

The Silent Sister Study Guide

The Silent Sister by Diane Chamberlain

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Plot Summary

The Secret Sister is Diane Chamberlain's story of family tragedy and eventual redemption. The story's main character and most prevalent narrator is Riley MacPherson who, at 25 has just lost her father and is technically an orphan. She still has a brother living, Danny, who is troubled and unreliable when looking for love or support. Moreover, the family has already lost Riley's mother seven years before, and 16 years before that, Riley's older sister Lisa committed suicide.

The story takes place in the span of a few weeks, during which Riley is tasked with returning to her father's home in New Bern, North Carolina in order to clean out his house and settle his estate. The girl is bereft with loneliness and not ready to face the task ahead of her. Within the first few days of her arrival, surprises begin pouring in. Her father owns a strange PO Box in a neighboring town under a false name. He has left a sizeable and valuable collection of antique pipes to a random couple that live in his RV Park—Tom and Verniece Kyle. Her father's personal RV is filled with postcards and pictures from people she doesn't know, as well as a collection of music she didn't know he liked.

During her first conversation with Tom and Verniece, Verniece insinuates that Riley was adopted. This is news to her, and while she does not readily believe it, the woman plants a seed of doubt in Riley's mind about her family origins.

Riley employs an old family friend, Jeannie Lyons, and her daughter Christine, to help her clean her father's things out and get the home ready for sale. The process is stressful for Riley, and soon into the process she finds Jeannie trying to smuggle out a box. While Jeannie is out of the room, Riley searches through the box and finds old newspaper articles that accuse her sister Lisa of murdering her violin teacher, Steven Davis. Jeannie bears out the story. Steven was Lisa's violin teacher from an early age, and when Lisa was ready to apply for Julliard he apparently wrote a letter to the admissions staff that cast a negative light on her, and Lisa shot and killed him. Rather than face her trial, she drowned herself in the Potomac.

Riley knew nothing of the story, and when she goes to Danny with it, he is angry. He didn't recall it either, but as they talk about it he remembers flashes of a day with blood and sirens, and later, his mother telling him that he must have made it up. For Danny, his life as a child revolved around Lisa; whether it was her violin playing or her untimely death, he felt that Lisa sucked the life force out of his family and his childhood. Even as an adult, his bitterness is palpable.

Riley has a difficult time with the Kyles. Tom is very unpleasant and while Verniece is nice, Riley suspects she isn't authentic. Verniece confesses to Riley that they have many financial problems, and that they thought Riley's father was going to deed the RV Park to them. It wasn't in the will, and what's more, Riley finds that her father has been paying them \$500/month for as far back as she can see. She cannot figure out why her



father owes the Kyles, and when she pushes Tom on the subject, he tells her that her sister is still alive.

At this point in the story, the perspective alternates between Riley's current search for her sister, and Lisa's past story of survival. More than 20 years ago, on the day she supposedly committed suicide, Lisa's father and she drove to the Potomac in two cars, tried to share footprints in the snow, and dumped her kayak in the river. Lisa left behind her prized violin and a suicide note to her parents. Lisa's father then put her in Tom Kyle's car, who drove her to Philadelphia and left her on a train to San Diego. Once in San Diego, Lisa slowly acclimated, gaining a few friends, a job, even going to school to get a degree in music education. As the years went by, Lisa, who changed her name to Jade, fell in love and slowly expanded her circle.

Meanwhile, Riley hunts Tom Kyle down and asks him more, but he won't give any information. His wife comes to Riley and says they will trade knowledge of where Lisa is for the deed to the RV Park, which is worth more than \$200,000. Riley agrees immediately, motivated by a longing for family and a desire to know where her sister is. Before the gift deed is recorded, Tom tells Riley only that her father masterminded the entire plan, and that Tom drove her to the train station. After that, he didn't know where she went. Riley deems that information not worth the RV Park, and calls off the deal.

Eventually, Danny catches the scent of what Riley is up to and gets involved. He hacks into the police records online and finds a tidbit of information previously unreleased to the public: there were two sets of footprints at Lisa's suicide scene. Danny is keen to find his sister, but for different reasons than Riley: he is eager to see her punished for her actions.

Eventually, a private investigator comes looking for Lisa. She is in the back of the music store where she works when she hears a man asking about her in the front. Her boss, Grady and her girlfriend's grandfather, Charlie do not help the investigator, but instead encourage her to leave. Jade packs all she owns and leaves San Diego for Portland, where her girlfriend Celia lives. Once she arrives there, she breaks down and tells Celia everything.

Riley contacts Steven Davis's widow, Sondra, and talks to her about her search for her sister. She very carefully says that she feels her sister is truly dead, but is interested in what Sondra's investigator found. All Sondra can say is that they tracked Lisa as far as San Diego. Riley follows the lead to San Diego and eventually finds Grady, the man who owned the shop Lisa worked in. He does disclose that she worked for him, that she went by Jade, and that she disappeared to Portland. With that end exhausted, Riley returns home.

Because Jeannie and Christine are too much in Riley's space, and also because her nerves are frayed, Riley abandons the estate sale and sends Jeannie and Christine away. However, while working alone among her father's papers she finds her birth certificate and starts questioning why she was born in Asheville while her siblings were born in Alexandria. That, taken with the fact that her siblings are fair, almost white-



haired, and Riley has dark, wavy hair, leads her to call Jeannie frantically. Jeannie comes over and discloses that Lisa got pregnant at age 15 and had to go live with Jeannie in Asheville so that the local music community wouldn't know. Lisa's baby was Riley, and although she had planned to give the baby up for adoption, she found she couldn't part with her, so Lisa's parents—the people whom Riley saw as her own parents—adopted her. Lisa wore a white jade pendant inscribed with the Chinese symbols for 'mother' and 'daughter'; a gift from Jeannie that she never took off.

Riley feels abandoned all over again. Her real parents, while not dead, are lost to her nonetheless. Jeannie tells her that her real father was a boy that Lisa met in Italy on a concert trip, but Riley wonders if it's actually Lisa's close childhood friend, Matty. Matthew is now a man with dark curly hair, similar to Riley's own.

The next day Riley tries to track Matthew down, but he is away on a trip to Japan and is unreachable. She looks through her father's emails and finds several from someone named Celia, whom she now knows is her mother's girlfriend. The emails lead her to a search of her father's personal RV, to the postcards and pictures of children and a few CDs by a bluegrass band called Jasha Trace—a band comprised of two men and two married women, one of them a violin player that wears a white jade pendant.

The pieces fall into place: her father's random PO Box. The pictures of random children that must be Jade's and Celia's. Her father's interest in bluegrass music. Riley scours the internet for more info on Jasha Trace and sees her mother all over the website. She shares the information with Jeannie: that Lisa, now Jade, is alive and living in Seattle. What's more, Jasha Trace will be in New Bern in a matter of days for a concert, one they must have planned in order to see Lisa's father.

Riley's joy and anticipation is marred by the knowledge that Danny has figured all of this out on his own, and what's more, he plans to tell his police officer friend and have Jade arrested at the concert. Riley decides to warn Jade: she takes the old violin that Lisa had played as a teen and drives to a neighboring town, where the band has another concert planned. After the concert, she makes her way backstage and into the dressing room where her mother and Celia wait.

There is a tearful reunion between Jade and Riley, but Celia is angry that Riley has brought danger to their door. She tells them that Danny knows and will meet them in New Bern at the concert, possibly with police in tow. They talk for a while and Riley eventually gets angry at her mother for moving on with her life while she and Danny suffered so miserably. She leaves the dressing room in anger.

Celia, unbeknownst to Jade, follows Riley to her apartment and tells her the real truth of her mother's past: that she was sexually abused and assaulted by Steven Davis, the violin teacher, who is actually Riley's father. The day he was killed he had actually come to Lisa and threatened to take Riley away from her because his wife was unable to conceive. He reached for her, and Lisa shot him. Celia tells Riley this because in court, Steven's abuse would have made an excellent motive, and Lisa would have certainly been convicted. Riley feels less like she was abandoned and more defensive on her



mother's behalf. Even more desperate to keep Danny from arresting her, Riley leaves her apartment in the middle of the night and rushes to Danny, but she hits a deer and runs off the road.

The next morning, Jade, Celia, Jeannie, and Danny all converge at the hospital. Jeannie and Celia wait outside while the MacPherson "siblings" have a reunion by Riley's bed. Jade and Danny argue and Riley has to yell for them to stop. Danny is still convinced that Jade should atone for her crimes; but out of love for Riley, who desperately wants her mother in her life, he promises to keep the secret. The novel ends with Riley living a mile from Jade, moving forward and forgetting the past.

Part One: Prologue, 1-3

Summary

Prologue: In this short, third-person description of a scene in 1990 Virginia, people are walking along the Potomac on a cold, January day. A yellow kayak sits alone in the river, absent of its 17-year-old pilot, a supposed murderer who has committed suicide rather than face her trial. The scene is flooded with police and curious onlookers alike. A woman stands nearby, watching the scene, her coat wrapped tightly around her. She watches the police with disdain and feels that an empty kayak does not prove a suicide.

