

# **Sharp Objects Study Guide**

## **Sharp Objects by Gillian Flynn**

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# Plot Summary

Sharp Objects by Gillian Flynn features the protagonist, Camille Preaker who must return to Wind Gap, Missouri, her childhood home to do a story for the newspaper she works for. Two little girls have been killed and in a grisly move, had all of their teeth removed. There is a distinct reason that Camille doesn't want to return to Wind Gap: her mother.

Adora is Camille's mother, and the reader gathers, not a very nice one. When Camille comes into town to do the story, Adora is anything but welcoming. Camille also learns that she has a 13-year-old half-sister that she knew nothing about. Her mother had remarried several decades ago and hadn't bothered to mention it to Camille, a fact that she is okay with.

The reader learns that Amma presents one face to her mother, but a completely other one to everyone else. She acts like the subservient daughter to her mother, but as soon as Adora's attention is gone, Amma becomes her mother's real daughter and engages in sadomasochistic rituals and actions toward the people in the community. Camille's first inclination that something is wrong with Amma is when she follows her sister down to the family slaughter house and watches Amma clap with glee as the animals are slaughtered.

Camille visits with the local detective, Richard, hoping for some help on the story. He reluctantly tells her just enough to satisfy some quid pro quo with her. Camille also watches as her mother overreacts to the funeral of the two girls. Then Camille realizes that she's doing it to garner attention and sympathy from everyone because Camille's older sister, Marian, died when she was 13 from a terminal illness. The reader learns that it was Camille that found her sister's body in the woods just beside their home.

Richard and Camille have sex and Camille keeps most of her clothes on. She reflects on it afterwards and determines that she really didn't feel anything for Richard. Later, she goes to speak with John Keene, one of the murdered girl's brother. He's being accused of the murders because he fits a profile the police have developed. However, Camille speaks with a young boy from the playground where Natalie was last seen (John's sister) and he tells Camille that an older woman with a housecoat on walked away with her.

Back at the house Amma is throwing a tantrum about a table in her dollhouse. No one can seem to calm her down. She and Camille go to her room and Camille confesses to her that when she's upset she cuts herself. In fact, the reader learns that she cuts words into herself when she's suffering a tremendous emotional upheaval. One of the first words she ever carved onto her skin was the word, 'wicked'. This was shortly after her sister was found dead.

Mother and daughters decide to bond over shopping and head to the local mall. Adora's sadistic personality comes out when she persuades Camille to try on a dress that shows



her cutting scars. Adora makes fun of her and draws attention to the fact that she is damaged goods because she cuts herself. Later, when they return home, Adora tells Camille that she hates her and that she hopes that the last space reserved on her body is for her name. Upset, Camille leaves the house in tears.

Camille runs into Amma behind a store where Amma is getting high. She offers a joint to Camille and she takes it. The sisters smoke until they can't see straight. Later, when they come down off their highs a little, they make it home. The next morning they are still a little hungover and they tell Adora that they have come down with food poisoning. Adora swings into action, happier than Camille has ever seen her. Then it strikes her, her mother enjoys having sick children.

Recovering enough to leave the house, but still feeling horrible, Camille goes to meet with John to discuss his sister and the ongoing investigation. They end up drinking at a bar and Camille realizes they are too drunk to drive anywhere. She gets a hotel for the night and doesn't intend for anything to happen, but it does. The next morning she and John are wakened by the police knocking down the door. Adora fearing for her daughter had called the police to report her missing since she was so ill. The police take Camille and John down to the police station where Camille has to face Richard who has been fully apprised of how she spent her night. She avoids that conversation and instead puts forth her hypothesis about her mother.

She later goes to the hospital where her sister had been admitted and finds a nurse who will release the medical records. The nurse had reported that there were high levels of poison in the girl's system, but since no one could prove where the poison came from, Adora was never charged. Feeling sick herself, Camille understands that her mother has probably begun poisoning her and Amma already. She tells Richard what is going on and he suggests that they exhume Marian's body. Trace elements of the poisons would still be in the bones. Camille doesn't want to disturb her sister's remains and decides, instead, that she will allow her mother to poison her. Then, they will have her mother dead to rights.

Camille returns home, feeling worse. Her mother meets her at the door and asks if she can help her with anything. Camille tells her that she feels terrible and is going to just get a bath. Her mother waits until she is in the tub then walks in with a bowl of milk for her to drink. Camille knows that it is spiked, but drinks it anyway. She miscalculates, however, because the poison makes her very sleepy. She knows that she should get out of the bathtub but she finds that she can't. She's so sleepy and it seems that her muscles won't listen to her. She realizes that she's most likely going to be drown by her own mother. She begins to make her peace with dying when the door bursts open.

It is Richard with the police force. They surrender a warrant, search Adora's room and find several vials of poison in her hatbox along with a page from a diary from several decades previously talking about her poisoning of Marian in order to obtain the attention of a cute male nurse. They arrest Adora and Richard pulls Camille out of the tub. However, they are not able to find any evidence, including the dead girls' teeth, so they



can only arrest Adora for the murder of her daughter Marian and the attempted murder of Amma and Camille.

Camille tells Amma that she should come and live with her, and Amma agrees. Amma takes her back to Chicago and enrolls her in a private school where Amma seems to have a good time. However, Amma is also restless and at first rants and raves about everything in the apartment. She becomes particularly disturbed whenever Camille goes near her dollhouse, or refuses to help her purchase extravagant furnishings for it. Finally one day, Camille bends down to take a closer look into the dollhouse and is upset to see that the the floors of the rooms are made of ivory, teeth to be exact. The little girls had been killed by Amma.

Camille calls the authorities immediately who do an investigation and make arrests. Amma and two other girls would lure children down to the river banks, play with them for a little bit, then strangle them. Amma would remove their teeth herself. The other girls were too afraid of Amma not to do her bidding.

Camille is devastated and feels quite alone after all of this. However, her editor and mentor, Curry, asks her to move in with him and his wife. For the first time in her life she is included in a loving family unit and her inner child finally begins to heal.



# Chapters 1-2

## Summary

### Chapter 1

Camille Preaker works for the Chicago Daily Press, but hates the work. When she became a reporter she envisioned herself doing hard hitting investigative pieces. The reality of the job has left her in a third floor office building in downtown Chicago, where the most investigation she does is what's been left over in the employee's refrigerator.

When Camille's editor, Curry, asks her into his office, she's sure that she's about to be given a lecture about injecting energy and emotion into her pieces. However, he shocks her when he gives her an assignment that will actually entail her leaving the office. The catch? She has to go back to her hometown in Kansas: Wind Gap. Two little girls have been brutally murdered. Learning that the assignment is in Wind Gap, Camille tries her best to convince Curry that since she's from there she's the absolutely wrong person to send. Curry dismisses her and tells her to start packing.

Preaker does some preliminary work on the murders and learns from the police reports that all of the children have been strangled, and then their teeth are removed. Once again, she wishes she could find a way to back out of the assignment. What she hadn't told Curry is that Wind Gap holds bad memories for her, terrible memories. One memory revolves around following some of the local boys into the woods and discovering their secret hideout where they would hunt deer, watch porn, and hang out. She also remembers with embarrassment how she'd peered through the cracks at the porn they were playing and that this was the first time she masturbated.

