

The Rules of Attraction Study Guide

The Rules of Attraction by Bret Easton Ellis

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Plot Summary

Rules of Attraction by Bret Easton Ellis is a look at life on the college campus in 1985. Ellis uses the tools of humor and pathos to tell his story doing so quite effectively. The story takes place in an unnamed university in Camden, NH (non-existent). The story epitomizes the phrase sex, drugs and rock and roll—throwing in liquor for good measure. Although the touches of humor are quite appealing, there is the expected tragic edge that over-indulgent existences ultimately herald in. The plot is driven on the premise that most people want who they cannot have. As the character Gerald tells Paul, "No one ever likes the right person."

Among the dozens of young students the reader meets, there are three main characters. Sean Bateman is a senior who has changed majors multiple times. To say he is non-serious would be one a considerable understatement. He was surprised when his mentor advised him that he was failing only three of his four classes. Sean is constantly in search of the next girl, drink or drug that he can use and abuse. He is a self-described financial aid student who supplements his cash flow acting as a small-time middle man for a townie drug dealer. Sean perpetually owes money to Rupert the drug dealer, who is constantly threatening Sean to pay up. In reality, Sean is from a wealthy family and experienced an upper-crust lifestyle including a tony boarding school education. Sean conceals his wealth from his classmates. He could easily pay off the menacing drug dealer but refuses to do so.

Sean goes from one girl to another, eventually focusing on Lauren. Sean mistakenly thinks Lauren is the mystery girl leaving anonymous love notes in his mail box. Sean is immature and does not know the importance of fidelity or consideration for the other person's needs. When Sean's failures in his personal and school lives pile up on him, he makes a few lame attempts at suicide. Sean doesn't want to end his life but doesn't know how to straighten it out.

Lauren Hynde is another non-serious senior who has fluctuated between Poetry and Art as majors. She is stoned and/or drunk most of the time, dulling any concern she may have about her unabashed promiscuity. Lauren has a shallow relationship with Sean, who is a shallow man. Throughout most of the story, Lauren is pining away for her one true love, Victor. For most of the story, Victor is away traveling across Europe. Lauren is sad and depressed that he has not called her. She makes lame excuses for his lack of communication, envisioning him as sad and lonely without her and unable to get through to her on the phone. Eventually she is shocked when he calls her residence hall, does not recognize her voice and asks for another girl.

Paul Denton is a drama major and is a little more serious at his studies than many of the other students. Paul is bi-sexual but most of his interest during the chronology of this story is in men. Paul is very hurt when he is overthrown by Mitchell for a Freshman girl. Next, Paul pursues Sean, who is pursuing Lauren. Paul's relationship with Sean is one-sided as Sean doesn't give Paul a serious thought. Though Paul is in hot pursuit of Sean, he really sees Sean as boring and humorless. Even though Paul is good looking



and charming, he does not have good self-image. He sets the bar low for others and pursues people who do not return his feelings. Paul is promiscuous and is drawn to young, good-looking men. He is from a well-to-do family and just learns that his parents are divorcing.



Pages 13 thru 23

Pages 13 thru 23 Summary

At a drunken college party, an unnamed girl is attracted to drama student, Daniel Miller, who is across the room. The girl sees Daniel, blond and handsome, talking to another girl, so she gives up and starts to pay more attention to an NYU guy she has been talking to for some time. This unnamed girl is determined to lose her virginity so she takes the NYU guy back to her room luring him by telling him she has some pot. The girl wakes up with two guys in bed with her. The girl was so drunk the night before that she doesn't know who she lost her virginity to, but she wishes it would have been Daniel Miller.

At the drunken Thirsty Thursday Party, Sean is attracted to a Freshman across the room whose attention is focused on another guy. A very drunken Dierdre approaches Sean. She is somewhat attractive in a goth sort of way, but Sean is not terribly interested. Since the Freshman girl leaves with someone else, he decides to go with Dierdre back to her room. She has trouble getting her diaphragm on and it splits.

Paul is at the Thirsty Thursday party and is trying to talk to Mitchell, who is busy talking with Candice. Paul is drunk enough to leave with another girl, Katrina. Back at her room they drink some more, make out a little but don't have sex. Lauren, at the same party, is thinking about the love of her life, Victor. But he's in Europe. They promised to be faithful to each other, but Lauren already messed that up in September. Lauren is drunk enough that she leaves with a square freshman, Steve. Back in his unbelievably neat room, Steve asks Lauren if she has herpes. He said he heard she did. After clearing that up, they have sex while Lauren pretends it's Victor.

Pages 13 thru 23 Analysis

The story begins at an unnamed college in Camden, N.H. What is very apparent is that this group of college boys and girls are drinking, abusing drugs and having free sex. The first girl who is unnamed is attracted to one guy, Daniel, but settles for another. Sean is interested in a young freshman girl but winds up with a less attractive girl. Paul is gay and is wanting to hook up with Mitchell who is with a girl. Paul settles for Katrina but doesn't wind up having sex. Lauren is longing to be with her love, Victor, who is away in Europe, but at a party she winds up with a freshman for whom she has little attraction. This entire episode depicts young people attracted to specific people but settling for others or love the one you're with kind of behavior.



Pages 24 thru 39

Pages 24 thru 39 Summary

Victor is on a European vacation hitting London, Amsterdam, France and Greece among other locations. The majority of the time, Victor is drunk and strung out. Victor has a few encounters with gay men. In Crete, Victor goes to a nude beach and winds up getting sunburned everywhere. He meets up with several Yugoslav guys who teach him to sing every Springsteen song in Yugoslavian. Victor is not thinking of Lauren. He keeps trying to find out where another girl, Jamie, is. He's heard she is in Europe.

Paul has a sexual dalliance with Mitchell. Mitchell seems rather distracted. When Paul wakes the next morning, Mitchell is gone but the ash tray next to the bed is overflowing. Paul goes to the cafeteria for breakfast and sits with three male gay friends of his. The trio is having fun composing a student blacklist, but Paul is not in the mood for their levity as he looks longingly across the room at Mitchell who is sitting with a girl.

Sean is with Marc in Marc's dorm. Marc is shooting up and rambling on about how he and his peers are druggies because JFK was killed while their mothers were carrying them. Sean has been supplying Marc with drugs but Marc hasn't been paying him and owes him \$500. Sean repeatedly asks for the money, but Marc is so incoherent that he first does not understand what Sean wants. Sean persists and Marc finally says he's good for the amount right before he passes out.

Pages 24 thru 39 Analysis

On his European vacation, Victor is not giving Lauren a thought. Victor's main pursuit is drugs, drink and sex—in that order. In the Commons, Paul has breakfast with three gay friends who further darken his already black mood. Paul cannot hide his jealousy from his friends as he looks over at Mitchell eating breakfast with a girl. Mitchell is becoming more remote, and Paul is becoming increasingly depressed. Sean is trying to collect drug money owed to him by Marc. Marc's family is wealthy, and Sean is irritated that Marc is such a slow payer.



