

Safe Harbor: The Lake Trilogy Study Guide

Safe Harbor: The Lake Trilogy by AnnaLisa Grant

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Plot Summary

Layla and Will are continuing their lives as young college students involved in a serious relationship as the story opens, but they are also dealing with the fallout of earlier actions and decisions. Will and his mother, Eliana, are living under assumed names and in hiding from Will's father, Gregory Meyer. But then Gregory is shot and there's little doubt that he's going to die. With his death, Will and Eliana are free to return to their home town, Davidson, and to pick up their lives. Layla agrees to return as well with her guardians, Uncle Luke and Aunt Claire. When Will discovers that his father has never changed his will, leaving Will as the beneficiary of Gregory's properties and his millions of dollars, his first reaction is to deny acceptance or to give it all away. Layla, however, convinces him that he can do a great many good things with the money and Will agrees.

While waiting for Holly's trial, Will and Layla go through some rough times. Will struggles to assure himself that he isn't going to become a cruel, manipulative man like his father was and his journey to that conclusion is difficult. Layla struggles to help him through the self-evaluation and when they emerge, they are stronger and ready to commit to a life as husband and wife. Layla plans her wedding, leaving a great many of the details to Claire. She is overwhelmed with emotion during the rehearsal when Luke announces that "her parents" give Layla in marriage, effectively including Layla's deceased biological parents in the event as well. Emotions run high as the day approaches with Luke and Claire hating the thought of letting Layla move out though they are happy that she has found such deep love.

Their wedding is held in Davidson and the honeymoon ends with Will and Layla ready to reconnect with family and begin their lives together. But their first night at home is interrupted by another tragedy. As Layla begins opening congratulations cards, she discovers a letter from the man who claims he is willing to reveal the location of a dead juror. Layla wants desperately to meet the man and pay for the information and the deal is set for Thanksgiving morning. She discovers the killer is an FBI agent named Lassiter who was swayed to join Gregory Meyer's payroll. Lassiter claims the body was dumped in the lake and it takes months of searching before the body is located, giving closure to the family.

Meanwhile, Luke is defending Holly during the murder trial against her. Holly's mother was one of Gregory's ex-wives and Holly's brother, Marcus, was one of Gregory's abandoned children. When Luke comes up with four ex-wives, all with stories of manipulation and abuse at the hand of Gregory Meyer, the prosecution agrees to recommend that Holly is sentenced on manslaughter charges to five years in prison. But once they are in court, the judge overrides the recommendation, sentencing Holly to twelve years. An investigation proves the judge had been in a relationship with Gregory and the sentence is eventually overturned. Holly is released after the agreed five years and moves to Georgia under a new name.

As the story draws to a close, Layla and Luke are in the doctor's office five years after their marriage. Layla is certain she's pregnant and the ultrasound reveals that she and



Will are expecting twins. Layla says there have been many changes over those five years. Both she and Luke have graduated college. Luke has launched a construction business and Layla works for an organization that helps children work through the grief of a parent. Luke's mother has remarried and Layla is ready to look forward more years of love and happiness.



Chapters 1 through 3

Summary

As the story opens, Layla Weston admits that she really wants Gregory Meyer to die, though she knows it's wrong to think that way. Layla says eighteen days have passed since Holly Reynolds shot Gregory Meyer, Will's father. Gregory is still alive though he's in the intensive care unit. Layla expects that all of Gregory's people are rushing around to do his bidding, just as they would have done if he was able to make demands. Luke, Layla's uncle and guardian who serves the role of father to Layla, has traveled back to Davidson to be Holly's attorney. Layla knows that Holly must be in agony as she continues to wait with everyone else to see if Gregory dies. While everyone waits, there is more information coming to light about Gregory's cruelty and manipulation and Layla says she is pleased with this aspect of the situation. Layla is struggling to be supportive of her fiancé, Will, who is also waiting to see if his father dies. The relationship between Will and Gregory has been difficult but Layla knows Will is dealing with an array of emotions nonetheless.

Will is spending hours alone with Luke and Layla enters the room uninvited. She has become determined to be involved with the decision-making process though Will clearly wants to protect her from it. He now says that they are considering how to move back to Davidson and Layla is even more upset, pointing out that planning to move the family is something she should have a say in. Layla says she doesn't want to be part of a life where she has no say and rushes from the room. She's a bit ashamed of her reaction but not sorry she took it. Will follows and apologizes but says again that she has been through so much that he wants to protect her. Layla says she is fearful for their relationship because each spends too much time trying to protect the other. They talk through it and turn the discussion to Gregory's condition. Will reveals that there's no way Gregory is going to survive. Will then reveals that Gregory has never changed his will, and that Will will be the sole heir to his fortune. Will says he doesn't want the money but Layla points out that refusing it would just leave it in the company and that Will could do a great deal of good with the money. Will says he's trying to get past his anger at his father.

Will says he and Layla will finish their current semester at college and then move back to Davidson. Layla warms to the idea. They had planned to marry before the end of the semester but Will suggests they put the wedding off considering the time the move will take.

In chapter two, Layla talks to her best friend, Caroline, who is currently in California. Layla reveals the details of her conversation with Will and, at Caroline's prompting, says she hasn't seen Will today. Caroline says that Layla should go talk to Will immediately and then, to emphasize the point, hangs up on Layla. Layla knows Caroline is probably right and she enters the room where Luke and Will are talking. Luke leaves the room to give Layla and Will time together. They both apologize and decide to "do over" the past



few weeks. Layla asks Will how he's dealing with the death of his father and they talk honestly about their feelings. They turn the conversation to the wedding. Will says that he would have married Layla with his assumed name but would prefer to step back into his life as Will Meyer so that Layla is marrying the real Will. She agrees that they will return to Davidson and then make plans for their wedding. They fall into a passionate embrace even though they have pledged that they won't have sex until their wedding night. To ease back from the passion, Layla asks if there is any news about the juror who went missing from Gregory's trial. Will says there are agents working on the case but still no news.

In chapter three, Layla and Will cross the quad at the Florida State University and Layla notes that she's more observant of the details because she knows they'll soon be leaving. Layla has become very close to a young man she calls "Finn," and Will reassures her that they'll continue to see the friends they've made in college. Finn addresses Will as "John," his assumed name, and is sympathetic when Will reveals that his father has died, and that he and Layla will be moving back to Davidson. Will leaves them alone for a moment and Finn makes it clear that he's worried about Layla. She assures him that someday soon she will reveal her entire story to him. Will rejoins them and pledges that they will still marry in a local garden, as they had originally planned, and that Finn will be invited to the bachelor party. Will says the wedding will be "within a year."

After they leave Finn, Layla admits that she'd been worried that Will would put off the wedding indefinitely and that she's relieved that he put a one-year time frame on it. Will seems to think for a minute then takes Layla to the car. He insists that she close her eyes and she obeys. She tries to track their turns but is soon uncertain where they are. Will drives for ten minutes before helping Layla from the car, telling her to keep her eyes closed. When he tells her to open her eyes, she discovers they are in the garden where they are to be married. She can picture Caroline in a beautiful yellow bridesmaid's dress, Claire wiping tears, and Will. Will says he isn't certain he can wait a full year but Layla reassures him that the time will pass quickly. Will recites the vows that he's apparently been thinking about a great deal. He's eloquent and Layla decides to just say what's in her heart. When it's over, they kiss and Layla understands the symbolism of the first kiss after the marriage.

Analysis

Ch 1

There are pieces of background information scattered throughout the book which is the third and final installment of a series. The reader who has not read the previous two books will have to piece together many of the background details. Some of the more important details include relationships. Layla is the niece of Luke and Claire. Layla's parents died in what Layla believes is a car accident several years earlier. She lived for awhile with her grandparents and the relationship with her grandmother was horrible. Luke and Claire took her in after her grandparents died. Layla calls them "mom" and



“dad,” and their relationship is strong. Layla and Will met in Davidson but Will's father, Gregory, opposed the match. Will and his mother, Eliana, faked their own deaths and moved away to escape Gregory's cruelty and manipulation. Will and Layla reconnected and are now engaged though Will and his mother are living under assumed names. Holly Reynolds is the half-sister of Will's half-brother, Marcus, who died in a previous book. Holly shot Gregory after coming to the conclusion that he was going to escape justice after being charged in Davidson. Gregory apparently hired a man to kill jurors, including one whose body has not yet been discovered. The man hired, the location of the juror's body, and some other key facts will be revealed in this book.

Relationships are an important theme in this book and Will's relationship with Gregory drives a great deal of the action in the previous books. Gregory is cruel and manipulative, driving Will and Eliana to an extreme decision in order to hide from him. But with Gregory's injury that's so severe that death seems likely, Will is forced to examine this relationship and to come to terms with his feelings. It's a difficult process for him in some ways though he tries not to subject Layla to his feelings. Layla notes that she feels sorry for Will because he doesn't have the happy memories that he should have had with his father. She offers to share Luke with Will, pointing out that she knows it's not the same as having a father of his own. Will, with only his memories of cruelty to show for his own relationship with his father, says that having Will is “even better” than having a father of his own. It's important to note that Will is able to evaluate Luke as a person rather than simply bemoaning his lost relationship with his father.

Discussion Question 1

Describe the early details revealed about the relationship between Will and Layla. What does Layla say both are trying to do and why is that causing problems?

Discussion Question 2

What do you believe is Will's purpose of taking Layla to the garden and exchanging vows?

Discussion Question 3

What are some of the questions unanswered in the opening chapters for those who have not read previous books of this series?

Vocabulary

minions, treacherous, cater, comatose, adamant, corroborated, proclamations, transgressions, inadvertently, ponder



Chapters 4 through 6

Summary

In chapter four, Layla and Will are overjoyed at the level of emotion and Layla says she “almost” doesn't care if they go through with the “real wedding.” Will prods her into moving and Layla jokes that she can now introduce herself as Layla Meyer and suggests they plan a honeymoon. Will says his heart feels as if Layla is already his wife but says there's honor in waiting because giving themselves to each other after marriage is important. Will looks at it as a matter of honor and trust. Layla agrees, saying she has come to believe waiting is important.

They talk about the things to come. Will says Luke believes Holly can get a reduced sentence once the details of Gregory's cruelty comes to light. There will have to be press conferences as the truth about Will and Eliana's deaths come out. Will says Luke is planning exactly how much information to release in order to keep the press at bay. They head home, laughing and singing during the drive.