### Chapter 2

On her way to Wind Gap, Camille, looks over the information that she's received about the first victim, Ann Nash. Before she'd left she'd arranged to meet with Mr. Nash to talk about Ann and her death. After her arrival she heads straight for the Nash residence where she sits with Mr. Nash. She just lets him tell her whatever he feels like sharing. He theorizes that the killer had to have been a homosexual because Ann wasn't sexually molested in any way. Camille thanks him, offers her condolences, and then leaves.

Her phone rings. It is her mother who has learned that she is in town. Camille had half hoped that she could simply breeze in and breeze out without having to see her mother. No such luck. Adora Crelling, her mother, meets her in town and the tension between them is palpable. The reader learns that they have been estranged for a year, though no real reason is given. It is also clear that they are wary and they do not trust one another. Camille's half sister, Amma, is now living with Adora and her new husband, Alan. Camille does learn that the search party is out looking for the other little girl's body,



Natalie. Before she leaves to join them she learns that they have located the little girl's body. Camille has gathered enough information on both of the girls and feels a strange connection to both of them as their personalities were very much like hers when she was 9-10 years old. She had also been a tomboy and liked outdoor activities.

## Analysis

In these chapters the theme of the Loss of Innocence is evident in a couple of places. First, there is Camille as a young girl, following the older boys into the woods (unknown to them) and spying on them in their clubhouse. Through her exposure to pornography, and their hunting of animals, killing, skinning, and eating them, that she became aroused and masturbated for the first time. She was 10-11 years old.

Then, there is the obvious demonstration of the theme of Loss of Innocence in the death of the two young girls at Wind Gap. Both, like Camille, were adventurous, tomboy personalities, who died horrific deaths. They were strangled, and then their teeth removed. This would seem to suggest that someone is trying to remove their 'bite', or their hold on something, or perhaps trying to return them to an infantile state.

The reader can tell that Camille is unhappy with her job in Chicago, but that the opportunity to cover a large and sensational story is dampened for her by the fact that it is back in her rural hometown in Kansas. It is obvious that she left there as quickly as she could, turning her back on the small town for the large city. It is also as evident that she left so that she could forget about many things, leave behind many things, that have hurt her or frightened her. When the reader meets her mother, Adora, it is clear that they are at odds with one another and that there is no doubt that one of the reasons that Camille left home was because of something that has happened between her and her mother.

The theme of Family is demonstrated in their reunion, and the author is suggesting that mothers, in particular, have such a large impact on the lives of their children, for the better or for the worst. It is clear that Adora is the type of personality that always needs to be in control of the situation. And it is equally as clear that her daughter, Camille, doesn't bend to her control. It is also evident that Amma, the stepsister, does whatever her mother says, and as such is declared the better daughter.

It is interesting to note that Camille's mother's name is Adora. Adora, symbolically, should suggest someone that others 'adore' or love to be with. But Adora is just the opposite of this, as it is evident that everyone gives her a wide berth, and that not even her oldest daughter cares for her. It is clear that Adora wants people to adore her, but her personality makes that difficult.

Likewise, the mention of masturbation at such an early age, the fact that it is an indelible memory, and a humiliating one, for Camille suggests that there's more to the memory than the reader is being told at present.



## **Discussion Question 1**

Discuss the theme of Family.

## **Discussion Question 2**

What would motivate the girls' killer to remove all of their teeth after death?

## **Discussion Question 3**

Discuss Camille's mother, Adora.

## **Vocabulary**

anecdote, pallid, presumptuous, animosity, malady, scrutinized, faulty, aggrandize, purposely, conciliatory, scuttle, diffident, arrogant, haughty





# Chapters 3-4

## Summary

### Chapter 3

A week has almost passed, and Camille has begrudgingly agreed to stay at her mother's house. Oddly enough, for living there for a full week, she hasn't met her half-sister Amma, yet. A few days prior they'd all attended the funeral for the little girls and Camille's mother had taken it very badly, nearly having a break down. Camille remembers that her mother had lost her first daughter at an early age, so figures that this must be dredging up old memories for her. Camille remembers that her sister was named Marian. The reader also learns that it was Camille who found her sister's dead body. At the funeral the families had left their children at home for fear that they would be the next victim.

Finally, Camille meets her half-sister, Amma, and she notices how strange it is that the girl is compliant with Adora dressing her up. Though Amma is 13 years old, she seems very withdrawn and is content with allowing Adora to choose her clothing, decide her hairstyles, and even determine what the girl will eat, think, or say.

Camille is frustrated, not only with her family situation, but she's getting nowhere with the local police. Though she's from the town, and some of them remember her, they still aren't willing to cooperate with her any further. It is implied that they believe that she will make them look like imbeciles in their handling of the case. Camille sets her sights on the detective put in charge of the case, thinking that maybe they will give her a hand in her investigation.

### Chapter 4

Camille visits some local parks frequented by kids to try and figure out what had happened. She notices there are hardly any kids in the parks at all, which she attributes to the high rate of hysteria at the moment. She meets one child who says they know someone who saw Natalie being taken. Camille goes to the child, James, who saw Natalie being taken. James is quick to say it wasn't a violent kidnapping at all, and the person had been an old lady in a nightgown who took Natalie.

Later back at home Amma throws a tantrum over a coffee table and keeps going off about random things. This makes Camille very uncomfortable as the girl's mood swings are unpredictable and volatile. She is alternately kind, then hostile, without reason. In order to try and 'bond' with her sister, Camille confesses to Amma that she is a carver. A carver is someone who cuts things onto themselves to deal with stress. When Camille found her older sister killed when she was nine she carved the word "wicked" into her thigh. She tells the younger girl that it makes her feel safe.



Camille is covered in adjectives. She explains to Amma that she would be cutting all day but she drinks heavily in order to stop the compulsion. She tells her that the last time it became too bad she had voluntarily checked herself into the psychiatric hospital in Chicago and they put her on some medication. She suggests that maybe Amma needs some medications as well. Amma storms off.

Camille is beginning to be worried about both Amma and Adora since both of them have violent and unpredictable emotional outbursts, to both extremes. She had begun to notice this when the girls' names were officially released and the date for the funerals were set. Adora had gone off the deep end, more so than just someone in the community should have. Even taking into consideration that she also lost a child about the same age many years ago, Camille doesn't think that her mother should have reacted as she did. In fact, she's certain that both her mother and half sister have mental disorders that haven't been diagnosed.

## Analysis

In these chapters the theme of Dysfunctional Families is continued with more of the dynamics of Camille's own family. Her mother and half sister are emotionally unstable. Her 13-year-old sister, Amma, has a psychotic break over the table in the dollhouse, and her mother, Adora, comes unhinged when the girls' official announcements are mentioned on the news. Almost observing them as an outsider, Camille is able to view them clearly and is both saddened and alarmed by their bizarre behaviors. The author is suggesting that dysfunctional families pass along their dysfunctions unless a family member makes a concerted effort to combat it.

Camille's disclosure that she is a cutter, or a carver, is important in that it offers insight into the extreme emotional trauma that she suffered when she lived in Wind Gap with her family. This is when the cutting began, when she was 9. The words that she cuts into herself are all words that describe the overall emotion of the situation. When her sister died, she carved the word 'wicked' into her leg. Cutting, she confesses makes her feel better because it lets all of the emotion out of her body. In a very real respect, cutting herself, is symbolic of her punishing herself, as well as rejecting the emotions that she is feeling at the moment she cuts herself.

Also of note was the fact that the last girl, Natalie, was taken by a 'kindly' looking old woman in a housecoat on the playground. This would suggest that Natalie knew the person that took her, and that she went willingly. This demonstrates the theme of Innocence Lost, again, as the children obviously trusted the authority figure who approached them.

