears she doesn't care. When days pass without a letter, Frances takes that as a sign.

John Arthur's fiancée, Edith, visits and announces that she's getting married. Mrs. Wray tries to be positive but it's obvious she isn't happy about it. Frances predicts she will be after she has time to process the information. After Edith leaves, Frances receives a letter from Lilian that opens with "my darling." She writes that she wishes to be as brave as Frances.

When Lilian returns, Frances says they have to take steps toward resolving the situation. She suggests they find an apartment and live together, though they will both have to work to make it possible. Lilian predicts Leonard would come after her, strictly because of how the situation would appear to his friends and family. Lilian says everyone would think less of them for their choice. Frances says there are mean people in the world, but that not everyone has such a narrow thought process. Lilian seems to come to terms with Frances' plan but says she has something to say first. She tells Frances that she's pregnant.

In Chapter Ten, Lilian says she doesn't want to have the baby and that she has a plan. She knows where to get pills to cause an abortion. She says she took the pills about a year after the death of her first child because she couldn't face the idea of having another child for fear it would die as well. Lilian says she will need Frances' help when the time comes and already has a plan for how to time it so that the baby is aborted while no one is at home. Frances isn't happy about the plan but doesn't speak against it, admitting that she fears it might be the catalyst for Lilian and Leonard to repair their marriage. Frances tells Lilian she isn't certain about the plan but Lilian says the abortion is "nothing so serious." She says she's going through with it, with or without Frances' help. It's not as smooth as Lilian predicted, but she miscarries around the time she'd predicted after taking several of the pills.

Lilian is very weak and Frances helps clean up the blood. Leonard, who had announced plans to spend the evening with Charles, arrives home early. Leonard begins worrying about Lilian, who is obviously ill. Lilian says she believes she's miscarried and Leonard wants to find a doctor. Lilian refuses, saying there's nothing a doctor could do at this point. Leonard begins questioning Lilian and she insists that the miscarriage occurred naturally. Leonard doesn't seem to believe her, saying she shouldn't mind having a doctor's care if that's the case.



When Frances pushes Leonard to stop questioning Lilian, he turns on her as well. He asks how many other miscarriages Lilian has prompted. Lilian says she has “done all this” because she wants a separation. Leonard realizes that she's serious. He says the only reason she'd want to leave him is to live with another man. Leonard continues to rant and Frances worries that the situation is changing from unhappy to dangerous. She finally loses control and yells at Leonard, saying Lilian is leaving him to live with Frances. She says, “I'm the man,” then asks if Leonard understands what she's saying. Leonard calls her “unnatural,” then attacks her, squeezing her neck.

Suddenly, Frances hears the “liquid” sound of a “smack,” and Leonard's body falls to the floor. She looks up to see Lilian with the ashtray in her hand. It takes Frances a moment to realize that Lilian struck Leonard with the heavy ashtray and stand. Leonard's head is pouring blood and he's gasping for breath. Frances asks why Lilian hit him so hard in the head. Lilian swears she didn't mean to hurt him as seriously as she did. Then the sounds of Leonard's breathing stops altogether. Frances tries to make Leonard respond but it's obvious he's dead.

Frances says she'll go for a nearby doctor but Lilian argues. She says the doctor will call the police and that there will be questions, such as why they were arguing in the first place. Lilian fears the police will discover her abortion and Frances realizes her mother will be very upset when the police arrive. With that thought, more than Lilian's arguments, Frances agrees to help move Leonard's body outside and stage the scene to look like an accident. The task is more difficult than Frances imagines and she wishes several times that they had never begun it.

They get Leonard's body outside and into the lane near the back of the house. She finds a stone she believes to be about the same size as the wound on his head and stages the body as best she can. It's very dark and she can't see, but tries to straighten his clothes to appear as if he'd merely fallen. She and Lilian then return to the house where Frances frantically begins cleaning in an effort to remove any evidence of the crime. Lilian is weak from blood loss herself and is of little help. Frances burns some of the bloody items and tries to clean the rug. She hold the ashtray in the flames to eliminate the blood and tissue clinging to the base.

Mrs. Wray arrives home, accompanied by a man from the neighborhood. Frances is obviously disheveled and knows her mother suspects she's interrupted a romantic moment between Lilian and Frances. Back upstairs, Lilian is distraught. She pleads with Frances not to hate her. Though Frances is upset as well, she hugs Lilian and they both become calmer. When Frances is finally in bed, rain begins to fall and she believes that will help eliminate any evidence she might have overlooked on Leonard's body.

Analysis

John Arthur's fiance, Edith, arrives for a brief visit and announces that she's getting married. There is nothing particularly important about the visit other than the fact that it highlights how much Frances is stuck in her life while others are moving on with theirs.



John Arthur and Edith were not married before he died, but Frances and her mother have looked upon Edith as the equivalent of a widow. The traditions of the day meant the woman would likely have remained true to her marriage vows for the remainder of her life and it seems Mrs. Wray is upset to know that Edith is moving on.

As Edith leaves, she says that Frances seems to be “settled” in her life and Frances takes that as a negative comment that bothers her greatly. Frances has seen signs in her life several times that indicate she is becoming a typical spinster. She feels that she acts older than she is and that her chance at a different life is passing her by. She is struggling to find her place in the world and clearly isn't happy with her role managing her mother's house.

Lilian's pregnancy throws a serious problem into their plans. Two women choosing to live a lesbian lifestyle would not have been accepted in most circles of society, and the child of those two women would have been ostracized as well. Lilian doesn't mention fearing for the child or any other specific reasons for choosing an abortion, but seems to believe it's the only real choice available to them. The fact that Lilian aborted another child may mean she simply doesn't want to have a child.

Frances' reaction when Lilian announces that she is going to abort the baby is one of dismay. She seems to think that the plan is wrong but doesn't speak out against it. Her emotions do change, however, and she sees her relationship with Lilian as something tarnished. She doesn't feel as good about their plan to live together as she did prior to Lilian's plan for an abortion. Frances might have spoken out against the abortion but she admits to herself that she doesn't want Lilian to have that link with Leonard.

Frances can't believe that Lilian has struck a fatal blow to Leonard. As she begins to process the information and realizes what happened, she's incredulous. This is a major difference between Lilian and Frances and at least some of this might be related to their upbringing. Frances was raised in an upstanding family with a higher social standing than Lilian and it seems that Frances would never have considered the abortion or fighting back against Leonard. Lilian seems to take these steps for granted. She doesn't seem to feel that the abortion is of much importance. It's left to the reader to decide if Lilian's social standing has anything to do with her decisions. The fact that the perspective is limited to Frances' point of view means the reader also doesn't know Lilian's true motivations. As details emerge over the coming chapters, it seems possible that Lilian is looking for a means to kill Leonard in order to collect the insurance and put an end to her unhappy marriage. A conversation shortly after Leonard's death seems to support the idea that Lilian wanted to kill Leonard. She asks Frances if she wishes “we hadn't done it.” The comment almost seems to indicate that Lilian is glad she killed Leonard.

