

The Royal We Study Guide

The Royal We by Heather Cocks and Jessica Morgan

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Plot Summary

The following version of this book was used to create this study guide: Cocks, Heather and Morgan, Jessica. *The Royal We*. Grand Central Publishing, 2015. First Edition.

The Royal We is a novel told in the first-person by Rebecca “Bex” Porter, a young American woman living in England. A prologue at the start of the novel reveals she is to be wed to Prince Nicholas of Wales, who is second in line for the throne of England. The rest of the novel takes place in a flashback leading up to the wedding. At the start of the flashback (Part One) Bex is a Cornell art student who is doing a semester abroad at Oxford. It is the first time she has been away from her twin sister, Lacey, but she soon bonds with her new roommates at Oxford, including Nick. Though Bex is having a casual fling with Clive, another roommate, she and Nick begin to bond by watching TV together late at night, when neither can sleep. Eventually, Bex confesses her love for Nick and they begin a relationship.

In Part Two, Bex and Nick are still happily in a relationship, but after a photo of them kissing is leaked to the press, they become the subjects of intense scrutiny from both Nick’s family and the press itself. Bex thinks this will be an opportunity for them to finally reveal their relationship to the world, but Nick is intent on keeping things quiet. He confesses to Bex that the reason he has so much fear of the press is because of what it did to his mother, Emma: after marrying Richard and giving birth to her two sons, the paparazzi hounded Emma so intensely that she became paranoid, and eventually reclusive. Now, she lives alone, hardly speaks, and seems entirely disconnected from reality. Despite this confession, Bex and Nick are still hounded by the press, causing Nick to try to hide their relationship even more. At Nick’s birthday party, Nick spends the entire evening with an ex-girlfriend, Gemma Sands. Soon after, Bex is uninvited to attend a wedding with Nick. Bex feels them growing distant and fighting more often. Eventually, things crumble on Bex’s birthday. She and Nick fight before reluctantly agreeing to break up, saying that with things as they presently are, they cannot sustain a union.

In Part Three, Bex agonizes over her breakup. She briefly returns to the United States, where she proceeds to mope around her parents’ house. They encourage her to return to England, where her life is. Bex does so, and begins an intense streak of partying, that ends with her and Clive sleeping together on New Year’s Eve. Bex returns to England to comfort an injured Nick, who was accidentally punched after a reporter shouted inappropriate things about Bex at him. Bex carries on with her life, dedicating herself to her job at the Soane Museum and developing the Paint Britain program. She and Freddie, Nick’s brother, start spending time together and bond. During a party, they accidentally kiss. After their kiss, Lacey finds Bex and tells her that Earl, their father, has died. The sisters return to America and grieve. When Bex returns to England, Nick is at her apartment waiting for her, and they immediately reconcile. Nick takes Bex to meet Emma, and after the meeting he proposes to her.



In Part Four, Bex and Nick are gearing up to make their engagement announcement official. The preparations have created strained relationships among Bex's friends. When Nick goes back to the Navy, Bex is alone and feels highly isolated. She and Lacey fight over Lacey's flashy, attention-grabbing behavior. Meanwhile, Bex is being groomed by Marj to fit the role of a Duchess. The Queen asks Bex to sign away her American citizenship. At Gaz and Cilla's wedding, Bex breaks down from the pressure, and Freddie takes her home. Freddie then confesses his long-repressed feeling for Bex, and they kiss again. Bex denies him and they reconcile. Nick calls from the Navy and says Bex should not sign away her citizenship, but she does so anyway.

Part Five picks up where the prologue left off: present day, just as Bex and Nick are to be wed. Lacey and Bex fight because Clive has roped them into a blackmail situation. He has Lacey on tape talking about Bex and Freddie kissing, among other things. At the wedding rehearsal, Bex can tell that Nick already knows the details of the situation and he is furious. At the rehearsal dinner, they barely speak. Bex goes to Emma's chambers and confesses to all of the ways she has screwed up. Nick finds Bex there and he apologizes for being angry with her and says he still wants to get married. They assemble all of their friends to hatch a plan to combat Clive's blackmail attempt. Nick suggests they get married that same night, so no one can come between them. The group heads to a nearby church, and they have a small, humble ceremony and are married.



Prologue, Part One: Summer 2007

Chapter One, Two

Summary

The Royal We is a novel told in the first-person, narrated by its protagonist, Bex Porter. The novel opens with a short prologue, which takes place in present day. In the prologue, Bex is readying for her wedding to Nick. She is panicked about the global coverage surrounding her marriage, but also because of the mysterious texts and calls that are piling up. Her mother, Nancy, calls and their conversation reveals that Bex and her twin sister, Lacey, are fighting. Suddenly, Lacey bursts into the room and proclaims she “did something” (4).

Chapter One of Part One: This section moves back in time to summer of 2007, and opens with Bex arriving in England and starting her semester abroad at Oxford. She arrives at her new dormitory, Pembroke House, completely disheveled. Nick answers the door and helps her with her baggage. Bex is unaware of who Nick is. Only when her new roommate Cilla, asks her what she thought of the prince does Bex realize his identity. Cilla takes Bex out for a drink so she can meet all of her new roommates: Gaz, Clive, Joss, and Bea, otherwise known as “Lady Bollocks.” Bex becomes quick friends with all of her new roommates, and finds that in some way, their families are all connected to Nick. At the end of the night, Bex leaves the bar with Clive.

Chapter Two of Part One opens with Bex describing Lacey, her twin sister. Though they are both successful in school and in life, Lacey always pushes harder to do better than Bex. They are different, though, in the sense that Bex is studying art and Lacey is studying medicine. Lacey calls Bex at Oxford, eager for gossip about Nick. Bex reflects on the fact that she and Lacey have never been apart longer than eight hours, and as she grows more accustomed to her new surroundings at Oxford, she misses Lacey more and more.

Bex recounts to Lacey how she bumped into Nick after leaving the shower, clad only in a small towel. Bea, who witnessed the scene, curtly informs Bex that “Nick will never marry an American” (26) as though Bex had been trying to seduce him.

Later, everyone from Pembroke goes out to the bar together, including Nick and his current girlfriend, India Bollingbroke. The group goes out to the bar frequently, and Bex often goes home with Clive. However, they agree to keep things casual and not form a relationship.

Analysis

The novel opens with a prologue that reveals Bex is betrothed to Nick. This indicates that the novel will not be about their relationship in a direct sense, but the circumstances



and relationships surrounding it. Though one knows that Bex and Nick are going to end up together by the end of the novel, the reader is instead drawn to determining how they got there, and what is causing the chaos and inner turmoil surrounding the wedding day. Bex confirms this when she thinks, “I fell in love with a person, not a prince; the rest is just circumstance” (4). Indeed Nick is portrayed in this section as an ordinary man. Bex doesn’t even recognize him upon first meeting, but even after his identity is revealed, their relationship is relatively normal.

The tone of this section is light and carefree. Bex is simply enjoying herself and her new friends and surroundings. Compared with later sections in the novel, Bex’s time at Oxford represents a time in her life when she was unencumbered by press scrutiny, official rules and responsibilities, and strained relationships.

In Chapter One of Part One, Bex references her “unauthorized biography” (9) *The Bexicon*, written by Aurelia Maupassant. This is the first time the novel touches on one of its larger themes: women and the media. The *Bexicon* excerpt shows how Bex is deified by some, her rough edges smoothed over and the history of her relationship conveniently altered to fit an ideal image. Though later in the novel Bex will be excessively criticized by the media, this type of coverage appears to bother Bex just as much, as it is equally as false as negative gossip and rumors.

This section establishes Bex’s complicated connection to her family. In general, Bex has an ideal relationship with her parents and is especially close to her father, Earl. Bex and her twin sister Lacey are both competitive and reliant on each other. Bex being the first one to ever break away from their relationship for any significant amount of time will have implications later on in the novel.

Though Bex is consistently seeing Clive in this section, it is evident early on just how much Nick runs through her mind. Though she does not see or interact with him frequently, his absence is on her mind nonetheless. When Bea asserts that “Nick will never marry an American” (26), she is unknowingly foreshadowing the union of Bex and Nick.

Discussion Question 1

Why do you think the author chose to include the prologue?

Discussion Question 2

How would you describe Lacey and Bex compared to one another?

Discussion Question 3

Why do you think Bea insists that Nick will never marry an American?

Vocabulary

patrician



Part One: Summer 2007, Chapter Three, Four, Five

Summary

Part One, Chapter Three opens with Bex discussing the rumors that plagued her engagement to Nick: people believed she had come to Oxford with the express purpose of wooing Nick. However, Bex reveals she hardly saw Nick at all during her first few weeks at Oxford, as he kept a low profile and was busy with governmental affairs.

Early one morning, Bex goes out for a walk, hoping to draw the campus and get some fresh air. While out on the rugged trail, she runs into Nick, who is studying in solitude. He is doing a crossword puzzle, which he reveals is a personal contest between him and his brother, Freddie. Bex tries to leave Nick in peace, but he insists that she stay and they have a long conversation about their families. Their interaction is lighthearted, natural, and flirtatious. Still, Bex, does not have romantic feelings for Nick.

Part One, Chapter Four opens with Bex and her roommates participating in “The Glug” (39) a drinking competition that takes place between different dorms. Bex helps the team win a key victory in the championship, and Clive is overly affectionate with her. Bex begins to realize that Clive has deeper feelings for her than she for him. Later that night, Nick knocks on Bex’s door and offers her the trophy from The Glug. In addition, he brings her a bag filled with American junk food. Bex is thrilled. Nick spots the TV show that is playing on Bex’s laptop--a trashy American show called Devour. Nick, very interested, proceeds to spend the rest of the night watching the show with Bex. He tells Bex he has insomnia and calls his nighttime self “Night Nick” (48). Clive and Cilla return to the room, bringing a newspaper that claims Nick is afraid of horses. They realize Penelope, a woman Gaz has been sleeping with, tipped the press to the story.

When Clive and Cilla invite Nick and Bex out for a drink, but Bex makes up an excuse that Nick has agreed to help her study. When the others leave, Bex accuses Nick of planting a story with her to see if she would tip off the press. Nick protests, and explains that his childhood was riddled with lies about his parents being printed in the papers. This has lead him to adopt a cautious attitude in terms of who he surrounds himself with.

In Part One, Chapter Five, “Night Nick” and “Night Bex” are spending an excess of time together, watching “Devour” and eating Twinkies. Bex realizes she is spending more and more time with Nick and Clive is falling by the wayside. Bex contemplates her friendship with Clive, and lists the pros and cons of their union, but she also recognizes how her relationship with Nick is developing into something special.

One night, Nick bursts into Bex’s room, eager to watch the latest “Devour” DVD, only to find Bex is on the phone with her father, Earl. Earl asks for Nick, and the two briefly talk



on the phone, joking and talking naturally. After, Bex and Nick watch “Devour” episodes until sunrise. Nick realizes he has a public appearance at a museum with his father later in the day. The residents of Pembroke attend the event in support of Nick, and Bex cannot help but stare at Nick’s girlfriend, India.

When Bex returns home, she finds latest “Devour” DVD in her mailbox, and rushes into Nick’s room to share it with him. Inside, she finds Richard screaming at Nick. He stops to acknowledge Bex’s presence, but is equally curt with her.

Analysis

This section establishes the differences between Bex’s welcoming family and Nick’s cold, emotionally distant family. During their interaction in the woods, Nick confides in Bex that he sometimes feels trapped by his family and his role. This ease and openness to Bex indicates that Nick trusts her and feels comfortable around her. Nick’s frustration with his official role introduces the theme of Duty. At the end of the section, after Bex sees Richard and Nick fighting, she thinks “That was my first brush with just how barren Nick’s family life was” (62). Though Nick has expressed his discontent with his family life, Bex witnesses its intensity firsthand. For Nick, family is directly tied to duty, to the media, while for Bex it is tied to happiness.

Despite his frustrations with his father and the palace, Nick finds solace in his precocious younger brother, Freddie. This expands the theme of sibling relationships that weaves throughout the book. Though Nick and Bex have very different relationships with their respective sets of parents--Bex is open and comfortable with hers, while Nick hardly has any relationship with his--they both rely on their siblings for support in every element of their lives. Similarly, both Freddie and Lacey are bright, outgoing, and fun to be around, which balances out Nick and Bex’s tendency towards seriousness.

Bex and Nick’s conversation in the woods also introduces their differences and compatibility based on national identity. When Nick complains about someday being “sovereign” over the people of England, Bex jokes, “You’re not my sovereign” (38). Later, Bex thinks, “Certain columnists claim Nick liked me in spite of my being American, but [...] I like to think it was because of it” (51).

When Nick brings Bex the trophy from the Glug, he references the Cy Young trophy--a baseball award, in addition to bringing her a bag full of American junk food. These are things Bex mentioned in passing during their conversation in the woods in Chapter Three. This starts to hint that, even though Bex remains uninterested in Nick, he is possibly developing feelings for her. Because Bex is not associated with the British nobility, and is not even a British citizen, she will never view him the same way as a British person would. “...yet something about those uncinematic, quotidian hangouts in my room relaxed his grip on the real Nick” Bex notes (51). The reader sees how Nick grows more comfortable around Bex and retreats to her room both for her company and as a means of relieving himself from the pressures of his day-to-day responsibilities.