Adora and Amma's dynamic and dysfunction is illustrated further by the way that mother and daughter interact with one another. Amma is extremely subservient and allows her mother to dictate every aspect of her life. However, when Adora is out of earshot, Amma acts out violently against anything and everything. This illustrates the crippling effect and very real scars that emotional abuse can have on a child.



## **Discussion Question 1**

Discuss the theme of Dysfunctional Families.

## **Discussion Question 2**

Why does Camille cut herself?

## **Discussion Question 3**

Discuss the theme of Innocence Lost.

## **Vocabulary**

inconspicuous, unprecedented, fallacious, indelible, fanatical, proclivity, falter, unwitting, laceration, malleable, tortured



# Chapters 5-6

## Summary

### Chapter 5

Camille finally meets Alan, her mother's husband, when Adora decides that it would be nice for all of them to have a family dinner. Unfortunately, the dysfunction doesn't allow for a nice meal. In fact, Amma demands to know whom Adora likes best, her or Camille. Adora does not want to answer the question and reacts harshly to Amma, so much so that Camille comes to Amma's rescue and is rewarded for her efforts by having Amma turn on her. Then, Adora raises the stakes and turns on Camille as well. Angry, everyone leaves the table.

Camille tries to reject the urge to cut herself when she goes to her room, and instead focuses on the case. What did all of the girls have in common, if anything, that drew the killer to them? What was the motive?

The next day, after everyone is gone from the house, and it is just Camille and Amma there, Camille sees firsthand how Amma truly is. Amma is a horrible person even at 13. Camille finds out that behind Adora's back, Amma is doing drugs, dresses like a prostitute, and is mean to everyone, even her friends. Furthermore, Amma laughs at Camille and says that the two dead girls were worthless and no one liked them anyway. All of this astonishes Camille and makes her feel as if she's landed in the middle of some very horribly produced television movie.

### Chapter 6

Camille canvasses the town to try and get some information on what everyone feels might have happened. Most of the women in the town seem to think it was Natalie's older brother John. He looks like the type to hurt little girls for fun and sport. However, Camille runs into many people in the town that do not want to be involved in the case, and in particular, with Camille, She learns what she never knew when she was growing up there: people hated (and still hate) her family. Her mother, Adora, and her grandmother, Joya, were both cited as having been scourges to the entire town. Several other residents don't hesitate to point out that Amma is following in their footsteps.

Camille goes to the Nash house to ask a few more questions and when she gets there she finds her mother, Adora, already there. It is clear that she's been speaking with the Nash family, and when she starts to ask questions about the murder, Adora silences her. She accuses her of perpetuating the bad news around town, and is upset about it. Camille leaves in tears.



## Analysis

In these chapters the reader sees that there is more to meet the eye in Camille's family home. No one is as they seem. Amma plays the role of dutiful daughter, but in reality is far from it, using drugs, dressing provocatively, and exhibiting sociopathic tendencies. However, when Camille speaks with people in the town, she is given the harsh truth about how everyone views her crazy family. All of the women in her family are considered trouble makers, as well as unpredictable. No one trusts them, let alone likes them, she is told.

And yet, when she goes to the Nash residence, it would seem that her mother and the Nash family have 'bonded' over something and they are resolutely devoted to Adora, remaining loyal to her wishes that they not speak to Camille. In the wake of the deaths, it would seem that most are just wanting to put it behind them and forget that the killer has not been apprehended.

Appalled at her mother, Camille is most likely still surprised that her mother has the power to upset her. It is interesting to note that Adora's mother's name is Joya, yet another play on the usually positive word 'joy'. Not only is she not a JOY, but her daughter is not Adored. Both don't live up to their names, nor do they exhibit any of the characteristics one would attribute to someone with that name. The author seems to be suggesting that people are never as they appear. This is certainly true of every woman in her family and demonstrates the theme of Dysfunctional Families again. The fact that very often the dysfunction is not visible to anyone outside of the home, is suggested.

## Discussion Question 1

Why did the author name two characters Joya, and Adora?

## Discussion Question 2

What does the dinner time scene indicate about the members of Camille's family?

## Discussion Question 3

Discuss Amma's character.

## Vocabulary

sequester, fanaticism, indolence, scrounge, fatuous, parched, upshot, diligent, feasible, indulgent, urbane, serrated, feral, beastly



# Chapters 7-8

## Summary

### Chapter 7

Preaker begins to drink to help her de-stress after the day's events. Camille begins to remember strange memories of her mother. (flashback) Her mother is holding a baby in her arms, cooing to it. The baby isn't anyone that Camille remembers, only that it was a neighbor's child. Suddenly, when everyone was gone and Adora thought no one was watching, she saw her mother bite the baby on the chin to make it cry.

Back in the present, Camille sees Amma going to the family's slaughterhouse. This is a curious thing for a young girl to be doing, so Camille follows her. When she gets there some animals are being slaughtered. Amma seems fascinated and attracted to the killing, while Camille sees it as barbaric and is disgusted by the place.

### Chapter 8

After seeing Amma's duality first hand, Camille takes an interest in her, both agreeing that it would be best to keep her true side hidden from Adora. Camille drives to see the Keens, the second murdered girl's family, but this ends badly as the Keens are unfriendly and rude to Camille. Meredith, Natalie's older brother's girlfriend, says she can arrange a meeting between John and Camille.

Camille shares that all of the words scarred into her skin have a life of their own. She believes and feels like her scars on her body glow when the word goes along, or represents, what she's doing. In this case she feels as if several of the nastier words are glowing. She believes that John is innocent, but she can't imagine why she would think that.

## Analysis

In these chapters there is a lot of action, less dialogue, and the reader views Amma, in particular, acting as she truly is: vindictive, rash, and someone who enjoys watching weaker people or animals being hurt. This is particularly true when she watches some animals being slaughtered in the slaughterhouse. Camille finds the entire ordeal repugnant, but Amma is thrilled by the screams and the blood. She is positively glowing when they leave. However, it puts Amma in a good mood and she extends herself for the first time to Camille. They agree that Amma's secret identity should remain hidden from Adora.

The symbolic nature of the slaughterhouse is suggested in these chapters in that it is where innocent creatures go to meet their end. This demonstrates the theme of Animal Abuse. Camille is vehemently disgusted by the practice of raising animals for



consumption by humans. She sees it as barbaric. However, this is partially hypocritical since, as far as the reader has been told, she is not a vegetarian. Additionally, the entire town has, in some ways, become a slaughterhouse for young girls, with two children already dead.

Camille says that the words on her body glow when some situation she is in matches. This gives the reader insight into Camille's inner landscape and how she views those she is talking with. Meredith is one of the first in the county to actually seem to want to honestly talk to her. Camille figures that it is due to the fact that everyone seems very willing to blame John for the girls' deaths.

The theme of the Dysfunctional Family is present in this section as well as the focus is initially on Amma, whose enjoyment and sheer delight at the slaughter of the animals repulses Camille. The author is suggesting that in dysfunctional families, where emotions are suppressed, and there is not the feeling of a safe environment, there are no safe outlets for the emotions, so family members will cut themselves, or cope in other ways. In Amma's case, it would seem, she takes joy in watching things die in agony. This makes her a prime suspect in many readers' eyes.

Additionally, the memories that continue to surface for Camille while she's staying at her mother's house, don't reveal a woman who has many nurturing skills. The fact that Adora bites the baby's chin to make it cry suggests that Adora is much like Amma in that she likes having control and power over those that are weaker, and that it gives her pleasure to cause pain.