In Chapter 1, the action has moved to 2013 and the narration has changed to first-person. The speaker's name is Riley, and she begins her story by saying that she's lost nearly all of her loved ones by age 25. She is driving to coastal North Carolina to tend to her recently-dead father's estate. At a stop at a rural post office Riley investigates a mysterious PO box that is addressed to a name she doesn't recognize - Fred Marcus. Riley continues to her father's house, feeling the sting of the lost parent. In her sadness she thinks of her recently-ended relationship, adding to her low spirits.

Her father's house is waiting to be picked through, its contents sold before the house itself goes on the market. Riley walks through the house with an attempt at a critical eye: her father has tons of antique collections and there are nods to the family's love for music everywhere. In a spare bedroom there are five violins leaning against the wall. One has a tag that says Lisa MacPherson with an address in Alexandria. Lisa, Riley recalls, never lived in the North Carolina house. Riley's mother died soon after high school, and Riley ponders how much she will miss the existence of two people who loved her unconditionally. Her father was a loner, with few friends, and she won't plan on having a memorial service for him. Riley ponders how to find Danny: he was difficult to track down after her father's death, and she would need his help sorting out the house.

In Chapter 2, Riley drives to find Danny's trailer on the outskirts of New Bern, the town where her father's house is located. The trailer is on a sidelot of Mac's RV Park, which her father owned. Riley wonders what kind of mood her brother will be in when she sees him - affectionate? Angry? Bitter? He greets Riley as she heads towards his trailer, his face guarded. His first words tell her that his mood is angry.

Danny is a handful of years older, sharp and good-looking. He lives in the small Airstream with a functioning generator and laptop. He asks after Riley's ex-boyfriend, and she tells him quickly that Bryan was dragging his feet on his divorce. Danny walks with a limp from an injury he suffered in Iraq. Riley encourages him to take his anti-depression meds and he snaps at her.

Changing the subject, Riley says she's executing their father's will and she'll need Danny's help going through their father's belongings. Danny immediately says he doesn't want any of his father's money or things and he doesn't want to be involved in



the process. All he wants is the five acres on which his trailer sits. Riley begs him for his help, and he eventually relents, promising to come to the house once Riley has seen the lawyer. That night, Riley is having difficulty sleeping. While walking through the house she remembers that the random PO Box had a purple envelope in it. It holds a postcard of a bluegrass band; the bottom of the postcard says the words "Jasha Trace." A written note has a the tour schedule and a suggestion to meet up. Riley feels bad that Fred Marcus, whoever he is, won't get his postcard.

In Chapter 3, Riley goes to visit Suzanne, the lawyer in charge of the estate. It is split 50/50 between Riley and Danny - the house proceeds, the park proceeds, any money. The only separate piece is Danny's parcel of land. Among his things is a life insurance policy from his days as a U.S. Marshal. Riley is confused, never having recalled that her father worked as a U.S. Marshal. Eventually, she remembers a few comments from her childhood that point to this. Her father has several valuable collections; one, of old pipes, he has left to a man named Tom Kyle. Tom and his wife Verniece are longtime residents of her father's RV park. This is a confusing part of a the will. Her father also left his piano and \$10,000 to family friend Jeannie Lyons, an old friend of Riley's mother. Jeannie is a real estate agent that Riley should call to help sell the house and RV Park. The amount of money Riley and her brother will eventually share is several hundred thousand dollars. Suzanne mentions Danny, asking after his mental state. He is well-known in New Bern and inspires a myriad of thoughts: gratefulness that he served in Iraq, pity, fear, and compassion. As a last word of caution, Suzanne warns Riley not to dig too deeply into her father's life, that she may find things she didn't want to see.

Analysis

The first-person Prologue sets the stage with the scene that will become the crux of this story: a suicide, an escape from a sensational murder trial of a 17-year-old girl. The language used evokes a cold and mysterious scene: mist, snow, fog, and curious onlookers. The author immediately plants a seed of doubt by describing a woman watching the scene, one who doesn't believe for a minute that the empty kayak in the river proves that the girl committed suicide.

The first three chapters that follow tell the reader several things about Riley: she is lonely, she has lost both parents, and she longs to feel close to her lost family. Although she mentions that she and her father had a good relationship before his sudden death, she barely mentions her mother, who passed away just after Riley finished high school. Her brother Danny is slowly revealed to be suffering from PTSD from a term in Iraq; although he is her only existing relative, his injuries and varying levels of depression keep him at arm's length.

The house in New Bern, NC, is where Riley essentially grew up, but she mentions little memories of the place. There are few positive family recollections. Her father, she describes as a quiet, loner type of man, with so few friends that a memorial service would be useless, and this for a man who has lived in the same house for more than years.



These early chapters hold several examples of foreshadowing, of a story that will leak out little by little. First, the mention of her father's job in the Marshal's service. Riley barely remembers that her family used to live outside of Washington and that her family worked for the government. Second, Riley sees the collection of violins in her father's house, although she tells the reader that neither she nor Danny are musical. One of the violins has a tag that reads "Lisa MacPherson" with the Virginia address. Riley barely mentions, "Lisa never lived in this house." The reader may notice that Riley and Lisa share a last name, but at this point in the story, no more is said about the violin-player that only lived in Virginia. Third, as Riley is leaving Suzanne's office, Suzanne cautions not to dig too deep into her father's life. Riley may find things she isn't prepared to know about her father. With these words the stage is set for a slow unraveling of everything Riley thought she knew about her family.

Discussion Question 1

How does the author use Danny to add to Riley's feeling of isolation?

Discussion Question 2

Riley is a school counselor. How is her job ironic in light of her family issues?

Discussion Question 3

The first time Riley appears, she is investigating the false PO Box. What tone does the author set by starting Riley's journey with this task?

Vocabulary

wrest, expanse, plummeted, cremated, memorabilia, squirreled, vivid, executrix



Part One: 4-7

Summary

In Chapter 4, Riley is lamenting the fact that Danny is so difficult. After leaving the lawyer, Riley picks him up and takes him to their father's house. They eat shrimp and she watches as he slowly walks into the house. She mentions how much her father had saved, and they muse over how he would have that much money from his job running an RV park. Danny grows tense when Riley feeds him on the same plates they used as children. She changes the subject to romance. They ponder the strange bequests their father made - Jeannie Lyons and Tom Kyle. Danny says Tom is "an asshole" and proclaims he really doesn't want to deal with any of it. He begs Riley to hire somebody, that he has too many nightmares about their family. Danny goes on to the living room, complaining about all of their father's stuff and what a waste it was. Riley reminds him that their father needed collections to help him move on after Lisa. At Lisa's name Danny explodes, throwing his beer bottle into a glass cabinet, shattering everything. He runs from the house. Riley gets her car and follows him, picking him up to drive him back to his trailer. She begins to fear that he'll commit suicide, and suggests he sees a psychiatrist. After blowing up at her, Danny apologizes and promises that he's okay, but he can't work in the house anymore.

In Chapter 5, Riley goes to see Tom Kyle at her father's RV Park. He is, as Danny suggested, an unkind man with a sour expression. Riley tells him that her father left his pipe collection to them and his reaction is odd, like he didn't hear. His wife Verniece joins them: she is a more bubbly, friendly woman that sets Riley at ease. Over cold drinks, Verniece tells Riley that she reminds them of their son, Luke, because he was also adopted. Riley gently reminds Verniece that she wasn't adopted at all, but she feels odd. They seem happy to receive the pipe collection. Riley returns to the house for a run, but before leaving she glances through her father's bank statements and notices that her father had been paying Tom Kyle \$500/month.

In Chapter 6, Riley meets Jeannie Lyons for lunch. She has a slight memory of her from childhood. Almost immediately Jeannie mentions slyly that she and Riley's father had a 5-year relationship that began some time after Riley's mother died. Jeannie's knowledge of Riley's parents doesn't seem to match her own. The woman describes two people Riley doesn't recognize, and the change seems to arise from Lisa's death. When Riley tells Jeannie about her father's bequest, Jeannie's reaction is lackluster. She shares that her father left his pipe collection to Tom Kyle and this surprises Jeannie. On the whole, his will seems to be a mystery. Jeannie suddenly suggests letting her daughter Christine handle the house - selling its contents and getting it ready to put on the market. She is pushy about it, and Riley agrees but feels strange.

Chapter 7 finds Riley going through a box of old photos from her father's closet. As she looks through them she ponders why Jeannie makes her feel so uncomfortable. She finds an old picture of Danny and Lisa as children - they look very alike. Other pictures



remind Riley of her mother and her death from cancer, of Danny's time in the army, and Lisa's childhood, which was wrapped in playing the violin. Several pictures show Lisa with a young man similar in age - her best friend, Matty. She finds a picture of the three of them - Lisa at 16, Danny at 5, and her at 1. Her hair is dark, while Lisa and Danny are very fair. She recalls finding the picture when she was young and asking Danny who the older girl was; her mother had told her that Lisa died at 17 from drowning, but Danny adds that Lisa did it to herself. She recalls her parents saying that Lisa was very unhappy, and they hope Riley will never be that unhappy.