At home, Claire greets them and Layla is relieved that Will doesn't tell her parents about their “practice wedding.” Luke and Will begin talking about details of the upcoming trial and move. Luke reveals that Gregory had four ex-wives prior to his marriage to Eliana. Luke says Gregory's first marriage was to a woman named Loretta while they were both still in college. Gregory had been thoughtful and kind to Loretta. He was in an internship but was spending a great deal of time with his wife, which prompted the firm to let him go early. Gregory changed abruptly. Loretta was seven months pregnant with her daughter, Erin, when she left Gregory. Luke says Gregory never even saw his first daughter, Erin Marcon Wagner, who has a son named David. Layla is horrified by the callous disregard, made more intense by the knowledge that Gregory had sent another wife to have an abortion though that woman, Holly's mother, gave birth to a son she named Marcus.

In chapter five, Will didn't know about his brother, Marcus, until it was too late for him to connect with Marcus as a sibling. Now he learns of a sister but fears this girl will be angry that Gregory didn't choose to keep her in his life while Will was acknowledged as Gregory's son. Layla believes the situation will be different, partly because Loretta made the conscious decision to leave Gregory, apparently hoping for a better life without him. Will comes to realize that Layla is right on this subject and that they are going to live their lives regardless of events outside their control. They return to the house where Luke first checks on Will's emotional state then relates his plan. He says he'll continue to commute to Davidson and act as Holly's attorney and that the family will return to Davidson sometime before Memorial Day weekend. Claire, Luke, Layla, Will, Eliana, and Wes will all move into Claire and Luke's house there. Luke and Claire offer to let Will and Layla stay with them after they are married as well. Both promise to think about it.



The remaining weeks in Tallahassee pass with Will and Layla focusing on their studies. Layla forces herself to get some packing done though the sheer act brings back bad memories of other times she's been forced to move. Claire stops in to check on Layla and shares some information about her own childhood. Claire was abandoned by her father who had created a life and family for himself even before leaving Claire and her mother. Claire says she'd sometimes thought about trying to reach out to this other family but was happy enough with her mother, even though they were poor and moved often. Layla is thankful for the insight.

In chapter six, Layla and the others begin their trip to Davidson after being away for two years. Will confesses that he worries what other people will think about the extreme measures. He and Eliana deceived everyone when they faked their deaths. They agree that Will and Eliana will make the final leg of the journey later in the evening so they'll arrive in Davidson after dark. Layla rides the final part of the trip with Claire. They talk about wedding plans for a long time and then Layla listens to music for awhile before they talk about the hurdles they'll face as they pick up their old lives.

They arrive at Luke and Claire's house and Layla recalls the first time she'd entered that house. Her life has changed dramatically since then. When she enters, she finds her friends, Tyler, Caroline, Chris, and Gwen, waiting. Claire orders pizza for the friends to eat while they celebrate their reunion.

Analysis

ch 4

Wes Furtick has not yet been identified and he is actually not fully identified in this book. Wes is one of the men who worked for Gregory Meyer in previous books. While he was not directly involved in the deaths of Layla's parents or the jurors, Wes apparently knows a great deal about the illegal activities of Gregory Meyer. It's noted that he is one of several who are slated to testify against Gregory in exchange for immunity from charges. Though the details aren't revealed in this book, there's apparently no change after Gregory's death. Wes seems like a good guy despite his actions in the past and it's evident that Luke and the others trust him implicitly. Wes's role in the current situation is to provide security though Layla wonders why they need his services once Gregory is dead. Wes is now in a relationship with Eliana and they marry later in the book.

Will has apparently been lonely and longed for a sibling. The details of Marcus's life are not revealed in this book other than veiled references. Marcus's mother was pushed by Gregory to get an abortion but she apparently didn't. Then his mother pushed Marcus into Gregory's life, hoping for an acknowledgment, perhaps with a monetary settlement. At some point in this process, the situation becomes too much for Marcus and leads to his tragic death. Will knows that his father married several additional times and that he fathered other children. Will might have sought them out but he fears that they will resent Will and his mother as the only "family" Gregory decided to keep. It's later



revealed to be largely unfounded but this fear drives Will to distraction periodically over the course of the book. It's left to the reader to decide if this is a reasonable fear.

The lengthy conversation between Claire and Layla in chapter five is one example of the author's over-the-top efforts to make the book move in the right direction. It seems incredibly convenient that Claire's childhood so closely mimics that of Will, except that Claire was on the opposite side of the parents' decisions. Gregory chose to keep Will and his mother in his life though their lives were miserable at his hands. Claire's father chose to leave Claire and her mother behind. In Will's case, he wants to know his siblings but fears that they resent him. In Claire's case, she'd felt no resentment for her siblings but seemed to fear that they would have memories of a loving father that she missed out on. Claire says that if she ever had the chance to meet her siblings, she would have told them they weren't responsible for the choices made by their father. Layla grabs onto that idea, saying she hopes that's why Erin wants to meet Will.

Discussion Question 1

What does Will think his sister, Erin, might resent him? Does his fear make sense?

Discussion Question 2

Describe the “practice wedding” and its effect on both Will and Layla.

Discussion Question 3

What does Layla learn about Clair's childhood and how does that compare to Will's?

Vocabulary

coercion, manipulation, scenarios, logistical, mundane, perplexed, premeditated, infuriating, relinquished, suppositions, megalomaniac, anomalies, mantra



Chapters 7 through 10

Summary

In chapter seven, Will and Eliana arrive. Caroline and Tyler know the entire story but Gwen and Chris are very surprised to find that Will is alive and they agree to keep the secret until the press conference in a few days.

Layla is helping Claire make up one of the beds after their friends leave. Layla realizes it's a bedroom that she's never entered before and Claire reveals that it was Penny's bedroom. Penny was Claire's daughter who died at a very young age though the details of her death are not revealed. Layla asks Claire why she and Luke never had another child. Claire says Luke felt that it would be as if they were trying to replace Penny. Layla recalls that Claire and Luke had been up for partners in Gregory's firm and had thrown themselves completely into their careers at that point. Wes and Eliana head off to bed while Will and Layla finish clearing the kitchen. Layla helps Will make his bed and they talk about his worry over the coming media frenzy. They continue their work until bedtime, talking about Will's concerns over many things, including meeting Erin. Will says the next few days are going to be busy and takes the time to passionately kiss Layla.

In chapter eight, Layla recalls finding photos taken the night her parents died. Luke promised when she found them that he would explain, but asked to wait until Gregory's trial was over. Now that the trial is not going to be completed, Layla asks for an explanation. Wes is in the room and Luke asks him to stay because there are details Wes can fill in. Luke is hesitant still, saying he fears Layla's reaction. Luke says he and Claire become "important to the firm" after Penny's death, working long hours as a way of coping. Then they decided they would try for another baby and Luke told Gregory that Claire would want to stay home with the baby and that he planned to take a position at another firm so that he could be home more. Gregory informed Luke that he isn't allowed to quit. Luke had seen Gregory in a "compromising position" with another woman and threatened to bring that to light unless Gregory released him. Luke says that two weeks later, Gregory had orchestrated the wreck that ended in the deaths of Layla's parents. Layla is confused about the details but Wes convinces her it's the truth. According to Wes, the man responsible was devastated when he learned Layla – just a child at the time – was in the car. He later committed suicide and left a note about Gregory's involvement in the wreck, but police on Gregory's payroll did away with the letter. Luke says the discovery of Gregory's manipulation made him realize he could never have another child because that child would be in danger. It's also the reason he and Claire didn't take Layla in right after her parents' death. It's only after Luke finishes telling the story that Layla comes to realize that Luke feels guilty over her parents' death. Luke apologizes and tells Layla that it's his fault that Gregory took such extreme steps. Layla says there isn't any way Luke could have known what would happen. She points out that she had felt guilty for their deaths as well, because she had insisted they go out that night. She says neither of them is responsible. Luke reveals that Claire



doesn't know what's happened. Layla promises she won't tell but but urges Luke to talk to her, knowing that Claire is hurt over Luke's decision not to have another child and that having a full explanation could ease that.

The conversation turns to the upcoming press conference and Layla says she is going though Will isn't certain he wants her to. Layla doesn't plan to speak to the press but Luke says she needs to have a statement ready, just in case she's put on the spot.

In chapter nine, Layla is in the attic in her favorite spot, in her favorite chair. They plan next to go together to the lakeside, another favorite place that they haven't visited since they've been back in Davidson. Just as they are about to walk out of the house, Wes arrives. He demands they follow him and everyone gathers in front of the TV where Marlene Harris is holding a press conference. Marlene is Holly's mother and her comments are going against the advice Luke had given. Marlene had been in a very public argument with Gregory and her statements now may make Luke's story less credible.

They arrive at the back of the Mecklenburn County Courthouse where the press are waiting based on a phone call made by Wes. Marlene is waiting nearby though her moment in the spotlight is clearly over. Luke addresses the reporters first, acknowledging that he is Holly's lawyer before introducing Will who explains that he and his mother left faked their own deaths and left town. He briefly describes a life of cruelty at Gregory's hands and says he left because of Layla. There is a brief interchange with Marlene with Luke chastising her for calling the press conference against his instructions.

In chapter ten, they all arrive back home. Wes says he has a gift for Will and Eliana. He presents them each with their identification cards and financial cards, all with their correct names. Will's have "William Gregory Meyer" and Eliana's have Eliana Hufford, her maiden name. Will is a little disconcerted but realizes it's yet another step in his mother's efforts to move on with her life. Wes says he wants to marry Eliana soon, meaning her name will change again.

Will and Layla take their walk to the dock on the lake. They take a seat and Will announces that he wants to visit Holly in jail. Layla says she wants to go with him but Will says he needs to see Holly alone. Layla pretends to understand, knowing that arguing would only make her look jealous. They kiss and Layla, having suggested they marry on May 25 because that was her parents' anniversary, now suggests they move the date up some. She also announces that she'd prefer to marry in Davidson rather than returning to the garden in Tallahassee. Will is obviously excited about her choice.

Analysis

There are some additional relationships that are not fully described in this book though there are enough hints that the reader can work out most of the details. Caroline's boyfriend is Tyler and his father works at the law firm owned by Gregory Meyer. Chris's



father also works there and Layla fears that their fathers' relationships with Gregory might impact their own situations. Their fathers are not introduced but it appears they, like most people, are not sad that Gregory is dead. It's important to note that Luke is also employed by Gregory's firm. He later tells Layla about trying to leave.