## Discussion Question 1

Discuss the theme of Animal Abuse as it is discussed in these chapters.

## Discussion Question 2

What appalls Camille about both her mother and her half sister?

## Discussion Question 3

Discuss the symbolic nature of the slaughterhouse.

## Vocabulary

antiquated, parity, profound, usurp, ineffable, apathetic, skeptical, utilitarian, inept, skirmish, fervor, circuitous, fickle, inertia



# Chapters 9-10

## Summary

### Chapter 9

Camille goes with Adora and Amma to the shopping mall to get new clothes. Adora is pouting because she pricked her finger on a rose earlier in the morning and made no bones about the fact that it was somehow Camille's fault. While clothes shopping with them, Adora hands Camille a bunch of skin revealing clothes which makes Camille feel uncomfortable because of her scars. She eventually caves in and tries on an outfit. Adora belittles her and humiliates her by making a huge scene that is expertly choreographed to make Camille look demented.

John and Meredith show up for the interview later on and Meredith scoffs at the idea of a woman killing Natalie. John becomes belligerent when Camille asks about a report of Natalie poking out a girl's eyes when Natalie was nine. It is apparent to Camille that Natalie was not the happy and well loved child that everyone suggested she was.

After the interview Camille has to deal with the townspeople who are all starting to turn on Camille and her family. Amma and Camille have an odd tender, bonding moment when Amma admits she has things she hates about Adora, too. Still, Camille finds herself just wanting to leave the area, tell Curry that she's done, and taking the consequences. Maybe she should just quit, she thinks.

### Chapter 10

Amma comes down with an illness which is a clever disguise for her very real hangover. Camille goes to the murder spot with the local detective, whose name is Richard, but they come up empty. It is clear that they are attracted to one another and they kiss before parting ways. A mixture of emotions are swirling in Camille. She doesn't want to fall for Richard because when her interviews and investigation are over, she does not intend to stay.

When Camille returns to her house her mother is awake and asks her to have a drink with her. Adora tells Camille that she truly hates her and blames her for every foul thing that has ever happened. When Camille tries to tell her mother it is her who is cruel, Adora vows to have her name carved in the last smooth spot on Camille's scar filled legs. Angry, Camille storms from the room.

Camille sees Amma bullying John Keene, Natalie's brother, on her way home. Meredith wants an interview and her name to go along with the story. Turns out the two murder victims weren't nice girls as the media portrayed them to be. Meredith tells Camille that she once fought Ann and had half her ear bitten off. She shows her the scars.





## Analysis

In a larger than life scenario, the picture that is painted in these two chapters is that Adora and Amma are evil incarnate. Both seek to upset anyone and everyone in their wake, as well as to manipulate and control those around them. But others in the town are no better. The two girls that were murdered were both bullies, themselves, by all counts, and Natalie once poked another girl's eyes out. It seems that the entire town has a series of maniacal children running around. Obviously, the author is using this as a device to show that violence runs like a thread through communities, and that it permeates even the most innocent of residents in the community, often without their own knowledge of their acceptance of the violence.

The author juxtaposes the tender scene between Camille and Richard with Camille's confrontation with her mother, who blames her for everything (imagined or real), and who puts her cards on the table by telling Camille that she hates her and wishes that she'd never been born. She hopes that the last place on Camille's body is reserved for carving her own name in there. Thus, the theme of Family Dysfunction is chronicled again. Here the reader sees a mother who is so focused on her own needs and her own persona that anything that doesn't fit into that carefully crafted idea of herself, must go. She somehow sees Camille as a threat to her way of life, as well as someone who knows her secrets and could expose her. What those secrets are, Camille isn't sure.

The scene where Camille is blamed for Adora pricking her finger on the rose is symbolic in nature. The rose is a beautiful flower that often brings joy to those that grow them, or receive them. They represent love, as well. When Adora pricks her finger and blames Camille she's symbolically stating that Camille makes her feel things she doesn't want to feel and that Camille is ruining the persona and image that she's built for herself.

The tradition of violence is seen to be passed down to Amma who bullies John, as evidenced by Camille. She is also involved in many incidences around town where she causes trouble. However, at home she assumes another persona for her mother. It is clear that the lack of nurturing and the provision of a safe environment have shaped both Camille and Amma into people who don't readily trust others, or find it easy to express emotions constructively. Both of Adora's children are self-destructive because they have been told, and it has been internalized that they are worthless compared to their mother.

## Discussion Question 1

Discuss the tradition of violence in the town and in Camille's family.

## Discussion Question 2

Why are both Camille and Amma self-destructive?



## Discussion Question 3

Discuss the theme of the Dysfunctional Family.

## Vocabulary

fickle, parry, prolific, vacillate, appease, vacuous, apprehensive, fitful, circumspect, vagrant, dilapidated, pricked, vapid



# Chapters 11-12

## Summary

### Chapter 11

Camille and Richard meet up and exchange notes about the case. Camille has more information that Richard has, and withholds information for fear of blowing the case wide open. On her return Alan, Adora's husband, confronts her at the door and tells her that he blames her for everything going on including the declining mental health of Adora. Camille is blindsided by this and suddenly doesn't believe that the story is worth sticking around for all of the abuse. She determines that maybe she will move into a hotel or just leave.

Despondent, on her way to her room to get her things, Camille wanders into her deceased older sister's room and feels overwhelmed especially after seeing her sister's room all tidy, just as it was decades ago with the life support equipment. The reader is left wondering about the life support equipment.

### Chapter 12

Camille visits Richards's apartment that night and they drink. The drinking leads to sex but Camille keeps herself mostly clothed through it. After they are intimate Camille asks about the case to which Richard gives her only tiny new details. Camille goes home afterwards and feels like she was used. On her walk home she sees Amma getting high and joins her. The two of them become high and talk about Adora. Amma admits that she allows Adora to treat her in such a way because it is the easiest way to control her mother's actions.

## Analysis

In these chapters more of the background of the family comes out. Apparently, though the reader isn't given any more details, there was a disabled child in the family, perhaps the one that Camille found dead when she was young. Additionally, everyone but Amma is against her at her family's home, which makes her feel very rejected and disliked. She speaks with her editor to try and quit but he tells her a happy story and makes it clear that he expects her to stick it out. Still, Camille doesn't have to stay in the home one more night, she determines.

Her intimacy with Richard is dysfunctional, which illustrates the theme of Dysfunctional Families, because Camille isn't able to fully be intimate with someone. Symbolically, she keeps most of her clothing on during sex with Richard. In essence, she does not disclose any more of herself than she has to. She is unable to engage with anyone emotionally on a full basis.



The life support equipment is important and it has a large impact on Camille, but in these chapters the foundation is simply laid for later chapters, where its import will be revealed. However, the fact that someone in that family was so disabled as to need life support is symbolic of all of their need to have life support emotionally and spiritually after having to deal with Adora (and Joya).

## **Discussion Question 1**

What does it indicate that Camille won't take off all of her clothes during sex with Richard?

## **Discussion Question 2**

Discuss the theme of the Dysfunctional Family in these chapters.

## **Discussion Question 3**

Discuss the symbolism of life support equipment.