The theme of the media/press reasserts itself in this section through Clive. Clive and Cilla deduce that a story Nick placed with Penelope has been leaked, leading Bex to think Nick did the same thing with her. Instead, Nick refutes this claim and says he has been completely honest with her. In addition, Nick reveals how the media has damaged his family and his childhood. Bex's sympathy foreshadows the fate of her own relationship with the press. Throughout this section, Clive frequently brings up the press, or draws attention to the media in various ways. Though he is a journalist, the persistence of his actions hints at a more sinister connection between Clive and the media that will later be revealed.

Discussion Question 1

How does Nick and Freddie's relationship compare to Bex and Lacey's?

Discussion Question 2

What does Bex mean when she says "Certain columnists claim Nick liked me in spite of my being American, but [...] I like to think it was because of it" (51)?

Discussion Question 3

How would you describe Bex's relationship with her father, Earl?

Vocabulary

agita, quotidian, sycophant, ostensible



Part One: Summer 2007, Chapter Six, Seven

Summary

Part One, Chapter Six opens with a story of Emma Somers'--Nick's mother--and her fallout with Rupert, a former bodyguard, after he insisted to the press that he had an affair with Emma and fathered at least one of her children. Because of this scandal, Nick is forced to take a brief sabbatical from Oxford.

At the start of November, Lacey arrives in England to visit Bex and Oxford. Lacey immediately fits in with the residents of Pembroke, and Bex indulges in showing her all of the sights. Lacey, however, is disappointed that she is unable to meet Nick. Before Lacey leaves, they decide to throw a Halloween-themed party for their birthday on November 5th. The night of the party, Bex dresses as a "Little White Lie" and Lacey goes as a "Dirty Little Secret" (72). The party gets off to a great start, but Bex is disappointed that Nick is not there. When she goes to the bathroom to fix her makeup, she runs into Nick. She tries to get him to go to the party, but they end up going out together instead.

Part One, Chapter Seven recounts Nick and Bex's night out after they leave the party. They get masks and go to karaoke. In the midst of their fun, Nick writes a "little white lie" on Bex's shirt. The night ends with Bex pushing Nick home in a wheelbarrow. As they stand at the entrance to Pembroke, they share a tender moment. Bex is removed from the moment, though, as she considers that neither of them are single and that she has ditched Lacey on their birthday. Still Bex cannot deny that the moment they shared was special. Bex returns to her room and examines the messages written on her shirt. Nick has written "you are not my favorite," and Clive has written "I don't want strings" (82).

Analysis

This section opens with a focus on the theme of women and the media. Though Emma has managed to remain out of the public eye for a significant amount of time, the press is eager for a scandal and questions the validity of her sons' lineage. This also shows what an extreme effect that press coverage has on Nick's day-to-day life. He is forced to set his education aside to deal with matters relating to press scandals.

This story highlights Nick's continued expression of sadness for his role. He confides in Bex that part of him wished the DNA test Richard forced him to take came back negative--meaning he was not actually Richard's son, and thus providing an explanation for why he has never felt close to his father. Yet while Nick continues to struggle with his role as an heir to the throne, those around him idolize his privilege.



While Nick is feeling distant from his family, Bex is feeling especially close to hers when Lacey comes to visit. Lacey loves the partying and attention that surrounds Bex and her friends. At the time, she expresses insecurity that Bex is going to forget about her in favor of her new and exciting life in England. Though Bex assures Lacey this could never happen, Lacey's fears foreshadow her role throughout the rest of the novel: pining for Bex's affection while never fully receiving it.

At the end of the section, Bex examines the t-shirt she was wearing on the night of the party, which is now filled with "little white lies." The various messages reveal that Nick potentially has feelings for Bex, and that Clive wants to move their casual relationship into something more serious. This puts Bex in a very precarious position: she has an indication that Nick may be interested in more, but his close friend wanting a serious relationship with her may stand in the way of their union.

Discussion Question 1

How do you think Nick feels about Bex after the Halloween/birthday party?

Discussion Question 2

How are Bex and Lacey similar? How are they different?

Discussion Question 3

What is the role of the press in the novel so far?

Vocabulary

agoraphobic, dressage, profundity, supercilious

Part Two: Summer 2007, Chapter Eight, Nine

Summary

In Part One Chapter Eight, Bex, Lacey, and Cilla analyze the contents of the t-shirt over tea. Lacey and Cilla acknowledge there is something between Nick and Bex, but Bex cannot bring herself to admit it, or to admit she needs to dump Clive. The others insist she needs to make her feelings for Nick known. Just then, Nick appears to join their conversation. During the conversation, Nick presents Bex and Lacey with two enameled pins depicting a British and American flag intertwined.

After that day, Bex full acknowledges her feelings for Nick to herself, and becomes increasingly aware of his presence. As a result, she begins avoiding Clive. Meanwhile, Nick is still technically dating India. One night, Nick and Bex are walking home together and it begins pouring rain. They sprint home to Pembroke. On the landing of the building, Nick shields them with his coat and wipes some mascara from Bex's cheek. Bex thinks they are about to kiss, but then spots the camera of a paparazzi hidden in the bushes. When they get inside, Nick is furious and leaves Bex. It later turns out that the camera belonged to Nick's uncle Edwin's production company, who was filming an unauthorized documentary. Nick leaves Oxford once again. Bex pines for him in his absence, and her feelings for him are becoming increasingly evident.

Clive confronts Bex about her feelings for Nick, and they decide to end their fling. Clive warns Bex about the press and what could have happened if the picture of her and Nick were to have leaked. Clive also warns Bex that she might not want to be a part of Nick's "crazy" life as a royal. In order to support his argument, Clive shows Bex the press coverage surrounding Nick and his many rumored girlfriends. When he leaves, Bex considers this and does not feel worthy compared to Nick's girlfriend, India. Eventually, though, Bex convinces herself that she will at least try to get what she wants.

Part One, Chapter Nine opens with Bex explaining Nick's familial history of grand romantic gestures. Bex feels ready to proclaim her feeling to Nick, but he is away in London dealing with family business. Bex busies herself around campus and misses her family as Thanksgiving approaches. One day, one of Nick's security officers instructs Bex to visit Windsor Castle the following day.

On the day Bex visits Nick, she accidentally wears a shirt Joss has made for her: a long-sleeved top with a heart on its sleeve. Bex is incredibly nervous as she heads to Windsor, but feels prepared to confess her feelings. Nick gives Bex a tour of the castle, telling her about his family history and childhood. The tour ends when Nick reveals a full Thanksgiving feast he has had prepared for them. This prompts Bex to blurt "I'm so in love with you," (106). Nick is stunned, but then reciprocates the sentiment. They embrace, kiss, and head to the bedroom.



Analysis

The symbol of the flag pins is introduced in this section when Nick bestows the gifts on Lacey and Bex. The pins represent many phases of the characters: at first, how Lacey and Bex are tied together even though they are separated by the ocean, as well as how Lacey and Bex are eventually two Americans who choose to make their permanent lives in England. Most notably, though, the flag pins come to represent a special bond between Bex and Nick. They play a game in which Bex hides the pin under her clothes and Nick must find it later. This is symbolic for the way that Bex and Nick must hide their relationship, and also for the ways in which Bex must subvert her American self in order to be acceptable to Nick's family.

This pin also marks a transition in Bex's understanding of herself. She experiences a moment of contentment when walking down the street with Nick: "I told myself to carry this moment as a talisman of a time in my life when I was both truly content and lucky enough to realize it. In a very short time, Oxford had stamped itself on me, and everything back in the States--for the first time, I didn't use the word home in my mind--felt so far away" (88-89). This shows how Bex is beginning to feel at home in England, among her new friends. It also represents another type of transition: a turn in how her life is about to go from exciting and content to something more turbulent and unpredictable, as she and Nick are on the verge of beginning their relationship.

During Bex and Clive's breakup, Clive comes equipped with press clippings and insider information that are subtly meant to sway Bex away from Nick. Clive warns her against getting involved with Nick, for the chaos it might lead to. This reaffirms Clive's strong connection with things having to do with the media, and indicates where his allegiances may lie later on in the novel.

When Bex goes to visit Nick at Windsor Castle, she accidentally wears a shirt Joss designed for her: one with a heart printed on the sleeve. This shirt is symbolic of Bex's raw emotion as she is about to show Nick for the first time, newly split from Clive and ready to profess her feelings for Nick.

Nick takes Bex on a comprehensive tour of Windsor Castle, sharing details about his ancestors and memories of growing up in the castle with Freddie. This scene shows how Nick, despite his own reservations about his family, is eager to welcome Bex in and make her feel at home.

When Bex and Nick first consummate their relationship, Bex thinks, "The turbulent love and lust we gave in to that day felt like completion, like kismet, like the beginning of a story that was always meant to be written. Nick and I had discovered a gravitational pull of our own, and it changed everything" (109). Indeed, this day does change everything for Bex--and despite their relationship's ups and downs, their lives will continue to revolve around each other.



Discussion Question 1

How is Bex's definition of "home" changing?

Discussion Question 2

How does Bex's family life differ from Nick's?

Discussion Question 3

Make a prediction about what will happen to Bex and Nick's relationship after she visits Windor Castle for the first time.

Vocabulary

untenable, squizz, battlements, furk



Part Two: Summer 2009, Chapter One, Two, Three

Summary

Part Two, Chapter One opens with Bex reflecting on Freddie's brashness and well-known sexual exploits. She looks forward to the day when she will meet him, as she feels it is the first step in solidifying her relationship with Nick.

One night, Bex, Nick, and their friends are at a club. They have been dating for for a year and a half, and their relationship is still exciting behind closed doors--but nowhere close to being public. Bex reflects on the past year: telling her parents and Lacey about the relationship, hurrying to finish her degree at Cornell so she could return to England, and finding a job as an illustrator at a greeting card company. Meanwhile, Richard has continued to insult Bex and insist Nick rekindle his relationship with India. Back at the club, Bex and Nick sneak off to a secret bathroom together. After having sex, they leave in Nick's car, with Bex hidden on the floor under a blanket.

The next day, Bex wakes up in bed next to a man that is not Nick. Bex screams, and Nick bursts into the room. It turns out it's Freddie in bed with Bex. Bex and Nick both berate Freddie for his appearance, but Freddie receives their frustration with glee. He compliments Bex's sense of humor and appearance. The three of them joke around and mock Richard's disapproval of the relationship. Freddie pressures Nick to reveal the relationship, but Nick refuses. Instead of changing his behaviors, Nick attempts to prove his love to Bex by giving her a diamond pendant on a long gold chain.

In Part Two, Chapter Two, Nancy, Earl, and Lacey have flown out to London to meet Nick. Nancy presses Bex as to why Bex has not met the rest of Nick's family. A year has passed since the last chapter, and Bex is still Nick's secret. Nancy feels this is suspicious, but Earl is more understanding. Bex is conflicted about the matter. She does feel Nick is harboring secrets, especially where Emma is concerned. Nevertheless, Nick treats Bex's family incredibly well: he gets Porter family a room at the Dorchester Hotel and treats them to fancy meals.

Later that day, Bex's family meets Nick. The meeting goes very well, but Lacey puts pressure on Bex to take the next step with Nick. The pressure starts to make Bex feel uneasy about her relationship. That night, Bex and Lacey go out with Nick and Freddie. Freddie and Lacey hit it off immediately. At the club, Bex sees Nick and his old girlfriend, Ceres, talking animatedly. After that night, Lacey extends her trip and embarks on a fling with Freddie. Nick scolds Freddie for being "careless" with Lacey. In return, Freddie berates Nick for hiding Bex. After this conversation, Nick invites Bex on the family New Year's trip to Klosters, assuring her they can have a good time without worrying about the press.



Analysis

Though not directly mentioned, Freddie's well-known exploits reflect the double-standard of women in the media. Whereas a woman would be scrutinized for her promiscuity, Freddie is notorious in a fun, lighthearted way. As Bex's prominence rises, this divide will become increasingly evident.

In Part Two, Chapter One, the symbol of the blanket is introduced. When Bex and Nick go anywhere in the same car, Bex is forced to lay on the floor, covered by an itchy woolen blanket. This blanket is both a literal and symbolic representation of the way that Bex and Nick are keeping their relationship hidden. However, the blanket represents the specific way that continuing a secret relationship stifles Bex far more than it does Nick. Whereas Nick remains in the public eye and seemingly carries out his life unaffected, Bex is literally forced to stoop simply so that she can try and maintain some semblance of a relationship with him.

The theme of hidden relationships as it pertains to Bex and Nick is touched upon again when Bex first meets Freddie. Though Freddie seems to genuinely like Bex and respects his brother's new relationship, Bex is left out of Freddie and Nick's logistical conversation entirely. Freddie asks Nick when the "coming out" (123) is for their relationship, meaning when will they allow themselves to be seen together in public. Before Bex can even respond, Nick insists that the relationship will remain a secret indefinitely. Bex is given no say in this conversation, and her literal position as a bystander to this conversation will symbolically continue throughout the book, as Nick calls the shots of their union.

Continuing with the theme of hidden relationships is the symbol of the diamond pendant Nick gifts to Bex. The pendant itself is beautiful, but Nick offers it to Bex on a long gold chain, so it will be hidden when worn. Though the exquisite nature of the diamond symbolically testifies to the strength of Nick and Bex's love, the fact that Nick is so paranoid about their relationship being public that he will not allow Bex to be seen wearing a normal necklace reveals a deep-rooted insecurity that will lead to larger issues.