Layla is struck by the irony of her situation after Luke reveals how Gregory arranged the wreck that killed her parents. Layla notes that she would never have been living with Claire and Luke if her parents hadn't died. If she hadn't been living with Claire and Luke, she would never have met Will and Gregory would never have been faced with their blooming relationship. It's that relationship that led to Will's decision to fake his own death and disappear. Layla goes on to point out that Gregory divorced Holly's mother and literally created the situation that called for Holly to be in a position to shoot Gregory.

Marlene puts on a pretty good show for the reporters and others at the press conference she holds. She talks about Gregory's cruelty and how that drove Holly to shoot him. On the face of it, it seems a good idea but Claire points out that Gregory and Marlene had a very public argument that nearly ended in a lawsuit. Gregory accused Marlene of slander and Marlene's decision to speak out too early means that some people may simply not believe her. That could drive some so far to the other side of the issue that public opinion sways against Holly, and then against Luke and Eliana. There's an short confrontation between Marlene and Layla's family after Luke addresses the reporters. Marlene talks about her desire to stand up for her daughter but she's later revealed as the money-hungry woman who cares nothing for Holly and who leaves Holly without any of the settlement money given to her by Will.

Discussion Question 1

Describe the events that prompt the change in plans for the press conference.

Discussion Question 2

What are some of the ironic facts Layla points out about Gregory Meyer's attempts to manipulate events?

Discussion Question 3

From information revealed in this book, describe how Layla comes to live with Luke and Claire.

Vocabulary

antithesis, epic, imminent, solace, stoic, flustered, chauvinism, reciprocity, repertoire, fraternity, culpability, infinitesimally



Chapters 11 through 13

Summary

In chapter eleven, Luke is already working on Eliana's testimony though the trial is not slated to begin for several months. Layla heads to the jail to visit Holly. She walks several blocks to the jail and looks around for reporters, but sees none. She passes through the check point without incident. As she waits to see Holly, Layla remembers the last time she and Holly had been together, soon after Holly identified Marcus's body. Layla shakes away that painful memory. The conversation begins on a polite note. Holly apologizes if her mother was rude to Layla. Layla asks Holly to tell Will the truth about her relationship with him but Holly refuses. Holly recounts that she'd seen Will the day after he'd taken Layla to prom and that they'd come very close to having sex. Layla asks why Holly told a totally different story later and Holly says she believed Will was dead and didn't think it fair to be so harsh with Will's grieving girlfriend. Holly says Gregory Meyer owed Holly's family and that she had nearly gained back what was owed by having a baby with Will. Layla becomes angrier after Holly says Will plans to give all the ex-wives a settlement of five million dollars. Layla says she won't allow Holly to get any of that money and Holly counters, saying it won't be Layla's decision, especially once she signs a prenuptial agreement. Their time is up and Layla pledges to return with Will but Holly says Layla won't tell Will any of their conversation because she will just look like the jealous girlfriend. As Layla begins to leave the jail, she's still distracted and is caught off-guard when there are reporters waiting outside the jail, apparently having been tipped off by one of the guards. She rushes back inside and calls Wes who gets her out of the predicament. Wes advises Layla to tell Will about Holly's claims.

In chapter twelve, Layla drives around, weighing Holly's words. She convinces herself that there's truth to them. She gets home and goes to the attic where Will finds her later. She confronts him about visiting Holly the night after she and Will attended prom and he admits that he did. Layla talks to him

about Holly's claims that they had come close to having sex and Will says it was a mistake on his part.

They work through the situation and then Will asks why Layla had gone to see Holly. Layla says she wanted Holly to tell Will the truth about their relationship but Will already knows that Holly was using him and was involved in her mother's plot. Layla is surprised Will knows but then reveals Holly's statement that she "missed her chance at having a Meyer baby." Will is surprised to learn that Holly had deliberately set out to become pregnant. There is some discussion about the money and Layla says Holly believes she's going to get a share of the five million Will has agreed to give each of the ex-wives. Will says there's no way to ensure that Marlene doesn't give Holly any of the money but then says he might have an idea. He doesn't say what his idea is but says he wants to be sure Holly and her mother get "every penny they're entitled."



In chapter thirteen, a week has passed since the press conference and there are reporters still following Will and Layla each time they leave the house. Finally, Will promises that the six still hanging around will get exclusive statements when the trial begins if they'll leave Will and Layla alone for now. The reporters agree. Will and Layla go to Davidson College where Layla is caught up in the memories of her friendship with Marcus when they were friends. They find the main offices downtown and the admissions counselor's reaction is positive to their return to Davidson. They next enter Davidson College Presbyterian Church and Will suggests they have the wedding there. Layla had been in the church mourning with everyone else when she thought Will was dead and she is upset that he would suggest they marry there. Pastor Michael Bishop enters and suggests they have the wedding in the smaller Lingle Chapel. As soon as Layla sees it, she agrees.

Analysis

Layla talks about her relationships with Luke and Wes in chapter eleven. She says that Luke has been “upgraded to dad” and she says Wes is not the “bonus uncle” she'd originally thought but is now “just uncle.” It's not clear in this book whether there's some biological relationship at play here or if it's just Layla's way of looking at the situation. She goes on to say that once she and Will are married and after Wes marries Eliana, Wes will become her father-in-law. Layla likes the idea and says her life “just keeps getting better.”

The conversation between Holly and Layla in jail is quite telling about Holly's true nature and past events that aren't fully detailed in this book of the series. She mentions spending time with Will the day after the prom and Layla remembers that Will had left her that day, saying he had somewhere else to be. The fact that he and Holly came close to having sex is devastating to Layla, more so because she and Will have pledged that they will wait until their wedding night. Holly had talked to Layla and Claire at some point after Will faked his death and had revealed that she was in on her mother's plot to hurt the Meyers family. Now she recants that statement and says it's not at all what she meant. Holly says that Will will always look back on their relationship with longing because she was his first love and was driven away by Gregory Meyer. Another important aspect of this scene is Layla's reaction. She's initially sure of herself and of her relationship with Will but she begins to doubt herself when she's faced with Holly's hatred and certainty.

The sexual tension between Will and Layla is strong and it's Will's choice that they remain virgins until their wedding night. Layla has come to agree with that decision but she still seems to struggle with it. When she learns that Will and Holly were naked though they didn't go through with the sexual act, Layla is hurt. She says that Will apparently wanted to have sex with Holly but that he doesn't desire her in the same way. Will convinces Layla again that saving themselves for their wedding night is important and Layla realizes later that he's correct.



Discussion Question 1

Why do you believe Will and Layla have agreed to wait until their wedding night to have sex? Do you believe it's an appropriate decision?

Discussion Question 2

What do you know about Holly considering the information revealed during Layla's meeting with Holly at the jail?

Discussion Question 3

Describe Layla's reaction when Will suggests they have their wedding at the Davidson College Presbyterian Church. What's the alternative and why does Layla decide that would be better anyway?

Vocabulary

orchestrated, sadistically, unquenchable, arbitrary, semantics, exclusivity, periphery



Chapters 14 through 17

Summary

In chapter fourteen, Layla and Will arrive at home and Luke asks Will to help Wes in the garage. Luke has new information and he wants Layla to be the one to tell Will that he has other half-siblings. Michael Aaron Meadows is the son of Victoria Meadows. The other children, Sarah Brinkley Moore who is Cheryl's daughter, Marcus who is Marlene's son, and Will, are also listed. Layla notes the dates and sees that Gregory divorced each of his wives within a year of the baby's birth, and some while the women were still pregnant. Luke says Cheryl doesn't want to testify but says he believes her testimony might be the most important to Holly's case. Layla finds time along with Will and he brings up the subject of where they will live after the wedding. Will wants to move back into the home his father owned. Layla isn't certain but agrees to think about it. They talk about Marcus and Will says he regrets not getting to know Marcus as a brother. Layla then reveals the information Luke shared with her. Will cries and says it isn't fair. Layla cries with him.

In chapter fifteen, Layla and Will spend time together while Will works through his emotions. When Wes returns, Will asks if his mother has been informed of this development. Wes says Eliana already knew about the other wives and children. Will confronts his mother angrily. She explains that she was fearful of losing custody of Will if she angered Gregory. Will goes upstairs and Eliana pleads with Layla to help Will understand and accept her decision. Layla goes to Will and they talk. She admits that she understands both points of view. She knows that Will will work through the emotions and make up with his mother but hopes it will be soon because she knows Eliana is hurting. Wes tells Layla that he won't tolerate Will talking to Eliana like he just did. Layla points out to Wes that Will and Eliana have gone through a great deal together and that Wes has to give them room to work out some things for themselves, even though she knows he wants to protect Eliana. Will enters and apologizes.

In chapter sixteen, there's discussion about the ex-wives and how much Gregory paid each of them. While Loretta and Victoria got large lump sums and Marlene got a monthly allotment that added up to a significant amount, Cheryl got much less. Will wants to go to Virginia Beach to talk to Cheryl, who has refused to testify in Holly's trial. Luke objects but Layla points out that Will might get more information from Cheryl than Luke got. Luke finally agrees once Layla suggests Caroline and Ryan go with them. They head to Virginia Beach with plans to check into a hotel and visit Cheryl the following morning. They arrive at the Old Virginia Hotel where they find the rooms are ready and that Luke has paid. Will and Ryan share a room while Caroline and Layla share the other.

Layla and Caroline have some time before they are to join Will and Ryan for dinner. Layla questions Caroline about her sex life with Ryan. Caroline says the first time was awkward because it's such a learning experience. Layla thinks to herself that she



wouldn't normally be so intrusive into Caroline's life but the reality that she and Will will marry in just a few months has put this at the forefront of her concerns. Caroline assures Layla that the love between Layla and Will will make their first time perfect.

In chapter seventeen, Layla and Caroline join Will and Ryan at the restaurant where they discover that there is music playing nightly. "Orange Colored Sky" by Nat King Cole is playing as they enter the room and Layla feels sick. This is the song that was playing the night of the wreck that killed her parents. Layla rushes outside and tells Will the problem. Will counters, saying it's time for both of them to stop "running from our past" and face the future as a couple, leaning on each other for support. Will suggests that instead of dwelling on the past, they discuss something about their future so that she will forever associate that song with the night Will revealed he wants three children. Layla suggests they talk about the honeymoon before they talk about kids and Will says he plans for them to spend a week in Bali and a week in Ireland. Layla is overcome with Will's honeymoon plans. At the table, the talk turns to the wedding and Layla reveals that she'd like to marry on October 25. Will agrees. They kiss passionately and Caroline teases them about it. The two couples then settle in for dinner and an evening of "normalcy."