Analysis

These chapters deepen the mystery of Riley's father and his strange will, and also flesh out the mystery of who Lisa MacPherson was. During the scene between Riley and her brother at the house, Danny explodes at the mention of Lisa's name. The reader finally hears that Lisa is dead, and that her death was the point at which the entire family dynamic shifted. It is immediately apparent that Danny has some deep-seated issues regarding his family: "I have as many nightmares about our family as I do about Iraq." This is a very heavy statement against his childhood.

The Kyles are introduced in these chapters. The reader knows that they live at the RV park and that Riley's father left them a pipe collection, but the reader meets them first hand when Riley goes to tell them about the bequest. Danny's picture of Tom is the first impression, and it is borne out during the visit. Tom Kyle tries to act friendly and jovial to Riley, but she can see that it's difficult for him. His face is sour, his expression bland. His wife, Verniece, fares better. She immediately puts Riley at ease and seems genuinely thankful about Frank's gift to them. Verniece deepens the air of mystery surrounding Riley's family by mentioning that their families are linked by adoption; their son Luke is adopted just as Riley was. Riley is certain she wasn't adopted, and tells Verniece as much. The older woman pretends that she must have mis-remembered, but Riley can see that she's certain it's the truth. The nature of Frank's relationship with Tom and Verniece is again questioned when Riley finds that her father has been paying them monthly for years.

Chamberlain suspends this thought while shifting to a new character: Jeannie Lyons. Jeannie, real-estate agent and family friend, also received a bequest in Frank's will of \$10,000 and a baby grand piano. Like the Kyles, there is something shifty about Jeannie that leaves Riley feeling odd. Chamberlain does a thorough job of laying pieces of the puzzle around, and then throwing doubt on all of the new players. Verniece Kyle seems kind, but then Jeannie Lyons is certain that Riley's father had great distaste for both of the Kyles. And yet, Jeannie herself acts very suspect when Riley tells her of her own bequest; at best, lukewarm to the gift of \$10,000 and a grand piano. At the end of these chapters Riley is left with nobody she can really trust.

The mystery around Lisa is expanded in this section, where the reader finally learns that Lisa drowned herself at age 17, a fact that nobody really talked about. Riley herself didn't know of Lisa's existence until she found a picture of her older sister in her



mother's bedroom when she was a child. In the photo, Riley notes that she looks nothing like her siblings. This fact, when taken with Verniece's mention that Riley was adopted, is another puzzling piece that Chamberlain lays out for the reader to ponder.

Discussion Question 1

What things about Jeannie leave the reader with a feeling of discomfort?

Discussion Question 2

What are some indications that Tom and Verniece Kyle are not what they seem?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Danny feel that his family abused him?

Vocabulary

fastidiously, rhetorical, brittle, enigma, juttled, relegated, reclusive, eccentric, reticent, deluge

Part One: 8-11

Summary

Riley drives back towards the RV park. She has an unmarked key that she hopes will open her father's personal RV, and plans to stop by Danny's trailer again. At the edge of the woods she sees Harry Washington, local policeman and friend of Danny's. Harry reassures Riley that Danny is fine. Riley sees Danny and he tells her to sell her father's personal RV. She tries to engage him with the photos she found, but he shoots her down. When she mentions VHS tapes of Lisa playing violin, he responds violently, saying their entire family life was wrapped around Lisa when they were kids. He says that when she killed herself, she took the best parts of their parents with her, and he and Riley were left behind. Riley feels dejected and alone, and tells him so. She promises not to press him about the past if he promises to spend time with her.

In Chapter 9, Riley goes to her father's RV park. She is fending off calls from Jeannie while she digs around her father's things. On the refrigerator she sees an ad for the same bluegrass band she found in the random PO Box, the one in the purple envelope. Next to it was a picture of a few kids that she'd never seen before. When she sees his CD collection, filled with strange artists she had no idea he liked, she feels like a trespasser.

Riley walks over to the Tom's RV and finds Verniece at home. They sit down for coffee. Riley offers her father's RV to Verniece, and also asks if she knows why her father was paying them monthly. Verniece says she doesn't know. They talk more about the supposed 'adoption.' Verniece says that she once had a brief conversation with Riley's mother in which she confided that they'd adopted Riley from North Carolina. Riley recalls her dark hair. As she's leaving she sees Tom and asks why her father was paying him. He tells her it doesn't matter now, and that she should stop asking questions.

In Chapter 10, Riley returns home, wondering if she actually is adopted. She watches the tape of her sister playing the violin, constantly in tears. Lisa was a brilliant musician, but Riley feels for her, the pressure she must have been under. Lisa's violin teacher appears onscreen, a handsome but stern-faced young man. The tape shows Lisa's orchestra competing in Rome. Eventually it's too much for Riley to bear. Although she can't say she knew her sister, the tape has made her feel close to her, and she mourns the loss of her.

In Chapter 11, Jeannie finally makes it over to Riley's house to start cataloging items for an estate sale. Jeannie sets Riley on the task of emptying her father's papers into the shredder and pulling out items that she wants to keep. Riley finds Jeannie contradictory about many things she says about her father. Moreover, Jeannie mentions that Tom Kyle owed her father, and not the other way around: when they were in the Marshals service together, Tom had an affair with a client, and Riley's father smoothed it over for



him and saved his job. When Riley mentions that her father was paying the Kyles, Jeannie is incensed; she tells Riley that she's had money problems for years, and for her father to share so much with the Kyles and so little with her is hurtful. Riley mentions that Verniece told her she was adopted, and Jeannie protests this violently. The women seem to get along for a few moments at a time; and then Jeannie will say something hurtful and Riley will feel that Jeannie can't be trusted. Riley begins sorting through her father's papers; after a while she decides to go upstairs to see what Jeannie is doing. She finds Jeannie in her father's bedroom, fiddling with a small box and acting strangely about it. While Jeannie is in the bathroom, Riley opens the box and finds a pile of newspaper clippings about Lisa. Most of them cover her death, and call her an accused murderer.

Analysis

More is revealed and more clues are planted in this section of chapters. The reader finds that Danny has some very obvious issues that he deals with, not just from Iraq but from his childhood. He tells Riley that as children, their whole life revolved around Lisa, and even after she died, their life had to be about her. For Danny, who is a semi-important character, his truth makes up the base of who he is. His service in the military aside, he feels that his childhood was taken from him by his dead sister, and the parents she left behind were thin copies of the people that raised him. For Riley, who craves belonging and family, Danny will not provide the closeness she seeks. He loves her in the best way he can, but it's not the way she wants. She tries to meet Danny halfway, but watching from the outside, the reader can detect that Riley smothers him a bit.

Riley's longing for family seems a bit unbalanced. She states that she and her father were relatively close before he died, and her mother has been gone for seven years; but the character speaks as if she's always been alone. Her reaction to watching Lisa play the violin is completely the opposite of Danny, who said he's seen Lisa play enough to last a lifetime. Because Riley was only two when Lisa died, she doesn't remember what Danny does, that the family spent all of their spare time involved in Lisa's music. Riley doesn't have this baggage, so she watches the tape of her sister with fascination, an odd sort of longing for someone she never knew, and sadness that Lisa's life was apparently so difficult she took her own life. In the tape of Lisa, Chamberlain throws out two facts that will become important: the orchestra trip to Rome, and the handsome, stern man who was the conductor of the orchestra. Riley notices his charisma, his talent, and how every student clamored for his attention.

Jeannie's character is expanded in this section and is offered up as a potential antagonist. In a mystery story, the author has to spread a wide net of possible suspects, and in these chapters she paints Jeannie as strange, pushy, and untrustworthy. She makes herself unlikable by being pushy and by constantly suggesting to Riley that she knew Frank better than his daughter did. As a further motive, she confesses that she is in financial difficulties, and is hurt that Frank left so much to the Kyles. Her story about the Kyles - that Frank saved Tom's job in the Marshals - serves to cast distrust on the



Kyles as well as present another reason why he shouldn't be paying Tom every month. Jeannie also discredits Verniece's story that Riley is adopted.

This section ends with a cliffhanger- that before her death, Lisa was accused of murder.

Discussion Question 1

What purpose does Jeannie's pushiness serve?

Discussion Question 2

What clues to Lisa's life are revealed in the tape of her performance?

Discussion Question 3

Is Riley a reliable narrator? Why or Why not?

Vocabulary

rutted, searingly, perspiring, curio, revolting, threadbare, mesmerized, appraised



Part One: 12-16

Summary

Riley holds the box of newspaper articles and asks Jeannie what it all means. Jeannie insists that Frank would not have wanted Riley to see the articles, that she had been trying to find them before Riley did, and to please throw them away. The articles all profess Lisa as a murderer. Jeannie explains that Lisa was about to go to trial for the murder of Steve Davis, the handsome violin teacher from the VCR tapes. It was an accident, Jeannie says, but Lisa was afraid she would be convicted; moreover, she felt guilty that she had taken a life. Riley skims the topmost article: allegedly, Steve Davis had written to Julliard to convince the music school to reject Lisa's application. The murder trial explains why the MacPherson family moved from the DC area, and why Frank left the Marshals service. Riley realizes that Danny would have been six at the time of the murder, and Jeannie confirms that Danny knew more, but their parents wanted to convince them that it had not happened. Riley sends Jeannie home and reads every article in the box.

