

Saint Maybe Study Guide

Saint Maybe by Anne Tyler

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Plot Summary

Saint Maybe by Anne Tyler is the story of a man seeking redemption for his past mistakes. Ian Bedloe is a young man who gives up his future to raise the children of his brother Danny and Danny's wife Lucy. He does not do this out of love for the children, for he barely knows them, but out of guilt.

Ian blames himself for their deaths. He tells Danny that Lucy is cheating on him, and Danny runs his car into a wall. Lucy then overdoses on sleeping pills leaving her two children from a previous marriage and the baby she is passing off as Danny's orphaned.

Ian turns to religion for answers. He stumbles upon the Church of the Second Chance, which is located in an abandoned storefront. It is in this church that he seeks answers. He is told he will find redemption in taking care of the children. Ian throws himself into this with no thought of himself and his former life. This life is a lonely one that alienates him from his friends and his girlfriend. He struggles to become a better man to relieve the guilt that he feels.

The knowledge that Lucy was not cheating on Danny makes him question himself. He remains faithful to the church for he feels that only there will he be relieved of the guilt he feels. By sacrificing his life to care for the children, he seeks salvation for the deaths of their parents. In so doing, he allows the children to grow in a stable environment and find success and love in their own lives. In return, they attempt to help him find someone to share his life.

The children (Agatha, Thomas, and Daphne) love Ian as their father. They want to see him happy, but they see how he struggles without success to meld his past life with the present. Agatha blames Ian's religion for this and rebels against it. Thomas remains faithful to his religious teachings even as he leaves home and begins a life on his own. Daphne is like her mother and manipulates the religion to fit into what she wants to do.

Once the children are grown, Ian finds someone he loves and marries her. Rita joins the church and becomes a part of the life that Ian finds very important. She is a good influence on him and the family is happy with his choice.

The birth of his own child makes Ian see that his redemption is up to him. Only he can forgive himself for the guilt he feels. His religion gives him a sense of community and the ability to handle the situation day by day, but ultimately he must let go of the guilt and live his own life.

Chapter 1

Summary

Saint Maybe is a story of redemption. The novel begins by introducing the residents of Waverly Street in Baltimore. The Bedloe family is the center of the story. Claudia Bedloe is the oldest child of Bee and Doug Bedloe. She has left home and started a family of her own. Danny is the middle child, and Ian is the youngest. Ian is seventeen and bright, but lazy.

Danny Bedloe brings home his fiancée, Lucy Dean. She is a divorcee with two children. Danny and Lucy met at the post office where he works. She was mailing a package to her ex-husband. The family is stunned by the news of the ex-husband and children, but family members do not show it. The family holds in their emotions and do not voice their true thoughts to one another.

Lucy has two children and works as a waitress to support her family. Both her parents died in a car crash when she was in her teens. Danny marries Lucy three weeks after they meet. The Bedloes meet Lucy's children Agatha and Thomas. They are quiet, unfriendly children.

Ian takes a job with a moving company during the summer. He spends most of his evenings at his girlfriend's parents' house. They have been dating for two years and plan to marry after college. They make out, but do not have sex, though Ian would like to.

Lucy brings Ian dinner when his parents are taking care of Claudia's kids, while she is in the hospital. Thomas carries a doll with him named Dulcimer. Ian bonds with the children. Lucy and Danny announce that they are pregnant. The baby arrives on Ian's birthday, which is early. They name her Daphne. Ian takes one look at her and clearly sees she is not premature and knows that Claudia notices too. Ian does not want to believe it because that means Lucy was pregnant when she met Danny.

Lucy asks Ian to babysit, and he agrees to after school now and then. She just wants to get out once in awhile without the kids. Lucy always comes home happy. One afternoon she returns wearing a new dress and asks Ian how he likes it. It looks expensive, but she tells him it cost less than twenty dollars. Ian begins to question where Lucy goes on her outings. He believes she is meeting someone. Ian tells her he is busy if she calls him to babysit. He will not babysit, while she cheats on his brother. He questions Claudia about Daphne being premature. She tells him not to talk about it.

Ian makes plans to stay overnight with Cicely when her parents are out of town. His plans are thwarted when Lucy calls and Ian's mom volunteers him to babysit for her. Ian tells Lucy he has plans, and she promises to be back in time for him to be on time for



dinner with Cicely. She is not back in time, and Ian's anger mounts as time passes. Danny returns home from a stag party.

Ian is angry at Lucy for messing up his plans with Cicely. He complains to Danny about her and tells him that Daphne is someone else's baby. He also questions where she got the expensive dress. Ian goes to change, and Danny drives away crashing his car into a wall at the end of the block.

Analysis

From the outside, the Bedloe family looks perfect. They do not allow any unpleasantness to disturb this façade. Danny's parents are not happy that Lucy has an ex-husband and two children, but they do not let this show to Lucy or their son because it would destroy their tranquil existence. The family does not say anything at the birth of Daphne so as not to upset anyone or taint their perfection in other's eyes.

Ian sees the glimpses of concern before the masks slide into place. He has a more difficult time with accepting unpleasantness without questioning it. He feels he is betraying his brother. He talks to Claudia about this, but she brushes it off saying that Ian does not understand marriage and the agreements of married people. This suggests that she believes that Danny knows that Daphne is not his, but he agrees to act as if she is to spare Lucy's feelings.

Anger is what finally leads him to tell Danny the truth about Daphne's birth and his suspicions about Lucy. Ian regrets his hasty words, but he does not have a chance to take them back.

Discussion Question 1

Why are the Bedloes considered to be the perfect family? Do you think this status is important to him?

Discussion Question 2

Do you think that Danny knows that Daphne is not his daughter? Do you think he would treat her differently if he did know?

Discussion Question 3

Do you see it as a betrayal to Danny for the family not to let on that Daphne is not his daughter? Do you believe Danny should know the truth? Is his family keeping quiet for Danny's benefit or their own?

Vocabulary

bulbous, amiable, vestige, tolerant, scholastic, decorative, disillusion, inopportune, cameo, gaudy, ineffectual, cynical, illogically, constitutional, sporadically, cloddish, swagger, nuisance, collation, ruefully, exuberant, intimation, unkempt, enviable, meticulous

Chapter 2

Summary

Agatha and Thomas color as Daphne cries from her crib. They fight over who should check on her. Lucy is asleep, and they do not want to bother her. They both go to check on her. Agatha makes Daphne a bottle and gives it to her. The bottle drops, and milk spills out. Agatha picks it up and secures the nipple. This time Daphne accepts the bottle.

Agatha remembers her and Thomas' father. They lived in a metal-colored trailer then they got divorced. Thomas was a baby. Agatha remembers moving to Baltimore in a Mr. Belling's long black car. Mr. Belling bought Lucy new clothes, and they had an apartment over a drugstore. When he came over, he would give the children money for candy and tell them to take their time. He stopped coming over. Lucy had to get a job as a waitress. Then she met Danny. Agatha feels she was more of her old self when she met Danny. Agatha liked Danny. He was nice. Agatha remembers everything, but Thomas has a terrible memory.