Discussion Question 1

What does Edith mean when she says Frances seems to be “settling in” to her life?



Discussion Question 2

Why does Lilian plan to abort the baby she's carrying and what is Frances' reaction to the plan?

Discussion Question 3

Describe how Leonard dies and the reaction of Frances and Lilian to his death.

Vocabulary

roguish, guile, utterly, monstrous, persuaded, scrutinizing, queasy, fretful, shrill, spittle, throttling, hideously, coherently, trounced, eluded, urgency



Chapters 11 - 12

Summary

In Chapter Eleven, a policeman named Constable Hardy arrives shortly before eight the following morning and tell Lilian that Leonard's body has been found. As Constable Hardy reveals what's known about Leonard – including that he apparently died of an “injury to the head,” Mrs. Wray mentions the previous incident in which Leonard was attacked. Hardy takes notes throughout the interview and then tells Lilian she'll have to identify the body. Lilian is clearly shaken and Frances volunteers to go along.

Police Sergeant Heath picks up the investigation at the hospital, asking many of the same questions Hardy had asked. He then says Lilian will have to go to the Camberwell Police Station for more questions. Frances is on alert and questions the reason for the trip to the police station. Heath says Leonard's death might have been an accident, but that he plans to thoroughly investigate all possibilities. Lilian begs Frances to accompany her.

At the station, they are questioned by Divisional Detective Inspector Kemp. Frances remains during the questioning. Kemp asks about the previous evening and Frances fears that Lilian isn't convincing the police of her story. They quickly reveal the idea that there is a connection between the previous attack and Leonard's death. Lilian goes to the restroom and Kemp questions Frances about the Barbers, their marriage, and the previous attack.

Lilian's family arrives. Lilian is so distraught that a doctor is called to check on her. Frances and the others are ushered from the room and are later told that Lilian has apparently had a miscarriage because of the shock of Leonard's death. Kemp says Lillian can go home but that Heath will be prepared to open an inquest the following Monday, and that Lilian should be prepared to testify then. Lilian refuses her family's insistence that she go to her mother's and Kemp says it would be best if she remained at the Wray's for the coming days, in case the police have more questions.

When she arrives at home, Frances discovers the police have questioned Mrs. Wray about the Barbers' life as well. Frances is relieved to learn the police did not go up to the Barbers' rooms. Frances feels that her mother shows signs of “oddness” that makes her wonder how much Mrs. Wray knows about Leonard's death.

Lilian's family takes over her care and Leonard's parents arrive, having heard the news. Lilian and Frances have a moment to talk and they try to reassure each other. Frances expects a sleepless night but falls asleep immediately.

In Chapter Twelve, Mrs. Wray tells Lilian that she and Frances will do anything they can to help her, but Frances feels the words are empty. The newspapers pick up the story of Leonard's death and call it murder. Frances stops in later to visit with Lilian and the



members of her family who are staying for her. Their visit is interrupted by the arrival of Inspector Kemp and Sergeant Heath. They verify that Leonard was murdered based on the medical examination. They also say Leonard's clothing was "pulled about," indicating a struggle prior to his death. They believe the weapon was a pipe or a mallet and say the "blow was vicious."

The police then make a startling statement. They say Charles Wismuth had claimed to be with Leonard until after ten in the evening. Frances and Lilian know that's not true because they killed Leonard at least an hour earlier than that. The police say they believe Leonard was killed by someone with a grudge against him. Frances is initially upset that police know Leonard was murdered but reassures herself that they will never be able to find this murderer with a grudge against Leonard, meaning she and Frances will have gotten away with killing him. Frances says as much to Lilian the next time they are alone.

The date for the inquest arrives. Frances and Mrs. Wray accompany Lilian and her family. Leonard's father and Charles are also present. Charles testifies about spending the evening with Leonard, and Frances again can't figure out why he's lying. The case is getting more media coverage and there are many reporters and a crowd of people outside the courthouse. Lilian gives in to her family's insistence that she go to her mother's house.

Analysis

As soon as the police begin questioning Lilian and Frances, the two women begin to falter. At one point during the first day, Frances is certain the police can see through Lilian's words and actions to the truth of Leonard's death. At another point, Frances begins to forget what details she is supposed to know. She is quickly confused and feels her own story slipping.

Many people are outraged over Leonard's death. Ironically, Mrs. Viney makes the comment that Leonard never caused hurt to anyone and that she hopes the person who killed him is hanged. She doesn't yet know that Leonard has been having an affair and she never finds out that her daughter, Lilian, is the person who killed Leonard.

When Leonard's parents arrive at the Wray house, Frances greets them at the door and then lets them out when they are ready to leave. The few moments of interaction with the grieving parents take their toll on Mrs. Wray. The reader has to remember that she lost both of her sons in the war and her husband a short time later. While she's demanding and unbending in many ways, it's important to note that she is also a strong character who is moving on with her life despite these terrible losses. This is also one of the reasons Frances feels trapped in her mother's house and doesn't feel free to leave in order to live her own life.

Frances continues to waver about what the police know as Kemp and Heath meet with Lilian in her rooms. Frances can't help but notice the slight stains on the carpet that are



actually Leonard's blood. She knows that the ashtray is in that very room, just waiting to be discovered. In Frances' mind, the clues are all calling out to be discovered and she seems surprised that no one else notices what she feels is a palpable presence in the room.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Frances feel trapped in her life?

Discussion Question 2

What are some of the details Frances and Lilian might have missed in trying to cover up Leonard's murder?

Discussion Question 3

How might public reaction to Leonard's death have differed if he had been from a poor family living in a poor neighborhood?

Vocabulary

laborious, ascertain, discreet, wimple, uncanny, familiarly, talismanic, stupefied, unequivocally, lurid, palpable, mesmerized



Chapters 13 - 14

Summary

In Chapter Thirteen, the police remove all evidence of their investigation and Lilian's sister arrives to pack some of Lilian's clothes. Frances learns that the papers are carrying more news of the murder and she buys every newspaper available. Some have photos of Lilian as she's leaving the courthouse and some have photos of Lilian and Leonard. Several talk about the "pitiful young widow." While Frances is disturbed, she realizes the reports are exactly what she and Lilian need with several suggesting some additional suspects.

Several neighbors arrive, looking for additional information. Mrs. Playfair says she knows the coroner and might be able to get details that have not yet been released to the public. She returns that afternoon and says she has information that came from a police officer. The police have discovered that Charles lied about being with Leonard the evening of the murder. She also reveals that a young couple have admitted to being in the lane that night, and that they heard a commotion, but much earlier than the police had originally estimated Leonard's death.