## **Vocabulary**

solace, flagrant, infallible, meander, caustic, exacerbate, arcane, clamor, disdain, flippant, patronize, binge



# Chapters 13-14

## Summary

### Chapter 13

Once the girls start coming down off of the drugs they took, they head home and tell Adora they have come down with a case of food poisoning. Adora flies into actions, assuming the role of loving and caring parent. Through her haze, Camille begins to suspect that many years ago, Adora purposely kept her older sister, Marian, sick, too. This is only heightened when she refuses her mother's help later on in the day and her mother chastises her saying that she was the same way as a child, never letting her take care of her like Marian used to do.

Camille recovers, though Amma is still 'sick', and decides to go see Jackie, an old friend who had a falling out with Adora. Jackie had been their babysitter many years before, and had helped her mother take care of Marian. Camille never knew why they two women had stopped being friends. Jackie tells her that Adora's strange behavior comes directly from Camille's strange grandmother, Joya. Jackie then tells Camille she needs to leave Wind Gap for good this time. That is all that she will say.

### Chapter 14

Camille goes to a bar with John Keene, Natalie's 18-year-old brother, to talk about Natalie. John is almost certainly going to prison for the murders, which both he and Camille are certain he never committed. John ends up becoming very intoxicated and Camille decides that they are both too drunk to drive. She gets them a hotel room, just to stay the night in. John ends up seeing her scars and traces them with his fingers. Camille is just intoxicated enough that she ends up having sex with John.

The police wake her up in the morning and she is mortified and embarrassed about being caught with an eighteen-year-old. The police had intruded upon Camille and John because of a call that they'd received from Adora. Adora had called the police when Camille didn't come home and told them that she was very ill and needed to be home. They take both John and Camille down to the police station. While she is there, she runs into Richard who has heard all of the details. He asks her to step into his office and it is clear that she disgusts him. She tries to tell him that nothing happened between she and John, but it is clear that he doesn't believe her. Camille tries to smooth things over by offering to have oral sex with him, which he flatly refuses.

Camille visits Katie Lacey, her best friend when she lived in town. She wants to talk to Katie to figure out what is going on at her own house. However, Katie starts in on Camille and all of the sudden the prim and proper Katie starts yelling horrible things about Camille's family and basically drives Camille out of the house. It is then that



Camille remembers how it really was between them. Camille had been a friend by proxy, because their mothers knew one another.

## Analysis

In these two chapters some similar themes emerge. First, there is the predation by Adora toward both Camille and Amma when they are 'ill'. During this time, Camille is able to really observe her mother and how joyful, for a change, she seems to be. This sets up the entire line of inquiry that eventually leads toward her questioning her mother's version of events in her sister's death. In this way the theme of a Dysfunctional Family is suggested, once again, as well as Sacrifice. It is starting to become clear to Camille that her mother most likely sacrificed her own daughter's health just so she could garner attention from the community for caring for a terminally ill child. Later, her mother's former friend tells Camille that for her own health she needs to leave Wind Gap and never come back.

Adora isn't in complete control of her own life, that much is evident. She drinks with an 18-year-old, then has sex with him when he shows the slightest compassion towards her. This indicates, in a warped way, the theme of Hope. Poor Camille has very rarely been shown compassion or concern in her life and when someone comes along that offers it to her, she feels obligated to have sex with them.

The visit with Katie Lacey is devastating to Camille because her recall of Katie as her best friend is put into proportion when she meets her again after so many years. Katie is her mother, only 20 years younger. Engaged in showing a perfect persona of wealth and popularity, Katie is no more a friend to her now, Camille realizes, than she really ever was when they were in high school. Katie is a user, and it is her confrontation with Katie that finally helps Camille to understand her mother's motivation in doing what she has done all of these years.

## Discussion Question 1

What is it that compels Camille to have sex with anyone that shows her compassion or sympathy?

## Discussion Question 2

Discuss Camille's suspicions about her sister's death.

## Discussion Question 3

Talk about the theme of family dysfunction in these chapters.

## Vocabulary

obscenely, glaring, mischievous, paneled, ceramic, leering, talons, autoimmune syndrome, lupus, cringed, cackled, kneading, bootlicked



# Chapters 15-16

## Summary

### Chapter 15

Amma is in her room playing with her doll house when Camille comes home. Adora gives her a drink with medicine but it immediately makes her feel worse. Amma talks to Camille about how her night with John went, but Camille doesn't kiss and tell she says. Later on she goes to the hospital where her sister died. Camille requests the death certificate of her sister and finds out that she had been given a lot of potential diagnoses, but the main one was that Adora had been making her daughter sick. The nurse who wrote all this down and even called the police, telling them her suspicions, tells Camille that Richard had been there to talk with her earlier in the morning, too. However, there hadn't been enough proof to charge Adora, so the entire thing had been dropped.

Camille goes to see Richard and blames him for using her to get information. Richard doesn't deny the tactics and then they settle down and talk about what needs to be done about Adora. Richard suggests that they exhume Camille's sister to get the poisoning residue, but the thought of digging her sister up makes her feel bad so she decides that if a residue sample is needed, it will come from her. She knows that her mother has been giving both her and her sister low doses of something to make them sick. When Camille returns for dinner she can't eat due to not feeling good and Amma is talking about John getting the death penalty for the girls' deaths. Adora takes Camille into the next room and offers her a drink saying that Camille never lets her take care of her. Camille knows that the drink is poisoned but drinks it anyway with relish. She will have her blood pulled in the morning, and then her mother will be put away.

### Chapter 16

Camille miscalculates and realizes too late that her mother has somehow figured out what she is up to. The drugs in the drink have rendered her semi-lucid. She doesn't have the energy or strength to fight Adora who tells her that a nice bath will help her feel better. Camille knows that her mother intends to drown her but can do nothing to stop her.

Her mother lowers her into the tub and just before she passes out, the police break in and rescue Camille, arresting Adora. Richard pulls Camille out of the tub. She tells him that she hopes there is enough toxin in her body still to incriminate her mother. Fortunately, there is no need as the police serve Adora a warrant and find find several vials of toxins and drugs in Adora's hat box. Along with the vials is a page from Adora's diary explaining that she murdered her daughter so she could see a male nurse she was infatuated with. However, the teeth from the dead girls are nowhere to be found, which means that their chief suspect for those murders is still John.





## Analysis

The theme of Sacrifice is demonstrated again in these two chapters in that Camille purposely sacrifices herself to her mother's poison in order to incriminate her. She also isn't willing to sacrifice her sister's remains in order to prove it. Additionally, it seems likely that someone is willing to sacrifice John to the authorities, and to allow him to be placed on death row for murders that he didn't commit.

The theme of Justice is also introduced more fully in this section, though it has been hinted out throughout. It is only in these two chapters that a clear sense of right and wrong are determined by Camille. She wants justice for her sister, and for the two little girls that were killed, as well as for herself, Amma, and John, who is accused of the murders even though Camille knows that her mother probably did it.

When Richard rescues her from her mother's attempt to kill her, she briefly demonstrates the theme of Hope in that she expects that now everything will fall into place. However, this is short lived as the children's teeth can't be located. Thus, all they can charge Adora with is Marian's death and the attempted murder of Amma and Camille. All of these actions in these two chapters together focus and bring home the supposed extent of the theme of the Dysfunctional Family. However, as the reader will soon learn in subsequent chapters....the darkness grows deeper still.

### Discussion Question 1

Discuss the theme of Justice.

### Discussion Question 2

Discuss the theme of the Dysfunctional Family.

### Discussion Question 3

At age 13, what does Amma still playing with her dollhouse indicate?