Agatha changes Daphne's diaper and almost floods the bathroom flushing the diaper. She cleans up the mess and looks around at the chaos around them. She cleans up the best she can. Lucy wakes and gets Daphne from her crib.

Later in the day, Lucy dresses up and takes the children out. Lucy is trying to make friends with the son of the man who owns the typewriter shop. She flirts with him. She says she wants to get a typewriter so that she can learn to type and get a job in an office. He offers to rent her one and to deliver it. The man is in the process of a divorce.

Lucy practices into the night. She applies for office jobs and gets an interview. She leaves the children with Bee Bedloe. Lucy is upset after the interview. She will not speak about it. When she gets home she calls the typewriter man, Mr. Rumford, to come pick up the typewriter. Lucy fixes him dinner. He tells her that he will hold the typewriter for her. This leads them to drop by the shop in a pretense to visit her typewriter.

Mrs. Bedloe and Ian come to visit. They bring food for the family. Mrs. Bedloe is concerned when Agatha tells her that Lucy is asleep. Mrs. Bedloe changes Daphne and puts fresh clothes on her. She tidies the kitchen, while Ian and the children play Parcheesi. Agatha feels that Ian is not his old self. Mrs. Bedloe does not want to leave the children alone and unsupervised. Agatha hopes she will take them with her. Lucy wakes and comes into the room. Mrs. Bedloe fixes her something to eat.

Lucy calls Mr. Rumford to ask him to dinner. His wife answers the phone. Agatha and Thomas hurry off to bed. Lucy comes in to their room later and talks to Agatha about men and questions if she is doing something wrong in her life, since she cannot find a permanent relationship. Agatha does not understand and assures her mother she has



done nothing wrong. As she drifts off to sleep Agatha thinks of Hansel and Gretel alone and lost in the forest.

Analysis

Agatha is a strong, intelligent young girl who has to grow up quickly. Her mother talks to her like a grown-up for she has no one else in which to confide. Agatha does not understand her mother's confidences, but she does not let her mother know this.

Agatha feels she must be strong to keep her family from falling apart. Lucy is not a reliable mother, and Agatha must be there to take up the slack. This is a lot for a girl of seven to endure. Agatha does not understand her mother's lifestyle, and it scares her. She fears for her mother when she sleeps late and does not wake when the baby is crying. This puts a burden on her that she is not comfortable accepting. She is a child herself and expected to care for a baby. Agatha loves her mother, however, and she will not do anything that jeopardizes their family.

Lucy does the same in her own way. She uses men to help provide for her family. She wants someone to care for her so that she does not have to work and can afford to dress nice.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Agatha look after her mother and not tell the Bedloes what is happening? Do you feel that she should tell the Bedloes or remain loyal to her mother? Does this decision affect the welfare of the children?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Lucy talk to Agatha like she is an adult? Does this affect Agatha negatively or positively? Why?

Discussion Question 3

Do you believe that Lucy uses men? Name three examples of how she uses men and how. Do you believe that she enjoys the power she has over men? Why?

Vocabulary

jostle, stir-crazy, conniption, spunk, conceit, hoity-toity, bothersome

Chapter 3

Summary

Ian blames himself for Danny's death. He thinks Danny killed himself because of what he told him. He wishes he could tell his mom what he did, and she could kick him out. He even wishes that it was something that he could go to jail for. He does not tell his mother this because it is assumed that it was an accident--not suicide. Cicely is the only person he tells the whole story to. She attempts to ease his guilt by telling him it is not his fault. Ian goes to college in September. He feels it is a new beginning. Cicely visits him on weekends from her college in Philadelphia and stays in his dorm room.

His mother calls him just before Halloween to tell him that Lucy is dead. They believe it is an overdose of pills. There is no suicide letter, so they believe it to be an accident. The children could have saved her if they had called for help sooner. Doug Bedloe cannot find any of Lucy's relatives or an address book to help them find any.

Bee asks Ian to come help out for a few days. Ian leaves for Baltimore that evening. Doug Bedloe picks him up at the bus depot. He has tried everything to find Lucy's relatives, but even the friends she had at the Fill 'Er Up Café have moved away. They plan to send Agatha and Thomas off if their father as soon as they can find him. The Bedloes are too old to care for the children. Bee's arthritis is getting worse and she cannot get around very well. Once Ian is home, the Bedloes leave the children with him and go to bed.

The Bedloes plan and attend Lucy's funeral. Mrs. Myrdal comes to take care of the children, while the family attends the funeral. She tells Ian that she stopped babysitting for Lucy and socializing with her because Lucy was a shoplifter. Mrs. Myrdal witnessed her stealing a silk blouse and a scarf. Ian sits next to Cicely at the funeral. He feels overwhelming guilt for Lucy's and Danny's deaths. He prays for forgiveness. He feels a sense of being reborn. This sense of radiance leaves him as Daphne crosses the Bedloes living room to him, and he takes her into his arms.

Ian returns to college. He tries to recapture the feeling he got in the church, but he cannot. He goes to church, but he does not get the same feeling. On his Thanksgiving vacation, he returns home. Lucy's children are still with his parents. He tries to help with the children. Cicely tells Ian she may be pregnant. He tells her he will take care of her. Ian tells himself that if Cicely is not pregnant they will have a wholesome relationship. When Cicely phones to say she is not pregnant, Ian tells her she must go on the pill. His thoughts of wholesomeness are gone.

When Ian returns home for Christmas, he finds that the house is not decorated and it's dirty. Ian does the laundry and wraps the gifts. Christmas turns out to be like any other. Bee believes that they will eventually find someone who will take the children. Ian believes they are stuck with them.



Walking home after work one evening, Ian comes upon the Church of the Second Chance. The sound of singing makes him enter the storefront where the church is housed. He listens to the Public Amending. Ian confesses to the congregation that everything he touches goes wrong. He asks that the congregation pray for him to be good again and to be forgiven.

After the service, Ian meets Reverend Emmett. He asks Ian why he needs to be forgiven. Ian tells him that he caused his brother to kill himself. He goes on to tell how Lucy's children have been dumped on his mom and that she is not able to care for them. He asks if he is forgiven. Reverend Emmett tells him no. He says Ian has to offer reparation.

Reverend Emmett says he must drop out of college and raise the children. God wants to know how far Ian will go to right the harm he has done. The religion of the Church of the Second Chance is the religion of atonement and complete forgiveness.

Ian tells his parents he is taking a leave of absence from college to help raise the children. He makes arrangements with a cabinet maker to become his apprentice. His parents think he has fallen in with a religious sect. Ian feels he has to do this to be forgiven. His parents question what he needs to be forgiven for. He tells them he caused Danny's death that he drove into the wall on purpose. His parents just sit staring silently at him.

Analysis

Ian suffers guilt over the death of his brother. He wants some punishment, but it is seen as an accident. Ian does not question why Danny would just take his word and not question Lucy. Would he not want to know if what his brother said is true? He also came from a stag party where he had been drinking, so the idea that he could have been too drunk to drive is plausible. The reader is left with the same uncertainty as Ian, as to whether the crash was an accident or not.