Analysis

There's a bit of a contradiction when Will confronts Eliana about her knowledge of the other children. Eliana explains that there was a big age gap between Will and Gregory's other children and she says "it hadn't occurred to her" that they should connect. However, Will points out that he had often begged his mother for a brother or sister, citing his loneliness. Eliana then says she hadn't wanted to go against Gregory, fearing that he would take Will from her. It seems Eliana is trying to justify her decision when there really isn't a true justification for it.

One of the things Will continues to struggle with is the fact that he was chosen as the one child Gregory Meyer raised as his own. Will has learned that Gregory was indifferent to his other children and never even met some of them. The limited perspective means that Gregory's motivations are never discussed at all and the reader is left to figure out what caused Gregory to be involved in Will's life. It could be that Gregory was aging and realized that he needed or wanted an heir to the fortune he built. The fact that he never removed Will as beneficiary of his holdings would support that idea.

Discussion Question 1

Describe the argument Will and Eliana have when Will realizes Eliana knew about the other ex-wives and children of Gregory Meyer.



Discussion Question 2

Why does Will question his role in his father's life?

Discussion Question 3

What do you see at this point as one of the most important themes of the book? Give at least three examples of this theme.

Vocabulary

capacity, propensity, emphatic, nonchalant, vernacular, intrusive, legacy, catalyst, cascade



Chapters 18 through 21

Summary

In chapter eighteen, Will and Layla prepare to go to Cheryl's house the following morning. Caroline and Ryan have been promised a rental car and plan to spend the morning on their own. Will is overly nervous and tells Layla he fears he is becoming like Gregory. He says he worries that Cheryl will give him a description that sounds just like Will. They follow the GPS to the address, a very rural but pretty farmhouse. A young woman Layla correctly guesses is Cheryl's daughter greets them. Will introduces himself and Cheryl's reaction is warm. She invites them in and offers refreshments. Layla introduces herself and Cheryl says she already knows who they are. She reveals that she met Gregory Meyer and saw Will and Layla the day they met. Cheryl says her mother has kept everything about Gregory a secret but Cheryl found the divorce papers. Cheryl says she went to Davidson, intending to confront Gregory, but recognized him as the evil person he was. She says she saw something special between Will and Layla that night and didn't want to interrupt it. She knew she would someday meet Will and has been patient, waiting for that day. Their conversation is interrupted by the arrival of Sarah's mother.

In chapter nineteen, Cheryl enters the living room where Sarah, Will, and Layla are talking. Sarah introduces Will and Layla to Cheryl. Cheryl says she won't testify and Will says he isn't there to convince her otherwise, but has questions for her. Cheryl is uncooperative but Will pleads with her. He says he worries that he might turn into a man like his father and wants to learn all he can to ensure that doesn't happen. Cheryl says that Will's concern is proof that he could never become like Gregory. That softens Cheryl and she agrees to let Will ask questions. She says Gregory never allowed her to work and that he was controlling to the point that she had to carefully watch the food budget. She says she thought he would be kinder once she was pregnant. A few months later, they were slated to attend a party but Cheryl couldn't fit into the dress she'd planned to wear. Gregory shoved her down the stairs and left her there. She was carrying twins and miscarried one of them. Gregory showed up at the hospital the next morning and served her with divorce papers. Cheryl says she didn't want anything more from Gregory and took the settlement he offered, purchased the property for the farm, and severed all ties. Will says he plans to make an additional settlement on all the ex-wives but Cheryl refuses, saying she wants nothing more from the Meyer family.

Cheryl leaves the room and Layla goes to the car to give Will a few moments alone with Sarah. Sarah's husband Austin arrives and introduces himself to Layla. They talk for a moment and the topic turns to the money. Austin isn't surprised to find that Cheryl refused the money. Layla suggests they put it in a trust for Austin and Sarah's child, due in seven months. Austin agrees that's a good idea. They agree to keep it a secret so that Sarah and Cheryl can't object. Layla and Will return to the hotel to meet Caroline and Ryan for the trip home.



In chapter twenty, the two couples return home. Caroline talks a great deal about her day. When they arrive at the house, Layla asks Will if he plans to talk to her about their meeting with Sarah. He doesn't answer but goes to his room and packs clean clothes in his backpack. When Layla insists that he tell her what he's doing, he says he "needs some time" and plans to stay at his house while he sorts through his emotions. Layla objects but Will holds her and says he needs a few days alone. Layla tries to reason but Will is insistent. He says he has promised to keep Layla safe and that he has to know he can do that. Layla watches him leave then runs to Claire for comfort.

Layla doesn't hear from Will for the next day and a half. He doesn't answer texts and Layla is bereft and calls on her friends Caroline and Gwen. Layla says she hasn't talked to Will but plans to continue with the wedding plans. They go to the Bride's Head to shop for dresses for Caroline and Gwen, who will be Layla's bridesmaids.

In chapter twenty-one, Layla decides to give Will more time. A week has passed since he went home. Tyler arrives and says he's seen Will. Will is repeatedly going over the testimony from Gregory's ex-wives. Tyler says Layla should go to Will. Layla says she's giving Will space but Tyler says Layla should go. Instead, Tyler agrees to go to the mall and a movie with Layla. They drive by Will's house and sees several cars there. At the mall, Layla notes that someone is taking photos of her. Tyler texts Will to let him know in case it is a reporter trying to make trouble for Layla and Will. They go to a restaurant where the conversation covers Tyler's lack of a girlfriend. He says it's difficult to connect when Layla is the perfect girl and is unavailable. Tyler says his life might have been different if he had acted more quickly to gain Layla's attention before she met Will. They talk about the current situation with Layla and Will and Layla comes to realize that she should not have stayed away from Will for so long. They agree to skip the movie so that Layla can go to Will's house.

Analysis

As Layla and Will return to the motel after meeting Cheryl, Sarah, and Austin, they talk a little but they also spend some quiet time, each reflecting on the meeting. At this point, Will doesn't share a great deal about his impressions of Sarah and Cheryl and he doesn't talk about how the meeting impacted him. It seems that Cheryl's comments should have reassured him. Cheryl points out that Will is worried about how his actions affect others which is the exact opposite of Gregory and that should have helped Will see that being related to Gregory won't make Will act like Gregory. It's only later that it becomes more clear that Will isn't yet able to accept that he will become his own man and will not hurt people as his father did.

Layla is suddenly struck by the fact that Sarah will become her sister-in-law after Will and Layla are married. She doesn't refer to Sarah as Will's half-sister but does make the distinction that she and Sarah will be sisters-in-law. When she makes that connection aloud, Sarah objects, saying they will be sisters in the truest sense of the word. Sarah says she doesn't believe there's any need to use the term "in-laws" and that family is family. In the modern family connections with many blended families, the lines of



relationship are becoming less important to some and the term “step” is sometimes ignored. Sarah and Layla feel a connection and Layla later realizes that having this extended family fills a gap that has existed in her life.

Discussion Question 1

What is Sarah's attitude toward the term “in-law”? Why do you believe she has this attitude and what is the effect on Layla?

Discussion Question 2

Describe Will's meeting with Sarah and Cheryl. What did he learn and how do you believe this impacts Will?

Discussion Question 3

What do you see as the most significant setting of the story and why.

Vocabulary

contemplation, disconcerting, composed, picturesque, cordially, quizzical, smitten, hospitable, reciprocate, utter, whimsical



Chapters 22 through 25

Summary

In chapter twenty-two, Tyler drops Layla at Will's house. Layla hears laughter as soon as she enters the house and discovers Eliana's parents are visiting. Layla feels that she's intruding and prepares to leave but Will stops her. Layla reveals that her feelings were hurt terribly by Will's decision to put distance between them. Will says he was wrong and was trying to protect Layla. Will's grandmother greets Layla warmly. When she says she'll go home so they can spend time together, Will's grandmother objects, saying she has to get to know Layla. Layla and Will have some more time to talk. Outside, Will sees the man with the camera, who is driving the same black sedan Layla saw at the mall. Will approaches the man but he drives away. Will then takes Layla to meet his grandfather and his uncle where she receives another warm welcome.

In chapter twenty-three, three months pass. Layla gets to know Will's grandparents and his uncle Andrew. Layla and Will are to marry on October 25. Holly's trial is to take place November 17. The man in the black sedan is still showing up now and then. Layla still hasn't agreed to move into Will's house after the wedding and she hasn't spent any time there. The house is overly-ornate and pretentious, which is not appealing to Layla. When she arrives at Will's invitation, she's surprised to find that he's completely remodeled the house. Will says he will put the house up for sale if Layla still doesn't like it. Layla is amazed at the transformation and agrees to live there. Layla is supposed to be getting ready for a dress-fitting appointment but she is late, having stayed with Will to look over the reformation of the house. She arrives home and explains to Claire, who forgives her. Claire is somewhat emotional, citing the nearing date for Layla to move out. Layla points out that Will's house is very near but Claire is still a little sad at the impending change. Claire says she plans to fill the time before the wedding with "wonderful" memories. Claire says they are stopping by Caroline's house before they go to the dress fitting. What Layla doesn't know is that she doesn't have an appointment for a fitting but her friends have organized a shower for her. Some of their friends from Tallahassee are in attendance. Layla is initially worried about explaining the situation, including that Will has been living under a false identity, but they already know and have accepted the story. Layla is overcome by the outpouring of friendship.

In chapter twenty-four, Will has been staying at his house and Layla misses him but knows their time apart is building more anticipation for the wedding night. On a particular day, Will is shopping for gifts for several people, including a wedding gift for Layla. She is struggling to come up with an idea for a wedding gift for Will. Layla decides she'd like to remodel the pool house into a wood-working shop for Will and she enlists Luke to handle the details while she and Will are on their honeymoon.

Layla is packing when Luke enters the room. Their conversation turns to the missing body of the juror who is believed to be dead. Layla says she wishes the body could be recovered so the family could have peace. The man's name is Albert Blasi and Luke



says Wes is still working on the case. The conversation turns again and Luke asks if Layla is certain she's ready to marry Will. Layla doesn't initially understand but then realizes that Luke is feeling the same sense of loss that Claire has exhibited. Luke says he can barely imagine what he would have missed out on if he hadn't become Layla's father. She is sarcastic, saying that Luke has been forced to move out of state, hire and hire a personal security team because of Layla. Luke counters, saying losing his biological daughter was devastating and that he wouldn't change anything about his time with Layla. He says Layla made it possible for Luke and Claire to become parents again for the three years she has been with them. He says he is going to be handing Layla over to Will, trusting Will to take care of her, and that the thought of that is difficult. Luke cries some and Layla spends some times wrapped in his embrace. As they break apart, she says she might leave some of her clothes in her old bedroom and come back for them later. Luke agrees that's a good idea.