Mrs. Playfair says the police aren't releasing those details and that they are considering that Charles might be involved. Mrs. Playfair's suggestion is that Charles has spent a lot of time with Lilian and that he might have killed Leonard in order to further a relationship with Lilian. She goes on to say that the popular opinion is that Lilian knew nothing of Charles' plan to kill Leonard.

After Mrs. Playfair's visit, Mrs. Wray discovers that Frances has kept up a friendship with Christina. She's upset and asks if Frances has kept other secrets. She then says Frances was acting strangely on the night of Leonard's murder and makes Frances promise that she knows nothing about Leonard's death. Frances believes Mrs. Wray knows the truth about the situation and believes the police will soon figure it out as well. The following day, Mrs. Wray announces that she's going out for awhile. Frances imagines that she is going to the police with the information.

That afternoon, Inspector Kemp arrives. He relates the information Frances already has from Mrs. Playfair about the two witnesses and says he wants to ask Frances some questions about the Barbers. He reveals that he knows Frances attended a birthday party with Lilian and asks about Lilian's actions during the evening. Kemp says other people have mentioned that Lilian seemed different that evening and had apparently taken a great deal of trouble over her clothes. Frances is evasive and vague with her answers to his questions. Kemp then asks if Frances knew Leonard had a large life insurance policy. Frances denies knowing about it, but points out that Leonard handled life insurance as a career.



Kemp says he's going to talk to Lilian soon and says Frances shouldn't tell Lilian she's going to be questioned. When Kemp leaves, Frances realizes that the investigation is ongoing and that she and Lilian aren't yet clear. She goes directly to Mrs. Viney's to talk to Lilian. There, she finds that she can't have a private word with Lilian and suffers through an awkward visit. Lilian walks her to the door as Frances is leaving and they have a few moments to talk. Lilian swears she'd forgotten about the insurance policy. Lilian says she's considered telling the police the truth. Frances urges her to remain strong and be careful when Kemp arrives to question her.

In Chapter Fourteen, Leonard's funeral is held. Frances discovers that Leonard's family is blaming Lilian for Leonard's death, based on the idea that there might have been a romantic triangle involving Charles. They are accusing Lilian of having been a poor wife and are angry about the insurance policy. There is an argument over which flowers will be placed on Leonard's grave. Lilian's family then refuses to join the Barbers for tea after the service. Charles receives similar treatment and finds another way out of the cemetery.

Frances is struggling to hold herself together. She visits Christina and surprises herself by crying. She tells Christina some of the drama without revealing her role in Leonard's death. She briefly considers telling her about that as well, but discards the idea. Frances falls asleep while Christina works at her typewriter. When Frances wakes, she hears a paper boy announcing that police had made an arrest in Leonard's murder. She fears it might be Charles but finds it's a young man named Spencer Ward. The story says Spencer is engaged to a woman named Billie Grey, and that Leonard had been having an affair with her.

Frances rushes to Lilian's. This time she asks for a moment of privacy with Lilian rather than sitting through the awkward visit with Lilian's family. They talk about the arrest and their knowledge that Spencer is innocent of the murder. They discuss the fact that they should do the right thing and confess, eliminating the case against Spencer, but both fear the consequences. They believe Spencer can't possibly be found guilty but know they shouldn't let the case against him go any further. As they talk, Lilian admits that she knew about the affair from about the time she and Leonard went on holiday together. Lilian gets ready to go to the police but they talk themselves out of taking that step. They agree to wait until the first court appearance and plan to judge the situation again at that point.

Analysis

When Mrs. Playfair is relating the information she has about the case against Charles, Frances is appalled. She fears that the police will turn their investigation toward Charles and that they will accuse him of the murder. This is an example of the recurring theme of guilt that Frances deals with from the moment of Leonard's murder.

The country has just come out of a war that took the lives of many men. Frances is obviously against the war as evidenced by her statement that she had been involved



with protests. She also speaks out against the war on several occasions and this seems to have been a point of contention with her father. Mr. Wray encouraged John Arthur to join the military though Frances describes him as a gentle man who probably wouldn't have made that decision on his own. When Mrs. Playfair is talking about the police interest in Charles as a possible suspect, Frances objects. Mrs. Playfair says that it seems reasonable that Charles was romantically interested in Lilian, and that would serve as a motive for murder. She then says that "men don't kill each other for no reason." This makes Frances angry and she says that the country has been involved in a war where thousands of men did just that.

Later, Mrs. Wray says that she knows Frances is upset about the recent events and she agrees that the war has a lot to do with Leonard's murder, though she has a different explanation. She says that most of the country's best young men were killed in the war, leaving a less respectable generation of men who are capable of murder. She, like many of the genteel class of people, can't imagine the horrors of war and has little sympathy for the men who have returned with physical and mental injuries.

Frances and her mother are at odds after Mrs. Playfair leaves their house in Chapter Thirteen. Frances knows that she's reacting badly and that she is giving her mother cause to doubt her sincerity on several points. Frances believes that her mother might suspect she had something to do with Leonard's death, and she has already worried that her mother suspects there is a romantic relationship between Lilian and Frances. With all that on her mind, Frances receives a telegraph from Christina. The telegraph is an extravagance and Mrs. Wray questions Frances about it. Frances is just too tired of trying to keep things secret so she admits that it's from Christina and that she's kept up her friendship with Christina. Mrs. Wray is upset, saying Frances had promised to break off her relationship with Christina. Frances counters, saying that's what Mrs. Wray wanted but that she never agreed to stop being friends. Then Mrs. Wray puts the final touch on the conversation, asking if Frances has lied to her about other things. The mother-daughter relationship is obviously strained and it seems inevitable that they will eventually reach a breaking point.

Mrs. Wray makes a statement in Chapter Thirteen that is in keeping with the language of the era. She says that Frances has also had "these queer enthusiasms." In this case, the word "queer" simply refers to do something out of the ordinary, but the modern-day reader might take that to refer to Frances' sexual tendencies. An interesting aspect of this conversation is that Mrs. Wray fears that Lilian might have dragged Frances into some sinister situation. She doesn't seem to imagine that Frances might have been involved of her own free will or that she might even have instigated the murder. Her reaction is typical of a mother when she makes a threat against Lilian, if Lilian has involved Frances in some serious situation.

Discussion Question 1

Describe Frances' attitude about the war. What does Mrs. Wray say about the war's role in Leonard's death?



Discussion Question 2

What do you believe Mrs. Wray thinks about Frances and Frances' recent actions? Is she justified in her thoughts?

Discussion Question 3

Describe Frances' reaction over the arrest of Billie Grey.