The Church of the Second Chance allows Ian to take charge of his guilt and do something to try to alleviate it. It also gives Agatha and Thomas a second chance at a family. The church has different rules that make the Bedloes believe that their son has joined a religious sect. What kind of minister would tell a young man to give up his education to raise a family? Ian is a boy himself and not mature enough to take on the responsibility.

His parents are against his leaving school because they do not want their son burdened by someone else's children. He is a young man just starting his life and should not have to put his life on hold because of a sense of guilt. He made a mistake and cannot be held responsible for the actions that his words may have caused.



Discussion Question 1

Why does Ian feel guilty about Danny's death? Do you believe that Danny committed suicide? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 2

Do you feel that Ian should leave college to support Lucy's children? Do you think that his guilt should be a reason to look after the children? Why or Why not?

Discussion Question 3

What do you think of the Church of the Second Chance? Is it a viable institution or a religious sect? Why or Why not?

Vocabulary

accommodate, divert, despicable, envy, extraneous, downtrodden, humble, falsetto, odious, citified, chasten, stolid, querulous, solemn, pliant, guffaw, speculative, repudiate, petulant, tedious, penance, insular, impervious, ingratiate, jubilant, reparation, atonement

Chapter 4

Summary

Agatha, Thomas, and Daphne go to church camp. Agatha does not like it. Agatha brings a mustard seed for show and tell. Reverend Emmett had discussed it the day before at juice time. The mustard seed belonged to her mother. Thomas is stunned. Agatha will not show him the contents of their mother's jewelry box, but she will share it with the camp attendants. The box contains their mother's papers and if the Bedloes know if it they will send the children off to strangers.

Thomas does not remember their mother. He just recalls following some red high-heeled shoes. Thomas does not want to give up the mustard seed when it comes to him, but he must. Ian picks up Cicely on their way home. It is Claudia's birthday, and they are having a dinner for her. The children are worried that Cicely does not like Ian as much as she used to. She becomes angry when he rebuffs her advances. The children can see she is angry, but Ian does not notice.

When they are home, Thomas asks Agatha to see their mother's picture. She allows it. It is a picture of Lucy with Agatha and Thomas. Agatha remembers her father and where they lived before coming to Baltimore. Thomas feels left out since he does not remember.

Bee argues with Ian about his religion when Thomas refuses birthday cake. The church forbids sugar. She believes her son and the children are being brainwashed. Thomas follows the church's teachings because he wants to see his mother in heaven.

Analysis

Thomas is upset that Agatha shares their mother's mustard seed necklace with the church camp class, but she will not let him see what is in their mother's jewelry box. She fears that he will tell that the documents that the Bedloes have been searching so hard for can be found right in their house in Agatha's possession. She likes staying with them and does not want to be sent anywhere else with strangers.

Thomas just wants a connection with his mother. He does not remember her, and this worries him. He wants to see something that will help him remember his mother and fill the void where she used to be.

The children have a better perception of their surroundings than Ian. They can see that Cicely does not like the new Ian and do not see the relationship lasting. Ian is in his own world and sees only what he wants to see.



Bee is worried about the children growing up with the teachings of the Church of the Second Chance. She does not see it as religion. She believes the church members are being brainwashed and worries how this is affecting the children and Ian.

Discussion Question 1

Why do you think Agatha shares her mother's mustard seed with the church camp class? Why does this make Thomas so angry?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Cicely become angry with Ian? Do you see their relationship lasting? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Bee become so angry when Thomas refuses a piece of birthday cake?

Vocabulary

bashful, sham, idolatry, superficial, condemn, proselytize, obstinate, theoretical

Chapter 5

Summary

Doug Bedloe retires and does not know what to do with himself. Bee finds him things to fix around the house. Doug spends his time at the foreigners' house. The boys are always up to something, which usually requires a call to the fire department.

Claudia comes to the house occasionally to help with the heavy cleaning. Doug finds the family dog dead on the kitchen floor. He gets Ian to help him bury the dog before the children see her.

Ian invites his parents to a Christian Fellowship Picnic. They are reluctant, but they agree because Mrs. Jordan has accepted Ian's offer. Doug does not feel comfortable at the outing, and Bee sits away from everyone. She is unsociable.

Bee talks about Danny on the way home. She feels they are just going on with their lives with no thought of Danny. Ian is a completely different person, and Claudia has her own bustling life. She believes their lives are in ruin.

Analysis

When Doug retires he becomes bored. He feels useless to the family. When he was working he had something to do, and he was providing for his family. Now he must find ways to spend his time. Spending time at the foreigners' house keeps him occupied and out of the house. He feels that house can get crowded with all of the children. This was supposed to be the time that he and Bee would be alone to enjoy their lives after the children were grown and had left home. But, now they have a new set of children underfoot.

Doug and Bee Bedloe do not accept Ian's religion, but they want to keep the façade of a perfect family. So, they pretend that everything is okay and attend the Christian Fellowship Picnic. They are uncomfortable at the outing, and Bee feels that no one sees them as the perfect family anymore. This upsets her and makes her declare that their life is in ruins.

Discussion Question 1

Why is retirement so hard on Doug Bedloe? How do you think he would ideally like to spend his retirement?

Discussion Question 2

Why do Doug and Bee accept Ian's invitation to the Christian Fellowship Picnic? Would they have accepted if Mrs. Jordan was not going? Why or why not? Why do they feel so uncomfortable there?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Bee believe their lives are in ruin? Why is it so important to her to be seen as a perfect family?

Vocabulary

gratify, decrepit, peremptory, abrade, harebrain, inscrutable, arbitrate, infinitesimal, sufficient, indignant, languid, ecstatically, sparse, adaptable, delirious, discriminate, earnest, offense, rakish, compensate, luxurious, gaiety, incongruous, magnanimous, tithe, insipid, galvanize, jaunty, makeshift, calamity, optimistic

Chapter 6

Summary

On Saturdays, the church performs good works. Ian takes the three children. Thomas and Daphne love it. Agatha has to be talked into going. Ian meets Eli Everjohn. He is visiting the family of one of the church members. He is a private detective. Ian asks if he could find Agatha and Thomas' missing father.

Bee's arthritis has left her disabled. It leaves Ian to take care of the house and children mostly on his own. Agatha is a studious girl and ignored by her classmates. Thomas is very sociable and has many friends. Daphne always feels that she has to fend for herself. Ian works at Mr. Brant's shop. The business is good, and he keeps busy. Jeanie, a co-worker, tries to get Ian to go out with her and her friends, but he refuses.

Agatha argues with Ian about church. She does not believe and feels she should not have to go to church. Ian agrees and allows her to go home. Ian finds the rules of the church minor inconveniences except the Unmarried Sex Rule. This rule ruined his relationship with Cicely. He asked Cicely to marry him, but she felt they were too young. She wanted to see the world, not settle down. Ian is upset that he has not been forgiven. He feels that he is not being heard. This leads Ian to ask Eli to find Agatha and Thomas' father. He has him look for Thomas Dean. Eli asks about documents on Lucy's previous marriage. There is none that Ian knows of. They found no address book or any documents in Lucy's apartment.