Pages 40 thru 58

Pages 40 thru 58 Summary

Lauren makes her way to the Commons to eat lunch. She is not feeling very good about herself—her looks or her state of mind. Lauren sits with her friends, Roxanne and Judy, and learns that another mutual friend, Sara, is pregnant and plans an abortion the next week. Lauren sees the square Freshman Steve coming her way and pretends she doesn't see him. Lauren is embarrassed since Steve is just a Freshman. Lauren skips the rest of her classes and goes back to her room and moons over Victor.

Sean sees the girl he is interested in talking with another girl who appears to be a Lesbian. This girl had sex with Mitchell but Sean would like to hook up anyway. He's hoping she's the one putting notes in his mail box. Sean finds his friends, Tony, Getch, and Tim. Tim has gotten Sara pregnant. The others give Tim a hard time about Sara having an abortion. Dierdre comes up to the table and says hello to Sean. His friends remain silent while Sean tries to get rid of her. Sean is uncomfortable with her standing there since she is not very good looking. Dierdre asks Sean if he is coming to the party that night. He indicates he is but stays very remote toward her. She finally goes away.

At the party later that night, Sean finds out the girl he's attracted to is named Candice. Candice is at the party with Mitch. Paul is greatly distressed to see Mitch there with that trashy girl again. Sean runs into Roxanne with whom he had relations in the past. Out of frustration over Candice, he asks Roxanne to go back to his room with him. When she turns him down, he rushes back to his apartment in anger. He didn't want Roxanne and he is mad at himself that he put himself in the position to be rejected by her. After getting out his anger by kicking, hitting and breaking a few things, he goes back to the party.

Lauren is at her art studio working on posters for a student play. She just had a conversation with her mother that has distressed her. Lauren's mother does not really listen to her. When Lauren brings up her father, it irritates her mother. Lauren's father has a new 25-year old girlfriend and her mother thinks Lauren approves. Lauren's mind is on Victor who she envisions in Europe as lonely, hungry and missing her. Victor is probably trying to get call her but is having trouble getting through. An unnamed girl is pining away over an unnamed guy—how beautiful and desirable he is. Although the guy's name is not mentioned, she imagines him pinning the notes up in his room where she would like to live.

Pages 40 thru 58 Analysis

Lauren is not proud of her romp with Steve. In fact, when she sees him coming in the Commons the next day, she tries to avoid him. She's embarrassed because he is a Freshman and feels guilty because of her feelings for Victor. Lauren's self-worth



problems may stem from her bad relationship with her mother who she feels ignores her. After a disturbing call from her mother, Lauren reverts back to thinking of good times with Victor. Lauren naively thinks of Victor as lonely and miserable in Europe and trying desperately to reach her.

We learn here that the mysterious girl that Sean likes is actually Candice, the girl Mitchell is seeing, and the girl that Paul hates because she is seeing Mitchell. He fantasizes that Candice is the girl leaving him anonymous love notes. Sean shows his immaturity and anger when Roxanne rejects him. An unnamed girl imagines Sean pinning the notes she is leaving in his room. At this point, Sean does not know the identity of the girl and neither does the reader.



Pages 59 thru 74

Pages 59 thru 74 Summary

Sean and Paul wind up talking at the party after Candice and Mitchell leave. Sean is looking longingly at Candice as they depart. Paul is a little drunk and takes a second look at Sean, thinking he is quite attractive. Sean invites Paul to have some Mexican food. Paul takes this as a come-on from the handsome Sean and agrees to meet the next night. Sean is depressed when Candice leaves with Mitchell. He looks around the room at the left-overs and compares it to kids being picked last at gym class. Sean wants to drink more and asks Paul if he wants to get some Mexican food thinking that Paul has some bucks and he'll buy him some beers. Sean is drunk enough to agree to have dinner with this guy the next night. Sean goes back to his room and has sex with Dierdre again.

For his "date" with Sean, Paul changes outfits four times. Just when he is ready to leave, Raymond comes busting into his room shouting that Henry has tried to kill himself. Paul has one thing on his mind, he wants to meet Sean. Raymond and the others shame him into going with them to take Harry to the hospital. Harry supposedly attempted suicide because he found out he was adopted. The evening was upsetting for Paul since he was unable to meet Sean. After the hospital incident, Paul finds Sean at a party and apologizes for not meeting him. Sean plays along but doesn't remember about what Paul is talking.

Lauren rushes off to a post-modern tutorial only to find the professor passed out and the office reeking of marijuana. Lauren checks her mail and finds nothing from Victor. Sean tries to find the professor for a tutorial as well and has no better luck. The mysterious note-leaving girl, leaves a long message in Sean's mail box expressing her undying love and desire for him. She tells Sean how she dreams of bedding him.

Pages 59 thru 74 Analysis

Continuing the theme of unrequited love, this segment showcases the pitfalls of mistaken actions and words. While Sean's interest is in Candice, the dejected Paul, who is in love with Mitch, who is with Candice, takes Sean's drunken invitation to go to dinner as a pass. What follows is a humorous segment that keeps Paul from making his date with Sean. Paul finds Sean later that night. He purposely dismisses Sean's nonchalance about the broken "date." Sean didn't have a recollection of any agreeing to meet Paul. Sean was too drunk. By ignoring obvious signs, Paul is heading for disappointment.



Pages 75 thru 91

Pages 75 thru 91 Summary

Paul's view of his encounter with Sean was at odds with Sean's rendition. At the Booth, Paul mistakenly thinks Sean is jealous because Paul is talking with some Dartmouth guys. Sean is so drunk he doesn't know what he's doing or saying. He agrees to go back to Paul's place only because Paul says he has booze. Paul is hoping they have sex.

Lauren is at the same party. She is having drinks and dancing with her friend Judy's boyfriend Franklin. She misses Victor so much, and Franklin reminds her of him that she winds up having sex with him later that night. Lauren feels guilty about it and wishes Judy would have shown up at the party so it would not have happened. Lauren reminisces about Victor. Lauren was going to try to stop thinking about Victor.

Sean and Paul have totally diverse recollections of their excursion back to Paul's place. They both agree they have a few drinks, and Sean smokes some pot. Sean remembers getting bored and leaving, going back to party to look for Candice, Dierdre or even pregnant Sara. Paul has only images of their night of sex. From Paul's perspective, he and Sean are falling in love. They do everything together, drink, shoplift, eat, sleep together. Sometimes they are at Sean's when his French roommate Bertrand is not home. In Paul's mind, Sean has totally given himself to Paul. Sean's thoughts do not reflect this.