Vocabulary

approximations, pathetic, grotesque, dithering, trifling, incriminating, temperament, implications, conspicuous, festooned, cortege, pacifist, loathsome, baffled



Chapters 15 - 16

Summary

In Chapter Fifteen, Frances leaves Lilian without the comfort of a hug or a kiss, a first since their romance began. Mrs. Wray has a new take on the situation after the newspaper reports of Leonard's affair. Details about Spencer Ward and Billie Grey begin to appear. Spencer lives with his mother and works at a garage. Billie Grey is an assistant at a beauty shop. When Charles' fiance learns that he had also been having an affair, she ends their relationship.

Frances is among those who attend the court hearing against Spencer. She watches as Leonard's father goes to Lilian, apparently apologizing for his earlier actions. She sees Spencer's mother arrive and take a seat. Spencer is "smirking" and Frances finds she doesn't like him.

During the court proceedings, Inspector Kemp relates the information he gathered during his investigation, including that Charles had admitted that Leonard was having an affair with Billie Grey while Charles was having an affair with Billie's sister. Charles' statement includes that Leonard had identified Spencer as his attacker in July, and that Charles believed Spencer killed Leonard. Kemp then relates information from Billie, including that Spencer had claimed Leonard was not surprised to learn of Leonard's death and said Leonard got what he deserved. Spencer claims he didn't kill Leonard, but says he would like to "shake hands with the bloke that did." The magistrate declares that the case will be tried and Frances leaves the courthouse, disappointed that there isn't a more definitive resolution.

Frances and Lilian decide that Spencer is tough and can withstand another week in jail. They decide they will again wait before revealing the truth to the police.

In Chapter Sixteen, the case against Spencer continues and the public opinion is that Spencer is guilty. Frances continues to struggle, imagining all sorts of scenarios. She knows Lilian had cheated on Leonard with Frances, and wonders if Lilian might have cheated with another man as well. She considers that the baby might not have been Leonard's at all. She also fears that Lilian might go to the police with a story against Frances. Then she hates being apart from Lilian and regrets her fears.

Almost a month after Leonard's death, Lilian returns to pick up some things. She talks about Leonard's affair but Frances interrupts, saying she doesn't really want to hear Lilian's complaints about her husband. They are alone in the house and Frances feels their time is wasted. They are at odds and their argument continues. Lilian admits that Leonard was cheating on her while Lilian was cheating with Frances, but says Leonard's actions still bother her. Lilian pleads with Frances to say that everything will be "alright" between them once the trial is over. They kiss though Frances expects the kiss to be awkward. They are soon caught up in the passion but as soon as it's over,



Frances makes a comment about Lilian's rent, calling it “payment” for something other than rent. They continue to argue and Lilian leaves in a rush.

The court system continues with the case against Spencer and it's decided he will be tried for murder.

Analysis

The guilt eats away at Frances and she deals with that for a great deal of the time after Leonard's death, especially when the trial against Spencer Ward begins. Frances hates that her lies are part of the case against Spencer and she struggles to find the courage to tell the truth, but can never quite bring herself to that point. An interesting aspect of Frances' life is her waffling emotions toward Lilian. She begins to seriously doubt that Lilian had acted in the heat of the moment and that Leonard's death was the accident Lilian claimed. She looks at the fact that Lilian knew about Leonard's affair even before she decided to abort her baby as another problem with Lilian's story. The insurance is yet another indication that Lilian might have wanted Leonard dead. Despite all these doubts, Frances will later turn to Lilian with the hope that they can build a life together.

Appearances are an important part of the story and Frances spends a great deal of energy trying to keep up the lie that she and her mother are financially sound. She seems to hate putting on the act though she can't imagine doing anything different. However, Frances is also guilty of judging others in the same way she imagines she is being judged by her neighbors. When she sees Spencer, she finds she dislikes him on sight, mainly because of his demeanor and appearance. He has bad teeth and she admits that she can't find anything about him that she likes.

Frances can't believe that anyone would believe that Spencer is actually guilty of murdering Leonard. When the first court appearance is over, she is surprised to find that people seem to believe all the evidence against Spencer but don't believe his declaration of innocence. Mrs. Viney is the only one to express doubt. She says she doesn't really believe Spencer is “all there,” indicating she believes him to be mentally incapacitated.

Frances returns to her mantra about the war and its effects on the men of the time. She says that Spencer is “a thug,” but adheres to the idea that the war and the situation molded him. When she expresses this idea to her mother, Mrs. Wray asks for an alternate suspect. That's the one question Frances can't answer without implicating herself in Leonard's murder.

Discussion Question 1

Describe Spencer. What is Frances' impression of him? How will the impression of others impact Spencer's trial?



Discussion Question 2

Describe Frances' state of mind as she faces the trial. How does the strain impact her relationship with Lilian?

Discussion Question 3

What is Lilian's reaction to Leonard's affair? Is she justified?

Vocabulary

debilitating, ingenuity, jostling, blustering, conspicuous, smirk, malevolent, tawdry, perfunctory, deplorable, malice, pilfering



Chapter 17

Summary

In Chapter Seventeen, Lilian and Frances are distant with each other but agree they will go to the police immediately if Spencer is found guilty. The trial commences and Frances is dismayed to discover that it seems everything is going against Spencer. He is now subdued and obviously frightened. Charles is called as a witness and Frances is surprised when he is bruised and limping. She learns he was beaten by the husband of the woman with whom he'd had an affair.

Lilian testifies, including the day Leonard had arrived at home with a bloody nose. Billie Grey is called to the stand and Frances is struck by the fact that she seems very much like Lilian. She says Leonard had never lied to her about being married but that the marriage was in name only. She also says she and Spencer were never engaged, and that was all in Spencer's head. She swears she and Leonard were in love.

Spencer takes the stand and denies having killed Leonard. His mother swears that Spencer had been home at the time of Leonard's death. The next witness is a neighbor who says he'd been home the evening of Leonard's death, though his employer believed he was out of town. He says Spencer was home and didn't leave the entire evening.

That evening at home, Frances and her mother talk about the house. They know they'll have to have new renters if they are to keep the house and Mrs. Wray seems to consider that it might be time to give up on the house. She says it's "only bricks and mortar" and that the home's "heart stopped ... years ago." Frances says everything is "a muddle" and Mrs. Wray says Frances has always made things more difficult than they need to be.

The final statements are made in court the following day. Everyone then waits for the verdict. The judge has a cap in his hand that he will don if he is to pass sentence on Spencer. However, the jury announces that they have found Spencer not guilty of Leonard's murder.