Ian searches Agatha's belongings to try to find documents. He finds Agatha's and Thomas' birth certificates. They are in the names of Agatha Lynn Dulsimore and Thomas Robert Dulsimore, Jr. They had been hunting for the wrong man. Ian justifies looking for Thomas Dulsimore, Sr. by saying that the children should know their genetic background. It will help him apply for guardianship. He gives Eli the new name. Eli finds Dulsimore, but he is dead. He died in a motorcycle crash. He gives Ian Dulsimore's mother's name and address.

Ian goes to see Mrs. Millet. She did not like Lucy. She felt that she trapped her son into marriage by getting pregnant. She did not think the baby was his. They were only teenagers, and the marriage was not a happy one. When she got pregnant again, Dulsimore got a divorce. Lucy ran off with the lawyer who handled her divorce. There are no relatives still alive. Ian would have never left the children with a man like Thomas Dulsimore, Sr.

Analysis

Each child has their own personality. Agatha is more solemn because she was the one who saw how difficult their life was before the Bedloes. She remembers her father and the divorce. She knows her father is not a nice man, but she can cushion Thomas from



that so that he is not scarred by it. Agatha is old enough to remember Mr. Belling and how he took care of their mother. She does not understand the full circumstances involved, but she knows their mother always needed a man in her life to make her happy. These memories leave her less sociable than the other children.

Thomas and Daphne only remember being with the Bedloes, so they are more outgoing and less jaded. This leads them to readily accept the church doctrines that Agatha rebels against. She sees how following the church is negatively affecting Ian's life and refuses to accept it. He does not pressure her and allows her to make her own decisions about attending.

Ian is hurt when he discovers the children are keeping secrets from him. He finds the documents the family has been looking for and has a private detective look for Agatha and Thomas' father. He tries to tell himself that he is doing it for the benefit of the children, but he knows it is more for him. The family that Ian finds is a disappointment. He would not want the children to be part of such bitter family.

Discussion Question 1

What are the personalities of the children? Why do you think they vary so much? Do you think that Thomas and Daphne have had more or less of an advantage than Agatha? Why?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Agatha rebel against Ian's religion? Do you think the church has a positive or negative effect on the family? Why?

Discussion Question 3

What are your thoughts on Lucy's mother-in-law? What effect do you think she had on Lucy and Thomas Dulcimore, Sr.'s marriage? Why?

Vocabulary

balky, alienate, furtive, cadaverous, confound, raiment, minuscule, earnest, studious, callow, perceptive, morose, quarrelsome, hypocritical, absolve, trite, petty, unconstitutional, opinionate, incongruous, ostentatious, incurious, implication, passive, inconsequential, mundane, tedious, oracular, raucous, pittance, sashay, beset, saunter, flux

Chapter 7

Summary

Agatha wants to find Ian a wife. She has been accepted to college and worries about Ian being alone. The children are growing, and soon it will be only Ian and his parents. Daphne agrees to get him together with her teacher, Arianna Pennington.

Miss Pennington is a young woman who is attractive. Daphne tells Ian that Miss Pennington wants a conference with him. Miss Pennington comes to dinner. Also at the dinner is Mr. Kitt, a vagrant that the church adopted. Each member takes turns having him to dinner. Ian has also invited a new member of the church, Sister Harriet.

Harriet is a forgettable person who takes no care with her appearance. She looks plain next to Miss Pennington. The talk centers on Sister Harriet. Ian does not act sociable to anyone during dinner except Sister Harriet. The children's plan to find him a wife does not work. They feel that Ian is out of step with everyone and his "churchy" language sets people on guard. They love him and watch people's reactions to him.

Analysis

The children see that Ian is lonely, and they want to help him find a wife. They are concerned about him and what will happen to him once they leave to start their own lives. They feel that Ian needs someone to take care of him.

Ian does not let people get close to him, however. He is very religious and focused on finding redemption, and this pushes people away. Ian readily accepts anyone connected to the church, but he is awkward around everyone else. The children love him deeply and do not like to see people react negatively to Ian's "churchy" language and his social awkwardness. He is different from the young man who had many friends in high school. His guilt transforms him from a young man who had a lovely girlfriend and many friends to a man who does not notice the advances of women and talks only rarely during a social engagement.

The children are disappointed that their plan to find him a wife does not work. They blame Sister Harriet. They feel her presence is a hindrance that makes Ian look like a religious nut.

Discussion Question 1

Why do the children want to find Ian a wife? Why does the thought of someone new in his life not make the children jealous?



Discussion Question 2

Why do you think Ian does not warm to Miss Pennington? Why has he changed from an outgoing teenager to a socially awkward grown up?

Discussion Question 3

Why do the children blame Harriet for Ian's lack of success with Miss Pennington? Name specific examples from the text?

Vocabulary

extravagant, indifferent, impervious, luminous, ostensible, summons, vagrant, detest, irksome, ideal, cajole, demure, illogical, aghast, reflective, forlorn



Chapter 8

Summary

Reverend Emmett has a heart attack. This leads him to ask Ian if he would be interested in becoming a minister so he can take over the church of the Second Chance when he is gone. Ian is not sure if he has the calling to be a minister.

Daphne is sixteen and a wild child. Thomas is at Cornell, and Agatha is in her second year of medical school. Ian does not like Daphne's boyfriend, Gideon. Daphne reminds Ian of Lucy, and he is concerned about her involvement with boys. Ian has to pick Daphne up from school. He sees Gideon with another girl. He does not tell Daphne because of what happened when he spoke of such things to Danny.

Reverend Emmett invites Ian to dinner. Ian tells him he doubts he can give people spiritual guidance. Emmett would like Ian to be a friend as well as a parishioner. He tells Ian that he knows the parishioners do not strictly follow the rules of the church. He knows he has made mistakes in the rules of the church. He admits that the Sugar Rule was not his best idea. He tries to make Ian see that you just have to try your best, and people will follow.

Ian tells Rev Emmett that he cannot become a minister. He does not feel worthy. The arrogant certitude that he had an obligation to inform his brother that Lucy was cheating makes him feel unable to guide others.

Analysis

Reverend Emmett has watched Ian grow over the years and sees him as a perfect successor to take over his church. He is devout. He gave up his future to raise the children in hopes of redemption for the guilt he feels. Ian readily follows the church's rules when others only pick and choose which rules they want to follow. He sees in Ian a quest to become a better person.

Agatha and Thomas have left home. Agatha is succeeding in medical school, and Thomas is in college. This leaves only Daphne at home. She is very much like her mother and very into boys at sixteen. Ian fears for Daphne because he sees her mother in her. He is worried she will end up like her mother, pregnant and having to get married to a boy who does not love her. Then, the boy will leave her when things get too difficult. Daphne is a free spirit and takes life as it comes and does not worry about the consequences.

Ian feels that he does not have the right to help guide people in their spirituality. His arrogance and certitude caused so much pain in so many lives he feels he is not worthy to tell others what they should do. He is not even sure he is doing the right thing so how can he lead others.



Discussion Question 1

Why do you think Reverend Emmett invites Ian to take over the church after him? What qualities does he see in Ian that suggests that he would make a good minister? Do you think Ian should become a minister? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 2

Why do you think Ian does not tell Daphne about seeing her boyfriend with another girl? Do you think this would be a surprise to Daphne? Do you think she would mind? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Reverend Emmett have such strict rules to his religion if he knows people do not follow them? Do you think he should change his rules? Why or why not?