Despite the secrecy that plagues Bex's relationship, those around her seem to think she is living lavishly, simply because she is dating Nick. When Bex's family comes to visit, Nick arranges for them to stay at a fancy hotel and eat at nice restaurants. When Lacey gushes at Bex's circumstances, Bex insists "'This isn't my life,' I said, feeling like I was repeating myself. 'This is one day in my life. The rest of the time, I have ants and no central air'" (130).

In this section, Nick and Earl meet in person for the first time, though they have talked over the phone in the past. Nick and Earl are a unique relationship in this novel: Earl treats Nick the way he would any other man--bestowing no special treatment despite Nick's status. This is a testament to the kindness of Earl's character. In return, Nick enjoys talking to Earl and treats him with tangible respect. Because Nick has no real



relationship with his own father, there is a sense that Earl provides a substitute for this relationship.

Discussion Question 1

How would you describe Freddie's first impression of Bex? What clues about Nick's past can you infer from his reaction?

Discussion Question 2

Why does it bother Bex that Lacey enjoys Nick's lavish lifestyle?

Discussion Question 3

What is the significance of Bex being invited on the family trip to Klosters?

Vocabulary

perfunctory, persnickety, lavalier



Part Two: Summer 2009, Chapter Three, Four

Summary

In Part Two, Chapter Three, Bex heads to the “sleepy mountain village” (144) of Klosters, along with Nick and their friends. Bex runs into Clive, who complains about his struggling career and inquires why Bex and Nick are still a secret. Nick appears, and Clive announces he is dating Gemma Sands, Nick’s ex. Bex is convinced she hears jealousy in Nick’s response. That night at dinner, Nick’s family openly mocks Bex--her American status in particular. Freddie distracts Bex with chatter. After dinner and drinks, Bex finds Bea helping her overly-intoxicated sister, Pudge. Bex helps Bea deal with Pudge’s sickness and gets her to bed. With Pudge asleep, Bea lectures Bex about dating Nick, saying he is a full-time job.

One afternoon in the cabin, Bex overhears Nick’s relatives Agatha and Nigel discussing their shock at the possibility of Bex being Nick’s girlfriend. When Nick, Freddie, and Richard enter the cabin, Nigel confronts Nick. Richard interjects, saying Nick is not seeing anyone seriously. Freddie defends Nick, but Nick cuts him off before storming away. Later that day, Nick goes skiing with Cilla and Bex. Nick apologizes for the earlier scene, and feels guilty for not being able to control his family or the press. Nick continues, saying he feels trapped by his future. Nick kisses Bex after their conversation, not knowing there is a photographer nearby who captures them.

Part Two, Chapter Four opens with a tabloid headline speculating on Nick and Bex’s relationship, and featuring the photo of them kissing. Nick, so upset by the leak, flies back to London with Bex. They are forced to hole up in Bex’s apartment, as the paparazzi have staked out the surrounding area. After Nick is able to leave, Bea, Joss, and Cilla come over to help Bex reinvent her image to be appropriate for the press, and plan her life around dealing with the paparazzi. Though Bex’s family is celebrating the publicity around the romance, Nick is tormented by it. Richard lambasts Nick and Bex for their carelessness, and the Queen informs Bex she cannot stay overnight at the palace. Bex gets a new apartment in a nicer area that allows for more discretion. Lacey spends her winter break in London, helping Bex get settled. By the end of winter break, Lacey has temporarily put medical school on hold and has decided to move in with Bex for a semester. Meanwhile, Nick’s personality has changed. He is no longer interested in going out or having fun. His guard is up constantly. The paparazzi begins following Bex to and from work daily, and she becomes a regular fixture in the tabloids. All elements of her appearance are criticized.

One afternoon, Freddie visits Bex at work, curious to see how she is handling her newfound fame. Freddie expresses worry about Nick’s tense state. They talk about how to get him to unwind. Lacey appears, talking excitedly about the paparazzi outside the office. When Freddie takes his leave, Lacey talks about her long-term plan to seduce



Freddie into a relationship. When the sisters leave the office, paparazzi swarm them. Bex decides to run, dragging Lacey with her. They lead the paparazzi on a chase through London, eventually finding refuge on a bus. At home, the two are greeted by an upset Nick, and Freddie. The Daily Mail has already posted photos of Bex and Lacey leading the paparazzi through town, spinning it as a "chase" "endangering tourists" (172). Nick blames Freddie for not handling the situation better. Freddie, initially apologetic, grows angry with Nick's accusations and storming off. Lacey excuses herself, leaving Nick and Bex alone. Bex apologizes for the chase, and Nick stresses about the state of their relationship.

Analysis

Upon arriving at Klosters, Bex has the chance to catch up with Clive for the first time in a while. Though his career as a journalist is struggling, Clive is more interested in discussing the nature of Bex's relationship--particularly, why it still remains a secret. This prodding indicates several possibilities: that Clive still has real feelings for Bex and looks to come between her and Nick; or that Clive has more sinister intentions for gathering insider information on Bex and Nick.

Until this point in the novel, Bex's American status has been a non-issue. Aside from a few quips at Oxford and Bea's sarcastic comments, it was never pointed out that Bex was in any way different from those around her. However, this section introduces the larger theme of national identity. During a dinner at Klosters, Nick's relatives scold Bex for saying "god save the queen" (147) during a toast. This leads to them having a drawn-out conversation mocking and harshly critiquing Bex's status as an American. Just as she is powerless to do anything about her identity, Bex is powerless to return the criticism, as she does not want to create a rift between her and Nick's family.

At Klosters, Nick is tense with Freddie. When Richard insists that Nick is not seeing anyone, Freddie attempts to defend Nick's relationship, which Nick promptly shuts down. Even later in the section, when Freddie comes to visit Bex at work, he expresses concern for Nick's reclusive and volatile state. Whereas the possibility - and then reality - of Bex and Nick's relationship being revealed is a source of great fear for Nick, Freddie thinks it is a good thing. Though Freddie is outwardly defending Nick in these scenarios, he is also in part defending Bex, and providing support for her perspective that Nick fails to see as he begins to retreat further and further from the public eye and from the relationship itself.

When Bex and Nick's relationship is revealed, Bex's parents and Lacey are thrilled, as they feel more than enough time has reasonably passed for them to announce their union to the world. Bex is not allowed to rejoice in this sentiment, though, as Nick becomes increasingly distressed with the press scrutiny that follows the reveal of their relationship. It would seem that Nick's greatest fear for their relationship was the press tormenting them to the point where they become reclusive and possibly permanently damaged like Emma. Despite being fully aware of this reality, Nick immediately falls into



the habits of someone like his mother: hiding from the public eye, not caring for himself, and neglecting his personal relationships.

Meanwhile, Bex is so busy worrying about Nick that the first signs of deterioration begin to creep into her relationship with Lacey. Lacey makes a drastic change when she chooses to drop out of medical school in favor of moving to London and working at a clothing store. On the surface, this seems to play into Lacey's personality as someone who loves attention and the spotlight. One may think that Lacey is simply trying to ride Bex's newly-famous coattails. Yet, fears expressed by Lacey earlier in the novel indicate that her decision to leave medical school and relocate to England is based in a greater fear of losing her relationship with her sister. Because Bex is so busy with her new life and emotionally preoccupied, as well, she has not been able to dedicate much emotional weight to her sister, thus Lacey is acting out of a fear of being left alone and not knowing who she is without the twin sister she has come to rely on so much.

Discussion Question 1

Why do Nick's friends and family look down on Bex's American status?

Discussion Question 2

How is the press starting to play a larger role in Nick and Bex's relationship?

Discussion Question 3

What do you think Nick will reveal about his mother in the next chapter?

Vocabulary

sycophants, poncey



Part Two: Summer 2009, Chapter Five, Six, Seven

Summary

Nick explains to Bex the truth of Emma's seclusion. Emma and Richard met, fell in love, and were engaged just two months later. The "constant microscope" (176) of the palace and the press caused her to wither and her confidence to disappear. Richard's inability to deal with emotions made him cold to her plight. After the birth of her two sons, she was especially paranoid. Because of the press, she became reclusive and, eventually, completely non-communicative by the time Nick was five. She now lives alone at Trewsbury house, visited occasionally by her husband and sons. Nick wishes that the truth about her condition would be revealed to the public. Nick ends the story with an explanation of how the press is capable of completely ruining a person, and how he does not want that for either Bex or himself. Despite Nick sharing this heartfelt revelation, Bex remains uncertain of their future.

Richard allows Nick to enter the Britannia Royal Naval College, as Freddie had. Bex hopes this will give him a sense of purpose. Instead, the couple begins bickering frequently. Nick wants to remain hidden from the public eye and Bex feels trapped, watching her friends go out and have fun. One morning, Bex finds Lacey and Freddie in the news, though she thought Lacey was back in medical school. Nick is horrified at the news, and asks Bex to talk to her sister about being so public. Bex promises to discuss the situation with Lacey. Later that day, Bex and Lacey meet at Harrods to look for dresses to wear to Nick's birthday party. Lacey hams it up for the paparazzi, while Bex is eager to get inside. They meet up with Bea, who helps Bex choose a dress. After Bea leaves, Bex tries to talk to Lacey about the paparazzi situation. Lacey surprised Bex with the news that she has officially dropped out of medical school and is moving to London permanently. In response, Bex tells Lacey she has to stop seeing Freddie. Lacey tries to be understanding, but is clearly hurt.

That night, Bex sees Nick on the news. A reporter asks him when he is getting married, to which Nick responds, "getting married is the last thing on my mind" (191). Bex cannot deny this hurts, but she tries to remain positive. The next morning, Bex confesses her hurt, and Nick apologizes. He suggests that, perhaps, the time has come for them to "go public."

Part Two, Chapter Six takes place at Nick's birthday party. Bex is in awe of being in the same room as Queen Eleanor for the first time. Nancy, Earl, and Lacey are also in attendance. Throughout the night, Bex is forced to watch Nick from afar. She cannot manage to catch his eye a single time and is forced to watch him spend the evening with Gemma Sands. In an attempt to retaliate, Bex tries to look like she is having a wonderful time. Eventually, during the dancing portion of the evening, Nick finds Bex and her parents. They chat only briefly before he takes off once more. At the end of the



night, Earl suggests that palace life is “strange” and Bex must be prepared for all it entails.

Part Two, Chapter Seven opens with, “Nick and I broke up ten weeks later” (209). Gemma Sands’ appearance at the birthday party sparks rumors, and sends Bex spiralling. Nick asks Bex to attend his uncle Edwin’s wedding with him, and Bex accepts. Meanwhile Bex gets a new job at Sir John Soane’s Museum. One day, Nick calls Bex and says she is uninvited to the wedding because her public approval ratings are low and the Queen doesn’t want her in attendance. After this conversation, they do not speak for two weeks. The day of the wedding is also Bex and Lacey’s birthday, and they, along with their friends, go out to a club. Nick plans to meet them there after the wedding. That night, the friends hang out at Gaz’s house before heading to the club. Clive announces his new job writing for the gossip pages of the Recorder. Bea shows Bex the latest photos from the wedding, revealing Nick in attendance with Gemma Sands. Bex is enraged, but then decides to have a great night at his expense.

That night at the club, Bex is morose. She cannot bring herself to drink, and texts Nick telling him not to show up. Instead, he arrives as planned. He can tell she is upset, and they exit the club to talk. Bex immediately expresses her pent up fears: they have been dating for four years, with no move towards being public. In the course of their argument, it is revealed that Nick lied about the reason Bex was not invited to the wedding. Bex was uninvited not because the Queen instructed it, but because Nick chose not to go with Bex so as to avoid controversy. They come to a mutual conclusion that their relationship should end.

Analysis

The story of Emma ties directly into the theme of women and the media. Though Emma was a bright and seemingly indefatigable woman in her youth, the press managed to destroy her confidence completely. Her story also has many parallels to Bex and Nick’s present situation: Nick is distraught by the press speculation surrounding his relationship, and he is becoming emotionally distant in the same way that Emma did. Though Nick is like Emma in this story, he is also like Richard: Bex is the recipient of the more intense press scrutiny (though Nick may be criticized, it is Bex that receives more specific criticism of her body, her clothes, her career, and her “attempt” to marry the future king). In this scenario, it is Bex who would need greater emotional support in the relationship, and yet Nick is incapable of providing that support. Just as Richard chose to hide Emma’s illness from the press completely, Nick would rather hide his relationship from the press completely, which puts their relationship in danger of leading to the same entrapment and estrangement.

Bex feels tension lingering after this conversation. Though she is grateful that Nick has opened up to her about such a serious and personal matter, it does not actually resolve any of the related issues within their own relationship. Bex thinks, “I felt haunted by something. As if somewhere in our turning point we’d forgotten to make sure we were still going in the same direction” (180). Bex’s hesitation is compounded as it begins to



dawn on her the enormity of the role she would have to assume if she were to marry Nick, and someday become a duchess. As Nick is becoming increasingly serious about his own duties, this forces Bex to think about hers, and given the complicated state of their relationship, Bex cannot easily see herself adapting to those types of duties.