Pages 75 thru 91 Analysis

Sean's thoughts show that he is totally unaware of Paul's feelings. At this point, it is apparent that Sean is either in deep denial, or Paul is fantasizing to a very unhealthy degree. This question lingers for the reader. Sean has been so attracted to Candice that it is difficult to believe that he suddenly would be interested in Paul. Sean has had no gay thoughts or actions up to this point. Paul has talked about his affair with Mitch. Mitch is always seen with Candice and could be bi-sexual. This segment begs the question: Is Paul fantasizing or at least greatly exaggerating in his mind his relationships with both?

Lauren is not being a good friend to Judy. She's sleeping with Judy's boyfriend, Franklin. Lauren uses the excuse that she misses Victor and that Franklin reminds her of Victor. She recalls in a fragmented portion that Victor had been in love with Jamie. Jamie is the girl he is looking for in Europe. Is Lauren fantasizing about Victor? Is that something that is over or that never was? Lauren seems to blame others for her actions.



Pages 92 thru 108

Pages 92 thru 108 Summary

Sean recollects about a "hippie" girlfriend from his Freshman year. It was the '80's when he met her and he had thought hippies were dead. But he was very attracted to the girl even though they were nothing alike. The girl was stoned all the time and thought everyone was beautiful. Sean had put up with her because she was cute and they had good sex. She always called Sean beautiful, but when he realized she thought everyone was beautiful even a guy that killed his girlfriend, he began to find the relationship impossible.

Paul discusses how he and Sean skip classes days for fun, drinking, drugs and sex. He is jealous that some girl is putting notes in Sean's mail box offering herself to him. Paul is trying to figure out who the girl might be. Paul thinks he might know who the mystery note leaver is. He puts a couple of cigarettes out in her box as a not-so-gentle warning to stay away from Sean. Paul's mother calls telling him to meet her in Boston because she has something she wants to discuss. The Jareds will be with her. Paul doesn't want to take off because he fears leaving Sean alone on a Friday night. But his mother is insistent so he agrees to meet her. Sean is unconcerned that Paul is going to Boston and plans to go to the Dressed to Get Screwed Party.

The mysterious note-leaving girl is heavily fantasizing about Sean wanting desperately to have sex with him. She thinks Sean knows who she is. She is determined that she will have him and has vowed that she would do so the next night.

Lauren is now with Franklin. Judy is with Steve and doesn't care about Franklin. Lauren is starting to wonder if Victor is dead. Her post-modern professor asks why she wasn't at Saturday's session. He tells her to attend Saturday and to let the senior in the class know that the class is on. Lauren leaves a note in the senior's box.

Pages 92 thru 108 Analysis

Even though Paul's views his relationship with Sean as a love affair, Sean lacks any deep thoughts of Paul. Paul's mother has something she wants to talk about. He's is not enthused about leaving Sean for the weekend. The note-leaving girl is ready to make her feelings known for Sean. Lauren is now with Franklin and is thinking Victor, still her true love, may be dead. Her post-modern tutor tells her to attend Saturday's class and to let the senior in the class to attend as well. Good guess is that the senior is Sean. Lauren leaves a note about the class in Sean's mail box. Could Lauren's note leaving be confused with the mysterious note-leaving girl, or is Lauren the mysterious note-leaving girl?



Pages 109 thru 125

Pages 109 thru 125 Summary

Sean is at the pub waiting to see Lauren. He saw her put a message in his mail box, so he is certain she is the mystery girl who wants him. He is thrilled that the mystery girl turns out to be someone so completely beautiful. Sean grows weary of waiting for Lauren, of the boring artsy talk at one table, and the boring Viet Nam talk at another. Sean follows the pretty girl that just left the table and discovers that there is a guy already there in her bed. Sean goes and visits Susan, who at first is not receptive since she has a boyfriend. Susan is Sean's hippie girlfriend from his Freshman year.

Lauren is going with Franklin but is not happy, stilling pining for Victor who never contacts her. Sean doesn't want to take Paul to the bus station, so he pretends his bike won't start. To Sean's relief, Paul takes a taxi. Sean returns to his room, takes some Nyquil so he can go to sleep and dream of Lauren. From Paul's viewpoint, Sean is sorry his bike would not start. Paul feels sorry for Sean who looks at Paul like he's going to miss him. Paul sits in the back of the bus and is irritated when a bunch of young high school kids board the bus at one of the stops. A young man who looks amazingly like Sean gets on and sits near Paul. Paul starts fantasizing about this Sean Boy. When the bus arrives in Boston, the Sean Boy asks Paul for \$5. Sean Boy looks so much like Sean that he can't say no. He's very upset at his mother. Sean is on his own and will surely get laid.

Sean receives another note which he thinks is from Lauren. It indicates that they will be together "once the sun sets." Sean sees Lauren and Judy in the Commons. Sean asks the girls if they are going to the party that night and adds "once the sun sets" for Lauren's benefit. When she doesn't react, Sean figures she's playing it cool.

Pages 109 thru 125 Analysis

Sean saw Lauren put a message in his box. He's ecstatic this beautiful girl is the mystery girl. However, the note he saw her put in his box was about the post-modern class. There is anticipation of a confrontation between Sean and the mystery woman, who plans on making her move that evening or as she says in a message "once the sun sets." Sean interprets her non reaction to the phrase "once the sun sets" as her playing it cool. Paul arrives in Boston worrying about Sean getting laid that night.



Pages 126 thru 144

Pages 126 thru 144 Summary

The mystery girl is preparing for her seduction of Sean. She is soaking in scented bath oil and hasn't eaten for two days. This girl worships Sean. She refers to him as "You" and "Him" — with first initial cap "Y" and "H" as in the "G" in God.

Paul registers at the hotel in Boston where he will be meeting up with his mother and the Jareds. Their son Richard Jared will be along as well. Paul and Richard went to high school together and had a few sexual encounters. Paul is wondering if they will connect during this stay. Finally, his mother and Mrs. Jared arrive. Richard will arrive in time for dinner. The ladies take the adjoining room so that the boys can have the other. Paul continues to worry about Sean and feels like bolting but doesn't.

Lauren is having a nightmare that Victor is dead. She is so upset that she rushes out in the hall, running into a friend. She tells the guy that she is breaking up with Franklin. Lauren winds up having sex with this guy. Sean can't get Lauren out of his mind. After trying to encounter her and failing, he returns home and masturbates as he thinks of her wondering what she's like in bed.

Pages 126 thru 144 Analysis

The mystery girl literally worships Sean. She has chosen tonight to seduce him. Paul is unhappy being away from Sean. He is having a miserable time chatting with his mother and her friend. Paul is torn between thinking about Sean and thinking there may be a possibility of a fling with Richard. Again, when the passages are from Sean's perspective, he shows absolutely no interest in Paul or any other man. All Sean thinks about is women, sex with women, and most recently sex with Lauren who he thinks is the mystery woman.