In Chapter 13, Riley shows up at her brother's trailer with the articles. After glancing through a few of them, Danny grabs his shotgun and storms off into the woods, with Riley close at his heels. They stop in a nice clearing, and Danny reveals that he always had memories of the murder that their mother brushed off as fantasy. He tells her that he remembers blood, and Riley screaming, and that she had a cut on her forehead. Riley's mother had always told her that the scar there came from a fall. The more he talks, the more Danny remembers the scene that his parents had tried hard to make him forget. He goes on to tell Riley that he's not suicidal, but angry: at her parents, at Lisa, at the government. Riley tries to talk to him and he explodes, saying her years of grad school aren't enough to fix him.

In Chapter 14, Riley spends some time reading about Steven Davis. On the internet, she finds that his wife, Sondra Davis, has started a blog for grieving spouses. The blog chronicles her husband's relationship with Lisa as a teacher, noting Lisa's "mental illness" and stating that Davis had gone to Lisa's house to apologize for the letter. The blog further postulates that Lisa's body was never found in the Potomac River. Riley feels sympathy for Davis's widow and considers the things she said about Lisa.

In Chapter 15, Jeannie descends upon the house with her daughter Christine, who works in estate sales. They jump right in, telling Riley that an appraiser is coming to check her father's collections. As much as Riley wants the task completed, she is worried about Jeannie and her daughter taking over everything. Suzanne calls to ask Riley to sign some papers with her and Tom Kyle the next day. Riley spends the remainder of the day cleaning the house with Jeannie and Christine.



In Chapter 16, Riley meets with Tom Kyle in the lawyer's office. Tom drops hints to Riley about what he and Verniece will do without the RV Park. They sign papers and are leaving the office, when Tom offhandedly mentions to Riley that Lisa did not kill herself.

Analysis

These chapters, while deepening the mystery of Lisa's death, also reveal a few insights into why Danny is the way he is.

The supposed facts surrounding Lisa's death are tied to the accidental shooting of Steven Davis. Chamberlain gives the reader two sides to the story: Jeannie represents Lisa's side by telling Riley that Lisa was upset that Davis had ruined her chances at Julliard, but the shooting itself was definitely an accident. Frank's service revolver was locked up in the den, but apparently Lisa knew how to get her hands on it. By contrast, Riley reads a blog written by Sondra Davis, Steven's widow, which gives a vastly different perspective: Lisa was always peculiar, she says, and her talent had waned, which is why Steven wrote the letter to Julliard in the first place. His purpose in going to the MacPherson's house was to apologize for his actions, but Lisa "ambushed and attacked" him with her father's gun. It is in the blog that the author drops the first hint that will control the remainder of the novel. Lisa, according to Sondra Davis, never committed suicide, but faked her own death in order to escape her murder trial. This hint, which doesn't register with Riley at first, resurfaces with Tom Kyle in the closing paragraph of Chapter 16 and Part One.

Another important revelation in these chapters is how the news of the murder affects Danny. The reader has become acquainted with Danny's hot temper and his dismissive opinion of his family. In Chapter 13 the reader sees the source of the hurt and pain in the young man's life: his youth was characterized by the family obsession with his older sister's talent, and after she dies, the obsession turns to her absence. Moreover, Danny remembers being present at the time of the murder. He recalls blood, screaming, the ambulance, and Riley with a cut on her head. The scene is the source of countless nightmares, made worse by the fact that his parents insisted he was making it up. Here the reader sees how and why Danny is troubled. When Riley attempts to talk him through it, he explodes in anger, saying it's not his mind that is sick, but his soul.

Jeannie becomes a slightly more sympathetic character in this section. She understands Riley's turmoil at the news she is learning, and while she does not wish to criticize Riley's parents, she feels that much of the drama could have been avoided had they been honest with Riley and Danny.

Discussion Question 1

Did the MacPherson parents make the right decision in not disclosing the details of Lisa's death to Riley and Danny? Why or why not?



Discussion Question 2

At this point in the novel, what can the reader surmise is Tom Kyle's motive in revealing secrets to Riley?

Discussion Question 3

Why and how do Jeannie and Christine make Riley feel uncomfortable?

Vocabulary

equipped, charlatan, obituary, symmetrical, introductory, quirky, turmoil, daunting, hindrance



Part Two: 17-22

Summary

Chapter 17/Lisa/January, 1990: Lisa sits alone in her room in the middle of the night. Her father comes to get her. He only lets her take her backpack. At the last minute he tells her to remove her favorite pendant, and instead of leaving it behind she tucks it in her pocket. They drive both cars to the river. Lisa tries not to think about what she's leaving behind: her mother, Riley, Danny, and her violin "Violet." It's snowing as they park at the river, deep in the woods. Lisa pulls the kayak off of the car and drags it to the river, by herself, thinking of Riley and Danny and her lack of options. Her case, the lawyer says, is unwinnable. She will go to prison. Her father has planned everything: new clothes, new identity, new life. They leave the riverbank in his car and drive away from DC. They stop at a rest area and Lisa gets into a car with Tom Kyle, who takes her to Philadelphia to catch a train out west. Her father makes her recite the address of a PO Box in a random North Carolina town, warning her that it is only for emergencies. When her father tells her goodbye, he warns her never to pick up a violin again. She goes with Tom Kyle.

Chapter 18/Riley: After Tom's casual mention that Lisa's not dead, Riley rushes home and drives to the RV park. Tom isn't at the RV, but Verniece is. The woman is kind and consoling, telling Riley she doesn't know why Tom would say something so crazy. With hesitation she does confide that Riley's father was supposed to leave them the RV park in his will. The fact that he didn't explains Tom's gruff and rude demeanor. Verniece goes on to say that she's certain Lisa is dead, and that Riley can confide in her any time.

Chapter 19/Lisa/January 1990: Lisa arrives in San Diego, California, her body showing signs of mental and physical exhaustion. She takes a cab to Ocean Beach, but can't find a hotel. She hauls her suitcase and her purse to the beach and sits against the sea wall. A woman named Ingrid comes around and offers her a bottle of water and a cookie. She asks Lisa her name; her new documents say Ann Johnson, but Lisa, thinking of the jade pendant in her pocket, blurts out the name "Jade." The next day she finds a room in a run-down motel and sleeps all night and into the next day. The woman Ingrid shows up at her hotel and offers Lisa a cottage on her property, saying that the girl doesn't really belong in the hotel. She agrees and follows Ingrid a few blocks to her house. The property is beautiful and Ingrid is kind, and Lisa is undone by the attention. Ingrid is sympathetic and helps her get settled. She spends a few days in the cottage, barely eating and not venturing to go out. Ingrid comes by and pries a bit, asking if she is pregnant or has AIDS. The woman encourages her to go out and get some food because she is too thin.

Chapter 20/Riley: Riley goes back to the RV park after dinner. Tom immediately says that police never found a body, and also a second set of footprints at the riverbank. Although Verniece keeps telling Tom to stop goading Riley, he clearly states that he



thinks Lisa is alive and well. Riley tells Tom that her father never indicated that the RV park should go to them. He swears at her and stomps away. Verniece apologizes and says that they are in financial straits, and that it is making them both edgy. Riley leaves their RV and goes looking for her brother.

Chapter 21/Jade/March 1990: Jade pretends to play the violin, at least making her fingers do the motions. She misses her music terribly. Jade is growing slightly more comfortable in Ocean Beach, even stopping into Grady's, the local music store. She thinks a lot about home, about her family and Matty, her best friend. One day she changes twenty dollars into quarters and tries to call her family, only to find that their number is disconnected. She calls Matty next; he answers the phone, and she freezes at the sound of his voice. Matty hangs up.

Chapter 22/Riley: Danny isn't at his trailer, but Riley leaves him a note. Back at home, Riley tries to get into her father's computer but doesn't know the password. The next day, Jeannie and Christine come over again. To avoid them, she drives out to Danny's trailer, but he's still not there. She searches around town and finds his car at the local pool hall; she goes inside and asks him to come help with their father's computer. She goes on to tell him that he hurt her feelings when he yelled at her a few days before. Danny agrees to come help with the computer. When they arrive at the house, Christine makes a big deal over Danny and almost scares him off, but Riley gets him upstairs to the computer. Danny resets the hard drive, and Riley tells him everything that's happened with Tom and Verniece. Danny doesn't give it much credit, and Riley finds that she wants it to be true. Danny reminds her that if they found Lisa, she would end up in prison, "where she belongs."

Analysis

In Part Two, Chamberlain begins inserting chapters into the narrative that disclose what actually happened to Lisa: that her father, Frank, with the grudging help of Tom Kyle, arranged for her to fake her suicide and move to California. The reader learns in Chapter 17 that Lisa's case was unwinnable, prison almost a certainty, and that Frank had died her hair and convinced Tom to fashion a new identity for her. They parked in the woods to avoid tracks and dumped her kayak in the river. She did not take her violin with her. The chapters from Lisa's perspective show her sadness, her fear of being discovered, and her horror of what happened to her. They do not disclose her guilt or innocence. She thinks of the "event" with horror and regret, but she never discloses how Steven's death occurs. She does consider Danny and Riley and how her choices have negatively affected them. Riley in particular is at the forefront of Lisa's memories.