Yet it is Bex's attempt at adherence to these duties that continues to drive a wedge between her and Lacey. Lacey is eager to enjoy the lifestyle Bex sometimes gets to experience on account of Nick--such as shopping trips and fancy dinners. Bex, at Nick's request, asks Lacey to be more tactful and less generous to the paparazzi. "We're not a package deal," Bex says to Lacey. "We used to be," Lacey returns (189). Lacey subtly hints that it is not Bex's lifestyle she longs for--but Bex herself.

Bex is eager to attend Nick's birthday party, because she feels it will be an opportunity for them to showcase their relationship in public. She attends the party wearing the diamond pendant Nick gave to her, only on a shorter chain, so it can be seen by everyone. This is a symbolic maneuver, intended to show that Bex is ready to display their relationship. Yet, the night goes terribly, and Bex only speaks to Nick for a brief moment. Meanwhile, Nick spends the evening with Gemma Sands. Bex notes that her dress is the exact same shade of "cornflower blue" (201) as Nick's eyes. This symbolizes how, despite Bex's efforts, she cannot change the fact that she will never be as suited for Nick in the same way as someone from a family like Gemma's.

At the end of the section, Nick tells Bex that she is no longer invited to attend a family wedding with him. He says it was not his decision to make, but that the ruling came from his family because Bex's "public opinions ratings" are "so low" (213). Bex is shocked to hear that she has public opinion ratings, and equally shocked to hear that Nick is using them as a criteria to move forward with their relationship. Without realizing it, Nick is succumbing to the same pitfalls that caused Emma's relationship, and life, to deteriorate completely.

When Bex and Nick break up, there is a sense that they still genuinely love each other, but that the strain of the press and Nick's family make their unconventional union too difficult to continue. Nick expresses a desire to return to their relationship's early days back at Oxford. For Bex and Nick, Oxford will always represent a time in their lives when they were able to be truly carefree and live with some semblance of normalcy. Yet, when Nick expresses a desire for those times, Bex says, "Just because people weren't chasing us doesn't mean your demons weren't" (222). This indicates that there was a level of inevitability to their breakup. They were not torn apart because of the press themselves, but because they let the press come between them in a way that evoked Nick's deepest fears.

Discussion Question 1

How has Emma's condition influenced Nick?



Discussion Question 2

How has Bex and Lacey's relationship changed because of Bex's relationship with Nick?

Discussion Question 3

What does Bex mean when she says that she and Nick were still "hiding" at Oxford?

Vocabulary

wan, phalanx, slovenly, gimlet, consternation, pillock, besotted, gambit, balk



Part Three: Winter 2011, Chapter One, Two, Three

Summary

After their fight, Bex does not see Nick again for months. She regrets picking the fight, but also feels it was inevitable. Bex cries, "This whole country feels like Nick to me," (228), and so Lacey encourages Bex to return to the United States. Back in Iowa, Nancy and Earl have upgraded to a larger home. On her first day back, Bex sees Nick and Gemma in the tabloids, and realizes she did not think she would be forced to see such things in the U.S. Even people from her hometown recognize Bex from her place in the tabloids. Over Skype, Freddie encourages Bex and tells her Nick is not doing great emotionally, either. Three days before Christmas, Nancy and Earl intervene and tell Bex she needs to move on with her life. She has spent too much time "loafing" (231) and should return to England. They encourage her to re-find herself and reclaim what she feels Nick has taken from her. Lacey suggests they return in time to attend a wild New Year's Eve party hosted by Clive's new girlfriend.

In Part Three, Chapter Two, Bex wakes up in a fancy Parisian hotel room reeking of "booze and smoke and stale sweat," (234). A man is in bed next to her, who she realizes is Clive. Bex recounts how New Year's Eve was the start of a new chapter of drinking, partying, and flirting. Each time Nick appears in the tabloids alongside Gemma, Bex appears having a wild, carefree time. Because of her exploits, the paparazzi becomes even more toxic. Six months later, Bex's parents call with concern, and say that she is simply using her current lifestyle as a way to escape reality. Freddie, too, expresses concern one afternoon when he visits Bex at her apartment. He tells Bex that Nick is doing well, and has finished his Naval officer training.

One afternoon, the friends are getting ready to go out to the opening of Joss's new store, Soj. Though Nick RSVP'd "No" to the event, he arrives with Ceres. Clive helps Bex escape, leading to Bex waking up in the hotel bed next to him. Clive wakes and confirms they had sex. Bex calls Lacey, and Freddie answers. He informs her there's been "an incident with Nick" (244).

In Part Three, Chapter Three, Bex rushes home from Paris to London in order to make sure Nick is okay. The previous night at Soj, a paparazzo said something about Bex to Nick, and when Nick went to punch the photographer, Gaz stepped in his way. Bex arrives at Joss's house and goes upstairs to where Nick is resting. Nick is surprised to see her, but their conversation quickly becomes natural. Bex appreciates Nick defending her. They both admit the breakup has been difficult, but that their conversation has been a good step. Ceres calls Nick, providing a cue for Bex to exit. As she leaves Joss's house, she feels refreshed.



Analysis

In this section, Bex returns to Iowa as she struggles to separate her feelings for Nick from her life in England. Though her parents previously expressed concern for Bex and Nick's relationship, they encourage her to return to England. Bex thinks, "This is one of my favorite memories of my parents, because in their faces I saw the most naked love and concern and support--and faith," (233). Bex also realizes that, no matter where she is, she can't escape Nick or her own role in the press. She sees tabloids featuring Nick and various women, as well as herself.

After Bex returns to England, though, she does not return to her normal life. Instead, she turns to a life of intense partying. The motif of alcohol returns as a driving force in Bex's life. This part of the novel passes in a rapid-fire blur as Bex struggles to grieve her relationship in a healthy manner. Ultimately, this phase ends with Bex having sex with Clive. This parallels Bex at the start of the novel, when she continued to sleep with Clive as a method of subverting her feelings for Nick, she now does the same thing in different circumstances.

In Part Three, Chapter Three, we see that Bex and Nick still have strong feelings for each other, though they are trying to move past those feelings. Nick gets injured for defending Bex to a paparazzo saying vulgar things, and Bex rushes to his side as soon as she hears about the incident. Their conversation is cordial and friendly, though the circumstances that brought them there are of much greater passion. Bex touches on this slightly, saying "Being your girlfriend was temporary, but being your ex is for life" (251).

Discussion Question 1

What different ways does Bex cope with her breakup?

Discussion Question 2

Why do you think Bex sleeps with Clive?

Discussion Question 3

What underlying issues lead to Bex and Nick's breakup?

Vocabulary

tenuous, pernicious, peaky, pique, preternatural



Part Three: Winter 2011, Chapter Four, Five

Summary

At the start of Part Three, Chapter Four, Bex is Skyping with Earl about the latest Chicago Cubs game. She has reconnected with her parents after avoiding them during her binge. Bex returns to work at the Soane museum and dedicates herself to the job completely. She develops a new initiative called Paint Britain, which provides art classes to at-risk children. Bex also starts dating “proper, employed” (254) guys again, though she admits she is unable to develop real feelings for them. Lacey has also moved out of Bex’s apartment, and keeps herself busy dating various guys.

On Freddie’s 25th birthday, Nick and Freddie give a joint interview on BBC. Lacey and Bex watch together. The brothers talk about their military service, Emma, and relationships. Nick asks the press to stop speculating about his relationships and leave his former girlfriends in peace. The next day, Freddie visits Bex at work while she is giving a tour to a group. After the tour is over, Freddie takes Bex out to lunch and encourages her to go out and have fun. He then expresses his own dismay at being “the spare” (263). They discuss Lacey, and how it’s all too clear she secretly hopes for more with Freddie, despite Freddie not wanting anything more with her. At the end of the chapter, Bex agrees to a fun weekend out of town.

In Part Three, Chapter Five, Bex and friends are spending a fun weekend in the countryside, playing tennis and croquet-based drinking games. During cocktail hour, Bea pokes at Bex, but admits she misses having her around Nick, and hints that they should consider getting back together in the near future. Bea’s sister, Pudge, is there as well—fully transformed after another stint in rehab. Bea suggests that Bex still has another chance with Nick, if the timing is right. At dinner, Bex runs into Freddie, who says he is taking a break from dating. Bex gets a call from the palace, saying the Prince of Wales is on the line. It turns out to be Richard, who wants to inquire about Paint Britain and offer his patronage to the program. Freddie and Bex celebrate by drinking champagne and wandering around the grounds. In a treehouse, they find Bea and Gemma having sex. The two reveal they’ve been carrying out a secret affair for some time. Bex and Freddie return to the house. They snoop around the house and find a tiny room hidden below the stairs. Inside, they accidentally kiss.

Analysis

In this section, the symbol of Paint Britain is introduced. Bex dedicates herself to her work at the Soane Museum, and it is revealed just how talented and valuable she actually is. Bex returns to her original passion, art, and creates a program that genuinely touches the lives of others. This is the first time in the novel that Bex’s identity has not



been directly tied to Nick and his life, and she is finally allowed to grow independently of him. Paint Britain is so successful, in fact, that Richard offers his patronage to the program.

During this phase, Bex also returns to dating average men. Theoretically, Bex would enjoy a relationship that was free of barriers and could exist in public with no restrictions. Yet, Bex laments that she is unable to develop real feelings for any new man she dates. Though she is healthily moving past Nick at this point, part of her acknowledges that she is not yet entirely over him.

Lacey subtly expresses hopes for a deeper relationship with Freddie, a fact magnified by Bex's newfound singleness. Bex can tell that Lacey's feelings for Freddie are genuine, and not simply based on a desire for fame, but she also has an inkling that Lacey waiting for Freddie may be dangerous, and that Freddie is not going to reciprocate her feelings.

Bex and Nick rekindling their relationship is foreshadowed by Bea's comments. Though she has been critical of Bex up until this point, she admits to the fact that Bex is a more worthy suitor than the vapid women Nick has been dating in her absence. Bea says that their reunion is all about "timing" (271) which adds another level of foreshadowing to how Nick and Bex will eventually reunite.

Freddie, despite not being interested in Lacey, becomes increasingly supportive of Bex during her breakup. Their friendship is solid despite Nick's absence, and Freddie even visits Bex at work before inviting her out to lunch. They are able to talk openly about Nick and Lacey. Freddie also confides in Bex about being "the spare" (263) showing that he is willing to drop his defenses around Bex. Their kiss at the end of the section is a culmination of the tension that has been building between them.

Discussion Question 1

How has Bex evolved outside of her relationship with Nick?

Discussion Question 2

How has Bex's relationship with Bea evolved up to this point?

Discussion Question 3

Why do you think Bex and Freddie kiss? Have there been hints leading up to the moment?

Vocabulary

inveterate, trivets, bucolic



Part Three: Winter 2011, Chapter Six, Seven

Summary

Bex says that kissing Freddie is an incredible experience. But she quickly pulls away as she is reminded of Nick. They instantly apologize for the kiss and say neither of them meant for it to happen. They exit the tiny room, and find Clive lurking nearby. Bex sees Lacey running across the lawn, and Bex feels she knows what she is about to hear: Earl has died. Bex and Lacey immediately get on a flight to Iowa, where they help Nancy with the funeral preparations. They find out Earl had a heart attack one night while driving to a Cubs game. A large number of people attend the funeral. Bex and Lacey agree to never fight again. At the same time, Bex yearns for Nick to comfort her. One day, Nancy instructs her daughters to return to London and get on with their lives. They promise to visit frequently. When Bex returns to her London apartment, Nick is there waiting for her.

In Part Three, Chapter Seven, Nick and Bex are speechless at the sight of each other. Nick explains he still had his old keys and that he felt compelled to be there for Bex. Bex collapses and they cry together. They embrace, kiss, and proceed to have sex. Afterward, Nick expresses genuine regret at Earl's passing. They talk about how hard it has been being apart from each other, and how they have struggled to feel normal. Still, Bex says that what has happened between them does not need to change the status of their relationship. Nick says he is interested in being serious once more; that he does not want to date other people. He confesses to handling their relationship poorly and wants to be able to do it all over again.

Bex and Nick have a few days together before Nick is called back to the Navy. Bex alternates between sadness for her father and happiness at Nick's presence. Bex is prepared to confess what has happened with other men in the time they have been apart, but Nick insists he does not want to hear. He tells Bex that before he returns to the Navy, he wants her to meet Emma.

They drive out the cottage in Cornwall where Emma is staying. Nick is nervous and tries to explain what Emma is like. He says he does not like the way the palace chooses to cover up her condition. He also reveals that Richard has been caught with India, and that they have been having a secret affair for some time. At the cottage, they see Richard's car in the driveway. Just as they are about to enter the house, Richard walks out. He leaves quickly. Lesley, the housekeeper, greets Nick and Bex excitedly. They find Emma in the study, sitting in a rocking chair. Bex notes the strong resemblance between Nicka and Emma. They all sit together, Bex and Nick talking quietly, and Emma listening. Bex eventually leaves Nick and Emma to go for a walk. Lesley finds Bex and hands her a piece of paper, which turns out to be a watercolor of Emma, evidently painted by Richard. When Bex shows Nick the painting, Nick declares he wants to live



in the open with Bex. He lowers to one knee and proposes to Bex with a plastic ring saved from a Cracker Jack box they shared at Oxford. Bex agrees to the proposal and they embrace.