Pages 141 thru 162

Pages 141 thru 162 Summary

Prior to the toga party, Sean drops by to see his drug dealer, Rupert. Rupert is angry with Sean telling him he needs to sell his bike and pay up his account. Sean cajoles Rupert out of total anger and gets him to give him another bag of dope.

Lauren and Judy get ready for the toga party, going all out, they dress in togas. Judy mentions that someone put out some cigarettes in her mail box. On their way to the party, Judy depresses Lauren by asking her if she's heard from Victor. Chased by a naked guy, Lauren darts into a phone booth to call Victor. Lauren calls his number and when Jamie answers, she hangs up. It is over with Victor—maybe she'd been delusional about him. When she returns to the party, she runs into Sean. They wind up dancing and drinking together and later leave together. Stuart takes over the dance floor and does a wild solo when "Dancing with Myself" plays. He's hoping to impress Paul, but he's not there. As Sean and Lauren leave, the mystery girl watches. She tries to follow and catch Sean's attention. He ignores her and leaves with the girl. The mystery girl knows it is over. There will be no more messages.

Richard arrives at the hotel with bleached platinum hair and dressed in a tuxedo. At dinner in the ritzy dining room of the Ritz Carlton, Richard or Dick as he likes to be called is a rude monster. The entire time they are sitting there, he has his foot in Paul's crotch trying to turn him on. Richard tells the group that he is taking subjects such as "Oral Sex Workshop" and "Gang banging 111." Richard begins telling a filthy joke which his mother tries unsuccessfully to stop. After the "joke," she forces him to leave the restaurant. Paul is kind of turned on and stops thinking about Sean.

Later that evening, Eve Denton takes her son downstairs for a private drink. There she reveals that she and his father are getting a divorce because they don't love each other any more. Paul seems to be neither surprised nor hurt. Eve wonders to herself if Paul is still seeing that girl from Connecticut.

Pages 141 thru 162 Analysis

Lauren, still pining over Victor, is hurt when Judy asks her if she has heard from Victor. Later that evening when she tries to call him, she realizes her relationship with Victor is over and that she had been deluding herself about him. After that revelation, she feels free and is drawn to Sean. He's been there all along, but she was too tied up thinking about Victor that she had not noticed. Although Judy mentions that someone put cigarettes out in her mail box, Judy is not the mystery girl. The mystery girl watches sadly as Sean and Lauren leave together. She knows it is over before it began and vows she will leave no more messages for him. Although Richard is very rude, Paul is drawn to him, perhaps because Richard says whatever he wants and does not hold

back like Paul does. The news that Mrs. Denton delivers to Paul is that she and her husband are divorcing. It doesn't appear to bother Paul, but he is a person who has a habit of hiding his true feelings and thoughts.



Pages 162 thru 182

Pages 162 thru 182 Summary

Lauren and Sean wind up at the dorm shared by two lesbians. They smoke pot and drink with them. Lauren is very drunk and things remind her of Victor and she feels sad. Lauren thinks Sean is okay, not handsome and kind of small. She thinks he is trying to impress her with profound comments that aren't profound. She remembers seeing Judy crying when they left the party. They go back to Sean's place. He plays "You're Just Too Good to Be True" on the guitar and sings to her. It's so pathetic that it makes her think of Victor and cry. The sex they had was okay. Sean's view of their time alone was different. When he sang to her, it so touched her that she cried. During foreplay, he's not getting an erection and thinks something is wrong. Then he realizes what it is: "He can't remember the last time he had sex sober."

Paul is watching TV by himself in the hotel room when Richard returns. Paul scolds him lightly about his behavior earlier. Richard seems a little sorry and expresses his dislike of school. Eventually, he makes a pass at Paul, who rather reluctantly has sex with Richard. Paul packs and quietly leaves on the first bus Saturday morning. He wonders how his mother will react to his leaving a day early. Paul wonders if he'll find Sean with a girl. Paul returns to Camden and to Wooley House where the party was held the night before. There is all manner of human secretions that Paul is careful to step over. There are also passed out people who look dead, some naked and some stacked on one another. Suddenly alarms go off and a girl starts running around, screaming her head off. Paul sees Sean and Lauren standing at Paul's window. Sean waves and smiles as he sees Paul pass by. Paul is surprised that Lauren was with Sean.

The mystery girl is in her bathtub cutting her wrists. She tries to cut at her ankles but is too weak. Laer, Roxanne discovers the girl's blue body in the dark red water.

Sean is sleeping while Lauren looks out the window hearing laughter, music, screaming, and even an aria. She looks around the buildings and spots Paul's room. She thinks back to the last time she was with him. Back then she had heard from a friend that Paul went off on a weekend with Mitchell. She had liked Paul but it didn't work out. Sean and Lauren and Judy and Frank spend Saturday together. They shop and eat out and wind up back at Lauren's together. Sean thinks he's falling in love in Lauren. They hear that a girl committed suicide. The two guys laugh and make some snide remarks.

Pages 162 thru 182 Analysis

As is the hallmark of this book, first person Sean and first person Lauren see their first night together very differently. Lauren cries when Sean sings to her because it seems strange to her and makes her think of Victor. Sean thinks she is touched by his music. Nonetheless, they manage to get together. Paul is still mooning over Sean but perhaps



the intensity is fading since he had sex with Richard. Paul leaves the hotel a day early and there is a lingering feeling about what his father is doing. The news of the divorce may have hit him harder than it seemed at first. The mystery girl did commit suicide. Her identity is still not revealed. Lauren had a relationship with Paul until Paul split to be with Mitchell. Sean is falling in love with Lauren and thinks of nothing but her. When Paul walks by and sees them together in Sean's window, Sean happily waves at Paul seemingly not feeling a bit awkward.



Pages 182 thru 206

Pages 182 thru 206 Summary

Clay who is referred to as the Guy from L A misses California and finds things depressing at Camden, especially due to a recent murder and the suicide of a female student. Clay stays stoned and is afraid of the Commons area due to a myth about dead Indians rising up with tomahawks poised. Paul confronts Sean about their relationship being over. Sean mainly ignores him and answers very curtly. Sean has nothing but Lauren on his mind. Lauren is still looking for word from Victor. She is bored with Sean. All he does is drink beer and play video games. Someone tells her is a drug dealer.

Sean and Lauren attend a party at her Poetry professor's home. He is retiring and is holding a small gathering. Sean really doesn't want to attend. He's jealous of the Professor, but Lauren reminds Sean that Vittorio is going on 70. Sean is starting to find Lauren boring and thinks it may be over. But still he hates leaving her side and is still jealous of the old man. A long, tedious intellectual conversation ensues, and it is almost more than Sean can stand. Sean finds a bottle of Librium in the bathroom and takes one. He's trying to calm himself down from the nightmarish party. The combination of the liquor and the Librium makes Sean pass out and he wakes up at midnight in a bedroom. Sean returns to the living room. Only Lauren and Vittorio remain. Lauren's shoes are off and Vittorio starts kissing her feet and feeling up her legs. Sean grows angry and demands they leave. Vittorio is very tipsy and is begging Lauren to stay. Vittorio gets up and falls over. Sean refuses to help him and leaves. He hooks up with Judy at the pub. They go back to her place and make out.