In chapter twenty-five, the rehearsal takes place. A woman named Linda is the wedding coordinator and she walks them through the details of the wedding ceremony. Layla is standing outside the doors of the chapel with Luke, waiting for her cue to enter. When it's time, the doors are opened and they walk down the aisle. Layla looks over the chapel, knowing that the guest list is fairly short and the chapel was a good choice. At the altar, Pastor Bishop tells Luke he will ask "who gives this woman to be married to this man," and that most of the time the father responds that "her mother and I do." Layla realizes that she and Luke haven't talked about what he should say at this point. The pastor repeats the question and Luke responds with, "Her parents do." Layla realizes this makes her biological parents a part of the ceremony as well and she's choked with emotion that Luke is so thoughtful. She thanks him with a hug as he hands her off to Will. The rehearsal is interrupted by the pastor's cell phone. He announces that his wife is expecting a baby and he takes the call. After a brief conversation, he says his wife is in labor and agrees to present a condensed version of the ceremony before he leaves. He does and leaves. Everyone else leaves for Luke and Claire's where the rehearsal dinner is being held. Luke and Claire give an emotional toast, urging Will and Layla to work as hard on their marriage as they have worked to be together. Layla responds, saying Luke and Claire gave her back a happy life and that she has "everything I always wanted."

Analysis

ch 22

The back-and-forth between Layla and Will becomes somewhat monotonous as each struggles with their emotions and worries, usually at the expense of the other. When Will left Layla's house, insisting that he needed some time alone, he tells her that he needs to process the recent information and think through the stories of his father's ex-wives. But when Layla arrives at his house, he says he wanted to spare Layla from going through all the stories with him in case it frightened her. Their ability to communicate at this point isn't strong and it seems they will have to learn to talk honestly if they want to



make their marriage last. It apparently does improve and the epilogue is five years after the wedding with Will and Layla still happy together.

The full details of events before this book are not revealed in this book but the reader does learn that Gregory didn't approve of the relationship between Will and Layla which prompted Will's decision to fake his death. Eliana apparently couldn't let Will leave without her which prompted the plan for them both to disappear. They were thorough and told no one, including Eliana's parents who have lived all this time believing that their daughter and grandson were dead. When Layla meets them for the first time, she fears that Will's grandparents will judge her for being the reason Will and Eliana chose that path. But they know that Gregory made the lives of Will and Eliana miserable and they are open and accepting, insisting that they get to know Layla better.

The man following Layla is pointed out, meaning it's significant to the story line. Layla puts it down to a reporter and neither she nor Will recognize the man. Later, it's revealed that the man is actually an FBI agent but he is acting outside his role in the FBI. He was apparently on Gregory Meyer's payroll and it turns out that he is responsible for the disappearance of a juror in Gregory's trial, which was ongoing when Gregory was shot and killed.

Discussion Question 1

Describe Layla's first meeting with Will's grandparents.

Discussion Question 2

Who does Layla think is driving the black sedan and why does she believe he's taking photos of her? What other explanations can you come up with?

Discussion Question 3

Why is Luke's response to the pastor's question of "who gives this women in marriage" so important to Layla?

Vocabulary

sequestering, gorgeous, trendy, myriad, instantaneously, scouring, reckoned, reiterate, bolted, emphatically, lineage, ostentatious



Chapters 26 through 27

Summary

In chapter twenty-six, Layla has a nightmare about the wedding. She dreams she is in the chapel and there's an old woman among the audience who doesn't smile. When she gets closer, the old woman's face morphs into Layla's cruel grandmother's face. In the dream, the woman begins yelling at Layla, saying Layla isn't entitled to happiness. As the dream goes on, Luke leads Layla down the aisle and hands her off to Will. It's only when she is with Will that she hears someone standing up for her. Will says Layla knows her grandmother is part of her past and has no place in the present. Claire wakes Layla and goes over plans for the day, including what time they'll be picked up to go to the church. She gets a text from Will who says this is the day he's to become Layla's husband, making him "the luckiest guy on the planet." The morning is spent in preparation as Layla is accompanied by Caroline, Eliana, and others to get her hair done and makeup on. When she's dressed, Layla is amazed as the sight of herself in the mirror. She is wearing her mother's wedding dress and has white daisies in her hair. She notes the look of hope in her eyes and believes this will be the day she puts all pain behind her.

They arrive at the church and Luke leads Layla into the chapel. Layla is surprised to find it's packed with people. They had limited the guest list but Will issued a general invitation to people of the town and many showed up. Layla is moved again by Luke's statement that Layla's parents give her in marriage. Then she loses herself briefly in Will's eyes until she answers the pastor's question with "I do."

In chapter twenty-seven, the reception is held at an Italian restaurant in town that closed to the public for the affair. Family and friends are already there when Will and Layla enter to a round of applause. Sarah and Austin are among the guests. Sarah is six months pregnant now and Austin says the baby is going to be named Noah James. The event goes off smoothly with a set menu for the guests followed by music and dancing. When Layla dances with Wes, he says he has talked to Will and now plans to ask Eliana to marry him. It still seems early to Layla when Will announces they have to leave if they want to have time to change before catching their flight. As Will and Layla leave, the band begins playing "Let's Get it On" by Marvin Gaye with Tyler and Caroline doing a "seductive dance" to the tune. Layla blushes and knows Caroline is behind the antic. They go to Luke and Claire's house to change for the flight and are momentarily caught up in passion as they change. Layla tries out her new name and decides she likes being Layla Meyer.

Their first stop will be New York City with a two-day layover. They arrive at JFK Airport and go to the Four Seasons where Will has booked their stay. Layla discovers Will has purchased tickets for the play, "Wicked," which delights Layla. Will carries Layla over the threshold of their motel room. The passion blooms immediately but Layla breaks away from Will to change from her traveling clothes and "freshen up." She has lingerie and



puts it on, letting the idea sink in that she's now Will's wife. Will says she is beautiful and they go to bed together.

Analysis

Layla's nightmare about her grandmother in chapter twenty-six is an important look into Layla's self-esteem issue. Layla spent several years with her grandmother who was a cruel woman, likely unhappy herself and taking that out on Layla. In the dream, the old woman screams that no one would attend Layla's wedding "if they knew what you did." She blames Layla for the death of Layla's parents. As was earlier revealed, Layla herself has felt guilt for the wreck that claimed her parents' lives. She insisted that they go out that evening. Layla now knows that Gregory Meyer orchestrated the wreck but Layla holds to some feelings of guilt over the situation. In the dream, Layla continues to yell at her grandmother who continues to yell back, saying that Layla doesn't deserve to have love and that Will can't possibly love her. An important aspect of this scene is that Layla pulls at Luke's arm, pleading with him to tell her grandmother that she's wrong. But in the dream, Luke doesn't respond to Layla's pleas or acknowledge her grandmother's presence. It's evident that Layla just isn't yet self-confident enough to stand up to her grandmother. She holds to a subconscious fear that she really doesn't deserve this kind of happiness and that she might yet be abandoned by those who love her. However, even in her dream, Layla is able to believe that Will will stand up for her.

Layla expects that there will be only a few people attending their wedding and she is surprised when she enters the chapel and finds that many of the people from the town are there to share in the occasion. The reader has to remember that Gregory Meyer was an important person in the town and Will, as his son, had been an important young man prior to faking his death. Will is going to pick up that role again, at least to some degree, and he has worried that the people of the town will not forgive the fact that he faked his death. His motivation for inviting the people of the town to the wedding is not revealed but it seems likely that this is another effort on his part to make amends and to take his place in society.

Discussion Question 1

Why do you believe Will offers a general invitation to the wedding and why do so many people attend?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Layla sometimes feel that she isn't entitled to the happy life she now lives?

Discussion Question 3

What is the significance of Layla's nightmare about her grandmother?

Vocabulary

Frequently, disgusted, manipulation, groggy, rehash, blissfully, solitude, inquisition, frazzled, vestibule, dichotomy, posterity



Chapters 28 through 30

Summary

In chapter twenty-eight, Will and Layla arrive home and Layla is again amazed that the two weeks of their honeymoon passed so quickly. They spent time in Ireland and Layla says the country was beautiful beyond description. They also spent time in Bali and says she and Will were utterly relaxed. Will carries Layla across the threshold of their home once they return to Davidson and announces that he has to meet Luke the following day to see Holly. Layla has talked to Luke who says the remodeling of the pool house is complete. The following morning, Layla suggests they have Luke, Claire, Eliana, and Wes over for dinner that evening. Will agrees and Layla says they'll open the remaining gifts and envelopes then.

Layla accompanies Luke and Will to the jail to see Holly. There, they learn that some of the other ex-wives and siblings have arrived. Layla suggests everyone join them for dinner. Will hesitates, saying it might be better to meet them for the first time at some neutral location but Layla points out that they all want to get to know Will. Luke agrees with Layla which prompts Will to agree as well. They enter the room that's been set up for the meeting. Holly and Marlene are already there. Will says that he considered the amount Marlene and Holly got from his father before Gregory's death and subtracted that from the six million dollars he planned to give each wife. That means Marlene will receive six hundred thousand dollars. Marlene and Holly are furious. Luke says the money is a gift and that they also have to agree that they won't ask Will for anything more. Holly is furious, having believed her mother would give her some of the six million dollars they expected to receive. Holly will be in jail for several years and everyone knows that Marlene probably won't have anything left by the time Holly is released. Layla knows this is the first time Holly realizes Marlene won't be loyal or kind, even to her own daughter. Both Layla and Will are relieved their interaction with Holly and Marlene is now at an end.

Layla and Will arrive home after grocery shopping and Layla hurries to get everything done so that she can show Will the wedding present she arranged for him. They go to the pool house and Will is overjoyed at the woodworking shop Layla arranged for him.