Analysis

When Bex and Freddie kiss, Bex describes it as a surreal experience. Though it is physically wonderful, she pulls away as she is instantly reminded of Nick, adding to the evidence of Bex still having lingering feelings for Nick. When they emerge from the room below the stairs, Clive is lingering nearby, and seems suspicious of Bex and Freddie. Clive is becoming increasingly bold in his observations of Bex and the royal family, and his presence is worth noting here, as he will only become more demanding of Bex and those around her.

When Earl dies, Bex and Lacey are devastated. Earl's passing represents a new chapter in Bex's life in which she is truly on her own. Though she still has Nancy, Bex and Earl were very close and he was always honest with her about her life and her choices. Now, Bex will have to make those choices alone. Nick is also deeply affected by Earl's death, as he and Earl shared a unique relationship; Earl was essentially Nick's surrogate father in light of his nonexistent relationship with his actual father, Richard. Nick is waiting at Bex's apartment when she returns to England to share this grief with her. The high emotions of the moment lead to the pair rekindling their romance. Bex professes, "I love you. And I am so, so sad. Those two things can be equally true. I learned that the night we broke up" (288). Though they do discuss the issues that plagued their relationship in the past, the speed at which they reunite is incredibly fast and will have repercussions later on. Bex is effectively trading one relationship (that with her father) for another (that with Nick).

During the time Bex and Nick have together before he is deployed, Nick takes Bex to Trewsbury House to meet Emma. During the drive to Cornwall, Nick reveals that Richard has been engaging in a secret relationship with India, Nick's ex-girlfriend. This is a significant moment for the theme of hidden relationships in the novel, as it reveals the deep hypocrisy that forced Nick to keep his relationship a secret, while simultaneously Bex meeting Emma helps close the circle of internal torment that plagued Nick regarding his mother's condition and the press surrounding his relationship. He is being completely transparent and allowing Bex to make judgments for herself. However, just because Nick no longer experiences this anxiety does not mean it disappears entirely. Rather, after this section, it would seem that Nick's anxiety about the press and his family are transferred to Bex.

While at Trewsbury House, Bex sees a watercolor sketch of Emma, painted by Richard. This sketch is a symbol of Richard's softer side: his love of art and his love of Emma. Though he has a bristly personality, he is not completely void of emotions.

After leaving Trewsbury House, Nick proposes to Bex with a ring from a Cracker Jack box. This ring is symbolic of Nick and Bex's time at Oxford, where they bonded over



various American junk food, and their relationship grew roots in a real friendship. The ring is also honors Earl, who loved to attend Chicago Cubs games and eat Cracker Jacks with Bex. As Bex and Nick move forward with their future as an officially engaged couple, the ring Nick proposes with honors important elements of their past.

Discussion Question 1

What is the significance of Nick taking Bex to meet Emma?

Discussion Question 2

What is your impression of Richard's character? What might his internal life be like?

Discussion Question 3

Make a prediction about how Bex and Nick's engagement will go.

Vocabulary

N/A



Part Four: Autumn 2013, Chapter One, Two

Summary

In the time that has passed since Bex and Nick became engaged, Marj, the royal publicist, has taken Bex on as her newest project. Her office is covered with note cards detailing stylists, plans, and a complex timeline leading up to when Nick and Bex will reveal their engagement on Christmas Day. Bex has been carefully re-introduced into Nick's public life at events like polo matches. The relationship is top-secret, though, and Bex is not even allowed to tell her family. After pranking Bex with fake jewelry boxes, Nick finally presents Bex with her real ring inside a Cracker Jack box. The ring, known as the Lyons Emerald, belonged to Emma. Nick then surprises Bex with Nancy and Lacey, who have not yet been allowed to know about the engagement.

On Christmas Day, the royal family traditionally walks to church, and Queen Eleanor decides this walk is when the engagement will be revealed. Bex is nervous not only about the reveal, but because it is the day she will be meeting Queen Eleanor for the first time. Meanwhile, Nick has been advocating to reveal the truth about his mother's condition to the world, as her failure to appear at his wedding would be enough to reveal the truth, anyway. It is decided that this truth will be revealed as part of a television special in which Bex and Nick discuss their courtship. The interview, filmed on Christmas morning, goes spectacularly, and Bex and Nick are able to present themselves as they are, if not slightly more polished. They tell the story of how they met and fell in love, before Nick reveals the truth about his mother.

Bex is incredibly impressed and in awe upon meeting Queen Eleanor, who turns out to be wise and brusque. When Bex walks in the procession with the rest of the royal family, she can feel her life changing.

Analysis

In this section, Bex and Nick present a united front to the press. Though their engagement is still highly manipulated by the royal family, they are allowed to do certain things on their own terms. They allow Clive to print a rumor about Bex attending an event with Nick. Yet while they are doing Clive a favor in an attempt to help a friend, giving Clive an inch may make him hungry for more. Other press surrounding Bex and Nick is more positive, however, such as their official BBC interview. Though the interview is orchestrated and planned, Bex and Nick are still genuine in it. This represents how, when together, Bex and Nick are capable of using the press to their advantage and presenting stories on their own terms. Furthermore, Nick is allowed to reveal Emma's condition in the interview. This brings a sense of symbolic justice to Emma, whose truth is now revealed through the very means that ruined her life.



Nevertheless, despite the fact that Bex and Nick are able to share their status with the world, there are certain elements of Bex's own life that become even more drastically altered. For example, she is not allowed to tell anyone about the engagement until it is made official. Her physical appearance is also subject to scrutiny by the palace, who now dresses her and does her makeup so she will be "presentable" alongside Nick. Bex is aware of this shift in her life, and seems to accept that this is a sacrifice that will be necessary if she is to remain with Nick. She acknowledges this just as she is about to exit the car on Christmas morning, thus establishing her engagement to the public, "To take an outstretched hand knowing it would lead me on a journey I could not reverse. And when I let out that breath and followed Nick into the glare, I left a part of myself behind" (320).

The symbol of the Lyons Emerald is introduced in this section, when Nick presents it to Bex as her official engagement ring. The ring symbolizes the weight of Bex's newfound role as a proper lady and official partner of Nick.

Discussion Question 1

What sacrifices has Bex made to become Nick's fiancée?

Discussion Question 2

What is your impression of Queen Eleanor?

Discussion Question 3

How does Bex and Nick's interview show their control over the press?

Vocabulary

pillock, nattering, colloquialism, baize, equerry



Part Four: Autumn 2013, Chapter Three, Four

Summary

After the announcement of her engagement, Bex becomes globally famous overnight. She is covered in the tabloids regularly, and profiled in magazines like "Vogue." All of Bex's friends are thrilled to hear of the engagement, except for Clive who feels that Nick and Bex slighted him by not providing him with the information about their engagement or Emma. Nick is deployed by the Navy just two weeks into January, leaving Bex to figure things out for herself.

Bex expresses frustrations about Clive to Cilla, who assures her he will get over it. In the same conversation, Bex expresses a sense of exhaustion: she has been going non-stop since she and Nick got back together, and has not yet stopped to take stock of her own emotions. Joss joins the conversation, complaining that her store has closed. She asks Bex to help her get the business back on its feet. When Freddie fails to show a continued interest in Lacey, she begins dating Tony, a club owner and known drug dealer. Lacey casually mentions Bex and Nick would be "great PR" (325) for his new club.

Bea begins training Bex in everything she needs to know in order to fit in with the nobility. Bex has been asked to leave her job and focus on her "training" full time. Marj micromanages Bex's outfits, diet, makeup, and studying. Bex tries to include Lacey, but these efforts are often thwarted by the palace. Lacey is clearly hurt, and begins avoiding Bex. When they do talk, Lacey never asks about Bex's personal life. Bea helps Bex understand that by ignoring Bex, Lacey is actually expressing her desperation for attention.

Part Four, Chapter Four takes place at the Royal Ascot in June. It is the first time Bex will see Nick since his deployment. Bex sees Clive there, and he subtly implies that his failure to capitalize on a royal story has turned his career into a flop. He also tells Bex not to tell Nick about their fling in Paris. Lacey appears, drunk and unruly. She is upset because security is not allowing Tony and his friends on the premises, and becomes more upset when Bex says she cannot do anything about it. Bex is relieved to finally see Nick. Later in the day, Lacey finds Bex once again and tells her she has scored a book deal, but it becomes apparent that the deal is contingent on Bex's participation. When Bex says she cannot contribute, Lacey is furious and leaves. Nick returns to Bex's side and tells he has been called back for yet another deployment. Bex assures him she is okay with this.



Analysis

Though Bex was briefly in control of her public image and persona, her engagement to Nick takes her celebrity status to another level beyond her control. Nick returns to the Navy shortly after the announcement, meaning that he is no longer available to help support and guide Bex through this newfound fame.

Following the engagement announcement, Bex's friends become desperate for her patronage. Clive openly expresses discontent with the way Nick and Bex have failed to provide him with any more stories, and essentially blames them for the way his career has grinded to a halt. In addition, the fact that he discourages Bex from revealing what happened between them to Nick is suspicious. Though he may just be embarrassed or concerned for the relationship, the fact that he is so aggressive about getting insider information on the royal family indicates he may have a more sinister motive. Joss, too, asks Bex to use her new role to curry favor with her clothing line, despite its outlandish nature being blatantly out of sync with what the palace mandates. Finally, Lacey asks Bex to help her promote her boyfriend's new club and is irritated when she refuses.

Indeed in this section, Bex and Lacey's relationship begins to deteriorate. Though Bex attempts to include Lacey in events like shopping and planning the wedding, the palace is not welcoming to Lacey, so Lacey ultimately pulls herself away from Bex. Bea helps Bex realize that in doing this, Lacey is actually revealing how desperate she is for Bex's affection.

Bex is unsure how to balance all of the competing forces in her life. Though her lessons and makeovers are intended to help her become an "improved" version of herself, it would seem that Bex is gradually letting her identity slip away from her. Her relationships are strained because of her status, and she is having difficulty balancing everything without Nick's presence. She even admits to not actually feeling engaged: "I wanted to feel engaged, and not just like a girl wearing a very big ring" (346-347). Still, Bex is incapable of putting her own needs first. When Nick asks if it is okay that he be redeployed, Bex consents, despite the overwhelming feeling that she needs him by her side. Though it may seem that those around Bex are abandoning her or asking more from her, Bex is also contributing to her own isolation. At the end of the section, Bex tries to convince herself that she is doing her part as a small cog in a larger machine: "I floated outside myself and saw a person who was learning for the first time what it was like to belong, not just to someone else, but to something much bigger than herself" (347).

Discussion Question 1

How has Bex's relationship with the press changed?



Discussion Question 2

Why are Bex's friends more demanding of her now that she is engaged to Nick?

Discussion Question 3

How is Bex still isolated in this section, even with Nick at her side?

Vocabulary

affianced, confabs, ashram, inveterate, fomenting



Part Four: Autumn 2013, Chapter Five, Six, Seven

Summary

Part Four, Chapter Five opens with a gossip column alleging Bex and Nick's relationship is in turmoil because Bex is too demanding. Meanwhile, Bex and Nick are enjoying the few days before Nick is re-deployed. Bex expresses a desire to go back to work, and Nick tells her to start rejecting the advice of the palace regarding her lifestyle. Bex tries to keep her anxieties in check, though, not wanting to unload so much emotion on Nick. Planning the wedding only increases Bex's anxieties about the relationship and her life. Bex finally asserts to Marj that she wants to return to Paint Britain, if only to show the press that she is involved in something outside of the palace. This leads to a highly successful Paint Britain event hosted by Bex and Richard. After the event, Bex asks Richard about the watercolor of Emma she saw. Richard is cold to her, and when Bex says she wants to get along with him, he lashes out, saying she and Nick are responsible for ruining his life by revealing Emma's condition, making it impossible for him to ever remarry. He then asserts that Nick only proposed because he gave him a deadline to become engaged.

The next day, Bex finds that Lacey has been arrested in Paris in connection with Tony and his drug dealings. The palace helps bail Lacey out of jail, but Queen Eleanor requests, via Marj, that Lacey no longer be involved with the wedding preparations. In addition, Bex is not to be involved with Paint Britain "for a while" (359). Holed up at home with nothing to do, Bex succumbs to reading everything about herself online, which only adds to her distress. Lacey visits Bex on her way home from the airport, and they get into a massive fight over everything that has happened in the past few years. The fight ends with Lacey storming off.

In Part Four, Chapter Six, Bex is being fitted for her wedding gown. She is exhausted and has barely spoken to Nick because of spotty communications on his ship. She is also sad about the fact that she and Lacey have not spoken in some time. During a fitting, Queen Eleanor drops in and asks Bex to come with her for a moment. In the Queen's private chamber, she helps Bex try on various royal tiaras while they talk about Nick. The Queen talks about Americans she has met in the past before presenting Bex with papers that would enable her to renounce her American citizenship. She does not tell Bex to do so, but gets Bex to introduce the idea herself.

In Chapter Seven, Bex is agonizing over the still-unsigned paperwork. She misses Nick, and is struggling to make it through the year without him. Her friends and family are all busy, so Bex turns to the internet. She begins ravenously consuming everything written about her, especially the vitriolic gossip blogs. When a gossip blog posts a quote from India saying that Bex is only marrying Nick because of Richard's ultimatum, the story gains traction and the negativity aimed at her increases.