Vocabulary

bode, blasphemous, aloof, surly, ritual, wary, presumptuous, winsome, metaphorically, vocation, veritable, misconception, obscure, doctrine, crestfallen, certitude, passivity

Chapter 9

Summary

In 1988, the Bedloes' roof leaks causing damage in the linen closet. Bee Bedloe dies. Agatha and Thomas come in for the funeral. Doug Bedloe takes her death very hard. He stays shut in his room. Ian grows broody and distant. There is a vacancy felt in the house after Bee's death.

Agatha returns for Thanksgiving and becomes concerned about the family. She is an oncologist in L.A. There is no food in the refrigerator. They had planned to have Thanksgiving dinner at a restaurant. Daphne is always surprised by the handsomeness of Agatha's husband and wonders how someone as plain as Agatha got him. The family goes to the train station to meet Thomas. Thomas works at a software company in NY. He invents educational computer games.

Agatha asks Daphne what has happened to Ian. Daphne does not see any change. Agatha says the house is in shambles. There are dirty dishes and dirty laundry. There is no food in the house. Daphne is used to it and does not notice. Agatha says that Ian looks like an eccentric, middle-aged uncle. Daphne says that Ian is fine. He even has a "sort of " girlfriend named Clara. Agatha thinks Clara should come to Thanksgiving dinner. She asks if Daphne is seeing anyone, and Daphne comments that she is more of a one night stand type.

Agatha has everyone pitch in to clean the house and make Thanksgiving dinner. She has invited Mrs. Jordan and the foreigners to dinner. Agatha and Daphne sort through Bee's belongings. They try to get Doug to help to see what to keep, but he goes to the foreigners because he does not want to be around while they go through his wife's belongings. They find a photo of Lucy and Agatha and Thomas. Daphne is attracted to this because she did not know her mother. She keeps the photo. She wants to frame it and hang it on the living room wall with the other family photos. Agatha says that is inappropriate. Daphne says she has as much right to be there as anyone else.

In the linen closet, they find Bee's sewing box, it is flooded from the leak in the roof. It only has sewing material, but they keep looking through it in hopes of a connection to Bee. Agatha questions Daphne about why she still lives at home and has not gone to college. Agatha thinks it is time she started her own life. Agatha believes that Daphne and Ian are stuck in a rut. She feels that without the Church of the Second Chance they would have more in their lives. Religion, she believes, narrows and confines you.

Agatha offers to pay for someone to come and clean and organize the house. Daphne says there is a person, Rita the clutter counselor, who sorts people's households and puts things in order. Agatha tells her to hire her. Rita organizes the Bedloe house. She develops a crush on Ian. She orders a bureau from the place where Ian works so that



she can see him. Daphne tries to tell Rita that Ian has a sort of girlfriend and is very Christian. Daphne enjoys seeing how Rita looks at Ian.

Agatha and Thomas come in for Martin Luther King Day for a long weekend. Agatha is impressed with Rita's work, but she can see that things are starting to clutter up again. Agatha offers to pay for a touch-up service. Agatha agrees to go to church with the family on Sunday. She wants to see Clara and invite her to dinner. Ian thwarts her plans, and Agatha is confused. She asks Ian how long he plans to be on his own. Ian tells the family that he is thinking of getting married. He wants to marry Rita, the clutter counselor. They have been seeing one another. Doug is excited by the idea. He likes Rita. Daphne is as stunned as everyone else, for she did not have a clue they were seeing one another. Everyone is happy for Ian.

Analysis

The death of Bee Bedloe leaves more of a hole in the Bedloe family than they thought possible. She was a central part of the family. Agatha worries about the family because the house becomes disorganized and cluttered after Bee's death. They do not remember to do laundry or pick food. It is as if they are just going along in a haze not noticing their surroundings. Agatha especially sees this in Ian who looks unkempt.

The news that Ian has a sort of girlfriend is well received, but not the fact that she is not coming to Thanksgiving dinner. It does not bode well for a relationship if his girlfriend is not invited to family gatherings to meet the family. Trying to make it seem like a normal Thanksgiving, Agatha invites Mrs. Jordan and the foreigners who always come for holidays. But, it cannot be normal with Bee not there.

Agatha tries to help the Bedloes by organizing and cleaning the house. It is a difficult job, but she is tenacious. Cleaning out Bee's belongings, however, proves too much for her. She offers to pay someone to take care of it. This brings Rita into the Bedloes' lives and happiness into Ian's. It is a happiness that he has not had in a long time.

Discussion Question 1

How does Bee's death affect the Bedloes? Why does her death leave such a big hole in their lives?

Discussion Question 2

Why is Agatha worried about the Bedloes when she comes home for Thanksgiving? What has happened to Ian and the household?



Discussion Question 3

What is the reaction of the family when they find out that Ian may be getting married?
Why has he kept his relationship from his family?

Vocabulary

broody, generic, affable, gist, surreptitious, verbatim, tedious, reverently, garish,
inappropriate, enigmatic, demoralize, furtive

Chapter 10

Summary

Rita asks Ian if he wants children. Ian likes their life now without distractions. Rita is worried because she will be thirty on her birthday. Ian sees that as young, for he is forty-two and he feels too old for babies. Rita talks about her friend who is having twins. Her friend tells her girls are easier to raise than boys. Ian begs to differ. In his experience, they are not. Rita says this is not the same since he was not their father. Also, his parents helped raise the children.

Rita tells Ian she might be pregnant. She is happy about it. Ian is unsure. Rita enjoys her pregnancy. The thought of a child of his own gives Ian mixed feelings of worry, excitement, and tiredness. Rita has many friends who fill the house. They talk about babies and childbirth. Ian retreats to the basement with his father. Ian builds a cradle for the baby. While out with Daphne and her boyfriend, Rita begins to bleed. They take her to the hospital where Ian insists that Daphne leave because he wants to be alone. Rita asks Ian to pray for the baby.

Rita is put on bed rest. This is not easy for her because she is a go-getter, but she will do anything for her baby. Rita wants their first Christmas together to be special. She calls Thomas and Agatha to make sure they are coming. She invites Mrs. Jordan and the foreigners. Rita plans to prepare hors d'oeuvres as Bee Bedloe used to do. She must cook from the living room since she cannot stand, but Doug totes things for her from the kitchen.

Thomas announces his engagement. The family feels the girl bosses him around too much, but they congratulate him and call Angie. They welcome her to the family. This brings back memories to Ian of Danny introducing Lucy to the family. Rita's dinner of hors d'oeuvres is a success. Doug declares that Bee would be proud. The family reminisces about past Christmas dinners.

Rita gives birth to a boy. Ian cannot sleep that night and calls Reverend Emmett. He tells him about baby Joshua. The Reverend tells him that he knows Ian will be a good father. Ian feels ready to rest after their talk. People come to visit Rita and the baby once they are home. The foreigners bring a gift that they hope is proper. Ian goes to bring Joshua down for everyone to see as Rita's mother questions Reverend Emmett about his beliefs on christenings. Bringing the baby down brings a memory of Danny presenting Daphne all those years ago. Ian reflects on how people you meet change your life.