Later in Lauren's room, Sean is ignoring her glance. She is thinking again about Victor and wishing Sean would get dressed and leave. Sean is aware but keeps ignoring the fact. Finally she confronts him about sleeping with Judy. At first, he denies it but becomes sullen when Lauren reveals that Judy told her. Sean still does not admit his romp with Judy, just shakes his head like she is being ridiculous. Sean finally leaves. Lauren watching from her window sees Sean walk toward his building, then change direction toward Judy's apartment.

Pages 182 thru 206 Analysis

Although the Guy from L A has been vaguely mentioned before, the reader now knows his identity as Clay. Clay is stoned into paranoia and thinks some dead Indians buried around the Commons may come alive and attack. Paul confronts Sean about their relationship. However, Sean as usual doesn't seem to know what Paul's talking about, which begs the question again if there actually is a relationship. Sean and Lauren's intense relationship is already on the rocks. Sean feels the party given by one of Lauren's professors is a nightmare. The intellectual banter is driving him over the edge. Even though he is beginning to think Lauren is boring, he is strangely jealous of her



relationship with the 70 year-old professor. Perhaps out of suppressed anger or resentment, after the leaving the party alone, Sean hooks up with Judy and winds up having sex with her. Judy tells Lauren, who pretends to be hurt. She uses this pretense as a wedge in breaking it off with Sean. With Victor ever-present in her mind, she just wants it over with Sean.



Pages 207 thru 228

Pages 207 thru 228 Summary

Sean is very upset about Lauren finding out that he slept with Judy. Lauren had accused him of biting Judy's inner thighs. He does not remember biting any thighs of the girls he slept with during the last few days. With the Monster Mash blasting on the radio, Sean goes to his closet and selects a tie, which he attaches to a plant hook on the ceiling. He places the noose around his neck and kicks the chair out from under him. The tie only holds for a second and Sean crashes to the floor. He gets dressed and rushes off to Commons to confront Lauren. Sean finds Lauren and makes an awkward attempt to patch up their relationship. He says all the wrong things like, "I didn't know Judy was your best friend" and "Since when does having sex with someone else mean I'm not faithful to you?" Sean's comments do not go over well with Lauren, who still is mooning over Victor.

It's Halloween. Sean rides to town with Norris. Norris picks up some Ritalin while Sean looks at girly magazines. Sean is thinking that maybe it is not over with Lauren and buys her some peanut butter cups and fake blood for himself. They go on to a record store. Sean decides to buy her a record but does not know what she likes. Later in class, the professor calls on him for his opinion on the subject at hand. Sean doesn't have a clue what to say, since he has been fantasizing about one of the girls in class. Later he visits his mentor who tells him he is failing three classes. Sean was surprised—he thought he was failing four. Sean tells his advisor he will fix the situation then leaves planning to go back to his room and overdose.

When Sean returns to his room, all he can find is Actifed. He takes 10 or so Actifeds, downing them with beer. He passes out and is awakened by Norris. When Norris figures out he tried to kill himself with Actifed he winds up having a good laugh. Norris talks Sean into going to the Halloween party. Sean goes to take a shower but first tries to cut his wrists with a dull razor blade that only leaves red marks. Sean picks up the peanut butter cups and snatches his roommate's lighted jack-o-lantern and heads off to the party hoping to find Lauren. At the party, Lauren is dancing and laughing with another guy. Sean takes off for Lauren's room. He smears the butter cups and smashes the pumpkin on her door and leaves a nasty note telling her to die. Sean is back in his apartment alone listening to music. He picks up the tube of fake blood and spreads it on his wrists, neck and forehead. It looks authentic and is dripping all over him when Lauren comes by. She tells him through the door that they need to talk. When Lauren comes in, she gasps at the site of Sean dripping with blood. She is angry and starts to leave but changes her mind and comes back and kisses Sean.



Pages 207 thru 228 Analysis

Sean doesn't remember biting Judy's or anyone's inner thighs recently. This indicates that Sean has not had any sense of fidelity to Lauren. Rejected by Lauren and on the verge of flunking out, Sean makes several very lame attempts to kill himself. He tries to hang himself with a cloth tie that rips immediately. He tries to overdose on an over-the-counter sinus remedy and lastly tries to cut his wrists with a dull razor. These attempts illustrate that Sean does not like the way his life is heading but isn't ready to end it. Sean is still not looking at the reality of his life and is not taking responsibility for it nor taking on the difficult job of making real change. Sean half-way wants to patch things up with Lauren but only on his terms. He is too shallow to think that Lauren may have issues that she needs to deal with before she is able to have a solid relationship. Sean's pathetic attempt to reconcile with her is an egocentric disaster. Sean's personal and academic lives are in shambles, but he does not know what to do about it. Even with all of Sean's issues, Lauren makes a last-ditch effort to pull their relationship out of the flames. But with Lauren constantly obsessing about Victor, it remains to be seen if her intentions are genuine and lasting.



Pages 229 thru 247

Pages 229 thru 247 Summary

Victor is back in New York and finally calls Lauren's hall. Lauren answers and recognizes Victor's voice. Lauren tells Victor she has missed him and asks why he had not called before this. Victor does not recognize the voice and tells the person he actually called to talk to Jamie. Lauren disconnects the call. Later, Lauren with swollen eyes from crying and stoned out of her mind, is with Sean. She vaguely remembers Sean crying and screaming at someone on the phone. Through her haze she sees Sean pack some things and leave. Later, Lauren beds down with Noel but thoughts return to Victor.

Sean recalls the last time he saw his father. His father was very sick and dying with yellowed skin and a frail body. But Sean did not rush off to New York to see his sick father, or visit his mother in the psych ward, or skip class or argue with his brother. He went to New York to escape Rupert to whom he owes \$600 with no way of paying it. Patrick waits for his brother, Sean, at the hospital. Two of his father's aides are sitting outside his room. Patrick does not like these aides, who he plans to fire as soon as he is in charge. He's irritated that his brother is either late or not showing at all. Finally, Sean comes walking down the corridor, visiting his father briefly. Patrick confronts Sean about his failure in school and his drug habits. Sean rejects any offers of help and leaves saying he is going to Utah or Europe. Sean stays in New York City a few days, spending time with Robert, an old friend. They get stoned on drugs and alcohol, each winding up with a girl back at Sean's father's apartment. Robert's girl is Janey Fields.