In chapter twenty-nine, Wes, Eliana, Luke, and Claire arrive and Eliana confirms that she and Wes are engaged. Soon, the other members of Will's new extended family arrive. Those at the door include Victoria and Loretta, Gregory's ex-wives, and their children, Michael and Erin, Will's half-siblings. Michael is standoffish and leaves abruptly. Erin says Michael hasn't yet "warmed up" to her either and Will knows that Michael has to come to terms with the situation on his own. Erin takes the lead on the conversation, saying she doesn't know Gregory Meyer and doesn't want to talk about him. She says the extent of caring about Gregory is that he fathered other children so that Erin is now reunited with brothers and sisters. There is an instant connection between Will and Erin and Erin says she wants to know all about Will, beginning with



how he and Layla met. Soon after dinner, Loretta, Erin, and Victoria leave. Eliana and Wes begin to clear the table while Layla begins opening cards left for the young couple on their marriage. One is thick and when Layla opens it she reads a note that says the body of the missing juror can be found if they pay the rest of the money owed by Gregory Meyer.

In chapter thirty, Layla drops the envelope, horrified to discover there are various photos of her. They realize the man in the sedan who followed Layla must have taken them. Will reads the note which says Gregory owes the man two hundred, fifty thousand dollars and that Layla is to deliver it in return for the location of the body. Layla immediately says she'll do it because she wants to give the family closure. Will and Luke argue against it, saying Layla will be in danger. Wes, however, says he can provide protection. The instructions say the exchange of money for information will take place on Thanksgiving morning and Layla continues to argue for paying the killer. After the other leave, Will and Layla argue, Will saying he doesn't understand why Layla won't allow him to take care of her. Layla is focused on how the family must feel, unable to get closure on the death of the missing man. Layla finally realizes Will's side of the situation and agrees that she has to turn over more control to him.

The next morning, both are feeling better. Their conversation is interrupted by the arrival of FBI Agent Croft, followed by Wes. Wes notes that the pictures of Layla are meant to make it clear that the man can get near Layla, meaning she is in danger. Wes says it's a common practice for the men hired by Gregory but says he can't identify the photographer. They continue to discuss possibilities, including that the man is just looking for money and may not even be the killer. Layla makes it clear to Luke and Wes that she will allow Will to decide what they should do. Will proposes he go with Layla to exchange the money for the information. Luke still believes Wes and the FBI can protect Layla but Croft says he believes Will could go with Layla. Luke says he still wants the FBI and Wes protecting Layla. Layla says she realizes that Will is going to do everything he can to protect Layla and that no one is going to keep him from that.

Analysis

When Layla and Will encounter Luke for the first time after the honeymoon, Layla notes that Will is somewhat awkward with Luke, something that's never happened before. When she asks Will about it, he says that it has suddenly occurred to him that he has now had sex with Luke's daughter and that made him uncomfortable. Layla seems not to understand Will's attitude, pointing out that everyone knows they've had sex now. The sex question is a theme that runs throughout the book and this is just one example of the differing opinions about sex.

When Holly first sees Layla, she sarcastically offers congratulations on their marriage. Will interrupts, saying that Holly isn't allowed to talk to "my wife." This is the first time Holly has seen Will stand strong and she's caught completely off guard. It's an interesting situation because Holly believes Will is weak when he has, in fact, merely been trying to be polite and doesn't stoop to the level of Holly and Marlene's



manipulating. Then Will surprises Holly by saying that he knows Holly had planned to try to have a baby with Will. Holly's reaction is to turn angry words on Layla for telling Will about their conversation. Holly thought Layla would keep the conversation to herself because it would hurt Will to know the truth. Will shouts at Holly that he and Layla are married and that they don't keep secrets from each other. It's bound to be a real blow for Holly who had always thought she would somehow get the upper hand again.

Discussion Question 1

Knowing that Will has plenty of money, why does he settle less on Marlene and Holly than they expected? Was he justified?

Discussion Question 2

Describe Will's new relationship with Erin and Michael. Why do you believe Michael is struggling with the situation more than Will, Erin, and Sarah?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Layla want so badly to give the money to the man who claims to have killed the missing juror? What does this say about Layla's character?

Vocabulary

seductive, indignation, smirk, coax, protruding, defers, epitome, extortion, feigned, jovial, bilk



Chapters 31 through Epilogue

Summary

In chapter thirty-one, Agent Croft has created a plan that is finally approved by Will, Wes, and Luke. There are still several days until the drop and the family is caught up in Holly's trial in the meanwhile. The ex-wives take their places in the courtroom and greet each other, most relieved that the ordeal of testifying is soon to be over. Holly is brought in, dressed to appear sedate. Marlene is in a "skin-tight dress" and high heels, accompanied by her husband, Gordon, who appears meek. The judge is Tabitha Harris and the attorneys tell her that they've agreed to reduce the charges. Luke prepares to put Gregory's ex-wives on the stand and he begins with Loretta who talks about her life with Gregory. She says Gregory was notified when Loretta went into labor but never showed up. He didn't fight when she asked him to give up his parental rights to Erin. Victoria is next on the stand and she describes similar events of manipulation and cruelty.

The judge interrupts, saying she doesn't need to hear any more testimony about Gregory and is prepared to pass sentence unless the attorneys expect some substantially different testimony from one of his other witnesses. Both agree that the other witnesses would have given similar statements and the judge says she is ready to pass sentence. The attorneys are surprised but the judge insists. She begins by saying that Holly was charged with murder but the charges were amended to manslaughter with the prosecutor recommending that Holly be sentenced to five years. The judge then says that Holly will be ordered to serve the maximum, twelve years. Everyone is shocked. The judge has the attorneys come to her for a private conversation. Wes whispers that it seems as if the judge has taken Gregory's death personally. When the court is adjourned, Luke agrees. He says the judge had berated the attorneys, saying Gregory was an "upstanding citizen and outstanding attorney." Luke says Judge Harris was not originally assigned to the case and that she is within her rights as the judge to refuse the deal. Everyone is frustrated and upset and Luke is called on by reporters for a statement outside the courthouse door. He pledges to appeal the sentence.

In chapter thirty-two, Thanksgiving morning arrives. Layla tells Will she noticed that Pastor Bishop knew Will when they went to the Davidson College Presbyterian Church and he says Eliana took him to church when he was small. Eventually, Gregory refused to allow them to attend though they still did whenever he was out of town. Layla says she believes they should begin attending church and Will agrees. Later that day, Will and Layla are gearing up to meet the man who claims to know the whereabouts of the dead juror. Layla is to wear a wire that will transmit back to the agents watching her. She has an earpiece through which Agent Croft can talk to her. Will is away for a short time and Layla learns that he won't be wearing a transmitter of his own. Will returns and they prepare to make the exchange. They have a duffle bag with the money and walk to the marina where the exchange is to take place.



A man says Layla's name and when she faces him she realizes it's the man who has been taking her photo. Through the transmitter, Layla learns that the man is another FBI agent named Lassiter. Layla puts the money near him and asks if Gregory Meyer's promise of money is why he was willing to turn to crime. He agrees that the money was the reason. Lassiter then says he doesn't know the exact location of the body. Layla yells which prompts Croft and Will to tell her that she has to calm down. Unable to think with all three men talking to her, she removes the earpiece. Lassiter then says he dumped the juror's body in the lake. Layla is furious and shoves the duffle bag off the dock and into the lake. Lassiter pulls his gun and Layla is sorry for her rash action, especially so because she promised Will she wouldn't act rashly. As Lassiter fires, Will jumps in front of Layla and the bullet strikes him in the chest, sending him into the water. Lassiter pulls Layla up the ramp but Wes appears out of nowhere, tackling Lassiter and telling Layla to go look for Will. Layla rushes back and it's only then that she discovers he's wearing a bullet-proof vest. He's hurt but not seriously and the paramedics agree to allow him to go home. Layla is disheartened and Will promises they'll begin dragging the lake in search of the body.

The epilogue opens five years after that Thanksgiving Day. Layla says she and Will both earned their degrees and Will has a contracting company while Layla is employed by an organization that helps children deal with the loss of a parent. She recalls that it took almost a year of searching before the juror's body was recovered and that Lassiter was found guilty of murdering the man. Wes and Eliana married two years after that Thanksgiving when Will was shot. It took almost two years for Luke to discover that the judge had been involved in a sexual relationship with Gregory Meyer for almost ten years.

Layla and Will are in the doctor's office on a particular day. The nurse questions Layla about her current state, including that she's been having some morning sickness. Layla is pretty certain about the date of conception and the doctor says everything seems to be fine. He performs an ultrasound and, when Layla questions what's being seen on the screen, points out twins. They are caught up in possibilities, including whether the babies will be boys, girls, or one of each. As the book comes to a close, Layla realizes that her life has changed dramatically in the past five years and that she knows "the next five years are going to be filled with nothing but love." She concludes by saying she has wanted and worked for that love and that it's greater than she could ever have imagined.

Analysis

The situation with the judge on Holly's case is not fully explained in this chapter. He rants at Luke and the prosecuting attorney about the sentence proposed for Holly. She says that Gregory was upstanding as a man and as an attorney which prompts Luke and Wes to jump to the conclusion that the judge must be biased. As a rule, a judge who has a conflict, such as a personal attachment to the victim of the case, should "recuse" herself from participating in the trial. It's only later that Wes and Luke are able to dig up the evidence to prove that the judge did have a personal relationship with



Gregory and wasn't fair in her ruling. A new judge would likely agree to the terms of the plea bargain. Layla makes an interesting comment about the sentence.

When Holly is told she'll be serving twelve years instead of the five she expected, her stepfather leans forward and touches her on the back in an apparent effort to comfort her. Her mother, Marlene, does nothing. Layla believes that Marlene might be relieved to know that Holly won't be back in the near future meaning she won't be expected to share any of the settlement money with her daughter. As the book comes to a close, it's revealed that Holly serves her time and is released after the five-year sentence. She moves away without trying to contact Marlene, apparently finally able to see Marlene for what she is and realizing that her mother will never truly care about her.

Discussion Question 1

Describe what happens at Holly's trial.

Discussion Question 2

What are some of the facts revealed in the epilogue?

Discussion Question 3

How does Layla come to learn the location of the dead juror's body?