Frances looks for Lilian but they are separated by people and Frances sees Lilian turn, apparently turning away from Frances. Frances accepts that their affair ends with the trial and leaves the courthouse. She reaches Blackfriar's Bridge and briefly considers throwing herself over the edge. She dismisses the idea and sits on a stone seat on the bridge. Lilian soon joins her. They wonder if they can get past the horror of the past events and make a life for themselves now. Frances considers those who have been hurt, including Leonard, Lilian's aborted baby, Charles, Spencer, Leonard's family, and Billie. She wonders if finding happiness would be an insult to those hurts. They sit, side-by-side, and Frances knows they will have to make decisions soon. However, for the moment, she is happy just to be.



Analysis

The relationship between Frances and her mother continues to evolve and change as the trial against Spencer kicks off. Frances plans to go to the police if Spencer is found guilty and knows that means she will go to jail for her role in the crime. She has a great many concerns and fears related to that possibility. One of those is Mrs. Wray. Frances wonders if her mother will be able to cope with the situation if Frances is put in jail. Frances admits that she had been prepared to leave her mother's house in order to live with Lilian, but says that was a completely different situation. She seems to be wondering about the effect of being jailed rather than just of being absent from the home. Mrs. Wray's social standing is very important to her and Frances likely realizes the distress her arrest would cause her mother.

Billie Grey takes the stand during the case against Spencer. She doesn't really look like Lilian but Frances notes that she resembles Lilian in how she acts. This may indicate that Leonard had been attracted to Billie because she reminded him of Lilian, perhaps when he and Lilian had been young and in love.

On the final day of court, Lilian approaches Billie. Lilian has expressed hatred for Billie since learning about the affair but she seems to have a change of heart at this point. Frances can't hear the conversation but Lilian tells her about it later. She apparently says that Billie is more entitled to be Leonard's widow than Lilian. Lilian seems to be admitting that her marriage to Leonard was a sham and acknowledging that the love between Leonard and Billie was more real than the marriage between Lilian and Leonard.

Just before the verdict, Lilian and Frances have a moment alone. Frances tries to comfort Lilian but Lilian refuses it. She seems certain that Spencer is about to be found guilty and that they will then have to turn themselves in. Their attitudes toward each other are so tangled that it seems each time one of them is prepared to give up everything for their love, the other is waffling. It seems they are doomed but it is possible that they overcome their shaky beginning and actually make a life for themselves after the trial is over.

Discussion Question 1

How does Lilian's attitude toward Billie change over the course of the final chapter? Why do you believe it changes?

Discussion Question 2

With all the information now revealed, do you believe Leonard's murder was truly an accident with no forethought? Why or why not?



Discussion Question 3

What do you believe is the long-term outlook for Lilian and Frances? Why?

Vocabulary

skulking, advocate, blunder, abashed, queue, nave, proclamation, stolid, rebuked, chiding, hapless, truculent, degenerate, incriminating



Characters

Frances Wray

Frances is a young woman who lives in a London neighborhood in 1922. She is a lesbian who has never had any real interest in men. At one point, her parents learn that she is involved with a young woman named Christina. They try to keep her from seeing Christina again, believing that will end Frances' lifestyle but Frances merely settles into a lonely life as a single woman until years later when she meets and falls in love with Lilian Barber.

Frances is a quiet woman who is very much aware of the way people talk. She doesn't want to be the subject of gossiping neighbors, but she is unwilling to live a different life merely to keep up appearances. For example, she does the difficult housework herself because they are unable to afford servants. She gives up the opportunity to live with Christina because her parents are hurt by their relationship. Instead of living the life Christina is living, Frances takes on the duties of managing her mother's affairs, the family finances, and the nearly unending household chores.

When Lilian kills Leonard, Frances believes they should immediately call for help. Her first instinct is to tell the truth about their situation and the event, even though she knows it will probably put her relationship with Lilian under scrutiny. Frances gives in to Lilian's pleas to hide Leonard's body and the crime, but it's in her nature to worry constantly about the situation for the weeks following the murder. Another important part of her nature is seen in her plan to step forward if the young man on trial is found guilty of murdering Leonard. While she doesn't want to give up her own freedom, she isn't willing to let someone else pay for her crime.

Lilian Barber

Lilian is the wife of Leonard Barber and the lover of Frances Wray. She lives with her in-laws during the early days of her marriage and rents the rooms offered by Frances as a means of escaping that situation. She is somewhat selfish in her dealings with Frances, probably at least partly because her marriage is difficult. She learns that Leonard is having an affair and that may be part of the reason she turns to Frances. She aborts a baby after learning of the affair and tells Frances it's because she wants her life with Frances to be happy, though it seems just as likely that she is hurt over Leonard's betrayal.

Lilian mentions that she wishes Leonard would die but never mentions to Frances that Leonard has a sizable life insurance policy. It seems possible that the life insurance is on her mind after she kills Leonard and may have weighed into her reason for begging Frances to help hide the body.



Lilian's character is such that she seems rather easily led, especially into relationships that involve someone caring for her. She becomes friends with Frances and is obviously happy when Frances takes a protective role in their relationship. Lilian is fearful of being blamed for her role in Leonard's murder and alternately wants to go to the police and pleads with Frances to hide her involvement.

Leonard Barber

Husband of Lilian Barber, Leonard Barber is having an affair but ironically becomes furious with Lilian when he learns she is in a lesbian affair of her own. Leonard is murdered by Lilian after attacking Frances. Leonard is a happy person who is pleased with his life though he is obviously unhappy with his marriage. He flirts with Frances to some degree though Frances doesn't encourage him. He is involved in an affair and Lilian apparently knows about it. The details become public knowledge after Leonard's death.

Mrs. Wray

Mrs. Wray is Frances' mother. She is a very proper woman accustomed to living a life that no one else would criticize. It embarrasses her that Frances does so much of the housework because people of their social circles all have servants to do that work. The lack of social acceptance is another reason she hates the idea of Frances being a lesbian.

Christina

The former lover of Frances Wray, Christina has moved on from her failed relationship with Frances and lives with another young lesbian woman named Stevie. Christina is still devoted to Frances as a friend but says she would not give up her life with Stevie to pick up her relationship with Frances.

Charles Wismuth

The best friend of Leonard Barber, Charles is engaged to be married but is also involved in an affair outside that relationship. Charles lies about where he and Leonard were the night of Leonard's murder, but later comes clean about the facts and the affairs.

Mrs. Viney

Mother of Lilian, Mrs. Viney is the matriarch of the family and takes over whenever she's present. She is somewhat disabled physically but doesn't allow that to change the fact



that she is in control. She talks about Lilian's "artistic" side but Lilian says her mother's expectations are such that any show of creativity is treated as artistic.

Billie

Billie is the girl with whom Leonard has an affair. She says she knew from the beginning that Leonard was married and didn't care. She also says that she hadn't deliberately encouraged another young man to believe their relationship is more serious than it actually is.