Analysis

Rita is concerned about Ian's acceptance of her pregnancy. He is older, and she is unsure if he wants to have children of his own. Ian has spent most of his life raising



children and would like a break. Rita is excited about being pregnant, and her happiness makes him see that it could be a good thing.

Rita uses the holidays to truly become one of the family. She prepares hors d'oeuvres for Christmas like Bee used to do. This brings Bee's presence into the house. Doug loves her for this because it makes everyone reminisce about past Christmases. It feels like Bee is still with them.

Rita and Ian have a son. Ian is scared at first, but Reverend Emmett assures him he will be a good father. Ian knows that he will be. Presenting the baby makes him think of Danny and how proud he was when he presented Daphne to the family. He did not see any flaws. He just saw a beautiful baby girl. It makes Ian see that moments like these change your life, and Ian finds his redemption and understands his brother a little better.

Discussion Question 1

Why is Rita worried about Ian's reaction to her pregnancy?

Discussion Question 2

Why is Ian scared of having a baby when he has raised three children with success?

Discussion Question 3

How does having a baby of his own change how Ian views life?

Vocabulary

deft, deprive, emphatic, deficiency, nonchalant, dexterous, invalid, evolution, perspective, staunch, resolute, sumptuous, conspicuous, infatuation, incongruity, devout

Characters

Ian Bedloe

Ian Bedloe is a young man who feels guilty for the death of his brother Danny. Danny kills himself after Ian tells Danny that his wife is cheating on him. Rather than questioning this observation or talking to his wife, Danny drives his car into a wall near the Bedloes' house. Ian's guilt leads him to take over the care of Danny's daughter and his wife, Lucy's two children when Lucy overdoses on sleeping pills. Ian had been a happy college student who was enjoying his time at college and his time with his girlfriend.

He leaves all of this when he joins the Church of the Second Chance and is told that his redemption lies in taking over the care of Danny and Lucy's children. Ian leaves school and sacrifices his happiness to care for Agatha, Thomas, and Daphne. He does not feel that he deserves happiness because he has caused much grief in his life. Ian looks for redemption in his caring for the children and doing good works through the church.

Ian questions if all of his work is in vain when he does not feel that he is forgiven and cannot forgive himself. He eventually finds happiness with a wife and their own child when his brother's children are grown and have lives of their own. Ian questions many of the choices in his life and wonders what his life would be like if he had not spoken out to Danny and taken it upon himself to care for the children. In the end, however, he is happy with his life. He enjoys the journey that brought him into the lives of Agatha, Thomas, Daphne, and, finally, his wife.

Agatha

Agatha is the daughter of Lucy and her first husband. She is a pragmatic young girl who has to take care of Thomas and Daphne when her mother falls apart after the death of Danny. Danny was to care for Lucy and her family so that she did not have to support them. His death takes a great toll on Lucy, so Agatha must learn to take care of her brother and sister at a young age.

Agatha finds a family with the Bedloes. She fights to keep it by not telling them who her father is and how to find him. She wants to stay with Ian and his family. Agatha rebels against Ian's obsession with religion. She does not understand the compulsion he feels for religion. She sees this as a sign of weakness. It also alienates him from people and this embarrasses her and makes her angry. She witnesses the breakup of Ian and Cicely and knows that Ian's religious views are the reason. This makes her rebel against it.

Agatha wants Ian to be happy and believes having a wife will give him happiness. She and her siblings set out to help him find a wife so that after they have left home he will have someone to love and care for. Agatha finds her own happiness in California. She



becomes a doctor and finds a loving husband. She still worries for her adopted family and wants only happiness for them.

Thomas

Thomas is the son of Lucy Dean and her first husband. He is a toddler when his mother dies. He does not really remember her as he grows older. He relies on his sister Agatha to tell him what their mother was like. Thomas is an easy going child who embraces religion and follows its teachings through his life. He moves to New York and gets engaged to a woman that the family does not approve of, but will not speak against. They believe she is too controlling of Thomas.

Daphne Bedloe

Daphne Bedloe is supposedly the daughter of Lucy Dean and Danny Bedloe. Everyone but Danny realizes that Daphne cannot be his daughter. She is a rebellious girl who takes after Lucy. She is free spirited and does what she likes. She does not believe in marriage, only in being in the moment. Daphne does not follow the religious teachings of the Church of the Second Chance as faithfully as Ian, but she does not rebel against the teachings of the church as Agatha does.

Daphne loves the Bedloes and believes that she is Danny's daughter and, therefore, a true Bedloe. She loves Thomas and Agatha, but she does not understand Agatha because she did not experience life with Lucy and the uncertainty that came with it. She has always known the stable life of living with the Bedloes. This makes her more socially adjusted.

Danny Bedloe

Danny Bedloe is the son of Bee and Doug Bedloe. His brother Ian has always looked up to him. Danny marries Lucy Dean after only knowing her for two weeks. Danny works at the post office and is proud of his job. He dies when his car collides with the wall near his parents' driveway. Ian believes that he committed suicide.

Lucy Dean Bedloe

Lucy Dean Bedloe is the mother of Agatha, Thomas, and Daphne. She marries Danny Bedloe after only knowing him for two weeks because she is pregnant. She needs someone to support her and her family and does not want to do it on her own. Lucy uses her charm on men in an attempt to better her life. However, she never seems able to make it work.



Bee Bedloe

Bee Bedloe is Ian and Danny's mother. She is devastated by her son Danny's death. She cannot take care of Agatha, Thomas, and Daphne because she suffers from arthritis and cannot keep up with the small children. She does not feel it is her responsibility to take care of children who do not belong to her son. Bee takes care of the children as best that she can, but must rely on Ian for most of their care. Her health slowly worsens over the years leading to her death.

Bee transforms from a sociable person who hosts holiday parties for the neighborhood to a woman who will not speak to others at a church gathering. Danny's death and Ian's life choices lead her to regress to being antisocial. She is the center of her family and her regression affects them all. Her death leaves a hole in all of their lives.

Doug Bedloe

Doug Bedloe is the father of Ian, Danny, and Claudia Bedloe. He is an algebra teacher and baseball coach at the local high school. He is not much help in raising Agatha, Thomas, and Daphne. He worries about Ian and his decision to leave college and join a church that meets in an abandoned storefront.

When he retires he spends much of his time in the basement or at the house of the foreign students. This is to keep out of the way of everyone in the house. He is very distraught at the death of his wife and is unsure of what to do after she dies. Ian's new wife named Rita brings the presence of Bee back to the house when she presents Christmas dinner as Bee once did. It helps the family cope with Bee's absence and Doug appreciates her effort.

Claudia Bedloe

Claudia Bedloe is the oldest child of Bee and Doug Bedloe. Ian confides in her that he believes that Daphne is not Danny's child. She tells him not to mention it. It is not their business to say anything. Claudia has many children and always seems to be pregnant when she comes to visit. She does not live close to the Bedloe family and comes to visit on holidays when she can.