Vocabulary

rashly, acquittal, systematic, sticklers, transition, jots, pose, maniacal, compliant, pedestal, duped, recuse, apathy



Characters

Layla Weston Meyer

A young college student as the story opens, Layla is looking forward to beginning her life as Will's wife though she continues to struggle with self-doubt and worry that she isn't really destined for true happiness. These worries stem from losing her parents years earlier and the cruelty imposed by her grandmother who had insisted that Layla was responsible for the deaths of her parents and was undeserving of happiness. Now Layla, a young adult, finds herself continually coping with those fears. When Will is struggling with his own worries, Layla initially decides that all she can do is give him the space to figure out his problems. It's not until a friend urges that she take action that she realizes she belongs at Will's side to help him come to terms with his fears. Layla has become very independent over the years of hardship and she has to make a conscious decision to allow others control over aspects of her life. She remembers taking those steps when she first comes to trust Luke and Claire and realizes she'll have to make the same conscious decision to allow Will to take on his role as husband. Even after she makes that decision, Layla has trouble following through. When they are face-to-face with a killer, Layla allows her outrage to overcome her instructions, putting Will's life in danger. Layla is a compassionate woman and is willing to put her own life on the line in order to get information about the murder of a juror in order to help the man's family find peace.

William Gregory Meyer

Layla's fiance as the book opens, he is the son of Gregory Meyer, a millionaire who dies after being shot by Holly Reynolds. Will is a very loving and caring person. His first reaction upon hearing that he was still his father's heir is to declare that he doesn't want any of the money. However, after Layla talks to him about it, he comes to realize that he can do a great deal of good with the money, regardless of how his father came to have it. Will knows about one brother who dies before Will has a chance to know him. Then Will learns that his father had other wives and other children. Will is torn by the information and wants a relationship with those siblings, though he also fears their reaction to him as the only child who was actually acknowledged and raised by Gregory Meyer. Then, as details about Gregory's cruelty emerges, Will fears that he will become more like his father as time goes by. He struggles with this fear, demanding time away from Layla. It takes a great deal of soul-searching for Will to accept that he is not going to be anything like his father and that he has the ability to become the person he wants to be. Will is compassionate and loving. His relationship with his mother is strong, possibly stronger because of the abuse they suffered at Gregory's hands. After his marriage to Layla, Will struggles with his role as husband, wanting to protect Layla even though she has trouble giving him room to take on that duty.



Luke

Layla's uncle who serves the role of her father since the car wreck that killed Layla's parents. Luke is an attorney and he represents Holly in the criminal case against her. Luke is consumed with guilt because of his role in the deaths of Layla's parents and his decision not to have more children, fueled by his fear of Gregory Meyer. Luke is protective of Layla and he struggles with his sense of loss as she prepares to marry Will.

Eliana

Will's mother, she is still recovering from her years of mental abuse at the hands of Gregory Meyer. She is in a relationship with Wes and is completely devoted to Will, but she insists that she be allowed to stand on her own two feet to face some aspects of the crisis on her own. Eliana and Wes eventually marry and Eliana makes changes in her life, giving herself a fresh start.

Holly Reynolds

Half sister of Marcus, Holly shoots and fatally wounds Will's father on the steps of the courthouse. She is in jail following the shooting but fully expects to be convicted of a lesser charge because of the circumstances surrounding the shooting. On the surface, Holly seems to be a victim of Gregory's cruelty but it's later that Layla discovers that Holly was an active participant in her mother's plot against Will.

Claire

Layla's aunt who now is in the role of guardian for Layla. Layla calls her "mom" and Claire seems to fill all the roles of mother for Layla. Claire lost a child of her own, Penny, but the details of that are not revealed in this book. Claire loves Layla deeply and falls in to help with Layla's wedding though the event is bittersweet and Claire faces the task of allowing Layla to move on with her own life.

Marcus

Will's half-brother, he dies in a previous book of this series but is mentioned several times in this book. He was kind to Layla when they first met and their relationship was apparently very friendly. However, Marcus was pushed by his mother to confront Gregory Meyer repeatedly, begging for a role in Gregory's life. That apparently drove him over the edge of reason and pushed him to a situation that led to his death.



Wes Furtick

An employee of the firm where Luke works, he was apparently told about the wreck that was orchestrated to kill Layla's parents. Wes is in love with Eliana and is very protective of her. He remains a big part of Luke's life and is keeping an eye on things from a security perspective.

Caroline

One of Layla's best friends, she is not always nearby but does serve as bridesmaid in Layla's wedding. She is straight forward in her approach to life. When Layla puts some distance between herself and Will, Caroline tells her to take control of the relationship, advice Layla realizes is sound. Caroline gives Layla that advice, then hangs up the phone, refusing to give Layla time to argue. This is typical of Caroline's attitudes and actions.

Sarah

One of Will's half-sisters, she lives on a farm and is happy to meet Will and Layla. Sarah notes that she was in Davidson, hoping to meet Gregory, but recognized him as an evil man. Sarah is very personable and nice when Will and Layla show up. She reveals that she'd known about Will and Layla and had been waiting for the opportunity to get to know them.



Symbols and Symbolism

Tallahassee, Florida

Where Layla and Will live until their decision to return to Davidson.

Florida State University

Where Will and Layla are attending when Gregory Meyer is killed. The campus is described only to a very small detail as Layla and Will spend their final few weeks there before moving back to Davidson.

Orange Colored Sky

The song recorded by Nat King Cole that was playing on the radio the night Layla's parents are killed in an automobile crash that she believes was an accident. It's playing at the restaurant in Virginia Beach when Layla enters and prompts a discussion between Layla and Will on how to move forward with their lives without always looking back on the dark, ugly past.

Mecklenburg County Courthouse

Where the press conference is held during which it's announced that Will and Eliana are not really dead.

Davidson College

Where Layla and Will plan to complete their degrees after moving back to Davidson. The college campus is pretty and is apparently located in downtown Davidson. It's noted that Layla and Will could have walked along Main Street to the admissions office but choose instead to stroll across the campus because it's so inviting.

Davidson College Presbyterian Church

Where Will suggests he and Layla have their wedding ceremony but Layla objects, pointing out that this was where Will's funeral service was held. It's an elaborate church with a beautiful sanctuary. Will understands Layla's reluctance and they agree to have the event in the adjoining Lingle Chapel instead.



Lingle Chapel

Where Will and Layla are married, this is a smaller chapel in the Davidson College Presbyterian Church. Layla believes the chapel will appear empty and is surprised when there are many people in attendance at their wedding.

Virginia Beach

Where Cheryl lives on a farm in a very rural area. The farm where Cheryl lives represents her freedom from Gregory Meyer. She got less in her divorce settlement than the others and initially refuses Will's offer of a larger settlement.

Ireland and Bali

Where Will and Layla go on their honeymoon. Ireland is significant because Layla has always wanted to go there but was told by her grandmother that she didn't deserve a trip like that.

Sex

Will and Layla are committed to waiting until their wedding night to have sex though they are tempted many times before that. They view sex as something sacred that they should save for each other only under the vows of marriage.



Settings

Davidson

The town where Gregory Meyer lives until he is shot and killed, this is where Will and Layla move after Gregory's death. Davidson is not described in great detail and most of the description indicates that it is a typical middle-class town with a courthouse square and a college. There is also a lake nearby and the house Luke and Claire own is on this lake.

The Garden

An unnamed public garden in Tallahassee, this is where Layla has planned to hold her wedding. There is a round courtyard filled with plants and a red brick path will serve as the aisle for the bride to join the groom. The flowers are beautiful and Layla can imagine every aspect of her wedding when Will takes her there as a surprise. They share vows in the garden though it's obvious that Will has practiced his much more than Layla.

The Meyer House

The home Will lived in as a child and that becomes his when his father, Gregory, dies. The house is overly-ornate and Layla doesn't like it. Will, however, wants to live there after they marry. Layla doesn't see the house for awhile and when she realizes the lengths Will has gone to in order to make it feel more like a home, she agrees to living there. There is a pool house as well, and Layla uses part of that over-sized room to create a workshop for Will.

Setting 4

Setting 1



Themes and Motifs

Relationships

The relationships between various characters is an important theme in the book as the characters deal with the fears and triumphs of those they love. Layla's relationship with her adoptive parents, Luke and Claire, and her relationship with Will are among the most important examples of this theme. Layla is an independent character because of her situation after the deaths of her parents several years earlier. Layla has to come to the decision to allow herself to be loved and cared for by Claire and Luke and she finds that she has to make that same decision as Will's wife, allowing Will to play the role of husband. Layla is excited about her upcoming marriage to Will but she comes to realize that Claire and Luke are hurting at the thought of allowing her to marry and move out of their home, even though she is only moving a short distance away. Layla's relationship with Claire and Luke is further complicated by her feelings of guilt over the deaths of her parents. She says she had to learn that she could be happy about her relationship with Luke and Claire without feeling guilty that her parents died in order for her to have this life. An important aspect of her relationship with Will is seen as Will is trying to come to terms with the depth of his father's cruelty. Will fears becoming like his father and demands time away from Layla to deal with this fear. Layla initially gives him the space she believes he needs but later comes to realize that their love will overcome Will's fears, and she goes to him, hoping that their love will be enough to help Will get through his doubts. Will's relationship with his father is also important in the book. Gregory was cruel and manipulative and never had a positive relationship with Will though Will apparently tried to make it better. When Gregory dies, Will struggles to know how he feels. On one hand, Gregory was his father, regardless of the status of the relationship. On the other, Will is relieved that he no longer has to hide from Gregory and that he can pick up his life in Davidson. There are other relationships seen throughout the book. Will's relationship with his mother is very strong, due partly to their united front against Gregory's cruelty. This relationship begins to change as well when Will's marriage to Layla nears and as Eliana's love for Wes deepens.

Self-control

The fact that Layla and Will decide to wait until marriage to have sex creates tension for them throughout the book. They made the decision in an earlier book of the series and it appears that Will was the one to insist on it. Layla has come to accept the decision and believes they are doing the right thing. Luke seems to worry about their ability to continue to control themselves as seen in his reaction to Will's plan to travel to Virginia Beach where he and Layla will spend a night in a motel. Luke becomes more accepting of the plan once another couple plans to accompany Will and Layla on the trip. When Layla learns that Will was naked with Holly Reynolds, she is devastated, taking it as a sign that Will was more attracted to Holly than he is to Layla. Will has to explain to Layla that the experience with Holly was a mistake and that he deeply regrets it. It's not



until their wedding night that Layla fully understands Will's determination that they wait. She admits that the wedding night would have been diminished if they weren't looking forward to their first physical union as husband and wife. Another example of this theme is seen in Will's fear that he will become the cruel man his father was. Gregory Meyer's lack of self-control is a driving force in the book. He was cruel to his wives, mentally and physically abusing them when he was angry. This lack of control makes Will hate Gregory and Will struggles with his fear that genetics will somehow play a role, making him more like his father.