For Riley, she immediately follows up with Tom and Verneice after Tom's comment. The reader now understands why Frank MacPherson has been paying Tom \$500 a month, and why he may or may not have promised the Kyles the deed to the RV park, but Riley does not. Tom still appears gruff and unfriendly, with Verniece attempting at turns to smooth things over with them both. Tom, in all of his blustering, does leave Riley with a



fact that would be hard to ignore: there were two sets of footprints at the suicide scene, he says.

Riley realizes that she wants Lisa to be alive. She wants another family member to be there for her. However, when Riley shares all of the new information with Danny, the author sets the stage for a new source of conflict. Danny reminds Riley that if Lisa was alive, she purposefully left them all behind. This is true and plays directly into Riley's already prevalent sense of abandonment. If Lisa was alive, she had abandoned Riley. What's more, Danny sees the situation with a measure of bitterness. "It would be just like her," he says, "to get away with it." He also reminds Riley that if they found Lisa, she would have to go to prison, and it would be nice to see her pay for what she did. Danny's perspective shows the reader the pros and cons of finding Lisa, and foreshadows the choices that Riley will have to make in pursuing the matter.

Discussion Question 1

How do the chapters from Lisa's perspective shift the tone of the novel?

Discussion Question 2

Does Danny have the right to feel how he does, about Lisa deserving prison? What is an alternate perspective?

Discussion Question 3

What clues does Lisa share regarding her guilt or innocence?

Vocabulary

dingy, seawall, concocted, frothy, paralyzed, scrutinizing, cowered, euphoric



Part Two: 23-28

Summary

Chapter 23/Jade/September 1990: Eight months into the move to California, Jade is now working at Grady's music store. Grady is her friend and praises her vast knowledge of music. Jade finds a kindly older man in the store and helps him find a record. His name is Charlie. Grady suggests that Jade go to college. She realizes that she'd never thought about actually living her life. Grady suggests she'd make an excellent teacher, and for the first time, Jade feels hopeful.

Chapter 24/Riley: Jeannie presses Riley to begin saving some items from the house for herself. She and her daughter nag Riley a bit about cleaning her end of the house: her father's papers and computer, to start. Riley has been overwhelmed with thoughts of her sister. Jeannie tells her that the RV park is worth close to \$200,000. Riley mentions the idea that her father may have intended the park to go to the Kyles, and Jeannie protests. They are interrupted by a phone call from Danny, who tells Riley he found something important.

Chapter 25/Jade/July 1992: Jade needs to buy a car if she wants to go to college and stay near Ocean Beach, where she feels safe. She writes a letter to her father's PO box, to "Fred Marcus," asking for money for a car. A few weeks later she finds a letter from North Carolina. The envelope contains \$2,000 and a simple note: "You are loved and missed." Jade drives to the campus to take a placement test and finds herself wandering through the music building. A flier catches her eye, advertising the orchestra from Johns Hopkins, where her friend Matty would be in school. She goes to the concert and sees her friend right away on stage. Although she imagines seeing him after the concert, she leaves during intermission.

Chapter 26/Riley: Danny informs Riley that there were two sets of footprints at the riverbank. He finds this information by hacking into the Virginia state police reports, and finds that that particular piece of information was kept out of the press, which leads them to wonder how Tom Kyle knew. Riley suspects Matty, but Danny reports that the police questioned him after Lisa's disappearance and he was out of town the night she slipped away. The track was cold, but Riley is determined to find her. Danny threatens to turn Lisa in if Riley is successful.

Chapter 27/Jade/October 1992: Jade is regularly attending school and is always hanging around the music building. She finds an advertisement for a violin for sale. After calling the seller to make arrangements, Jade meets the girl on campus. She is totally taken with the violin itself, and the girl playing it as well. When she gets home she plays for hours in her cottage.

Chapter 28/Riley: Riley drives to Myrtle Beach to talk to Caterina Thoreau, the woman who was Lisa's violin teacher after Steven Davis, at the time of her supposed suicide.



Caterina reveals that at the height of Lisa's talent, her parents took her out of Steven's teaching and sent her away for a year to study with a "mystery teacher," and it was during that year that Lisa's skill deteriorated. After her return, the MacPhersons put her with Caterina instead of with Steven again. Caterina, who has the most respect for Steven's talent, says he and his wife were unhappy, petulant people. Sondra in particular couldn't have children and struggled to be civil. After months with Caterina, Lisa found her groove again, and would have certainly gone to Julliard had Steven not interfered. They watch a few DVDs of Lisa and Caterina points out the white disc on a chain that her sister wore. The teacher says that Lisa returned from her year away with the necklace and never took it off.

Analysis

In Jade's life, the reader sees her gradually relaxing; what's more, she decides that rather than just surviving, she could entertain the possibility of actually living a life. The man at the music store, Grady, suggests this to her and it fills the girl with hope. She remembers that she has years ahead of her and she should try to do something with them. With the chapters from Riley's perspective constantly calling Lisa's character into question, the narrative from California depict Jade as a scared, damaged young girl. In this way, the author is effective at prolonging the mystery. Jade goes to college and takes a few risks: going to see her friend Matty in concert, and buying a violin herself. In her visit to Matty's concert, the reader sees a new side of Jade's character. Although she desperately wishes she could speak to him, she makes a firm effort to not put her friend in danger. It is a selfless act, one in the midst of many accusations that Lisa was the opposite of selfless. Her life takes a turn when she buys that violin, allowing herself to have a real life.

The chapters from Riley's perspective reveal more information coming to light. Danny finds that there were indeed two sets of footprints at the riverbank, and that the information wasn't in any press reports, so the mystery deepens with how Tom Kyle was able to come by the information. Jeannie and Christine are pressuring Riley to finish sorting through her father's things, but she can't focus. She tells Danny that she wants to find her sister, and again, Danny threatens that he will tell the police.

Riley visits Lisa's last violin teacher, a woman named Caterina. She reveals some information that is useful to the story, although not what Riley was hoping for. Lisa, it seems, left Steven's teaching and went away for a year to a new teacher. Caterina says that during this time, Lisa's skill deteriorated and she came back altered. Who was this "mystery teacher?" Nobody knew - only that Lisa wasn't the same when she returned. The teacher mentions the white disc pendant, the one that Lisa mentions in her narrative, that must have come from the mystery teacher. After her year away, Lisa never appeared without it. Caterina goes on to say that Lisa would have certainly gone to Julliard without Steven's interference, and paints him as a petulant, self-centered man. Although the tapes revealed the violin teacher to be stern, talented, and charismatic, this is the first mention of him in a negative light.



Discussion Question 1

How does Caterina's negative view of Stephen impact the reader's opinion of Lisa's crime?

Discussion Question 2

How does Jade's outlook on life change after Grady suggests she go to college?

Discussion Question 3

What are some of the negative opinions about Riley's parents?

Vocabulary

fugitive, pristine, glistening, spooky, aggravated, preposterous, formality, skittering



Part Two: 29-33

Summary

Chapter 29/Jade/March 1994: Against her father's express wishes and her better judgment, Jade changes her major from education to music education, a move that requires her to sit for an audition. Although she'd never be a soloist, she could help kids find their dream. Jade has to be good, but not too good, and that makes her nervous.

Chapter 30/Riley: Riley looks through her father's computer so Jeannie can sell it. She reads through his emails, finding one from someone named Celia, thanking him for the birthday card. She has no idea who that is. Christine interrupts her, asking to check the proposed prices on the kitchenware. When Riley sees her mother's dishes laid out to sell, she protests, and she and Christine argue for a few minutes. Danny interrupts them; he tells Riley he wants to talk to Tom Kyle personally about the two sets of footprints.

Chapter 31/Jade/August 1995: Jade is in her senior year in college, looking forward to being finished and able to start teaching. One day Charlie comes into the record store with his granddaughter Celia, from Portland. Celia and Jade are immediately attracted to each other. Jade has dinner that night with Celia and Charlie. After dinner, Celia and Charlie play and sing together, and Jade has to get her violin. She plays for them, for once letting her full talent out. They are shocked and suggest that Jade should be doing something more significant with her gift. Jade tells them she had to give it up when she moved to California. The group plays together until late into the night, and at the end of it, Celia and Jade spend the night together at Jade's cottage.

Chapter 32/Riley: At the Kyles's RV, Danny asks Tom how he knew about the second set of footprints. Tom and Verniece waffle; Tom finally says he probably heard it through the Marshals service, and asks them to leave. Riley gets down the path before realizing she'd left her phone on the counter in the RV. As she walks back towards it, she hears shouting coming from the RV in a harsh, grating voice. She realizes it's Verniece, but not the sweet and kind Verniece she knew, chiding Tom for giving them any information at all.

Chapter 33/Jade/Christmas 1995: Jade is spending the holiday with Celia's family in Portland. She is in love with Celia and wants to tell her father, so she sends him a quick note to the PO Box. Soon after, her father responds, cautioning her to be careful. At Christmas dinner, she had decided to wear her pendant, and Celia's sister-in-law asked about it's origin. Jade replies that it's white jade, and tells her the symbols mean 'hope' and 'happiness', but she is lying. After dinner, she and Celia play bluegrass with Celia's brother and family friend, and they sound magical together. Jade worries that Celia won't love her anymore if she knows about her past.