Cicely Brown

Cicely Brown is Ian's first girlfriend. She leaves him when he becomes immersed in his religion and will no longer continue their intimate relationship. She feels alienated from him and feels that he is letting his guilt rule his life. She is young and wants to experience life, not the mundane existence that Ian lives.



Reverend Emmett

Reverend Emmett is the pastor at the Church of the Second Chance. He tells Ian that he needs to take care of Danny and Lucy's children. He becomes an important figure in Ian's life. Ian turns to him whenever he needs support, and Reverend Emmett becomes a friend as well as his minister.

Rita diCarlo

Rita diCarlo is Ian's wife. She is a clutter counselor who cleans up the Bedloe's house after the death of Bee Bedloe. She is excited when she becomes pregnant and feels that Ian does not share her joy. Doug Bedloe readily accepts her into the family. He is happy for his son because Rita brings Ian the happiness that his life has always lacked.

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Ian Bedloe is a young man who feels guilty for the death of his brother, Danny. Danny kills himself after Ian tells Danny that his wife is cheating on him. Rather than questioning this observation or talking to his wife, Danny drives his car into a wall right in front of Ian. Ian's guilt leads him to take over the care of Danny's daughter and his wife, Lucy's two children when Lucy overdoses on sleeping pills. Ian had been a happy college student who was enjoying his time at college and his time with his girlfriend.

He leaves all of this when he joins the Church of the Second Chance and is told that his redemption lays in taking over the care of Danny and Lucy's children. Ian leaves school and sacrifices his happiness to care for Agatha, Thomas and Daphne. He does not feel that he deserves happiness because he has caused much grief in his life. Ian looks for redemption in his caring for the children and doing good works through the church.

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Symbols and Symbolism

Church of the Second Chance

Church of the Second Chance is the church that Ian Bedloe turns to when he is struggling with the deaths of his brother Danny and Danny's wife Lucy.

Sleeping pills

Lucy overdoses on sleeping pills.

Jewelry Box

Agatha keeps her mother's jewelry box hidden so that the Bedloe family will not be able to trace her and Thomas' father and send them away.

Typewriter

Lucy rents a typewriter so that she can attempt to get a better job than waitressing.

Red high-heeled shoes

Thomas can only remember walking with his mother and staring at her red high-heeled shoes. She wore them when she would go out to meet men.

Photographs

Photographs are important because they forge a link between past and present by helping the characters remember those who have died.

Arthritis

Bee Bedloe has serious arthritis that keeps her from being able to care for the children.

Baltimore

Baltimore is where the Bedloes live and where the story takes place.

Public Amending

Public Amending is where the members of the Church of the Second Chance speak of their transgressions before the congregation and ask for forgiveness.

Sewing Box

Agatha and Daphne find Mrs. Bedloe's sewing box in the closet. Wanting a link to her they keep looking through it even though it contains only buttons and sewing implements.

Settings

Baltimore, MD

The novel is set in Baltimore, Maryland. Most of the novel takes place in the Bedloe house on Waverly Street. The neighbors look up to the Bedloes, and their house is the place to be for the holidays. Most of the family stays in Baltimore. This city is a central part of the story.

Waverly Street

The story begins on Waverly Street where the reader learns how perfect the Bedloe family is. In the Bedloe house, there is a different story. The Bedloes keep up a façade of perfection to those outside. They do not let anything rock this perception. They do not argue or think too long on things that they do not like. By not expressing their true feelings, the house is held in a bubble of perfection.

Except for his short stint in college, Ian spends his entire life in the house on Waverly Street. It becomes a pivotal part of the story almost like a character on its own. When Bee dies, the house is neglected, and Agatha must get the family to clean and make it presentable for company once again. The family then hires Rita DeCarlo to put the house in order. She organizes and cleans, leaving the house with no clutter.

The novel ends in this house on Waverly Street. Ian celebrates the start of his own family here. The house started the story as a place to gather to celebrate. Even though through the years it became neglected and less inviting, it ends the story as a house of celebration. It is restored to its former glory, and the idea of perfection is not forgotten.

Church of the Second Chance

The Church of the Second Chance is a central part of the story. Ian finds a source of contentment in the walls of the abandoned storefront turned church. This is perfect for the church for it is for people who are not looking for flare, but simple instructions in Christianity.

Themes and Motifs

Guilt

Guilt is a theme of the novel. Ian Bedloe feels guilty for telling his brother Danny that his wife is cheating on him. This guilt leads him to leave college and raise Danny and Lucy's children. He gives up on his former life and loses his girlfriend because of the guilt he feels. When he discovers that Lucy was not cheating on his brother, he feels even more guilt. This guilt eats away at him and makes him question himself and his actions. It also makes him jaded to the actions of others.

Ian throws himself into caring for Lucy and Danny's children, while not enjoying a life of his own. He puts his own life on hold while he cares for the young children. Daphne is just a baby, so Ian is into his forties before he begins to ponder his own happiness. When his adopted family has found their own paths in life, Ian marries and begins a family of his own. He finds the guilt lessens as he watches the lives of the three children and how they have prospered.

Religion

Religion is a theme of the novel. Religion plays a major part in the life of Ian Bedloe. He embraces the teachings of the Church of the Second Chance as a way to lift the burden of his guilt for the deaths of Danny and Lucy Bedloe. His immersion into his religion alienates him from his friends and is questioned by his parents.

Agatha rebels against religion. She does not see it as salvation, but as a burden. To her, it is ruining Ian's life rather than helping him. For Ian, it is a way to find redemption for his past and to be forgiven. Religion encompasses and dictates his entire life. It makes it difficult for him to find people to relate to outside of the church. Others do not understand his zealous need for redemption and his blind following of the Church of the Second Chance.

Ian sees the church as his only salvation from the guilt he feels. It offers the redemption that he craves. Without redemption he will not find happiness and peace in his life. He feels that the more he does for the church and others the greater chance he has to be forgiven for the deaths of Danny and Lucy.

Redemption

Redemption is a theme of the novel. Ian Bedloe leaves college to care for Danny and Lucy's children because he is seeking redemption for their deaths. His parents try to tell him that he is not the cause, but Ian will not listen. He cares for Agatha, Thomas, and Daphne as if they are his own. He grows up quickly as he becomes their substitute father.

Ian embraces the teachings of the church in hopes that he will be forgiven and find the redemption he seeks. He spends his time helping others and building a life for the three orphaned children. He attempts to find Agatha and Thomas' father in hopes that he will find redemption in reuniting their family. This is thwarted when he discovers that their father has died. He feels that he will never find redemption, and all of his work is for nothing. Ian has to learn that to find redemption he must forgive himself for his actions and accept that not everything is in his control.

Ian could not fathom what would happen when in a fit of anger he told his brother that his wife was cheating on him. He could not guess that instead of questioning this and being rational his brother would commit suicide. Furthermore, Ian cannot be sure that his brother's death was suicide. Danny had been drinking, and the accident could simply have been an accident. The redemption that Ian seeks is from his own feelings of guilt and only he can offer that to himself.

Deception

Deception is a theme of the novel. Lucy deceives Danny into believing that Daphne is his child. She was already pregnant when she met him. She used her charm to marry her before she started to show. Danny is gullible and believes her when she tells him that the baby is premature. Ian and his family know, but no one tells Danny. By not talking about it, the family also becomes a part of Lucy's deception.