Greed

Gregory Meyer was a very greedy man and his money becomes a driving force in this story. Prior to the beginning of this book, Gregory pays men to do highly illegal and unethical things, including murder. He has jurors killed in order to manipulate the outcome of his trial. The body of one of those jurors is not found until the killer, an FBI agent, demands a quarter of a million dollars to reveal the location of the body. It's not clear what his motivation might have been or how he expected to get away with the money, but when confronted by Layla he admits that the money Gregory offered was enough to make him do illegal things. Another important aspect of this theme is seen in Holly's mother, Marlene Harris. Marlene gets more money than any of Gregory's other ex-wives as a divorce settlement. She then forces her son, Marcus, to beg Gregory for acknowledgment, apparently with money as the motivating factor. Marlene then believes she's going to get a settlement from Will for five million dollars and is obviously furious when Will makes the settlement for only six hundred thousand dollars, allowing for the millions Gregory already gave her. Holly believes that Marlene will save some of the money for her and is angry when she discovers that her mother's greed is so powerful that she's willing to cut out everyone, even her own daughter. At the opposite end of this theme is Cheryl and her mother, who refuse any offer of money from Will though Layla comes up with the plan to create a trust fund for Cheryl's child.

Theme/Motif 5

Theme/Motif 2



Styles

Point of View

The story is written in first person from the limited perspective of Layla. She is young and has led a troubled life which contributes greatly to the fears and concerns she expresses, Layla was orphaned several years before the events of this book. She feels guilty over her parents' death though she later learns that it wasn't her fault. She lived for several years with her grandparents and her grandmother perpetuated that guilt and instilled a lack of self-esteem in Layla that has a lasting effect on Layla though she is slowly overcoming this by the time the series comes to a close. As this book opens, Layla is living a much happier life than since her parents died. She lives with her aunt and uncle and she refers to them as "Mom and Dad." She is engaged to Will Meyer and she loves him deeply. She has an extended family that makes Layla's life much more complete than she could have hoped. However, she holds onto some of that guilt, believing that her happiness has been purchased at the cost of her parents' death. This impacts Layla's perspective and makes her harder on herself than she should be. Her wavering self-esteem means that Layla is sometimes willing to doubt herself and to doubt that others really care for her, which causes problems with Will. When Will suggests they put the wedding off, Layla doesn't really look for an explanation and feels defeated without giving Will an opportunity to explain. Despite her self-esteem issues, Layla is very self-aware. She realizes that she has trouble trusting others to fully care for her and she knows that she has to make a conscious decision to trust Will, especially after they are married. The limited perspective means the reader doesn't know anything until Layla learns about it. For example, the reader doesn't know that there was a sexual encounter between Will and Holly until Holly tells Layla. The reader also doesn't know Will's version of the events until Will tells Layla. This limitation is used to drive the action in some cases and to present twists and suspense that would not otherwise be possible. The perspective is appropriate to the story.

Language and Meaning

The story is divided into narrative and dialogue. The narrative is used largely for background and to move the action of the story along. The dialogue is written very casually, in keeping with the overall tone of the book. The conversations are largely meant to drive the action and the majority of these are discussions about events from the past or plans for the future. For example, Layla has a lengthy conversation with Luke and Wes about the night her parents were killed. It's through this dialogue that the reader learns that Layla's parents were targeted by Gregory Meyer as a means of controlling Luke, a lawyer in Gregory's firm. The discussion wraps up a situation that occurs in a previous book but that is mentioned several times in this book. Being the third and final installment of a trilogy, the book can stand alone but readers will miss some nuances of previous books of the series. For example, Marcus is mentioned on several occasions. He is the half-brother of both Holly Reynolds and Will and he dies in



a previous book. From this book, the reader knows that Marcus died and that he was manipulated by his mother but the details of that death are not revealed. This makes the references to Marcus somewhat clouded and leaves the reader with questions that are not answered by either the narrative nor the dialogue of this book. The casual tone means there are few words that will be unfamiliar to the reader with an average vocabulary.

Structure

The book is divided into thirty-two chapters and the Epilogue. An interesting aspect of the book is that it's written largely in present tense, giving the story a more immediate feel than if the author had chosen past tense. The book begins with a dedication to "Truman and Claire" and a quote from Robert Frost. The quote reads, "In three words I can sum up everything I've learned about life: it goes on." The author seems to be pointing out that the characters of this book, like people in real life, have to move on with their lives despite circumstances and events, good or bad. The book is presented in chronological order though there are some references to events that happened prior to the beginning of the book. In the first chapter, several of the main characters are introduced and the chapter ends with Will suggesting that the wedding be postponed. In chapter two he explains his reasoning and in chapter three the main characters begin making plans to move back to Davidson. That move takes place in chapter six and Will and Layla reunite with friends in chapters six and seven. In chapter eight, Layla learns that Gregory Meyer ordered Layla's parents killed. In chapter nine, Will announces to the people of Davidson that he and his mother faked their deaths to escape his father. In chapter eleven, Layla learns that Holly plotted with her mother to trap Will into marriage but failed. In chapter fourteen, Layla and Will learn that he has other half-siblings and Will becomes determined to meet one of his father's ex-wives. In chapter eighteen, Will and Layla meet Sarah and learn more about Gregory's past. In chapter twenty-two, Layla meets Will's maternal grandparents who help Will and Layla realize they have to work harder to make their relationship work. They are married in chapter twenty-six and begin to deal with their new lives as a married couple. Chapter twenty-nine ends with Layla opening what appears to be a congratulations card but is a promise to reveal the whereabouts of the body of a slain juror in return for money. Holly Reynolds' trial takes place in chapter thirty-one. In chapter thirty-two, Layla and Will discover that the man who claims to know where the slain juror's body was dumped is actually an FBI agent. Will is shot but Layla discovers he wore a bullet-proof vest as a precaution. The Epilogue takes place five years later. Will and Layla have settled into a happy life and discover they are expecting twins.



Quotes

Of course, even in his final days he has everyone eating out of the palm of his hand.
-- Layla (Chapter 1 paragraph 4)

Importance: Layla is talking about Gregory Meyer who is in the hospital and near death after being shot. This sums up Layla's dislike of Gregory who has made her life miserable and forced Will to go into hiding.

Because he chose me over her.
-- Luke (Chapter 5 paragraph 6)

Importance: Will is talking to Layla about his half-sister. He believes all the half-siblings will hate him because Gregory Meyer walked out on all of them but kept Will and Eliana at his side, raising Will with all the advantages money could buy.

Will said he was tempted to play 'let's see if we can lose Furtick' and then find a place to make out, but decided it would cause too much panic.
-- Layla (Chapter 6 paragraph 3)

Importance: This is during the first leg of their trip from Tallahassee to Davidson and it's in keeping with the informal tone of the book. Furtick refers to Wes who is responsible for security and is very good at his job. That Will fears the prank would make everyone panic is a statement that they aren't fully comfortable with their situation and that they are no longer in danger from Gregory.

No one quits Meyer, Finger, and Marks. You leave the firm because you're dead or you've been dismissed.
-- Luke (Chapter 8 paragraph 17)

Importance: Luke is explaining to Layla that his decision to turn in his notice prompted Gregory Meyer to arrange the wreck that killed Layla's parents as a warning to Luke. The conversation is important because Layla has blamed herself for that wreck, having been the one to insist they go out that night. Luke has also carried guilt for the years since the wreck.

I look at the dates of their marriages to Gregory Meyer and the dates their children were born. I see the pattern immediately and am disgusted.
-- Layla (Chapter 14 paragraph 20)

Importance: This is the first time Layla has been directly confronted with the information that Gregory had more children and that he abandoned each of them and their mothers before the babies were even born. Luke gives Layla the information first so that she can be the one to break the news to Will.



All those years you told me I didn't have any siblings because I was special. Lies!
-- Layla (Chapter 15 paragraph 13)

Importance: Will is talking to Eliana after just finding out that he has several half-siblings and that Eliana knew about them all along. Will is hurt and angry with his mother over what he sees as a deception though she tells him she hadn't really thought about trying to get him together with any of the other children.

You see, I'm just about to marry this incredible woman and I just found out some things about my father ... some things that make him even more terrible than I knew he was. I thought if I could find out more about him then I'd be certain not to become him.
-- Will (Chapter 19 paragraph 10)

Importance: Will has come to believe that he might become cruel and thoughtless like Gregory Meyer just because he is Gregory's son. What Will doesn't yet realize is that he's nothing like his father and that he won't ever become that heartless man. Will is talking to Cheryl, one of his father's ex-wives, and she recognizes his sincerity. She tries to tell him that he won't become like Gregory simply because he's already aware of Gregory's cruelty but he doesn't accept her answer.

I didn't know what I was going to find and I was afraid that if you read what the exes said my father was like you'd get scared.
-- Will (Chapter 22 paragraph 21)

Importance: Will is talking to Layla about their recent days apart while he'd gone over the statements from his father's ex-wives. Will has actually been trying to convince himself that he wouldn't become the cruel man his father was and it's his fear that has kept them apart.

You work things out ... together. When life stinks like a cow pie in the middle of summer, at least you have someone to swat the flies off of you!
-- Will's Grandmother (Chapter 22 paragraph 32)

Importance: Layla and Will have had some time apart as Will sorted through his emotions about his father. When Layla arrives at his house, she discovers that he's reunited with his mother's parents and she's hurt that Will chose to spend the time apart. Now she points out that Will and Layla have to work things out if they want the benefit of a solid relationship.

We've worked hard for this, Layla. Climbed mountains and fought dragons. And we won.
-- Will (Chapter 25 paragraph 7)

Importance: Will makes this comment as he and Layla are just a short time away from their wedding. Layla is nervous and Will points out that they have gone to great lengths to achieve this happiness and that they deserve it.



I know the pain they're experiencing and if we can help them in any any way we absolutely have to.

-- Layla (Chapter 30 paragraph 10)

Importance: Layla is referring to the letter that demands she pay two hundred, fifty thousand dollars in exchange for the location of the dead juror's body. Layla's immediate response is that they have to do it, even though it puts her in danger.

Five years meant sadness, heartache, and pain. But ... five years doesn't have the same meaning to me anymore.

-- Layla (Epilogue paragraph 1)

Importance: Layla is relating what has happened to her in the previous five years and comparing that to the happiness that she now has.