Spencer Ward

Spencer is the young mechanic who is tried for Leonard's murder. Spencer is something of a thug and doesn't seem very bright. When he is first taken into court, he puts on the act of a tough guy who is guilty but later comes to realize the seriousness of the situation and changes his tone to profess his innocence. Spencer is probably in love with Billie but doesn't realize that Billie doesn't return his affection.

Inspector Kemp

A police officer who investigates Leonard's murder, Kemp is serious about his duty. When Frances asks why he is so focused on what might be an accident, he responds that it's his job to do everything he can to find justice for the victim. He seems to truly believe he has arrested the killer when he brings Spencer Ward to trial.



Symbols and Symbolism

The Ashtray

A large ashtray with a base that stands alone on the floor. The ashtray is heavy and not particularly pretty. This is the “weapon” Lilian uses to kill Leonard.

The Clerk Class

The Clerk Class is a class of people that are not quite up to the social standing of Frances and her mother but are looked upon as much better than the poor of the region. They are generally working men who do clerking-type jobs, such as insurance policies.

Snakes and Ladders

This is the game played by Frances, Lilian, and Leonard on the night when they all get drunk. The game has been modified by Leonard and the action gets out of hand, so that they are all embarrassed and upset about their actions the following day.

The Gypsy Wagon

Frances gives this to Lilian as a gift. Lilian and Frances have spent some time talking about their desire to get away and live a life of their own choosing, and living as gypsies was one of those dreams.

The Housework

The fact that Frances does the housework at the home she shares with her mother is a great cause of contention between Frances and her mother. Mrs. Wray is accustomed to having servants who do all the household chores. She doesn't demean herself by doing any of the work personally, but seeing Frances doing the housework causes her a great deal of distress. The housework done by Frances represents the loss of their financial stability and of the lifestyle they lived while Frances' father was alive.

The Blackfriar Bridge

This is where Frances stops to think after the trial. It's literally a large bridge and Frances briefly considers jumping to her death because of her emotional state at the moment. She doesn't jump and Lilian joins her there. It's on this bridge that Frances wonders if she and Lilian might find happiness together after all.



The Insurance Policy

A life insurance taken out by Leonard, this is the money that is paid to Lilian after Leonard's murder. The policy is important because Lilian believes it will make the police look more closely at her as a suspect. When Frances learns that Lilian knew about the policy, she becomes skeptical of Lilian's motives.

The Brixton Roller Skating Rink

This is a roller skating rink where Frances and Lilian go for an outing one afternoon. Frances had talked about her love of skating and Lilian chooses this as a surprise for Frances. They are free to act silly together and to hold hands while they skate, with no one thinking anything is out of the ordinary between them.

The Stake

This is a metaphoric wooden object stuck in Frances' heart; it represents the fact that she has cut herself off from love and happiness after ending her sexual relationship with Christina. When she tells Lilian about the stake through her heart, Lilian pretends to remove it and the action is the first real indication that Lilian is interested in Frances.

The Judge's Cap

The headpiece the judge would have placed on his head if the verdict against Spencer Ward had been "guilty." That cap represents Frances' future, to some degree. She knows that if Spencer is found guilty, she will feel she has to come forward with the truth to save him from being sentenced.



Settings

Champion Hill

The neighborhood where Frances and her mother live in a large house, Champion Hill is a nicer part of town where there are many nice homes. When Leonard's murder is discovered, the papers make a great deal of the fact that the attack happened in this nice neighborhood. There are upstanding people living here and the fact that Frances and her mother are in financial difficulty is made even more difficult because of the general well-being of the neighbors.

The Wray House

The Wray House is the house occupied by Frances and her mother, and then by the Barbers. The house is large and was once a grand home, in keeping with the neighborhood. When Frances comes to the conclusion that she'll have to rent out part of the house in order to keep the bills paid, they remodel, installing a meter for the gas in the Barber's apartment and turning several upstairs rooms into a suite for the Barber's use.

Ruskin Park

A park near Frances' home, this is where Frances and Lilian go for a picnic before they proclaim their love for each other. While in this park, a man pays a great deal of attention to Lilian and Frances orders him to leave them alone. Lilian thinks it's sweet initially but later realizes that Frances had been jealous of the man.

The Viney Apartment

The apartment occupied by Lilian's mother and stepfather, this is a bustling place above a shop. It is very different from the Wray house. Lilian stays here after Leonard's murder, allowing her mother and sisters to take care of her. Frances visits here several times but seldom feels welcome.

The Courthouse

This is where the inquisition into Leonard's death takes place along with the trial of Spencer Ward. There are details about the building offered up during the story, including the differences in appearance between the area of the inquisition, which was somewhat squalid, and the rooms where the trial takes place. The majority of the final days of the story take place in the Courthouse.



Themes and Motifs

Love

There are a number of people in love during this story and prior to the beginning of the story, which leads to problems for a number of the characters. First, Frances and Lilian are in love, which is a problem for several reasons. Their love is taboo, especially during this time frame. They have to keep their love hidden because it's an affair involving two women, but also because Lilian is married. Frances and Christina were also in love prior to the opening of the story, and were forced to keep their love hidden as well. Once their love is discovered, Frances is unwilling to face the disapproval of her parents in order to continue her relationship with Christina.

Lilian and Leonard were in love prior to the opening of this story. Lilian talks about their love only in abstract terms, but it seems that love was never as committed and deep as the love between Lilian and Frances. Still, Lilian is hurt when she learns that Leonard is having an affair and Leonard is furious when he learns that Frances and Lilian are involved in an affair. Billie, the woman with whom Leonard is having an affair, is apparently in love with Leonard. She talks about her love for him when she's called in to court. From the amount of time Leonard spends with her, it seems possible that the emotion was reciprocal. Lilian realizes after Billie's testimony in court that the love between Billie and Leonard is stronger than the love between Lilian and Leonard.

The love among families is another aspect of this theme. Frances and her mother love each other though their relationship is stilted and on tenuous terms most of the time. There is a similar bond between Lilian and her family, especially seen in her relationship with her mother and her sisters.

Societal Dictates

The rules of society are different for Frances and her peers are different during this time period than those of modern-day society. Frances and her mother are part of a neighborhood that depends on servants for everyday things. Mrs. Wray is mortified that Frances does the heavy housework but is also upset when Frances allows these chores to go undone. In an effort to keep her mother happy, Frances tends to do the heavier and more demeaning chores when her mother isn't present. For these same reasons, Frances and her mother are embarrassed that they have taken in boarders to help meet their expenses.