Paul is very morose, still depressed over losing Sean. He meets with his friend Raymond who is trying to come on to the Freshman, Steve. Steve is unaware and does not pick up on Raymond's advances. Paul taunts Raymond, infuriating his friend. Paul tries to hook up with a townie, but learns that the young man likes girls.

Pages 229 thru 247 Analysis

Lauren is shocked when Victor finally calls her residence hall, doesn't recognize her voice and asks for Jamie. Despite this blow, thoughts continue to return to Victor. Much is revealed about Sean. He is not a financial aid student after all. Sean is from a wealthy family and attended boarding schools in his younger days. Sean leaves for New York ostensibly to see his dying father but claims it's because he owes the drug dealer \$600 and can't pay. Sean has a volatile relationship with his brother, Patrick. Patrick mentions the \$7,000 he just put in Sean's account. The question lingers: Since Sean has so much money why doesn't he just pay off the threatening drug dealer? Sean does not have a good relationship with either his father or brother, and his mother is in a psych ward. Perhaps his family life has contributed to Sean's drug and relationship problems. While still in New York, Sean spends some time with an old friend, Robert. They wind up with



some girls. Robert's girl's name is Janey Fields, or could it be Jamie Fields, the girl Victor is hung up on? Paul is floundering, looking for love in all the wrong places. He hits on a townie who is straight. Paul is starting to see Freshman as more attractive than older guys.



Pages 248 thru 265

Pages 248 thru 265 Summary

Sean drives back to Camden in his MG which was stored at the family home. He goes to the Pub and a few other places looking for Lauren. He vows to not have sex with anyone except Lauren. A short while later, Lauren and he are riding to Camden in what Lauren thinks is someone's borrowed MG. Lauren tells Sean that she's pregnant and that the baby is his. In reality, however, she is not sure at all to whom the baby belongs. Lauren tells Sean she will deal with it. He does not want her to get an abortion and proposes to her. She says okay.

Sean is ecstatic and suggests he and Lauren go on a little vacation. They drive in what Lauren still thinks is a borrowed MG to visit married friends in New York. Lauren fears that she and Sean will turn into this married couple. Sean is turned off by the married couple as well. They drive aimlessly around New England to one motel or diner after the other. Lauren notices that Sean pays for dinners with someone else's American Express. They do a lot of cocaine and their conversation dwindles to nothing. Lauren realizes she doesn't love Sean and never did. She carries a picture of Victor around with her. Sean is becoming repulsed by Lauren. She is looking skinny and unattractive to him. As they run out of cocaine and places to go, Sean finally says to her, "I'll pay for it." A short while later, Lauren is signing papers in a clinic and has an abortion. Sean who waited at the donut shop for her, asks for a truce.

Paul is sleeping with Gerald in whom he has little interest. As they lay there, Sean knocks on the door with a bottle of liquor. Paul gets dressed and Sean and Paul go walking in the snow. They have sex on the snowy ground after which Sean tells him he does not want to hurt him. Paul says he just wants to know who Sean is. Sean tells him he will never know. Perhaps Paul is settling, but he is spending more time with Gerald. In his wisdom, Gerald says that no one ever likes the right person.

Pages 248 thru 265 Analysis

Sean drives his MG back to school. Lauren thinks he borrowed the car from someone. When he uses an American Express card, she thinks that it is borrowed as well. Sean guards the secret of his family's wealth with a vengeance. The reason he does so is not apparent. When Sean first learns that Lauren is pregnant he is excited, proposes and she accepts. However, it is not long before both their thoughts and feelings go in a very different direction. They visit a married couple, which scares Lauren and Sean to think they could turn out like them. Sean and Lauren drive all around New England, finally coming to terms with their realities. They are not in love, do not want to be married, and do not want to have the baby. Sean offers to pay for the abortion. Lauren has an abortion and their relationship ends.



Paul is floundering around settling for Gerald at least for the time being. He has a hard time getting Sean and even Mitchell out of his mind. Gerald is the character to sum up this story thus far. Gerald says to Paul that no one ever likes the right person. Gerald showing a total lack of ego tells Paul that he likes Paul, knowing that the feeling is not mutual.



Pages 266 thru 273

Pages 266 thru 273 Summary

Sean is at a party looking for the waitress he picked up at the donut shop. Sean is happy and feels exhilarated and free. That evening, he winds up having sex with several of his old flames. Another day, Mitchell rides out to Rupert's with Sean. Mitchell doesn't know Sean that well but Mitchell wanted some dope and heard that Sean could help him out. Sean and Mitchell enter Rupert's house. Rupert is in a rage demanding money from Sean. Sean says Mitchell has the money, but Mitchell doesn't know what he's talking about. An argument ensues after which one of the townies picks up a machete and goes after Sean. After a scuffle, Sean takes the blade away from the townie. He and Mitchell take off in Sean's car with Rupert and some townies in hot pursuit. Sean is able to elude them and finally arrives back at the campus. Mitchell was terrified but Sean seemed to enjoy the episode.

Lauren packs up her belongings and runs into Franklin. They stop by the Brassiere pub for a drink. The waiter who serves them is Victor. Victor vaguely remembers Lauren as someone he fooled around with a little last semester. He thinks her name is Laura and leaves the bar with her. After all, he needs a place to stay. From Lauren's perspective, Victor found her at the pub. Right before Victor is due to pick her up to leave school, she runs into Paul. Lauren tells Paul that "he really likes you" and "talks about you a lot." Lauren is referring to Sean and confirms to Paul that it's over between them. A short while later, Paul sees a motorbike driving down the street. Paul runs after it but is unable to catch up. A neighbor, Sven, gives him a ride back to campus all the while Paul is thinking that Sven is pretty cute.

Tim is helping Sean pack up his belongings. Tim mentions Lauren. Sean says he liked her a lot. Tim asks why he didn't pay for it then. Sean says he didn't like her that much. Sean drives out of town on his way to parts unknown. He thinks about calling a few girls he knows but decides against it. Sean sees a heavy-set townie hitching for a ride. He stops and picks her up thinking she doesn't look too bad.

Pages 266 thru 273 Analysis

Sean is still immature and shallow. While waiting for Lauren to have an abortion, he picks up the waitress at the donut shop. Sean and Mitchell drive out to Rupert's for some drugs. They have a bizarre episode with the drug dealer and the townies at his house. Rupert wants his money from Sean, who says he doesn't have it. Rupert and the townies threaten him with a machete and chase after Sean and Mitchell as they ride away. They escape harm. Mitchell is scared to death but Sean seemed to enjoy it. Before he drives off, Sean hands Mitchell the pot he wanted from his pocket. Sean apparently likes living on the edge and having his life threatened doesn't bother him. Lauren winds up seeing Victor again at a pub. She thinks they're reunited. He barely



remembers her. She is still delusional about Victor and will probably be hurt again. Before she leaves the campus, Lauren intimates to Paul that Sean likes him. Paul runs after a motorbike that he thinks is Sean. He doesn't seem upset that he didn't catch up with him and seems to decide to love the one he's with. Sean leaves town not knowing where he is going to wind up. He picks up a girl on the way out. Sean has not changed and may never.