## Vocabulary

bedecked, wicker, shuffle, fiddling, exhilarated, feverish, syrupy, reconcile, pimped, brassy, whinnied, shudder, spittoon, fervent



# Chapters 17-Epilogue

## Summary

### Chapter 17

It is several weeks later and Adora is accused of all the crimes and murders, aside from the little girls. It is decided that Amma would come to live with Camille. She's enrolled Amma in a private school. Amma makes friends quickly and becomes close to a girl named Lily. Amma becomes jealous of Lily and makes Camille bathe her in an odd soothing ritual, just like their mother used to, she tells her. Camille is quick to say that they will not be doing things like Adora had.

Several months pass and Amma's friend Lily disappears while walking to school. Camille stumbles upon Amma's beloved dollhouse and realizes that the floors are abnormally shiny. When she stoops down to look inside she is horrified. The floors are made of ivory, teeth to be exact. Camille calls Richard and Amma and her friends from Wind Gap are accused and arrested for killing the little girls (and countless others from nearby towns as it turns out).

### Epilogue

Adora is officially accused of the only murder she had truly committed which was against her daughter, Marian, and accused of Munchausen by Proxy. Amma pleads guilty to the killings and states that she only killed them because they upset her. She also admits to letting Adora make her sick so she had her to herself. It is clear to everyone that Amma suffers from the same dementia and sociopathic tendencies as her mother and grandmother do. Because of everything that has transpired Camille wants to cut herself again but Curry, her editor and long time friend, saves her before she does. Curry and his wife decide to take Camille in and for once in her life Camille feels like she has parents.

## Analysis

These chapters bring together the full story and chronicles the long standing tradition of abuse and cruelty by the caregivers in the Peaker family. Justice, as a theme, is demonstrated in Chapter 17 as all of the guilty parties are properly accused and arrested. However, while there is some relief for Camille, she is miserable knowing that all of her existing family are behind bars, and that their type of 'crazy' might some day be hers.

She feels extremely alone in the world, and for most of her life she has had a worldview that included the assumption that everyone was out to hurt her or take advantage of her. As a result, this seemed to happen to her a great deal of the time. Her inability to deeply connect with someone is the direct result of her dysfunctional family, and is the chief



theme that occurs one more time in both of these last chapters. In the Epilogue, the theme of Hope emerges in that Curry, her editor, and his wife, have asked her to live with them for a while. With them she finally is able to feel what it is like to be part of a loving family unit. Though she is a grown woman, her inner child feels as if she has finally come home.

## **Discussion Question 1**

Discuss how all of the murders were sorted out.

## **Discussion Question 2**

What had prompted Amma to remove the girls' teeth?

## **Discussion Question 3**

What does the author seem to be saying about dysfunctional families throughout the novel?

## **Vocabulary**

clutch, wriggle, enroll, yearn, progressively, feverish, sweaty, metallic, voluptuous, tidily, upending, implicated, mosaic



# Characters

## Camille Preaker

Camille is the eldest daughter of the Preaker family. She is a journalist and is called in to investigate a murder for a news scoop in her own hometown. She tries to get out of the job but the boss thinks it'd be a good idea to go and face her demons. Camille's family is extremely messed up and catered well to her cutting and carving habits. Camille is also an alcoholic, which she uses to suppress her depression and desire to cut herself.

Apart from many of the other main characters, Camille wants to change. She recognizes her demons, her flaws, and wants to find relief from the things that she has seen and experienced.

## Adora Preaker

Right off the bat the reader develops an uneasy feeling when Adora is introduced into the story. Adora is the estranged mother of Camille. The reader starts to notice some weird habits and interactions that the mother has with her daughters, especially Amma. Adora is horrible to Camille and blames her for literally everything that happens. Eventually Adora tries to murder Camille but is stopped, arrested, and charged with the murder of her first daughter.

Many of Adora's issues stem from her inability to connect constructively with anyone else. This comes from her mother's same inability, and it is shown to be a characteristic that she has passed along to her own children. Both Camille and Amma have a difficult time allowing anyone to become emotionally close to them, even family members.

## Amma Preaker

When Amma is first introduced she is a little odd to begin with. As the story progresses the reader realizes that Amma is playing her mother and is a violent little girl. Later on in the story the reader finds out Amma was the real murderer and collected the teeth of her victims to make tiles in her doll house.

Amma is clearly a full blown sociopath in that she feels no remorse for the deaths that she's caused, and she enjoys causing pain and discomfort for anyone that happens to be around her. She allows her mother to poison her as it is her way of keeping her mother around where she can keep tabs on her. In the end, she has no empathy and no desire to change who she is.



## Alan Preaker

Alan Preaker is Camille's stepfather and Amma's father. He is a man of little words but does eventually tell Camille that if she keeps upsetting her mother she will be asked to leave. Alan is always a side character with not too many lines. He stands by Adora even when he learns that she poisoned Marian. He bails her out so she can await arraignment in the comfort of her own home.

## Richard

Richard is the detective in charge of this case. Camille and he exchange information a few times in the book as well as have a brief sexual encounter. He is the one who saves Camille from her mother but reacts weirdly to seeing her scars. At the end of the book he is never heard from again.

## Mr. Curry

The editor for the newspaper that Camille works for, and is stationed in Chicago. Curry sends Camille to Wind Gap her hometown for this murder case to be reported on. Unfortunately, this causes Camille to almost end up dying, so he offers her a place to stay until she gets back on her feet. It is clear that it will be a long term arrangement as at the end of the novel Camille is severely emotionally damaged.

However, Mr. Curry and his wife have been more than mentors for Camille and in the end, they become the loving family unit that she has never experienced.

## Marian

The elder sister of Camille who died at age 13, Marian had been very sick for a while. Not until the end of the book does the reader realize that the mother poisoned her daughter slowly to gain attention.

## Ann Nash

Ann is one of the victims who were strangled and had their teeth ripped out. Ann was murdered by Amma because she irritated Amma. Her teeth were pulled out and used as tiles in one of the rooms in Amma's dollhouse.

## Natalie Keene

Natalie, along with Ann, was a very mean girl, bully in her elementary school, and was also the victims of the murderer, Amma. Natalie's older brother, John, was blamed for the crimes even though it is found out later that he was innocent.



## John Keene

John Keene is the older brother of Natalie. He is accused of killing Ann and Natalie. He receives the death penalty for his crimes, but it is found that he didn't kill the girls later on in the book. His fate is never truly known.



# Symbols and Symbolism

## Adora's Name

Adora's name would seem to suggest that she adores people, or they should adore her, but nothing could be further from the truth. Mother to Camille and Amma, and the deceased Marian, it is clear that she 'loves' the objects of her affection to death.

## Teeth Pulling

The girls that were killed had their teeth pulled. The reader learns, later on in the novel, that they were used to create an 'ivory' floor in Amma's dollhouse. They represent Amma's desire to have control over others and to manipulate and use others as objects or commodities. She's completely sociopathic and killing people for their teeth so she could decorate her dollhouse represents her inability to have empathy for others, or to view others with any sort of compassion.

## Masturbation

Sexual activity of any kind represents inferiority and danger to Camille. This began when she was very young and watched the boys in the woods watching porn. This further repressed her ability to express herself in appropriate sexual situations. It is not only a release and escape from her circumstances, but to her, it is weakness, which only leads to vulnerability.

## Cutting

Camille confesses to Amma that she cuts herself in order to feel better. This self-destructive habit represents Camille's interior landscape and how she has a deep seated type of self loathing that she developed as a result of her dysfunctional family.