Bex attends Cilla and Gaz's wedding, running into all of her old friends. Bex asks Gaz to walk her down the aisle and he gleefully agrees. Bex ends up hanging out with Freddie, who notices her melancholy. When he finally asks if she is okay, Bex breaks down and Freddie has to escort her home immediately. Back at Bex's apartment, she tells Freddie everything that's been building up. Bex says she sometimes wants to run away, and Freddie latches onto this, saying they should run away together. He confesses he has been hiding romantic feelings for Bex for years. They then kiss again, and he encourages them to start over together. Bex does not respond, and Freddie realizes he has made a mistake. They quickly smooth things over and say they really do value each other. Suddenly, Nick calls and Freddie uses this cue to leave. Nick tells Bex she should not renounce her citizenship. They talk briefly, and Nick says he will be home soon. After the conversation, Bex signs the citizenship papers against Nick's wishes.

Analysis

In Part Four, Chapter Five, Bex and Nick are briefly reunited before his next deployment. Their togetherness shows just how influential he is in helping her navigate her new role: he encourages her to shirk some of Marj's demands, and make requests of her own. This inspires Bex to return to Paint Britain. After Nick returns to the Navy, Bex hosts a highly successful Paint Britain event, and the symbol of that program reasserts itself: Bex is capable and talented in her own way. She struggles to find success on anyone else's terms but her own. Unfortunately, few seem to appreciate Bex's genuine talent outside of her relationship.

In Nick's absence, and capitalized by other issues among her friends and family, Bex begins to question why she chose to marry Nick. She thinks, "We'd careened into each other's arms after my father died, and the ensuing tide of emotion had carried us here and dumped us and ebbed" (350). Bex begins to reckon with the fact that her reunion with Nick was heavily influenced by the death of her father. Whether or not she and Nick were meant to be together is irrelevant, though, as there is a sense that she cannot turn back.

After numerous struggles in previous sections, Lacey hits rock bottom in this chapter when she is caught up in a drug scandal. She and Bex have not spoken in months, and when they do, it turns into an explosive fight covering everything that has come between them in the past few years: Lacey's book and career, Nick, Freddie, and Bex "leaving" Lacey for Oxford, among other things. Bex feels that Lacey has been leeching off of her fame and success, while simultaneously tarnishing both of their reputations. Lacey makes her case saying that she is simply trying to navigate her way through Bex's new life. "We all had to rewrite our lives," Lacey says (363). The fight comes to no definitive conclusion, and seems to cause more damage to the relationship. When Lacey leaves, Bex "[feels] the invisible tie between us snap" (364).

After this fight, Bex plunges into wedding preparations, including her dress. The fact that Bex hardly cares about her dress indicates she values the relationship more than the spectacle of the wedding itself. At the same time, it is also worrisome that Bex feels the



entirety of the wedding is beyond her control. She hardly gets to make any decisions for herself, and simply allows herself to be put through the motions.

In the scene where Bex is invited into Queen Eleanor's private study, we see what an excellent strategist Eleanor is. She converses with Bex about Nick, and invites her to try on beautiful tiaras before cleverly introducing the topic of Bex's nationality. Up to this point, Bex's nationality has been a topic of conversation, but never one that was in serious danger. Now, this only adds to Bex's uncertainty about her future.

Bex expresses these fears to Freddie, saying "I love Nick. But I sometimes hate what loving Nick has led to, and I catch myself wondering what it would be like if I just got up and ran" (386). This conversation turns into Freddie's confession of love for Bex. Though Bex is surprised by the confession, there has been some foreshadowing to this turn. Freddie has consistently supported Bex from the first moment he met her, and in particular during the difficult period in which Nick is away with the Navy. He expresses that Bex is one of the only people in his life who does not make him feel like he is the spare.

At the end of the section, Nick encourages Bex to retain her American citizenship. Throughout the novel, Nick has embraced Bex's American identity wholeheartedly and has never treated her differently because of it. Nevertheless, Bex makes the sacrifice for him by signing the papers. Clearly, all she needed to know was that Nick--the person whom she is doing this all for--cared about her enough to want her to retain that aspect of her identity. Once again, Bex feels capable and in control of taking these large steps when Nick is at her side. She acknowledges this sacrifice by saying, "This was not the life I would have chosen, but Nick would always be the person" (391).

Discussion Question 1

Why does Eleanor want Bex to sign away her American citizenship?

Discussion Question 2

Does Freddie's confession come as a surprise? What hints have there been in the novel?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Bex sign away her citizenship, despite Nick asking her not to?

Vocabulary

shambolic, ebullient, aspersions



Part Five: Present Day, Chapter One, Two, Three

Summary

Part Five, Chapter One picks up where the prologue left off, and returns to present tense narration. Bex is having her hair and makeup done on the day before her wedding, and Lacey bursts into the room saying, "I did something" (395). Bex shows Lacey the threatening texts she has been receiving, knowing that Lacey has something to do with it. Bex knows that Clive is behind The Royal Flush and that Lacey has been leaking him information. Lacey insists she was tricked into it, but that Clive has her on tape confessing to things. Nancy interferes, demanding to know what is going on. Bex explains her kiss with Freddie and how Clive is attempting blackmail. Lacey explains that she overheard Freddie's confession to Bex, leading her to jealously give Clive the information. He later recorded her saying more when she was drunk. They agree that they have to come clean to Nick and Freddie about the whole situation. Everyone leaves to attend the wedding rehearsal at Westminster Abbey. When Bex sees Nick, she realizes that his tense expression means he already knows about Bex and Freddie.

In Part Five, Chapter Two, the wedding rehearsal passes in a tense blur. Nick does not even look at Bex. After the rehearsal, Nick and Bex are alone and he confronts her about her kissing Freddie. Bex apologizes profusely and explains her side of the story, including her one night stand with Clive and her isolated time while Nick was at sea. She then confronts Nick about Richard's ultimatum to find a bride. Nick denies that he kept his end of the deal, but that he proposed to Bex because he wanted to. Their conversation ends on an uncertain note, with Nick saying he is unsure if--knowing what he knows now--he still would have chosen Bex.

In Part Five, Chapter Three, Bex is preparing for the wedding rehearsal dinner after a crying episode. At the dinner, Marj compliments Bex's appearance and she feels embarrassed. Marj then apologizes for all of the preparations Bex has had to endure for the wedding, saying that even Emma never went through anything as intense. Bex spends the evening talking to all of the dignitaries in attendance. When Bex and Nick are finally in the same area, Bex spots Clive. Freddie gives a beautiful toast to the crowd, which praises the strength of Bex and Nick's relationship. During the toast, Nick sheds a tear and he and Bex hold each other's hands tightly. As soon as the toast is over, however, Nick heads off to talk to more guests. Bex catches Clive's eye and heads into the palace. Without thinking, she ends up in Emma's room. Bex sits down and starts talking about everything going on with her and Nick, though Emma does not seem to register anything. Nick enters the room and tells Bex how beautiful she looks. Nick asks if, in other circumstances, Bex would have told him the truth. They have a gentle conversation and reaffirm their love for each other. Nick then says they must talk to Clive.



Analysis

This section picks up where the Prologue left off, and the reader now sees that the source of Bex's turmoil is Clive's attempt at blackmail. The pieces of his character come together in a way that reveals he has been grooming Bex for this opportunity ever since their dalliance in Paris. If Nick and Bex were not going to give him a story, he was going to get it himself.

The discussion of Clive's blackmail leads to another messy fight with Lacey, who was roped into Clive's scheme. When Nancy witnesses her daughters fighting, she says, "Earl give me strength" (397). Both Bex and Lacey are filled with shame at the thought of their father, who lived a straightforward and honest life. He likely never would have imaged his daughters caught up in something so complicated and scandalous.

At the wedding rehearsal, Bex reflects on how the past few months have flown by with Nick at her side. After months of struggling and self-doubt, Nick helped Bex feel excited about the wedding. This reaffirms the idea that they are a team, and that Nick truly does make the struggles of Bex's role worth it. However, despite the past few months being happy, the wedding rehearsal takes a darker turn as Nick expresses his doubts about the relationship. "Maybe that's our destiny," he says. "Screwing up. Maybe we misread it all along" (417). He cannot fathom that Bex would have kissed Freddie, or become involved in Clive's blackmail scandal.

Bex realizes that Nick's shock and hurt are partially rooted in the fact that Bex has not been entirely honest with him about her feelings of frustration and isolation. She says, "Everyone thinks Americans are so in-your-face, but I was too scared to be a pain in the ass" (419). Bex acknowledges that she has isolated herself and in that sense, failed to uphold her side of being a team.

Marj apologizing to Bex for her intense lessons and makeovers provides some validation for what Bex has gone through in the past months. She says that Bex endured more than Emma ever did, providing a testament to Bex's strength and sheer willpower.

Freddie's toast provides Bex and Nick with a reminder of why they belong together. He praises Bex's stability and the strength of their relationship to endure. He says, "Together or apart, Bex and Nick have quite simply always belonged to each other" (426). This shows he is acknowledging the irrelevance of his own feelings for Bex, and how he wants the pair to reconcile.

After Bex and Nick do reconcile later in the section, Nick repeats his desire to return to the days of Oxford, once again affirming Nick's desire to escape scrutiny and responsibility. To this, Bex says, "We need to figure out a better strategy. We're not the same people we were then. This isn't the same world" (430). This shows a newfound resolve to pave a future together in which they can find the same happiness they had at Oxford, but within the structure of the lives they currently lead.



Discussion Question 1

Why did Lacey participate in Clive's blackmail?

Discussion Question 2

Why did Bex keep the truth about Freddie and Clive from Nick?

Discussion Question 3

Why is Nick always so eager to return to his life at Oxford?

Vocabulary

tremulously, exsanguinate, sojourn, debonair, palaver, episiotomies



Part Five: Present Day, Chapter Four, Five

Summary

When Nick and Bex leave Emma's chamber, they find Clive trying to worm his way past the guards. Clive asks for a word with Bex, but Nick grabs him and shoves him into a room that turns out to be Richard's study. Clive is indignant, though, claiming he "owns" (435) Nick and Bex and that he is sick of the attention surrounding them. He is upset that Nick never used his power to advance Clive's career. Clive says they cannot hurt him because Joss has the blackmail, as well. Bex slaps Clive, and Nick tells Clive to run whatever story he wants, because it will not matter. Clive storms off.

When he leaves, Bex and Nick reaffirm their love for each other. They then plan to seek their friends' help in dealing with Clive. They assemble everyone in the study to hatch a plan. Bea calls her sister and instructs her to destroy Clive's laptop. Cilla says they should give Xandra Deane a "counter scoop" (441), and Freddie offers to elope with Lacey. Everyone seems to see the logic, but Nick and Bex deny him. Instead, they decide they have to tell Marj so she can begin working on it. Amidst fears that the Queen will cancel the wedding, Nick says that even if the wedding is cancelled, their marriage will not be. He asks Bex to marry him that night. The group makes a plan have the wedding that night at St. James chapel.

In Part Five, Chapter Five, the group heads to the church, with Bex hiding under a blanket in the car once again. Nick greets her at the church entrance. They share a moment alone and Bex relishes in the normalcy of the wedding they are about to have and encourages them to make more room for normal things in their lives. Cilla's cousin Bernard, a clergyman, arrives to officiate the wedding. He is drunk and does not recognize Nick and Bex. Lacey arrives at the last minute, and she and Bex hug tightly. She says she got a recording of Clive admitting to the blackmail. Whether or not the piece runs, they have counter-proof of Clive's intentions.

The wedding begins with Lacey and Nancy walking Bex down the aisle. Only when Bernard reads their names from a piece of paper does he recognize Nick and Bex. He is startled and kneels down. He continues with the ceremony and Bex thinks about how happy she is. Though she is unsure what will happen tomorrow with Clive's story and the wedding as a result, she knows she is doing the right thing by marrying Nick. They kiss and are married.

Analysis

When Nick tells Clive to print whatever story he wants, Nick is shirking the weight of the press that has haunted him and his family for so long. At a different point in the story, it



is easy to imagine Nick being horrified at the idea of Clive's story appearing in the tabloids, but here he is able to put the fear of public scrutiny aside and make a decision based on his own feelings--that feeling being his love for Bex and desire to marry her no matter what.

Bex and Nick realize that, in order to combat Clive, they need to assemble all of their friends. This serves as a reminder to all of the people that love and care for Bex and Nick, and are not simply in their circle for personal gain. The friends hatch a plan to have Bex and Nick married that night, with each friend contributing something to the arrangement. This serves as a parallel to Oxford, but in a modern context: all of the friends are gathered together with a mission, but everyone is now more grown up and has been able to find happiness in their own way. Gaz and Cilla are married, and Bea and Gemma are open about their relationship. This scene is the first step towards the sense of growth and maturing past Oxford, while still keeping that spirit that Bex alluded to in the last section.

The symbol of the blanket briefly returns in this section when Bex hides under it to be transported to St. James chapel. Rather than simply accepting her position, Bex complains about the blanket and asks how she ever could have endured hiding under it so many times.

When Bex arrives at the church, Nick opens the door for her. This scene is a parallel to when Bex first arrived at Oxford and Nick greeted her at the door of Pembroke. Their relationship has come full circle since that time.