The young women who are lesbians in this story are probably not well received in society of this time. The fact that Chrissy's girlfriend Stevie is a teacher seems somewhat out of sync with the time unless Chrissy and Stevie were keeping their sexual relationship very secret. Stevie would not likely have been welcome to teach in most



schools if her sexual orientation were known. For the same reason, Frances keeps her friendship with Chrissy secret from her mother.

Another important example of this theme is seen after the young servant comes forward, admitting that she'd been in the lane with a young man at the time Leonard's body was being dumped. When Frances hears this detail from a neighbor, she gasps, fearful that the servant might be able to identify Frances as having been in the lane as well. Mrs. Payfair misunderstands Frances' reaction, thinking that she is horrified to learn that the young woman had been outside with the man. The servant admits that she'd been afraid of coming forward because she feared repercussions from her employer.

Guilt versus Freedom

Frances almost immediately feels guilt over her role in Leonard's death but she is soon caught up in the fear of being punished for the crime. She wants to do the right thing by going for help, but allows Lilian to talk her into taking no action. Over the coming days, Frances interacts often with the police and watch as they question other people as part of their investigation. The guilt continues to build and she continues to believe that her role in Leonard's murder will be discovered. She imagines all sorts of eventualities over the course of the investigation and wavers occasionally on whether she should tell the police the truth. Lilian also considers going to the police on several occasions, but she and Frances talk each other out of it each time.

The guilt builds as the police put their focus on Leonard's best friend, Charles. Frances plans to go to the police if Charles is arrested, believing she won't be able to live with the guilt. When Spencer is arrested instead, Frances feels guilty that someone else is serving time in jail for a crime she and Lilian committed. She plans to go forward immediately after the initial court appearance, unless he is released. When he is held over for trial, Frances and Lilian discuss their guilt but each continues to weigh that against their fear of being jailed and sentenced to death. When Spencer appears so cocky in the initial court appearance, Frances convinces herself that he can withstand a short time in jail better than she. Though she struggles with the guilt, she continues to fear the loss of freedom enough to push the guilty feelings aside.

As the trial comes to a close and it becomes evident that Spencer will be found guilty, Frances really focuses on what she believes will be her final days of freedom. Once the trial is over, Frances feels a huge sense of relief but wonders if she will ever truly be free of the guilt she feels over Leonard's death.

Death and Loss

The story is set soon after World War I, meaning most of the families are dealing with the deaths of loved ones. Frances grew up with two brothers, Noel and John Arthur, and both died in the war. Their deaths haunt Frances, especially the fact that Noel was lost at sea. Frances wishes to know the details of his death because she hopes that he died



instantly without experiencing prolonged pain or fear. The memory of Noel's fear when he was hit by a wave as a child is also painful to Frances because she remembers making fun of his fear. That memory becomes more painful to her considering that he died at sea.

When Frances and Mrs. Wray meet Mrs. Viney for the first time, the thought turns almost immediately to the young men who died. Mrs. Viney says she lost two nephews and a son-in-law to the war, and describes another who returned with an eye injury.

There are hundreds of soldiers who wander the streets, most without jobs, homes, or families. One accosts Frances in London one day, saying the women have achieved a great deal while the men were off fighting. When Leonard is killed, several people jump to the conclusion that one of these homeless soldiers was likely the attacker.

Another aspect of this theme is seen in the death of Frances' father. He leaves the family with serious financial problems which means they struggle just to meet the household bills. The death of Mr. Wray and the loss of money mean Frances has also lost the opportunity to live a life of her own. She gives up her life with Christina in order to stay with her mother. She hates that she is only in her mid-20s but is living the life of a spinster.

Duty

Frances grows and matures over the course of the story. Several years have passed since Frances' relationship with Christina, meaning she has aged that much physically. When the romantic relationship between Frances and Christina is discovered, Frances is willing to give up that relationship in order to do what her parents want. She says later that she regrets that decision, but Frances continues to do what's expected of her with regard to caring for her mother.

When Frances and Lilian begin to become romantically involved, they begin to consider the possibility of beginning a life together, apart from their families. Frances struggles with the idea of leaving Mrs. Wray on her own but seems to believe she can make that decision. However, when Frances begins to face the possibility that she might be jailed, she worries greatly about her mother. She knows that her mother will have to figure out how to manage her affairs but will also be forced to live with the censure of her friends.

Another example of this theme is seen in Christina's attitude toward Frances and Stevie. While Christina is undoubtedly still in love with Frances, her allegiance is now to Stevie. She tells Frances that she wouldn't give up that relationship in favor of Frances, even if Frances were willing to leave her mother's home.

Leonard apparently feels a sense of duty toward his marriage, though he is having an affair. Billie testifies that she and Leonard were deeply in love, and that Leonard would have married her if he hadn't been married.



Styles

Point of View

The story is written in third person from the limited perspective of Frances Wray. The limited perspective makes it impossible for the reader to know the true thoughts and feelings of other characters. An important example of this limitation is seen in Lilian's motivation for killing Leonard. It could be that she merely acted in the heat of the moment and that she didn't mean to kill him but it could also be that she wanted Leonard dead and saw the opportunity to get away with killing him. Lilian speaks of her wish that Leonard were dead prior to the murder but never speaks of a plan to carry it out. Lilian also claims to have forgotten about the large life insurance policy she inherits upon Leonard's death, but Frances doesn't completely believe her. The fact that the reader never sees into Lilian's true thoughts make it impossible to judge which is correct.

Frances is a young woman who lives almost completely under her mother's control. She doesn't openly object to the situation but she isn't happy in the situation either. Frances imagines that her mother suspects Frances is involved in Leonard's death. She believes this based on vague actions of her mother that, to Frances, seem suspicious. The reader never has a look into Mrs. Wray's thoughts, meaning she may not have been suspicious of Frances at all.

Frances is often caught up in her own worries and emotions, and these project themselves into Frances' thoughts and actions. This means that every thought Frances expresses may be a manifestation of her own emotions rather than the true thoughts of the other characters. For example, she imagines that the police are either more or less sincere as a means of seeking information, but the reader never knows what the police are actually thinking.

The limitation is lessened to some degree by the dialogue. There is a great deal of dialogue and these conversations give a better look at some of the characters, sometimes clearing up what Frances believes about specific people and situations.

Language and Meaning

The language is fairly straightforward but is colored by the culture, characters, time period, and the British English. There are a few words and phrases that some readers might find unfamiliar. In many cases, these are presented as dialogue and are an obvious effort to give the reader a better feel for the time and culture. For example, the word curb is presented in the story as "kerb."

There are several sexual situations and events that may be disturbing to some readers. There are explicit sexual scenes between Frances and Lilian that are described in great detail. They are often nude or nearly so, and there is also description of body parts and



reactions. Another event of this caliber is the abortion. There is discussion of the abortion in fairly graphic terms and Lilian refers to the child that she is trying to kill but that is clinging to life. Finally, there is a graphic description of Leonard's body after Lilian hits him with an ashtray. The women can see his brain and the Frances then has to clean up a great deal of blood, both from the abortion and the murder.