## Slaughter-house

The slaughter house is an ironic symbol. It is not only a place where animals are slaughtered, but indicates that the family home is a house of slaughter, literally, and emotionally. Additionally, it is a device that allows the reader to begin to see just how depraved Amma is.



## Joya

Joya is Adora's mother. She is also representative of false appearances, since someone with the name Joya suggests a happy and nurturing individual. However, the reader learns that Joya is just as violent and uncaring as her daughter and granddaughter. The reader also realizes that the sociopathic tendencies were inherited from Joya.

## Life Support System

Literally, Adora's oldest daughter had to be placed on life support because Adora was poisoning her. Not only did she poison her literally, but emotionally and psychologically, she poisoned all of her daughters. All of them needed emotional life support, something that only Camille managed to find for herself.

## Rose

When Adora is pricked by the rose in the garden, she blames Camille for it. This represents Adora's mindset in that she does not take personal responsibility for anything, and likewise, most often roses represent love. When Adora blames Camille for the thorn, she is symbolically blaming Camille for the hurtful kind of relationship that they have.

## The title: Sharp Objects

The title, itself, is symbolic. Not only does Camille use a razor blade, and other sharp objects, to scar herself, but her family is filled with 'sharp' personalities and dysfunctional psychosis. Her family 'cuts' Camille's personal and emotional body so much so that she finds it difficult to allow anyone to become close to her.

## Camilla's Clothing

When Camille has sex with Richard she leaves on most of her clothing. This represents her inability to be emotional available to anyone, or to fully trust anyone, even in an intimate situation.

The revealing outfit Adora has Camilla try on at the mall, and then tears her down due to her scars that were showing, is symbolic of their very toxic relationship.

## Dollhouse

Amma's dollhouse is where she hides the teeth of her victims. She uses them as ivory tiles in her doll's house. When Camille inspects and accidentally knocks into it, some of the tiles come free and she is able to see that they are actually small children's teeth.





## Bowl of Milk

Like one might offer a cat, Camille is offered a bowl of milk by her mother when she is in the bathtub. The milk is laced with some sort of poison.



# Settings

## Chicago

Chicago is where the reader first meets the protagonist, Camille. She's come from the Midwest and has no desire, whatsoever, to return there. Unfortunately, a grisly murder convinces her editor that Camille needs to return to her home town.

Later, Camille brings Amma back to her apartment in Chicago and this is where Camille discovers what the ivory floors in the dollhouse are really made of.

## Missouri

The state of Missouri is where Wind Gap is located. Being in the Midwest, it is assumed that the characters will have those 'solid' Midwestern values that are often depicted and stereotyped. Not so in this novel.

## Wind Gap

Wind Gap is described as a very small town with Gone with the Wind tendencies. All of the women tend to dress and act as if they are still in the 50s with their white glove events, social teas, and clubs. This is also where most of the plot takes place as Camille returns to her family home here.

## Wind Gap Hotel

When Camille and Richard meet for dinner, they end up going to the hotel and having sex. Camille keeps her clothing on, most of the way, anyway. Then, later, when she becomes very drunk, she and John Keene go to the same hotel and have sex (sans clothing).

## Police Station

Richard works as a detective at the police station. Camille spends a lot of time there trying to get answers to some of the questions she knows the police have figured out. This is also where she's brought when the police find her at the hotel with John.

## Woodbury Hospital

This is the hospital where Camille goes to obtain the old medical records on her sister, Marian. This is where she learns that her sister was poisoned and no one could gather enough evidence to make an arrest.



# Themes and Motifs

## Dysfunctional Families

This is one of the main themes throughout the book. The author shows through this novel that the dysfunction and abuse caused by parents is long ranging and far reaching. Joya, Adora's mother, abused her, and Adora similarly abused her own daughters, killing one of them. All of the dysfunction seems to stem from a lack of compassion or connection with one another. Adora does not know how to show affection for her children except when taking care of them during illness, which is why she does it. She also gains prestige and attention from the community for taking care of such 'sickly' children.

The dysfunction ripples down to the children who manifest this disconnection even further. Camille becomes self-destructive in that she cuts herself. She abuses herself as a form of self love and emotional release. The author suggests that when Camille cuts herself there is an euphoria that is akin to an orgasm, something that Camille feels ashamed about as well.

Amma takes the dysfunction and disconnection to another low because she is fully sociopathic. She has no compassion for anyone but herself. She does not consider the pain of the pigs that are slaughtered, the girls that she has killed, or the countless friends that she has traumatized in her short life. She sees people as commodities, much like pigs, to be used in any way she sees necessary. Thus, when she uses the dead girls' teeth to decorate her dollhouse, she is symbolically using them as a product. She does not connect or empathize with another human being at all. In fact, when it finally comes out that she's the killer of the little girls, she could care less about it all, except that she was caught.

The author suggests that of all the influences that matter in the world, the connection that one has with another human being, and in particular one's family, can make the difference in many lives beyond just the family unit. She also suggests that dysfunction is a disease that, if left unchecked, can be passed along to each succeeding generation, often growing worse with each incarnation.

## Abuse of Animals

The pigs in the family slaughterhouse are also abused before they are slaughtered by the butcher. Adora spends a lot of time abusing them so that they will grow larger and fatter quicker. She insists on them being crowded into pens where they can't sit or stand, but are wedged in with one another, jam packed. In many ways, the author suggests, the way in which Adora treats the pigs is the same way she treats her daughters.



Likewise, Amma has internalized this abuse as connection and has a warped sense of love and attachment. Her gleeful response to the killing of the pigs indicates this. Camille, however, is appalled at the entire ordeal and refuses to eat any of the meat that comes from the slaughterhouse. This in itself indicates her unwillingness to buy in or to, literally, consume or swallow the abuse as normal.

There are other instances where animal abuse is mentioned throughout the novel, and the author suggests that animal abuse, even if it is the slaughter of animals raised for food, is just a stepping stone away from similar treatment or perspective towards human beings. This is indicated in the first few chapters when Camille remembers seeing the boys in the woods hunting animals and killing them, hanging their dead carcasses from the rafters. Later, when Camille is speaking with Richard she references the dead girls and says that in many respects whoever killed them treated them like bad animals that had to be put down, their teeth pulled to prevent biting.

## Hope

Hope and the desire for a better way to live is something that Camille yearns for. Of all the children, she was the only one that was able to resist Adora's administrations when she was little. Whether she intuitively knew that her mother was harming her older sister, or she refused to acknowledge physical weakness, she was able to internalize enough compassion for others to develop a sense of empathy. What this does is to allow her to also develop a sense of hope for herself.

She hopes that she will, one day, be able to fully be intimate with someone, to actually have a truly deep and abiding relationship. She believes that having a child might not be in her future, but she hopes that if she does decide to bring a child into the world that she will break the cycle that her grandmother started so many years before.

Hope is something that she doesn't dare acknowledge at the beginning of the novel, but is something that, as her character evolves, begins to be a feeling that she has more and more. The first instance of it is when she meets Richard and she believes that he really likes her and isn't judging her. She also experiences hope when her mother and sister invite her to the mall to hang out with them and do some shopping. This, of course, turns into a disaster, but initially, it is her hope that they will be able to connect.

## Sacrifice

The theme of Sacrifice is touched upon lightly in the initial chapters, but really begins to pick up regularity in the last half of the novel as the reader learns that Adora was willing to sacrifice her own daughter's health in order to manipulate a male nurse to spend time with her. She felt that she just needed more time for him to get to know her, to see what a great caregiver and mother she was, and then he'd fall in love with her. Unfortunately, she kept her daughter too ill for too long, and killed her. In the end, the male nurse wanted nothing to do with her.