At the altar, Nick and Bex reaffirm "We are a team" (446), and indeed they are. Throughout the novel, their relationship is consistently at its most successful and functional when Bex and Nick work together to solve problems instead of keeping their feelings and fears hidden from each other. Regardless of what happens with Clive's story, they are making a vow to support each other. Their love is not for publicity or political gain, but because they genuinely are a pair that brings out the best in each other. The final line of the novel reaffirms the sentiment that Bex and Nick are a highly successful team, excluding all other external factors: "The kiss that blesses these promises forces the only certainty I need: that even if we are never a duke and a duchess, we will forever be Nick and Bex. An unbreakable we, at last" (452).

Discussion Question 1

What elements of this section harken back to Bex and Nick's days at Oxford?

Discussion Question 2

What brings Bex and Lacey back together at the end of the novel?



Discussion Question 3

Do you think Clive will release the story? What do you think will happen if he does?

Vocabulary

petard, ignominy



Characters

Rebecca “Bex” Porter

Bex Porter, the narrator and protagonist of the novel, is an American woman. When the novel begins, she is 20 years old and an art student at Cornell. After meeting Nick during her semester abroad at Oxford, she graduates early and promptly returns to live and work in England to continue her relationship with Nick. At the end of the novel, Bex is in her late 20's, and marrying Nick, making her a Duchess.

Physically, Bex is tall and thin with long brown hair she frequently wears in a ponytail. Bex prefers plain clothes, such as jeans and t-shirts, and resists the scrutiny the press places on her physical appearance. Bex is outspoken, friendly, and has a dry sense of humor. She is very close to her twin sister, Lacey, and to her father, Earl.

Nicholas "Nick" Wales

Nick is the grandson of Eleanor, the Queen of England, making him second in line for the throne. At the start of the novel, Nick is in his final year at Oxford. After university, Nick is conflicted about his future, which he feels he has no control over. Eventually, he joins the Royal Navy.

Nick is sensitive and trusting. He is emotionally vulnerable in comparison to his staunch father and carefree brother. He feels the need to protect all of his friends, and feels guilty for the ways in which his status as a royal sometimes inflicts difficulty on those around him.

Lacey Porter

Lacey is Bex's twin sister. After graduating from Cornell, Lacey begins medical school at New York University. Eventually, she decides to leave school so she can come live with Bex in England. Lacey begins an off-and-on fling with Freddie, though it becomes clear that Lacey wants more from the relationship than Freddie does.

Lacey quickly becomes popular with the press for her bubbly attitude and excellent style. She often incites the paparazzi whereas Bex tries to escape them.

Frederic "Freddie" Wales

Freddie is Nick's younger brother, making him third in line for the throne. Freddie is characterized by his flamboyant personality and love of partying. Freddie is constantly dating new women and bragging about his conquests. At the same time, Freddie feels he is living in the shadow of Nick, and consistently disappointing their father.



Richard

Richard is Nick and Freddie's father, and first in line for the throne. He is a very staunch, serious man who seems to find no joy in life. He is very controlling of his son's public image and personal lives. He reveals to Bex that he feels his life has been wasted covering up Emma's illness and being forced to withhold from divorcing and re-marrying. Despite his seriousness, it is revealed that is a great supporter of the arts, and a good painter himself.

Queen Eleanor

Eleanor is the Queen of England, mother to Richard, and grandmother to Nick and Freddie. She is wise and controlled without being cold. She has a sarcastic, sly personality. Eleanor can be manipulative when she desires, such as when she hints that Bex should sign papers renouncing her American citizenship.

Earl Porter

Earl is Bex and Lacey's father. He is an inventor who made his money off of the "Coucherator," a couch with a refrigerator built into the base. He is a good-natured man with a sense of humor. One of his greatest passions is the Chicago Cubs.

Earl passes away in Part Four.

Nancy Porter

Nancy is Bex and Lacey's mother and Earl's wife. She is more serious compared with Earl. She enjoys the finer things allowed by Bex's relationship with Nick, and adopts a fake British accent at the end of the novel.

Gaz

Gaz is one of Bex's roommates from Pembroke. He is a hapless redhead who goes on to be a successful lawyer. He marries Cilla in Part Four.

Cilla

Cilla is one of Bex's roommates from Pembroke. She has an open and straightforward personality. At the end of the novel, she becomes Bex's personal assistant.



Beatrix "Bea" Larchmont Kent-Smythe

Bea is one of Bex's roommates from Pembroke. She has a very stiff and cold attitude to anyone who does not behave according to the standards of British nobility. By the end of the novel, she and Bex have developed a tenuous friendship. She and Gemma carry out a secret relationship.

Clive

Clive is one of Bex's roommates from Pembroke. He and Bex have a brief fling at the start of the novel, before they dissolve so Bex can be with Nick. Clive is an aspiring journalist who grows hungrier for a scoop of Bex and Nick with every chapter. In Part Five, it is revealed that he is the writer behind the gossip blog *The Royal Flush*, and that he is attempting to blackmail Bex with information he has about her infidelities.

Joss

Joss is one of Bex's roommates from Pembroke at Oxford. She is an eccentric fashion designer who is prone to taking on the look and lifestyle of whomever she is dating.

Gemma Sands

Gemma was Nick's first girlfriend, and they briefly date again in Part Three. It is later revealed that Gemma is in a secret relationship with Bea.

Marj

Marj is the Palace's public relations manager and is in charge of coordinating the press surrounding the royal family.

Emma

Emma is the wife of Richard and mother of Nick and Freddie. After giving birth to her sons, she suffered a mental breakdown due to the intensity of the paparazzi and public scrutiny. This caused her to become an invalid who lives alone in an isolated home outside of London. She hardly speaks and does not seem to recognize anyone.



Symbols and Symbolism

The Flag Pin

The flag pin is a symbol for Bex's conflicted identity as an American betrothed to the future king of England. Though Nick loves Bex's American characteristics--especially the lack of pressure she puts on him regarding his future responsibilities--Bex remains torn, as everyone else around her pressures her into becoming more British, and more like those "traditionally" suited for someone in Nick's position

Richard's Watercolor Sketch

The watercolor sketch of Emma represents both Richard's love of art and love of Emma. Though Richard has a cold and closed-off personality, the sketch represents a part of him that no characters in the novel get to experience: someone who is sensitive and emotional.

Paint Britain

Paint Britain symbolizes Bex's skill and love for art outside of her relationship. It is a program she started at the Soane Museum to give underprivileged children an opportunity to learn about art. Though many around Bex pin her success and fame completely on Nick, Paint Britain shows how Bex is capable of finding success in her own way.

Bex's Diamond Pendant

The diamond pendant Nick gives Bex symbolizes the purity and strength of their love. Yet, the fact that he gives it to her on a long chain symbolizes how he hopes the relationship will remain hidden. When Bex puts the pendant on a shorter chain, she is showing how she wishes the relationship was public.

Alcohol

Alcohol is a symbol for Bex's disregard for her future. This is used both positively and negatively in the novel. Early in the novel, when Bex is at Oxford, she drinks heavily and is having a wonderful time making new friends and exploring potential relationships with Clive and Nick. She is focused on having fun and not overly concerned with her future plans. Later in the novel, when Bex has just returned to England and is attempting to move past her relationship with Nick, she drinks heavily again and parties constantly. Here, Bex is being careless in a way that reveals she is completely uncertain of her future and is hoping to avoid that responsibility for as long as possible.



Nick's Blanket

The blanket that Nick uses to cover Bex when they ride in the car together symbolizes both the secretive nature of their relationship, and also the imbalance in that secrecy. While Bex lays on the floor, covered by the uncomfortable blanket, Nick sits in the car normally. This shows how keeping the relationship a secret disproportionately impacts Bex and her happiness.

Freddie's Cigarettes

Freddie's cigarettes symbolize how, despite coming off as a carefree individual, Freddie is actually riddled with his own complex anxieties. To the public, he is lighthearted at all times, but in private, he smokes when he is anxious either about his future or his relationships.

Bex's Cracker Jack Ring

The Cracker Jack ring symbolizes how Bex and Nick's relationship finally comes full circle upon their engagement. When Nick first proposes to Bex, he does so with a toy ring from a Cracker Jack box. Cracker Jacks tie into their early days together at Oxford, as well as honor the spirit of Bex's late father, Earl, who would always get Cracker Jacks with Bex at Chicago Cubs games.

Joss's Shirt With the Heart on its Sleeve

The Joss-designed shirt featuring a heart on its sleeve symbolizes Bex's desire to confess her feelings for Nick. She accidentally wears the shirt on the day she visits him at Windsor Castle, when she is planning on professing her feelings, which she ultimately does.

The Lyons Emerald

The Lyons Emerald symbolizes both Bex and Nick's official engagement, but also the sacrifice that Bex ultimately makes to be with him. In accepting the ring, which formerly belonged to Queen Victoria II and Emma, Bex is agreeing to adopt the official role of a "lady" and everything that comes with it, leaving behind a piece of her authentic self in order to do so.



Settings

Pembroke House

Pembroke House is a dormitory at Oxford University. It is where Bex stays during her semester abroad and where she meets her roommates and friends Cilla, Gaz, Clive, Bea, Joss, and Nick. Throughout the novel, both Bex and Nick refer to Pembroke house as being a haven: a phase of their relationship where they did not have to be concerned with the media following them and could enjoy a carefree lifestyle.

Bex's Flat

After graduating from Cornell, Bex gets her own apartment in London. Her relationship with Nick allows her some comforts, such as treating her family to a nice hotel or dinner, but her apartment, with ants and no heat, reflects the reality that the secrecy of their relationship means she is forced to live in total normalcy.

Klosters

Klosters, the traditional winter home of the royal family, is where Bex and Nick's relationship is accidentally revealed to the public for the first time, in addition to when Bex interacts with much of Nick's family for the first time. Both of these scenarios are hostile towards Bex, who does her best to seem disaffected.

Westminster Abbey

Westminster Abbey, the most famous church in England, is where Bex and Nick are slated to have their wedding. The night before, they have a more intimate ceremony in the cathedral, with just close friends and family in attendance. Though they are about to be wed in an incredibly prominent ceremony, they are making a dedicated effort to their relationship and to the friends who helped them arrive at that altar.

Trewsbury House

Trewsbury House is a small cottage in Cornwall. It is where Emma lives, along with the housekeeper Lesley. The physical isolation of the cottage represents Emma's emotional isolation from her family. Nick visits Trewsbury frequently, as he aims to maintain some semblance of a relationship with his mother. He detests the fact that Richard's visits are much less frequent.

Paris

Paris is a site of mistakes and debauchery for both Bex and Lacey. Bex goes to Paris with Clive on a drunken whim, and wakes up the next morning realizing they had sex. This information will later be used to blackmail Bex. Lacey goes to Paris with Tony, a boyfriend, and gets caught up in a drug scandal.



Themes and Motifs

Sibling Relationships

The Royal We focuses on the ways in which sibling relationships are just as complicated as other types of family relationships, or even romantic relationships. The sibling relationships explored in the novel are sources of both anger and joy for the characters, and require as much work the romantic entanglements.

Though the obvious central focus of the novel is Bex's relationship with Nick, Bex's relationship with her twin sister Lacey proves equally vital to the narrative arc in that Lacey provides support for Bex's relationship, but also holds up a metaphorical mirror so Bex can better understand the choices she is making in choosing to be with Nick.

The exploration of this relationship begins in the Prologue, which indicates that Bex and Lacey's relationship is strained. Then, Part One reveals that Bex's semester at Oxford is the first time they have ever been apart. This sets up the trajectory of their relationship to gradually degenerate as the novel progresses. Lacey gives up her own dreams of becoming a doctor to move to England with Bex, and subsequently fully immerses herself in the lavish lifestyle of British nobility. This causes problems for Bex, who is eventually forced to criticize Lacey's behavior because of her ties to Nick. Yet, the reality of the situation is that Lacey simply behaves the way she does for the sake of being close to, and just as valued as, Bex. Tensions come to a head when Lacey reveals she inadvertently aided Clive in his attempt to blackmail Bex. In cleaning up the situation, Lacey is able to fully realize how her antics were fueled by her sheer jealousy of Bex's relationship, and Bex is able to realize how she has failed to balance her new duties with one of the most significant relationships in her life and that, if she had, things may have turned out much differently. The novel concludes not only with Bex wedding Nick, but also with Bex and Lacey reaffirming their importance to each other.

Meanwhile, Nick's relationship with his younger brother Freddie provides its own insights about sibling relationships while acting as a mirror for elements of Bex and Lacey's relationship. Freddie consistently shirks his responsibilities and causes trouble for his older brother. Though Freddie doesn't mean to cause genuine distress to Nick, he can't help but loathe his role as "the spare" and the accompanying lack of responsibility and purpose. Freddie's more open loathing of his role as "the spare" help show the unspoken challenges Lacey is confronted with. Perhaps it is no coincidence that, as Bex and Lacey and Nick and Freddie, respectively, grow apart over the course of the novel, that Bex and Freddie become closer. They are able to see what the counterpart of their sibling needs, but are incapable of actually acting on it. Still, they find solace in the other version of their sibling as a middle ground.