Analysis

During this section of the narrative, Jade's life starts to take shape into something hopeful. She changes her major to music education, and her reason is very poignant: although she can never be a soloist and play to a sold out concert hall, she can teach music to kids and help them realize their own dreams. In a way, Jade wants to find herself in a student and watch him or her succeed like she was unable to. Her friend Charlie introduces her to his granddaughter Celia, and it's love at first sight. Not only that, but Jade takes a few short moments to let Lisa MacPherson shine through, allowing two special people to get a glimpse of who she really is. Their relationship continues, which both frightens Jade and makes her feel joyful. At Christmas she meets Celia's family, which includes her brother and cousin. Late into the night the four of them play; a bit of foreshadowing for Jade's future a connection back to all of the bluegrass CDs in Frank's RV.

For Riley, the estate sale is taking shape and she has been so involved in her sister's life she has lost track of what she's doing in her own. Christine and Jeannie would like her out of the house in a few weeks, but Riley digs her heels in and procrastinates. The author deftly mentions a mystery email from Celia on Frank's computer, and at that point in the story the reader doesn't know who Celia is. However, in the next chapter, the reader meets Celia and knows who is emailing Frank, which means eventually, Jade is going to tell Celia everything.

Danny is fully involved in the investigation for Lisa now, which is good for the narrative because it makes it feel more like a mystery than a story about Riley. He has his own thoughts about his sister, which provides conflict and causes both characters to keep some secrets from one another. Another major reveal in this section comes at the hand of Verniece Kyle, who after Riley has left the RV, shows her true self. When Riley darts back up the path to get her phone, she hears the grating, screaming voice of Verniece, nagging Tom and pushing him. She is not the sweet, loving Verniece Riley has come to almost trust. Which Verniece is the real one? Although Jeannie has faded from the forefront as an antagonist, the Kyles have a motive and the disposition to take her place.

Discussion Question 1

Why do Celia's thoughts on church give Jade such a foreboding feeling that she'll lose her?

Discussion Question 2

Why is Verniece cautioning Tom about what he tells Danny and Riley?



Discussion Question 3

How much does Frank's reluctance to talk to his daughter affect her choices?

Vocabulary

jittery, mythical, credential, riffling, dredging, intriguing, heirloom



Part Two: 34-39

Summary

Chapter 34/Riley: Riley is leaving the house one morning for a run when Verniece pulls up in their car. She asks if Riley will jump in so they can chat. Verniece's manner is back to normal, nothing of the harsh meanness Riley had heard the previous time she'd seen her. Verniece tells Riley that she's very sick with heart disease and the drama is making it worse. She goes on to say that Tom knows a lot about Lisa's disappearance, and he'll tell Riley where Lisa is if she promises to give them the RV park. Lulled by the idea of keeping Danny and the police out of the supposed search, she agrees. She decides her father would have wanted her to do it.

Chapter 35/Jade/1996: Jade sends a letter to her father asking for details about her family. Frank answers that their family is falling apart. Her mother is very depressed and blames herself for what happened. Danny is an angry child and difficult to manage. Riley is a lovely child, but clingy and sensitive. Frank tells her that he'll take Riley out for her birthday. He closes with a stern warning to stop writing him, and to destroy the letter.

Chapter 36/Riley: Riley goes to Suzanne's office to discuss giving the RV park to the Kyles. Suzanne is suspicious and disagrees with the prospect, but will do as Riley asks.

Chapter 37/Jade/1996: After reading her father's letter, Jade rents a car and drives to North Carolina. She sits in front of the restaurant Frank told her they would be at and watches for her former family. The entire drive out from California she thinks about how she can't really share her whole self with Celia. When her family arrives, she sees the body language in her parents - the strain, the sadness. Likewise, Danny looks surly. Only Riley is happy and joyful. Jade watches the happy little girl and tells herself that she'd made the right decision.

Chapter 38/Riley: The next day, Riley takes the form from Suzanne's and drives to see the Kyles. Verniece is sharp and reluctant to give any information until the deed is recorded, but Riley refuses to wait all weekend to hear their news. Tom tells her what she already knew: he owed her father a favor, that Lisa had escaped, and that Riley's father came up with the idea. Tom goes on to say that he didn't think Lisa worth saving, but her father did. Riley is shocked that her father would risk so much to help Lisa escape. She asks where Lisa is and while Tom gives Riley Lisa's new name, he doesn't know anything else. Riley feels cheated because she'd thought Verniece knew where exactly Lisa is. She tears up the gift deed and tells the Kyles that the information isn't worth \$200,000.

Chapter 39/Jade/1996: Jade is working in the back room in the record store when she hears something asking Grady about her in the front. She hears Charlie and Grady both say they don't know her. When the man leaves, Grady and Charlie urge her to leave, certain that the man will go to the college next. They suggest going to Celia in Portland.



Before she leaves Charlie asks if she did it, and she says she didn't. She leaves Ocean Beach, taking her money and belongings with her, and drives all the way to Portland. She has a good story to tell Celia, but when she sees her, she tells her everything, "even the things Daddy didn't know."

Analysis

Jade makes a bold move in this section. After exchanging two letters with Frank, letters he begs her to destroy, she knows the name of the restaurant they'll be visiting for Riley's birthday. After flying into Raleigh, Jade rents a car and drives to the restaurant parking lot and watches them. The author is slowly giving clues about Jade's real relationship with Riley; although she is happy to see her parents and Danny, it is Riley who tugs the most at her heart. As she watches the happy 8-year-old she says, "I made the right choice, all those years ago," and the reader isn't sure she's just talking about faking her suicide. With Jade's story following a linear path for a while, in these chapters the author pulls some strings to make things happen. A private investigator is looking for Jade - the author doesn't say from whom. The PI has tracked her to Ocean Beach, to Grady's music store in fact. Grady and Charlie lie to the man, saying they don't know who she is. For the past six years Jade has gained their trust with her good character, and they don't believe for a second that she's a murderer. When Jade emerges from her hiding place, Charlie simply asks for a promise that she didn't do it. Jade says she didn't, but to the reader she remarks, "What else could I say?" In all of the glimpses into Jade's mind, she never says she didn't kill Steven Davis. By the end of Part Two, Jade has fled to Portland and told Celia everything.

Riley has a run in with the Kyles in this section. Verniece comes to sweet-talk her into giving them the RV park. Riley, who has already heard Verniece's real side, is on her guard; but when Verniece tells her that Tom can tell her where Lisa is, Riley caves. In the scene that follows the reader sees just how desperate and almost sad the Kyles really are. Chamberlain spent several chapters throwing suspicion around them and setting them up as antagonists; however, in this section they are revealed as simple dishonest people looking for some extra money. In the end, Tom is able to tell Riley only that he drove Lisa to the train station and what her new (fake) name was supposed to be, and Riley determines the information less than the money she would be giving up.

Discussion Question 1

Was Riley's treatment of the Kyles fair?

Discussion Question 2

How does the truth that her father masterminded Lisa's escape impact Riley?



Discussion Question 3

Is it possible for Jade to say both that she killed Steven Davis, and that she is innocent? Why or why not?

Vocabulary

marketable, coot, smudge, tremor, persona, mastermind, nauseated, sociopath, recoiled, vengeance



Part Three: 40-45

Summary

Chapter 40/Riley: Knowing that Lisa is alive fills Riley with excitement and caution. She returns home to Jeannie and Christine, excited about some things they'd found in the house. Riley explodes, telling the women that the estate sale is too soon and too much and she needs a break from the whole thing. Christine is angry, but Jeannie promises to get out of Riley's way for a few weeks. Riley does tell Jeannie to put the RV park on the market.

Chapter 41/Riley: Relieved that Jeannie and Christine are gone, Riley begins searching for her sister under the name "Ann Johnson." The search is too much for her. Riley recalls that Sondra Davis, Steven's widow, had once hired a PI to search for Lisa. She contacts Sondra from her blog. Sondra contacts Riley; she is a bitter and unhappy woman and very much believes that Lisa is alive and should be punished. In their discussion about the PI, Sondra tells Riley that she'd received an "anonymous tip" that Lisa had taken a train to San Diego, and that a few people recognized her but the PI could never find her. Riley books a flight from New Bern to San Diego.

Chapter 42/Riley: In San Diego, Riley's excitement is deflated by loneliness. She asks around Ocean Beach, mostly unsuccessfully because the town is populated by young people. At a Pilates studio an older woman recognizes Lisa and tells Riley that she used to work at Grady's. Through a mutual friend she tracks down Grady. It takes some convincing, but he eventually opens up and talks to Riley. She learns that Jade left the day the PI came into Grady's store, but he does mention Celia and Portland. He cautions Riley that maybe Jade should be left alone.

Chapter 43/Riley: Riley books a flight back home to North Carolina. Internet searches for Jade Johnson come up short. Riley is comforted that Grady found her sister so "awesome."