Adora is also willing to sacrifice her current daughters, though she has more success doing it with her youngest daughter, Amma. She has slowly been poisoning Amma just like she did Marian. At least once a month or so, Amma misses school due to a severe illness. Amma tells Camille that she is well aware of what their mother is doing to her, but she lets her do it just enough to keep Adora on a leash and controlled. This shocks Camille and is the first time that she begins to realize that Amma might be just as mentally ill.

Lastly, Camille sacrifices herself at the end of the story, rather than exhuming her sister's body to prove Adora killed her, Camille tells Richard that he can pull blood from her after her mother drugs her. She knows that her mother will at some point give her the poison, so she plans to use it against her in this way. When Adora brings her the milk in a bowl, Camille willingly drinks it knowing that it has poison in it. Unfortunately, she doesn't realize that Adora has made it twice as strong so that she would drown in the tub. Luckily, she doesn't have to pay the ultimate sacrifice.

## Loss of Innocence

The theme of the Loss of Innocence is one of the earlier themes that emerges in this novel. Abuse of any kind robs the young of their hope and joy, the author suggests. The younger the child is when the abuse occurs, the worse the twisting and warping that occurs, she offers. This is true in the case of Amma, and in many respects, Camille.

Both girls have been isolated by their mother, whose continued refusal to connect with them emotionally has left them both very socially disabled. Neither Camille or Amma can make or keep friends, real friends. Forming lasting relationships with anyone is nearly impossible. Their earliest memories are filled with pain.

A blatant example of this theme is in the death of the young girls. Their youth, their innocence is ended in a violent way, their teeth pulled out violently. That Amma did it indicates that she has no childlike innocence anymore, that she is quite clearly her mother's daughter, who sees people as mere commodities to be used and disposed of at will. Innocence in this book, is lost when people turn a blind eye to the evidence, such as the nurses and medical professionals at the hospital, or the police station.

# Styles

## Point of View

This novel is told in first person by the protagonist, Camille. This allows the reader to connect to the interior landscape, perceptions, and fears of Camille. However, it becomes evident that she is a fairly unreliable narrator because she, herself, is so damaged from years of psychological abuse by her mother. However, she's also notably braver than most of her family because she knows that she's damaged and faces her fears and the people who have so severely crippled her socially and emotionally.

## Language and Meaning

Language and meaning range from the jargon of a newspaper journalist, to the slang of the Midwest. However, all are easily understood as they are written in context. Very often the rich and metaphorical way in which the writer depicts an event can put those inclined to squeamishness in an uncomfortable reading environment. There are graphic depictions of pig slaughter, for example, and the description of Camille carving words into her skin is also examined in graphic detail. Sexually explicit scenes and innuendos are rife, as are the warped and disturbed thoughts of both Adora and Amma. Murder scenes are also graphic in nature.

## Structure

The book consists of 17 chapters with an Epilogue. Most of the chapters are told in a linear fashion, but there are numerous flashbacks and glimpses into the past, especially when Camille begins to have repressed memories surface in regards to her mother. There are also diary entries, Camille's words etched onto her body, and other plot devices used to give the reader more insight into the motivations of the other characters, especially Adora.



## Quotes

I'm not one of those reporters who relishes picking through people's privacy. It's probably the reason I'm a second-rate journalist.

-- Camille (chapter 2 paragraph 2)

**Importance:** At this point in the novel, the reader sees that while Camille doesn't like writing the boring human interest stories she's been given as assignments over the years, she also doesn't really want to be an investigative reporter because it means that she has to extend herself emotionally to 'connect' with the person she is interviewing as well as her audience.

There was nothing I wanted to do more than be unconscious again, wrapped in black, gone away. I was raw. I felt swollen with potential tears, like a water balloon filled to burst. Begging for a pin prick."

-- Camille (chapter 3)

**Importance:** In this quote, Camille is so tired of being who she is, of having to make excuses for her family, for having to fight and battle her own demons. To give up and simply allow the deep sleep to take her is very alluring.

The rush of the tobacco hit me more than the kiss; behind his car I vomited wine cooler with tiny, glowing slices of fruit."

-- Camille (chapter 4)

**Importance:** Camille is recalling her first kiss with a football player. She'd been 13 and he'd been 16. It is clear from this recall that she mostly went through the motions of what she 'thought' people were supposed to do.

They always call depression the blues, but I would have been happy to waken to a periwinkle outlook. Depression to me is urine yellow, washed out, exhausted miles of weak piss.

-- Camille (chapter 4)

**Importance:** This tells the reader just how skewed Camille's history is, and sets the foundation for the events that follow when she leaves to go to Wind Gap to pursue the story

Problems always start long before you really, really see them."

-- Camille (chapter 4)

**Importance:** In this passage Camille is reflecting on the fact that her own psychosis involved words. To her, words were real, and if one didn't capture them on something solid, then not only would they be gone, but what they represented would be gone. She started writing down everything anyone said as early as when she was 9.



It's impossible to compete with the dead. I wished I could stop trying.”  
-- Camille (chapter 5)

**Importance:** Camille is referring to her older sister that died. She realizes that in everyone's memories, Marian is always 10 years old and there's no competing in anyone's affections with that. Especially where her mother is concerned.

I've always been partial to the image of liquor as lubrication, a layer of protection from all the sharp thoughts in your head.”  
-- Camille (chapter 7)

**Importance:** This is a brief nod to the title of the book: sharp objects. In this case, the sharp objects are the haunting thoughts that she has and the compulsion to cut herself. Camille suggests that the only thing that allows her to dull them is to drink heavily.

This is the unforgiving light of the morning, time to drop the illusion.”  
-- Camille (chapter 14)

**Importance:** Camille realizes that she just slept with an 18-year-old and that it was a major mistake.

Women get consumed. Not surprising, considering the sheer amount of traffic a woman's body experiences. Tampons and speculums. Cocks, fingers, vibrators and more, between the legs, from behind, in the mouth.”  
-- Camille (chapter 14)

**Importance:** Camille views her body, and a woman's body in general, with repulsion. This is part of the reason why she feels shame with sexual release, why she covers her body with the self abusive cuts, and why she has a victim's mentality.

Sometimes I think illness sits inside every woman, waiting for the right moment to bloom. I have known so many sick women all my life. Women with chronic pain, with ever-gestating diseases. Women with conditions. Men, sure, they have bone snaps, they have backaches, they have a surgery or two, yank out a tonsil, insert a shiny plastic hip. Women get consumed.”  
-- Camille (chapter 14)

**Importance:** Camille is reflecting upon the nature of a woman's illness as opposed to men when they are ill. Men, she suggests, have a problem and get over it. Women have a problem and it continues to fester, even long after the physical nature of the illness is gone.

The face you give the world tells the world how to treat you.”  
-- Camille (chapter 17)

**Importance:** Camille recalls that her mother used to say this to them a lot when she was growing up. In particular, she thinks this when she has to speak with a disagreeable





nurse at the Woodbury hospital that doesn't want to help Camille retrieve her sister's medical records.

A child weaned on poison considers harm a comfort.”  
-- Camille (Epilogue )

**Importance:** In the end, Camille reflects upon the 'why' of her life. She sees that a child that only knows suffering may have a different perspective on pain, suffering, humiliation, and harm. A case in point was the fact that Camille derived great comfort from cutting words into her skin.