National Identity

Though some may think that the United States and England are culturally similar nations, considering the United States was once a colony of England and derived many cultural features from it, this novel reveals just how distinct the two nations are, and the capacity these differences have to create a tension in an individual, who is in this case Bex.

At first, when Bex comes to Oxford, she feels she naturally fits in with her new friends, Nick included. Though there are small, locality-based differences--such as Bex's penchant for attending Chicago Cubs games with her father--her ability to form meaningful relationships is in no way impacted by her national identity. At this stage, Bex sees the differences between the United States and England as minor.

As Bex's relationship with Nick deepens, she begins to see just how differently many think of Americans. In Part Two, during Bex's trip with Nick to Klosters, she is subject to Nick's relatives criticizing American culture, and making stereotypical claims that Americans are brutish and loud. This insecurity continues to grow throughout the novel, and by the time Bex and Nick are engaged in Part Four, Bex is forced to confront what her American status might mean for her relationship with Nick. Though Bex has lived in England for many years at this point, she still considers herself an American, and in the face of the rules and regulations of the palace, Bex clings to this identity as one part of herself that can never be taken away, even after she is physically transformed into the ideal duchess.

Bex's uncertainty is exacerbated when Queen Eleanor asks Bex to sign citizenship papers that would renounce her status as an American and give her British citizenship. Though she does not show it, Bex is devastated at the thought. When Bex tells Nick about this some time later, Nick is furious and implores Bex not to sign the papers. However, after this conversation Bex is inspired and signs the papers. This indicates a realization that Bex was holding onto her American identity out of some small fear that her relationship with Nick may not pan out. However, after his reassurance Bex comes to terms with the fact that they are a team, and that her national identity is an afterthought in comparison. Though she may no longer technically be an American citizen, she will always feel American at heart, and Bex knows that this part of herself has helped make her relationship with Nick so special.

Duty

The Royal We examines the ways in which predetermined duties and responsibilities can be a major source of struggle, no matter how superficially fantastical those duties seem.

For example, Nick struggles with his duty to his country and people. He frequently expresses to Bex the sense that his future is so predetermined, he feels trapped and confined by his role, rather than liberated by all of the power and resources at his



disposal. Nick is frequently reminded of this duty by Richard, his father, and the first in line for the throne. Richard is constantly encouraging Nick to take on a greater public role, and to find a suitable match so as to ease any public speculation about the future of the royal lineage. After finishing at Oxford, Nick faces ever-increasing pressure from Richard to live up to his role as heir to the throne. This involves Nick shying away from “fun” activities such as going to bars and clubs, the theater, and other public events that could be considered “frivolous.” Nick is eventually allowed to join the Royal Navy, which he finds incredibly fulfilling in the sense that he is doing something independent of his father.

Bex, on the other hand, faces no real duties or obligations at the start of the novel, but sees them increase in direct proportion to the deepening of her relationship with Nick. At first, this involves hiding from the press and behaving a certain way in public.

Then, after Nick and Bex announce their engagement officially, Bex’s duties are elevated entirely as she is ordered to become a “proper lady,” both physically and mentally, in every sense of the term. Bex understands that getting engaged to Nick will be a major sacrifice, but she is unprepared for the way those around her will attempt to completely change her identity. This leads to a number of crises for Bex, who is unsure of where to draw the line in her reinvention.

The Media

The Royal We provides a sharp look at the way that those in the public eye, and women in particular, are often overly-scrutinized by the media, and how many do not realize that this type of scrutiny can have negative effects ranging from a bad day to a ruined life.

Many of the characters in the story are in the public eye and the frequent recipient of attention from the media. Nick, for example, is frequently scrutinized for his terse relationship with his father, or for having fun at a pub with his friends. No matter how Nick acts with regards to his role, there is always a magazine, newspaper, or website who will find a way to show him having too much or too little fun.

Bex, and Lacey receive an entirely different breed of criticism that picks apart their physical appearance at all times. Bex is frequently attacked for her low-maintenance appearance, and Lacey equally criticized for her glamorous wardrobe and outgoing lifestyle. This dichotomy comments on the way that women are punished by the media no matter how they live or look.

Emma, Nick’s mother, also represents the power that the media has over a woman’s self image. In Part Two, when Nick describes the decline in his mother’s mental health, he discusses how the paparazzi was directly connected to her desire to live an isolated life. This ultimately had irreparable consequences and serves as a warning for both Nick and Bex.

In Part Four, Nick and Bex do an official interview as a newly-engaged couple. This represents a rare opportunity in which Bex is in control of her public appearance and is



allowed to speak for herself and her relationship. Though it serves its purpose, Bex is still prone to reading about herself online, particularly a blog called The Royal Flush, and this contributes to her eventual breakdown in Part Four while Nick is away.

In Part Five, Clive threatens to leak a story about Bex and Freddie that will deeply damage the public perception of Bex's upcoming wedding. Bex and Nick unite with all of their friends in order to vanquish Clive's attempts at blackmail. This is a literal and symbolic defeat of the gossip machine that has come to haunt Bex. As a united front, Bex realizes that she is capable of rising above the press scrutiny and living life on her own terms.

Hidden Relationships

With the plethora and diversity of the hidden relationships in this novel, the authors show the lengths individuals will go to for love and romantic fulfillment, as well as the many taboos that still exist surrounding who should and should not love each other.

Hidden relationships control many characters in this novel, though all for different reasons. Nick and Bex are the most obvious example of the novel's hidden relationships. Before the couple is even officially together, there is a sense that Bex should be keeping her distance and Nick should be wary of paparazzi so that their closeness is not misconstrued. After their relationship officially begins, Bex must actively hide so that she and Nick are in no way seen together. This continues for multiple years, until many, including Bex herself, express a desire to publicly reveal the relationship. Bex eagerly awaits the moment when Nick will be ready to announce their status to the world. Nick finds this a much more complicated matter for a variety of reasons: pressure from his father to find someone more suitable, as well as the intense press scrutiny he knows will befall them once they are revealed causes him to desire that the relationship be kept a secret indefinitely. Eventually, the press gets an image of the two kissing, sparking rumors and press scrutiny of Bex. Even then, there is no confirmation of the relationship, and the couple works to keep it under wraps. In Part Four, Bex and Nick announce their engagement to the world on their own terms, making their status as a couple official and shedding all remnants of secrecy that clouded their union for years.

Lacey and Freddie are another hidden relationship woven throughout the novel. However, they are distinct in that they are much more cavalier about being spotted together. What keeps them a secret is the fact that Nick and Bex put pressure on Lacey and Freddie to maintain a low profile, or abolish their relationship altogether, for the sake of Nick and Bex's relationship.

Lastly, there is the relationship of Richard and India Bollingbroke. Though this relationship is not a central focus of the novel, it is important because it highlights the hypocrisies within the royal family. Nick dated India for a time, including his time at Oxford, and frequently received pressure from Richard to transform the relationship into an official engagement. Though the novel does not confirm whether Richard and India were together during this period, Richard being with India at all shows how even

someone with so much apparent power and control is subject to the pressures of public appearance and taboos that may restrict him from loving whomever he wishes.



Styles

Point of View

This novel is told in the first-person by its protagonist, Bex Porter. Her tone is casual and conversational, which emphasizes the fact that she is just a “normal” girl who happens to get caught up in a romance with a decidedly abnormal guy.

Bex as a character and Bex as a narrator sometimes diverge. She is highly observant of others, and highly introspective--but her character is often passive, and does not act on the information she explicitly knows. Thus, Bex’s perspective adds a sometimes-contrasting perspective to the events of the novel. For example, when Nick is away with the Navy, and Bex is being groomed by the Palace for her role as the future Duchess, she bottles up her feeling and expresses them solely to the reader. She feels trapped, but seemingly goes along with anything the palace desires. It is not until Part Four, when Bex expresses her inner turmoil to Freddie, that her inner and outer lives are aligned.

Language and Meaning

The novel features a lot of highly-colloquial British slang. This creates a very strong sense of place, and also a sense of foreignness for American readers.

It is worth noting that, as the novel progresses, Bex incorporates some of these British phrases into her vocabulary. This shows her increasing alignment with British culture, and a sense that she feels more at home in England than she does in the United States. For example, in Part Five, Bex uses the insult "slapper" to attack Clive.

Another layer added to the linguistic intricacies of the novel are terms specific to British royalty. At first, Bex is in awe of places like Buckingham Palace, but they come to be referred to in brief, casual terms like “Buck House.” In this way, the language of the novel is an element that ties directly into the theme of National Identity, and the way Bex flows in and out of her roles as an American and British citizen.

Structure

The novel opens with a prologue that reveals Bex and Nick are to be married the next day. This establishes that the entire middle section of the novel will reveal how the couple goes from not knowing each other to being on the verge of marriage. Because the authors choose to show where the relationship will eventually lead from the very beginning, this indicates that the main focus of the novel is not to be the destination of the relationship, but the journey and all of the ups and downs that ensue.

The novel is divided into multiple parts, with several years skipping in between each part. This allows the authors to cover a large amount of time, while still honing in on the key, transformative moments that propel that characters of the novel forward.



Quotes

I fell in love with a person, not a prince; the rest is just circumstance.
-- Bex as Narrator (Prologue)

Importance: This shows how Bex has always loved Nick for who he is and not for the "circumstances" surrounding his life. Though her detractors want to believe Bex wanted to date Nick for his royal status, Bex's feelings have always been rooted in Nick as an individual.

Certain columnists claim Nick liked me in spite of my being American, but [...] I like to think it was because of it.
-- Bex as Narrator (Part One, Chapter Four)

Importance: Though Bex's American status is often called into question by the press and by Nick's family, it is part of what makes Bex appealing to Nick. She does not hold him to the same lofty standards as the British people do, and for that he is thankful.

I told myself to carry this moment as a talisman of a time in my life when I was both truly content and lucky enough to realize it. In a very short time, Oxford had stamped itself on me, and everything back in the States--for the first time, I didn't use the word home in my mind--felt so far away.
-- Bex as Narrator (Part One, Chapter Eight)

Importance: This moment is Bex's calm before the storm. She and Nick are days away from consummating their love, and Bex is relishing in being on that precipice of a life forever changed.

This isn't my life,' I said, feeling like I was repeating myself. 'This is one day in my life. The rest of the time, I have ants and no central air.
-- Bex (Part Two, Chapter Two)

Importance: Bex says this to Lacey after she repeatedly compliments Bex's lavish lifestyle. Bex insists that, though dating Nick has allowed her to put her family in a nice hotel and eat at a nice restaurant, her day-to-day life is much less glamorous and no one should think that it is.

I felt haunted by something. As if somewhere in our turning point we'd forgotten to make sure we were still going in the same direction.
-- Bex as Narrator (Part Two, Chapter Five)

Importance: Bex expresses this sentiment after Nick tells her the truth about Emma's condition. Though she is grateful to Nick for being so open with her, she realizes that the conversation will not solve the deeper issues within their relationship.



Just because people weren't chasing us doesn't mean your demons weren't.
-- Bex (Part Two, Chapter Seven)

Importance: Bex says this to Nick when he expresses a desire for their relationship to return to the way it was at Oxford. Bex points out that even if their circumstances were different, Nick would still have his own internal issues to resolve before their relationship could be successful.

To take an outstretched hand knowing it would lead me on a journey I could not reverse. And when I let out that breath and followed Nick into the glare, I left a part of myself behind.
-- Bex as Narrator (Part Four, Chapter Two)

Importance: Bex thinks this as she and Nick are about to officially reveal their engagement. She is wrestling with the fact that her life is about to change completely, and that she will have to make great personal sacrifices in the coming weeks and months.

I wanted to feel engaged, and not just like a girl wearing a very big ring.
-- Bex as Narrator (Part Four, Chapter Four)

Importance: After their engagement, Nick is deployed by the Navy, leaving Bex to fend for herself and her newfound role. This leaves Bex feeling like she and Nick are not actually in a relationship, and like she is simply acting out the character of a fiancée.

We'd careened into each other's arms after my father died, and the ensuing tide of emotion had carried us over and dumped us and ebbed.
-- Bex as Narrator (Part Four, Chapter Five)

Importance: Bex becomes increasingly isolated after her engagement. Here, she wrestles with the fact that she and Nick became engaged in a highly emotional time, and that neither of them were thinking completely clearly. Now, she is forced to make sense of the emotional rubble.

We all had to rewrite our lives.
-- Lacey (Part Four, Chapter Five)

Importance: When Lacey and Bex fight, Lacey accuses Bex of failing to realize the impact that her relationship has had on those around her. Though Bex accuses Lacey of simply riding her coattails to fame, Lacey insists that her engagement had many other consequences she has failed to realize.

The kiss that blesses these promises forces the only certainty I need: that even if we are never a duke and a duchess, we will forever be Nick and Bex. An unbreakable we, at last.
-- Bex as Narrator (Part Five, Chapter Five)



Importance: When Bex and Nick marry in a secret ceremony, they are making a decision as a team without regards to the input of others. After a long and rocky road, their marriage solidifies them as a team, and they will not let anyone emotionally or legally come between them.

We need to figure out a better strategy. We're not the same people we were then. This isn't the same world.

-- Bex (Part Five, Chapter Five)

Importance: Bex says this when Nick expresses a desire to return to their carefree days at Oxford. Before, she wallowed in that same sense of self-pity with him, but now she firmly declares that they are going to build a future together that is even brighter than their past at Oxford.