The book is lengthy and the action sometimes moves very slowly. This may be difficult for some readers and the temptation exists to skip over the scenes that seem too slow and redundant. Some sections could literally be skipped without missing anything of importance to the main story line. For example, Frances and Mrs. Wray are invited to Mrs. Playfair's for dinner. They arrive to discover there is another dinner guest. The young man is obviously meant as a "date" for Frances. The entire evening takes up a large section of a chapter and provides the reader only some indirect information such as Mrs. Wray's continuing hope that Frances will find a young man and marry.

Structure

The story is divided into seventeen chapters. The story is presented in chronological order. As the story opens, Lilian and Leonard Barber are moving into the home of Frances Wray and her mother. As the story comes to a close, the trial is complete and Frances realizes that she and Lilian have likely gotten away with killing Leonard. She wonders if they might find happiness together at this point, despite all they've endured. There is no real conclusion to the story and it's not revealed whether they actually do begin a life together.

The chapters are titled by number only, which gives the reader no clue about the contents of that chapter. Each chapter is lengthy with a great deal of action occurring. There are a series of events for each chapter and some authors might have chosen to divide these acts into shorter chapters. The story is appropriately divided between dialogue and narrative. The dialogue is believable and fits with the narrative. There are some sections that include character statements that are not in quote marks. For example, Frances and Leonard meet by accident outside the house in Chapter Two. The scene is seen from Frances' perspective. She is briefly frightened at the encounter until she realizes who is there. The author then paraphrases what Leonard says to Frances but these seem more like quotes, including that "He hoped she didn't mind that he'd wandered down to the garden."

The characters, events, and places are fairly well identified as they occur, though additional details about people, places, and events are fleshed out as the story goes on. For example, the reader doesn't learn Frances' last name in the opening pages. Leonard's full name is not revealed until after his murder. This forces the reader to put together the pieces as they read and means some readers may miss out on specific details.



Quotes

It wasn't like beginning a journey, after all it was like ending one and not wanting to get out of the train.

-- Narrator (Chapter 1 paragraph 5)

Importance: Frances is waiting for Lilian and Leonard to arrive. She has decided to rent out the rooms in order to help meet the household bills. She knows there will be major changes ahead and dreads them, though she sees them as necessary.

She remembered him once on the beach at Eastbourne, crying because a wave had gone over his head; she had jered at his faint heart. She would give anything to be able to take that jeer back.

-- Frances (Chapter 3 paragraph 13)

Importance: Frances is remembering a time at the ocean with her brother, Noel. She made fun of him for being afraid in the water but looks back on that moment with shame that is heightened because Noel died at sea.

You don't think about all these colours when everything's going all right; you'd go mad if you did. You just think about the colour on the top.

-- Lilian (Chapter 4 paragraph 38)

Importance: Lilian and Frances are at the bandstand in the park when Lilian makes this comment. She's talking about the layers of colors on the bandstand, visible because of the scratches in the layers of paint. Lilian is comparing this to life, saying the colors underneath are like unkind words, anger, and arguments. They are covered by kindnesses but they remain there.

And, yes, I think bed is the best place for you. Goodness knows, we don't want anyone to see you while you're in this sort of condition.

-- Mrs. Wray (Chapter 6 paragraph 28)

Importance: Mrs. Wray is upset that Frances spent time with the Barbers the previous evening. This is one of many examples of Mrs. Wray's efforts to maintain a lifestyle she sees as upright and reputable.

She guesses more than you'd imagine. Then again, she's good at not seeing the things that don't suit her.

-- Frances (Chapter 8 paragraph 25)

Importance: Frances is talking about her mother and this is one of several insights into the relationship between Frances and Mrs. Wray. Frances is worried that her mother is guessing the truth of her relationship with Lilian but also knows that her mother is able to overlook anything she sees as unpleasant.



Love's packed its upper case and gone to Hastings with its husband. Love's eating ices on the front, having a donkey-ride - I don't know. I don't care.

-- Frances (Chapter 9 paragraph 6)

Importance: Frances is talking to Christina and it's obvious that Frances is upset at the moment. When Christina asks what happened to Frances' recent love affair with Lilian, Frances responds with this quote. She's talking about Lilian's holiday trip with Leonard. The fact that she says she doesn't care is a statement of her fear that the relationship is at an end.

Either way - God, how monstrous it was! How different from the pure, true thing she'd had in mind!

-- Narrator (Chapter 10 paragraph 49)

Importance: Frances and Lilian are discussing Lilian's plan for an abortion. Frances doesn't want Lilian to have the baby for fear that it might somehow bring Lilian and Leonard back together, but she hates the idea of purposely aborting the baby. Frances doesn't insist against it and, in the end, helps Lilian when she goes through the ordeal.

Again, however, Frances had the impression that his friendliness was all surface - or, worse than that, was somehow strategic, designed to put Lilian at her ease, the better, later, to trip her up.

-- Narrator (Chapter 12 paragraph 34)

Importance: Frances is talking about the police officer and this is an example of the guilt Frances deals with from the moment of Leonard's death. Frances fears that Lilian will make a mistake and give them away.

That she wasn't a proper wife. That she and Charlie have been too friendly. And things about her money.

-- Lilian's Relative, Min (Chapter 14 paragraph 13)

Importance: This is the first time Frances learns that there is tension between Lilian and Leonard's family. Frances realizes that if Leonard's family is saying these things, other people might be saying them as well and that the police might begin to look at Lilian as a possible suspect.

He and Lilian murmured and nodded; finally she put out her gloved hand to him. He took it and held it, and they murmured again.

-- Narrator (Chapter 15 paragraph 25)

Importance: Frances is watching as Leonard's father goes to Lilian at the courthouse. He and his family have obviously learned that Leonard was having an affair. The conversation is never revealed but it seems likely that the family is feeling badly at their treatment of Lilian.



She gazed across at Lilian's profile, and for a moment, just a moment, she felt a burst of resentment towards her so violent that it could only be called hatred.

-- Frances (Chapter 15 paragraph 45)

Importance: This occurs during the trial against Spencer Ward. Frances is obviously angry at Lilian and hates the situation they've been drawn into because of Lilian's actions.

The moment the verdict's returned, if it's the wrong one, I can go to this Mr. Tresillian and -

-- Frances (Chapter 17 paragraph 4)

Importance: Frances is talking to Lilian and indicates that she will be telling the truth about Leonard's death if Spencer is found guilty. Mr. Tresillian is Spencer's attorney. Lilian interrupts and says she is going to be in court everyday and that she won't allow Frances to do take on that task for Lilian.