Chapter 44/Riley: The next day, Riley is sitting at her house going through old documents when Jeannie shows up to smooth things over from their blowup a few days before. She sees the photo that Riley showed around San Diego-- Lisa and Matty standing back to back with their violins-- and mentions the pendant Lisa is wearing. Caterina had told Riley that the "mystery" violin teacher had given it to her, but Jeannie says that she gave Lisa that pendant. When Riley presses her, Jeannie gets flustered and leaves. Riley finds a box of records from her childhood, including report cards from her and Danny. She finds their birth certificates and sees that while Danny and Lisa were born in Alexandria, she was born in Asheville, North Carolina. As a child her parents told her that they'd been "visiting Jeannie" in Asheville when Riley was born, but that story feels unbelievable to Riley: why would her parents travel across two states when they were about to have a baby? Suddenly, Verniece's adoption story begins to feel true.



Chapter 45/Riley: Riley calls Jeannie. She presses her on the birth certificate, and Jeannie confides that Lisa did not go away to study with a mystery teacher. In truth, Lisa went to Asheville to live with Jeannie because she found herself pregnant, and Riley was her baby. Lisa had been planning to give Riley up, for begged her parents to adopt Riley so she could stay close. The father, according to Lisa, was a random boy she met at a music festival, but Riley and Jeannie ponder whether it was her friend Matty. Jeannie begs Riley not to judge Lisa harshly, that she was a dear girl that Jeannie came to love in those short months. Jeannie discloses that the pendant Lisa wore actually said 'mother' on one side and 'daughter' on the other.

Analysis

In Part Three, the perspective still bounces between Riley and Jade, but not in alternating chapters as in Part Two. The first grouping of chapters are all from Riley's perspective, and mostly detail her trip to San Diego. Riley is very bold in contacting Sondra Davis, but the fact that she didn't remember Lisa, in fact barely knew her, gives the women a chance to speak frankly. Sondra isn't afraid to tell Riley that she feels her sister should be punished for killing her husband. Again, with each fact the reader learns about Lisa, the fact that she actually did pull the trigger can't be denied. In the past handful of chapters, Chamberlain repeatedly brings up another question to ponder: Jade would have reached out Riley if she wanted a relationship with her. Riley hears this from Tom Kyle, and then from Grady the music shop owner, and must ponder it herself as she continues her search.

The narrative takes a shocking turn when Riley really starts to consider her birth place of Asheville, North Carolina. Why would her parents go visit Jeannie when they were about to have a baby? Jeannie reveals what Chamberlain has barely hinted at: that Lisa is actually Riley's mother. This fact explains Lisa's "year away": why she was depressed, why her playing deteriorated, why such mystery surrounded her violin lessons, and why she'd "lost her confidence" when Caterina started teaching her again. It also explains the wide gap in years among the MacPherson children, and why Riley's hair is dark while her siblings have very fair hair. Understandably, Riley feels another wave of betrayal and loss. Although she still has Danny as her uncle, she feels even more isolated, and doubly committed to finding her sister.

Jeannie reveals the mystery of Lisa's white jade pendant, and why she wears it constantly. It's a reminder of the daughter she has, somewhere in the world. In this story, the author moves Jeannie from possible foe to friend. The reader sees the soft, loving side of Jeannie, and the truth that she really is an advocate to Lisa's family. Although Riley may not have family anymore, she is gaining allies. The chapter ends with Riley's commitment to finding her father.

Discussion Question 1

What were some early indications that Lisa is Riley's mother?



Discussion Question 2

Why are Grady's compliments about Jade so meaningful to Riley?

Discussion Question 3

Should Riley keep looking for Jade? Why or why not?

Vocabulary

diabolical, quaking, cautious, knickknacks, hysterical, haven, fervent, reclusive, insomnia



Part Three: 46-50

Summary

Chapter 46/Riley: Riley searches for "Matty," Matthew Harrison, and finds him in Baltimore. Riley can easily see some similarities in their features. She calls him early the next morning, only to find that he'd just left for Japan and will be gone for two weeks. Riley finds herself wishing for the days that she thought her life was normal. On a whim she picks up the local paper and sees an ad for a concert, the same concert she saw advertised in her father's RV, the same she found in the strange PO box that her father kept. The bluegrass band is called Jasha Trace. The pictures shows four musicians in a field, and the violinist wears a white, oval pendant. Riley quickly pieces together that her father must have been "Fred Marcus" with the PO Box, and it must have been just for Jade. Riley returns to her father's RV, where she'd seen the postcard. She also finds three CDs by Jasha Trace, and sees that the violin player is named Jade Johnson. Furthermore, she sees that they'll be New Bern in a matter of days.

Chapter 47/Riley: Riley listens to Jasha Trace as she scours the internet for the fiction of Jade Johnson's life. She finds that Jade and Celia have two children and a full life, and she feels hurt and discarded. She goes back through her father's emails and finds a handful from Celia; one about Charlie's death, and one written a few days before Riley's "mother" died. She recalls how the day before her mother died, Frank had arranged for her to be gone all day, and how peaceful her mother had been when she returned. She supposed Jade must have been there to see her mother. The last email she finds from Celia details that Jade had lost a baby in the hospital, that she was worried about Danny's injuries in Iraq, and that there was a place in her heart reserved for "R."

Chapter 48/Riley: She calls Jeannie first thing in the morning. Jeannie comes over and Riley tells her everything. Together they look through photos of Jade's life. When they see pictures from Jade's wedding to Celia, there is a sliver of the photo which shows that Frank was there. Riley can't shake the feeling of being hurt and betrayed, and Jeannie shares this feeling. Danny emails her and asks her to come over. She and Jeannie discuss the concert; Jeannie encourages Riley to contact Jade and talk to her.

Chapter 49/Riley: That evening, Riley finds that Danny also knows everything, and that the Kyles had been after him for the RV park as well. He is mildly annoyed at Riley, but is overwhelmed with anger at his father and Jade. Danny is prepared to turn Jade in to the police the night of the concert. They argue for a few minutes before Riley reveals that Jade is her mother.

Chapter 50/Riley: After leaving Danny's, Riley goes straight to Jeannie's house and tells her Danny's plans. They think of how to warn Jade, and remember that they're on tour. The next night they'll be in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, just a few hours from New Bern and close to Riley's actual apartment in Durham. She decides to go to the Chapel Hill concert and find a way to speak to Jade afterwards. Riley is afraid of how Jade will treat



her, but Jeannie shows her a picture of the day she was born. In the photo, Jade gazes on her with great love and peace.

Analysis

Jade has not yet reappeared in this section, but the action rapidly picks up as Riley learns more and more about her mother. Riley temporarily has to table the question of who her father is; Matty Harrison is in Japan and unreachable for two weeks, and she feels like emailing him instead of calling him would be a mistake. Harrison's travel schedule is a very convenient way for the author to set that question aside in order to focus on other things, and is a clue that he is probably not Riley's father.

After that, Riley rapidly learns the rest of the story: of the PO Box, of her father's growing knowledge of Jade's life, of the bluegrass band Jasha Trace. Her overwhelming emotion is betrayal from her father-- that he knew so much about Jade's life and never let on to Jeannie, his wife, his son, or to Riley. Jeannie confirms this emotion when Riley invites her over and tells her everything. The woman she has avoided for most of the narrative becomes her closest confidante and ally.

With the feeling that her father has betrayed her, Riley feels left out. Her mother has gone on to live a full life with a wife and child, while Riley is left to feel alone and abandoned. All of Jade's reasons to stay away pale in comparison to how Riley feels.

The conflict deepens when she speaks to Danny, who has learned everything on his own. For her brother, the issue is very black and white: Jade killed someone and must face consequences for her actions. It is interesting to note how different Riley's and Danny's perspectives are from looking at the exact same set of facts. The section ends with Danny promising to turn Jade in to the police when her band comes to New Bern for a concert, and with Riley driving to Chapel Hill to warn her.

Discussion Question 1

Are Riley's feelings of betrayal warranted? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 2

Discuss how Danny's and Riley's perspectives are so different.

Discussion Question 3

Who is displaying selfishness in this story? Jade, for having a life without her former family? Danny, for wanting her to be punished? Frank, for keeping his knowledge a secret? Or Riley, for wanting to contact her mother with all of its risk?

Vocabulary

jangling, plummeting, poignant, verify, complication, sophisticated



Part Three: 51-56

Summary

Chapter 51/Riley: Riley drives to Chapel Hill to see the Jasha Trace show, Lisa's old violin in tow. She watches the show with growing worry and anxiety. When it's nearly over, she tells the security guard that she's "Jade's sister," and he sets her up outside the door as the show finishes.

Chapter 52/Jade: Jade and Celia sit in their dressing room, preparing to leave. The security guard at the door tells Jade there's a girl outside who says she's Jade's sister. Jade, frozen, says she doesn't have one, when Riley yells from outside, "I have Violet with me"- Violet is the name Lisa gave her violin. Jade dashes for the door against Celia's protests and lets Riley in. Mother and daughter share a tearful reunion before Celia steps in and tries to remind Jade how dangerous it is. They argue, the other two band members come to grab Celia and Jade, but Jade is determined to stay with Riley for a few minutes. Riley tells the women about Danny and the concert in New Bern. Celia is angry, and leaves with the men.