Agatha deceives the Bedloe family by not telling them that she has her mother's jewelry box that contains all of her personal papers that will tell them the name of Agatha and Thomas' father. She does not want to leave the Bedloes. Her father left her family, and she knows he will not accept her and Thomas. Agatha sees it as a necessary evil to stay with the Bedloes.

Deception is a trait that seems to run in the family. Lucy uses deceit to help her family find a stable and loving home. She wants her children to be cared for and does not want to have to support the growing family on her own. Agatha uses deceit to become part of a family that she cares for and does not want to leave. They both seek to find a stable home, which is something that neither of them has known.

Styles

Point of View

The point of view of the novel is third person. It is omniscient for the narrator knows of the actions and events of the past and present. The narrator tells the story through the eyes of Ian, Agatha, and Daphne. Ian Bedloe starts as a teenager with hopes for his future. He progresses into a bitter adult with regrets and some happiness in his life.

Agatha is a child who has been through many hardships in her young life. Her jaded point of view brings contrast to the novel. Through her eyes the reader sees the life of Lucy Dean and her young children and, eventually, the life that Agatha struggles to hold on to with the Bedloes. She is secretive and holds her emotions close to her.

Daphne is a free spirit. She is a social person and understands people. Her viewpoint helps the reader to see how Ian is viewed by his adopted children as he grows older.

The story is told through exposition and dialogue. This allows the reader to become acquainted with the characters. The dialogue shows the special bond between the characters. The children are orphaned and looking for a stable loving family.

Ian Bedloe is looking to find redemption in the guilt he feels for the deaths of Danny and Lucy Bedloe. He believes he will find it by taking care of the children.

The story is told on a strict timeline so that the reader follows it easily. The viewpoint switches from Ian to Agatha and later to Daphne so that the reader sees their responses to their lives as the story progresses.

Language and Meaning

The language of the novel is simple. The book is intended for a general audience, so the language is not difficult or formal. The sentences are simple and make the book a quick and easy read.

The language of the novel is simple because it is told through the eyes of Agatha at a young age, Daphne as a teenager, and Ian who left college to raise the children. The children see the world through simplistic eyes. The reader gets to see how they view the people around them and their inner thoughts and fears. This leads them to feel like they are a part of the family. They hope that the characters will overcome their adversities and grow close.

The story is told through exposition and dialogue. The exposition shows the dreams and feelings of the characters giving the reader an intimate view of their lives.

The author's style is simple with short concise sentences. The chapters are long as she attempts to tell the story of the family in complete detail. This makes the book easy to read and enjoyable. The book is told in linear fashion with detailed descriptions of the characters and their lives. The style and language gives the reader a feeling of being a part of this makeshift family and all of the trials and tribulations that go along with that. The reader becomes an intimate part of their world.

Structure

Saint Maybe is comprised of ten chapters. The chapters are long, between thirty to fifty pages. It gives the sense of the years passing for the Bedloe family.

The plot of the novel is simple. A young man is seeking redemption. Ian Bedloe starts the story as a teenager. During a fit of anger Ian tells his brother Danny that Danny's wife is cheating on him. His brother's automobile accident right after these harmful words are spoken leads Ian to believe that he is responsible for Danny's death. He seeks redemption by raising the children of Danny's wife when she dies of an overdose. Ian feels that he has to do this to stop the tragedies from continuing.

The subplot of the story is the story of Lucy Dean and how she came to Baltimore with her two children, Agatha and Thomas. Their past is mysterious, and Ian must know unravel it to find a relative to take the children. Agatha hides all of her mother's documents to keep the truth from surfacing because she does not want to leave the Bedloe family. She knows no one else will want her and Thomas.

The novel's pace is slow. With long chapters, the action moves slowly. The words are simple as are the concepts, so the book is easy to read.

Quotes

There was this about the Bedloes: They believed that every part of their lives was absolutely wonderful.

-- Narrator (chapter 1 paragraph 1, pg. 8)

Importance: This quote is important because it shows how the Bedloes feel about their lives.

Your birthday-mate," Danny was saying. "Or your birthmate, or whatever they call it.

-- Danny Bedloe (chapter 1 paragraph 8, pg. 24)

Importance: This quote shows the connection between Daphne and Ian that will last their whole lives.

No, we can't. Face the facts, sweetheart: we're in the Department of Reality now.

-- Lucy Dean Bedloe (chapter 2 paragraph 1, pg. 59)

Importance: Lucy is telling Agatha that not everything can go your way in life.

I can't afford to take anything for granted in this life, I've learned

-- Lucy Dean Bedlow (chapter 2 paragraph 3, Pg. 65)

Importance: Lucy is lamenting to Bee Bedloe that she has to keep up her appearance because you cannot count on anything in life. The sudden death of Danny has left her without support for her family, so she has to find a way to support them.

And now I reckon Doug and Bee will have to take on those poor children.

-- Mrs. Jessie Jordan (chapter 3 paragraph 10, pg. 103)

Importance: This quote shows that it is expected by the community that the Bedloe family will take in the children.

Pray for me to be good again. Pray for me to be forgiven.

-- Ian (chapter 3 paragraph 8, pg. 119)

Importance: This quote shows that Ian believes he has become evil because of what has happened to his brother and his wife. He believes that everything he touches goes wrong, and he wants to be good again. He needs to be forgiven for the blame he feels about Danny's death.

We could ask for the trailer with the rainbow.

-- Thomas (chapter 4 paragraph 12, pg. 152)

Importance: This quote shows how young and naive Thomas is to think that he can find his former home with a rainbow as a landmark. To him rainbows are important and



should be remembered, but Agatha knows that they are not an important reference point.

It's very bad manners to criticize other people's religion.
-- Ian (chapter 6 paragraph 1, pg. 199)

Importance: Ian says this to Agatha when they get into a fight on the way to church. He does not like that Agatha is always badmouthing his religion. Religion is very important to him and how he seeks to be forgiven for his past mistakes.

It's very bad manners to force your own religion on them, too.
-- Agatha (chapter 6 paragraph 2, pg. 199)

Importance: This quote shows how Agatha views being made to go to church when she does not believe in religion. She sees Ian's religion as a negative impact on his life and does not want that in her own.

I've been atoning and atoning, and sometimes lately I've hated God for taking so long to forgive me.
-- Ian (chapter 6 paragraph 3, pg. 201)

Importance: This quote shows how difficult it is for Ian to live his life for atonement. He feels that he is doing so much and getting nothing in return. He voices these words only to himself, for he fears telling anyone else how he feels.

They are not the burden I meant. The burden is forgiveness.
-- Reverend Emmett (chapter 6 paragraph 5, pg. 225)

Importance: Reverend Emmett tries to tell Ian that he must be the one to offer forgiveness. He has to forgive Danny and Lucy for dying and leaving the children for him to care for.

I know absolutely that you'll be a good father.
-- Reverend Emmett (chapter 10 paragraph 15, pg. 333)

Importance: Reverend Emmett says this to Ian as if Ian's life had been leading up to this moment. Ian is now prepared to let the past go and enjoy his life with his wife and child.