Characters

Sean Bateman

Sean Bateman is a senior at a college in Camden, NH. He is originally from a southern state and claims to be a financial aid student. However, it is revealed toward the end of the story that Sean is actually from a very wealthy family. He keeps this fact secret from everyone at school for no apparent reason. Sean's main goals in life are to get drunk, get stoned, get laid, play video games and do as little school work as possible. His appearance is a matter of perspective. Sean is described as handsome by Paul, a bi-sexual student who is hotly pursuing him. Sean is described as not too bad looking by Lauren, who Sean is hotly pursuing. Sean has had various majors, i.e., computers (as he calls it) and literature to name a few. A mystery girl has a major crush on him and leaves notes in his mail box. When the girl sees him with Lauren, she goes back to her dorm and commits suicide. Sean hears about a girl "whacking herself" but has no idea he was the cause of it. Sean is not an intellectual and gets extremely bored when he is trapped at a gathering where a high-minded discussion is taking place. Sean buys and sells drugs on a minor basis. His source is an off-campus tough guy named Rupert. He always owes Rupert money and Rupert is always threatening him but for some reason always gives him more drugs. Sean, who is wealthy, could easily pay Rupert off but doesn't. Perhaps he likes to live on the edge. Sean's story line ends as he drives away from Camden just as shallow and immature as the day he arrived. Sean is introduced as a young man with no plans beyond what drinks or drugs he could find and would girl he would wind up with on any given night. As he drives off from College, he's had some pot and a few drinks and stops to pick up a young townie who's not too bad looking.

Lauren Hynde

Lauren Hynde is a senior at the same college as Sean in Camden, NH. She is described as a beautiful blond with perfect features and slender long legs. She is an art student but has switched back and forth to poetry. Lauren is desperately in love with a student who already graduated named Victor. Victor has been in Europe for weeks and has not called or sent any letters or messages to Lauren. She is lovesick and very depressed over Victor's inattention to her. Lauren hops from one guy to another with Victor ever present on her mind. Lauren has a terrible relationship with her mother. The little contact she has with her mother has devolved into criticism on her mother's side and hurt and resentment in Lauren's perspective. Lauren like the other featured characters is heavily into drugs, drinking, partying and rampant sex with anyone who happens along. Lauren had a sexual relationship with Paul who is a bi-sexual and in love with Sean. Lauren wanders into a relationship with Sean who she finds boring and non-communicative. Lauren is in denial about Victor through to the end. Even though he's shown over and over again that she has not been on his mind, she is always ready to make excuses for him and give him another chance.



Paul Denton

Paul Denton is also a student at the same university in Camden. Although he is a better student than Sean—he actually attends classes—Paul smokes pot and drinks heavily and is very promiscuous. Although he is referred to as bi-sexual, the majority of his attention is focused on men. In high school, he had a relationship with the son of family friends. This man's name is Richard and he has another fling with him while in college. Mitchell has just broken up with Paul for a girl named Candice. Next Paul falls for Sean and pursues him throughout most of the story. Paul imagines that the feelings Sean has for him are mutual which they are not. Paul's family is wealthy and provides for him but he does not feel close to them. Paul's mother has him meet her in Boston indicating that she has something important to tell him. The news is that Paul's parents are divorcing. Once Paul realizes that Sean is not interested in a serious relationship with him, Paul seems to be liberated and relieved. He starts looking around thinking that the Freshmen look pretty good.

Victor Johnson

Victor Johnson - is Lauren's true love. He is off on a European vacation for most of the story only returning near the end. Victor did not call Lauren the entire time he was gone. As it turns out he was really interested in another girl, Jamie Rivers.

Candice

Candice - The young Freshman who Mitchell leaves Paul for.

Richard

Richard Jared is the rude high-school friend that Paul sees again in Boston when he meets his mother.

Judy

Judy - Lauren's best friend. At one point, Lauren sleeps with Judy's boyfriend Franklin. Later in the story Judy sleeps with Lauren's boyfriend, Sean. However, they remain surprisingly close.

Rupert

Rupert - Rupert is a townie and a medium-sized drug dealer. Sean is the middle-man for a lot of drug traffic to campus. Sean always owes Rupert money which infuriates the coke-head.



Mystery Girl

Mystery girl - a girl leaves love notes in Sean's mail box. She tells him of her love for him offers herself completely to him. After seeing him with Lauren, she feels hopeless and commits suicide.

Vittorio

Vittorio - Vittorio is Lauren's Poetry professor who is leaving Camden and returning to Italy. He is a going away party which Lauren and Sean attend.



Objects/Places

Camden, NH

Camden, NH - the location of the college campus—the grounds, dorms and halls where most of the action takes place

London

London - Victor starts his European vacation here. But it's too expensive and the the hash has too much tobacco so he moves on to Amsterdam.

Greece

Greece - Crete the island off the coast of Greece where Victor meets a group of Yugoslavs who love Bruce Springsteen.

Amsterdam

Amsterdam - Victor spends days here on his European vacation - drugged out and sleeping around

Pop Music

Pop Music - the names of pop artists and their music are interspersed through the book

Alcohol and Controlled Substances

Alcohol and Controlled Substances - drugs and alcohol of all description are a huge part of this story: Pot, heroin, coke, Ecstasy, Absolut, rum, beer, Scotch are all constants in the story.

New York City

New York City - Sean is called their when his dying father is hospitalized there. Sean and Lauren visit married friends in NYC. Victor returns to New York from his European vacation.



The Commons

Commons - the school cafeteria. Lots of conversations take place while the students are eating.

New England Countryside

New England - Sean and Lauren take an extended road-trip through the New England countryside.

Boston, MA

Boston, MA - Paul meets his mother at the Ritz Carlton in Boston where she tells him some important family news.



Themes

Unrequited Love

The overarching theme of this story is misplaced love—love given but not returned. Not once in this tale of young love and lust is there a relationship where the partners get easily claim who they want or think they want. The story starts off with an unnamed girl who is never identified. This unnamed girl is attracted to Daniel who is with another girl. The unnamed girl wants to lose her virginity so she settles to do so with another boy, the entire time wishing it was Daniel. Paul is in love with Mitchell but Mitchell is a bi-sexual who bounces back and forth between Paul and girls. Mitchell has left Paul for Candice. Sean likes a young Freshman girl but she's tied up with another guy. Sean settles for another girl who he is not very interested in and in fact tells her his name is Paul. Lauren is in love with Victor who is out of time. Lauren feels guilty that she slips while he's gone to Europe. She has sex with a square Freshman named Steve, the whole time pretending it's Victor. Victor is traveling across Europe getting stoned, drunk and having sex with women and men. Victor is not gay but tends to be easily swayed into dalliances with men when he's in a comprising or needy position. The only girl he's thinking of is Jamie. Jamie is supposedly somewhere in Europe but he cannot locate her. The mystery girl who writes anonymous love messages to Sean, finally faces the fact that she'll never be with him but unfortunately finds it necessary to commit suicide. As the character Gerald tells Paul, "No one ever likes the right person."

The Downfall of Not Facing Reality

When Paul can't have the person he wants, he fantasizes that he does. When Paul has obvious rebuffs from Mitch, he ignores them and continues to pursue him. He hates the trashy Candice who is taking Mitch away from him. Is she the only thing standing in the way of their relationship? Or could the truth be simply that Mitch does not want Paul. Paul mistakes meaningless actions or words on the part of Sean as sexual advances. Neither Mitchell nor Sean are interested in Paul. They have had gay encounters of which they are not proud and openly pursue women. But because Paul is interested in them, he refuses to see the reality in either situation. It is a hard lesson by all main characters that whether they face reality or not, it is there waiting them out. Lauren sees her relationship with Victor as true love. When he fails to call her from his trip to Europe, she makes excuses for him. When he calls her residence hall, doesn't recognize her voice and asks for another girl, she is hurt but somehow stays in denial. In the end, Lauren still does not face reality. When she finally runs into Victor in a local pub, he vaguely remembers who she is. Of course, they were madly in love. Lauren sees things as she wants. On the last day of school, she is waiting for him to pick her up. She thinks they are riding off in the sunset together. Victor needs a place to stay and somewhere to go for Christmas.



Style

Point of View

Rules of Attraction is written in multiple first-person point of view. This style allows the reader insight into each character's reactions and thoughts as the story moves forward. The reader is privy to the thoughts and feelings of all the characters which makes for interesting comparisons. In many instances, the exact same incident is experienced at 180 degrees from one character to the other. For an example, Sean who is straight and drunk at the time asks Paul if he wants to get some Mexican food. Sean is asking Paul to go eat because he's broke and he thinks Paul will buy him some beers. Paul who is gay, takes the invitation as Sean asking him out on a date. Sean thinks Lauren is leaving him anonymous love notes. Another girl, not Lauren, is leaving the notes which makes for some confused exchanges between Sean and Lauren. Using the multi first-person point of view lends itself to both the humorous and tragic story lines. The light parts reminds one of the "screwball comedies" of the 30's and 40's. One could almost see Cary Grant as Sean and Irene Dunne as Lauren all confused about who likes who. Of course, due to language and substance, this updated version would not have made it past the censors back then.

Setting

The residence halls and local pubs serve as the back-drop for a large portion of this story hosting the many drunken parties that the characters attend. There are always kegs of beer and blaring rock and roll music in the background. There are many hook-ups between students most of which take place in their dorms or frat houses but sometimes in unexpected places. The local pubs in Camden frequented by the students include The Pub, The Carousel, The Brassiere and The Booth. There is a story line that takes Paul to Boston to an upscale hotel where he meets his mother, her friend and son—the son being a former lover of his. This setting underscores his angst at being away from Sean even though he winds up having a tryst with his former lover, Richard. New York City night clubs provide the setting for Victor's return to the States from Europe. Sean is called to New York when his father is hospitalized and on the verge of dying. He visits his father and has a confrontation with his brother, Patrick, at the hospital. As a couple, Sean and Lauren visit married friends in New York City. They also take a road trip through the New England countryside.

Language and Meaning

In this post-modern, highly stylized tale of sex, drugs and lots of rock and roll, the author takes the reader on a fast-paced view of the lives and loves of several current day college students. The casual style of writing is very believable for the campus life. The thoughts and words of the characters are laced with a healthy measure of expletives.



The dialog between the young students is realistic in its frankness and flippancy. The author reveals the thoughts of the characters which more often than not differs from his words.

Brett Easton Ellis' characters at first seem unsympathetic and on a losing track. Staying with them, however, they prove to be hilarious. In fact, although there are very sombre subjects covered in the book, Ellis rescues them from total despair with unexpected lightness. For example, Harry one of the gay young men tries to kill himself. As his friends are hauling Harry out to the hospital, Donald carefully takes the cashmere vest off of Harry because he doesn't want it to be ruined. During this same episode, the hick doctor pronounces Harry dead while Harry is alive and looking right at him. Sean is attending a toga party and plans to wear a toga but will put his leather jacket over it to look cool.

Ellis creates a phrases that are funny but apt. A specific example the guys refer to some of the parties as "Dressed to Get Screwed" parties. He also references Wet Wednesday and Thursday Thursday parties both referring to drinking parties.

Structure

As is explained in Point of View above, each character speaks and thinks for himself. The unnumbered and unnamed chapters are cropped and the story-line is fast-paced and at times fragmented. The fluidity of the plot leads to a fairly quick understanding of the relevance of events and the relationships between characters. The author deftly laces the seemingly stand-alone episodes together into a cohesive story. The character story lines begin with the reader feeling little or no sympathy for the characters. They're drunk or stoned all the time and having sex with anything that moves. But the story structured in this fashion, almost makes one take a backward step to really disliking these one-dimensional losers or at least not caring what happens to them. By adding insight and depth often times in the form of humor, the reader begins to like these reprobates and care what happens to them. The reader starts pulling for Sean to straighten his act up and connect with Lauren which might straighten her crazy existence up. By the author depicting these characters in perhaps the nadirs of their lives, they can only improve and thus engender some warmhearted feelings for pulling themselves out of their holes.



Quotes

There's a rumor going around that you're retarded.
(page 29)

I'm a financial aid student, man. I need some money.
(page 33)

This is the most meaningless question I have ever heard.
(page 39)

I kick at the walls on my roommate's side and break a doorknob on the closet door.
Then I go back to the party.
(page 55)

Can I remind you that we have someone O.D.ing in the backseat?
(page 68)

So went our days, Victor. It always seemed that there was just one minute left.
(page 86)

Go back to my room and drink some Nyquil to get some sleep. I heard that junkies use the stuff when they can't find any heroin or methadone.
(page 119)

I look good standing in front of the mirror, and it makes me sad that I'm surprised by this.
(page 142)

The grass is good but I have to light a cigarette to stay away and during a break on the record we can all hear someone from the party next door scream.
(page 165)

No one ever likes the right person.
(page 261)



Topics for Discussion

The story starts off with an 18-year old girl who wants to lose her virginity. What is her name?

Who is the mystery girl who leaves anonymous love notes in Sean's mail box?

When Lauren learns she is pregnant, who is the real father of her baby?

When Sean and Lauren decide to marry, who do they encounter that starts to change their minds?

What important family news does Paul's mother tell him when they meet in Boston?

What two majors does Lauren keep switching between?

What is the name of the girl that Victor keeps trying to locate?