Chapter 53/Riley: Jade tells Riley that she searches Facebook for her often. They chat for a few moments about Riley's life and Jade's family, and when they talk about Frank, Riley realizes that Lisa's suicide had truly ruined her family, as Danny had said. She is honest with Jade about this. They talk about Riley's father and Jade says it wasn't her friend Matty, but some random boy she met at a music festival. Riley's thoughts turn accusing, and she tells Jade she wishes she hadn't run away. Jade urges her not to argue when they had so little time together. Riley is angry and says that Jade got everything she wanted while she and Danny suffered. She runs from the dressing room.

Chapter 54/Jade: Later, Jade is back at her hotel with Celia, feeling awful at how she had hurt her daughter. Celia insists on canceling the show in New Bern, but Jade protests; Danny knows who she is and is able to find her, whether they tour or not. Jade realizes that she has hurt her old family and her new one, that she can't avoid her mistakes. They figure that Jade will be found out and Jasha Trace will be over, but Jade wants to talk to Riley once more. Celia storms from the hotel room.

Chapter 55/Riley: Riley goes back to her apartment, torn and upset from her talk with her mother. Celia comes to her door. Celia apologizes for how she treated Riley at the club, but bluntly says that Riley has messed up their lives. Celia says she can't have Riley go on thinking that Jade just ran because she was selfish, and tells her the truth: Steven Davis was her father. He raped Lisa when they were in Italy. Riley is overwhelmed with horror. Celia goes on to tell her that the day Steven was killed, he had come to the house and threatened to take Riley away from the MacPhersons because his wife couldn't have children. Steven had always been touchy to Lisa, ever since she was a child, and Lisa was terrified of him. She left the room to load her father's gun, just to scare him, but when she returned he was holding Riley on his lap.



Lisa snapped, threw Riley aside and shot Steven in the head. The real reason Lisa ran away, Celia says, is to prevent this from coming to trial. While she would have certainly gained sympathy from the jury, it was a solid motive to kill Steven Davis. Riley tells Celia that she'll try to talk to Danny again.

Chapter 56/Riley: Riley is overwhelmed at what she's learned. She can't sleep and decides to leave Durham and drive back to New Bern. Jeannie has called several times and Riley calls her from the car, ready to tell her everything she's learned from Celia and Jade. The story comes out in great sobs; Riley feels terrible for how she spoke to her mother. A deer runs in front of Riley's car and she runs off the road.

Analysis

The action is rising to a pitch in these chapters. Riley goes to see her "sister" at the concert in Durham and basically forces her way backstage with the violin. When Jade sees her, all of her worries about being rejected and left behind seem to melt away, at least temporarily. They experience a few moments of mother-daughter closeness when Riley is overwhelmed by a sense of abandonment, and lets her mother know her feelings. Not only did Lisa's disappearance literally ruin Danny and the MacPherson parents, Riley distinctly feels that her mother cast her aside and went on to live a fruitful life. The most potent point Riley makes is that Jade "got everything she wanted" while she and Danny suffered, particularly Danny.

The author's crafting here is effective. Unlike Riley, who sees Lisa's survival as a gift, Danny wishes to see her pay for her crimes. Danny's childhood literally veered off course after his sister's supposed suicide: his parents were vacant and uninvolved, and his mother continually invalidated his memories of Steven Davis's murder. The subtle tweaking of Danny's feelings lead to his isolation and difficulties in school, which were later compounded by his time in Iraq. To Danny, Lisa is the genesis of all of his current issues, and it's a natural desire for him to see her face the consequences.

Celia comes to Riley's apartment to finally reveal the whole story: Steven Davis was a sexually abusive man that used his power as a violin teacher to have his way with Lisa. At 15, he raped her during the music festival in Italy. Chamberlain has been dropping hints all along that there was another layer to the story that only Celia knew- several chapters back Jade says, "not even Daddy knew." Finally, the truth of how he came to be killed is revealed: in his attempt to take Riley away from Lisa, she snapped and shot him. The flight from facing a jury was a desperate attempt to prevent the details of his abuse--a handy motive for premeditated murder--from coming to light. Riley's feeling of betrayal from being abandoned evaporates when she hears exactly why her mother had to run away.

Stopping Danny becomes even more important, but in her race back to New Bern, Riley is waylaid by a car accident.



Discussion Question 1

What are some clues the author leaves that point to Steven Davis's true nature?

Discussion Question 2

Why is Jade willing to go on with the show in New Bern?

Discussion Question 3

Is Celia insensitive to Riley's feelings? Why or why not?

Vocabulary

scenario, maneuvered, conspicuous, contorted, resolutely, catastrophe, revulsion, repulsive



Part Three: 57-60, Epilogue

Summary

Chapter 57/Jade: Jade and Celia sit stiffly over breakfast the next morning. Jade feels terrible about how Riley left her. She doesn't want Riley to know about her real father, and she doesn't know that Celia visited Riley the night before. The men in the band notice the tension. Celia receives a phone call and tells Jade they must leave immediately--Riley was unconscious in the hospital. Celia tells Jade that she'd visited Riley and told her about Steven Davis. Jade is mortified and angry, but Celia assures her that Riley understood Jade's perspective better after hearing the truth. On the way to the hospital, Jade calls Jeannie, who reports that Riley is unconscious but okay. Danny is there as well, and knows the whole story, but Jeannie can't say for certain what his next move may be.

Chapter 58/Riley: Riley wakes up in the hospital. Jeannie is there and tells her she has two broken fingers and a concussion. Danny enters the room, angry but relieved. They discuss the truth about Lisa and Steven: Danny says it doesn't matter how terrible a person the man was, that Lisa still killed him. Riley begs Danny not to take her mother away, that if he wants to blame someone for her escape, blame their father. Jade arrives at Riley's room.

Chapter 59/Jade: Jade is thrilled to see Riley well. She tries to apologize to Danny but receives a very cold reception. They argue, about Lisa's guilt and the mess she left behind. Danny accuses her of abandoning all of them and ruining their family. Lisa agrees that she messed up their family, but argues that she was young and didn't know what to do. Riley has to yell at them to stop. Danny kisses Riley on the cheek and whispers into her ear before turning to leave the room. Jade begs him to forgive her; he tells her that one day her sins will catch up with her, but not because of him.

Chapter 60/Riley: Danny leaves, and Riley tells Jade what he said: that he won't turn her in. Jade is visibly relieved. They discuss Celia's visit and the truth of Riley's father-Frank hadn't known. Jade tells Riley it's best to just think of her father as a random boy from Italy. They discuss how Riley can be a part of their lives. Jade asks if Riley is willing to live a lie, and Riley says she is.

Epilogue/Riley: It's a year later, and Riley has left North Carolina for Seattle. She feels like knowing the truth of her sister's "suicide" helps her to be a better counselor. To their Seattle friends and family, Riley is the daughter that a 15-year-old Jade gave up for adoption, and they are newly reunited. Riley keeps in touch with her brother, but she doesn't hold onto any hope that he'll ever welcome Jade into his life. Riley and Jade are moving on with their lives and not talking about the past anymore.



Analysis

The clash between Danny and Jade has a breath of realism to it. Hearing the true story of how his sister was victimized and taken advantage of takes the edge off of Danny's desire to see her punished. The fact that she killed another human remains, along with the fact that she knowingly left her family in shambles. Danny finds these facts hard to forgive, but at the end of the day, it is Riley who stays his hand.

Riley is probably the only other person that Danny actually loves, and she begs him not to take her mother away. He realizes that Riley needs love, and needs family, and because he can't provide the closeness she longs for, he won't be the one that sends Jade away. In a sense, Danny is the unsung hero of the story: he sacrifices his own need for justice to keep Riley happy.

By the end of the story, Riley has left North Carolina to live near her mother. They tell their area friends and family a version of the truth. They also make it a point to move on with their lives and not dwell on the past. Riley has decided to let go of her mother's mistakes, but that means letting go of all of the past. For Riley and Jade, there is only the present.

Discussion Question 1

Did Celia do the right thing in telling Riley the whole truth? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 2

In this story, how much of "the right thing" is subjective?

Discussion Question 3

After gunning for justice throughout the entire story, how is Danny able to suddenly let it go?

Vocabulary

decisive, distress, pendant, abandoned, tremor, cobbling, exquisite, aborted, perplexed, effervescent



Characters

Riley MacPherson

Riley is a young woman who had a basic happy childhood, but rapidly lost her mother and her father within seven years of each other. In addition to this, her family life holds the ghost of her sister Lisa who committed suicide when she was young; her remaining family, her brother Danny, keeps her at arm's length.

Riley's longing for family and belonging is her defining characteristic. She didn't grow up as an orphan, yet her adult years are characterized by this void and loneliness. After her father's death the void grows wide and yawning, and her rapid discoveries about Lisa make it worse before it's better.

As a character, Riley is quick to criticize and quick to get her feelings hurt. Her brother, who has PTSD from a term in Iraq, is probably incapable of forming close attachments, and yet Riley pressures him to revert to their childhood selves. Her yearning is understandable, but she's not understanding towards her brother. As the mystery of Lisa deepens, Riley lessens the pressure on Danny, and yet they end up somewhat closer anyway in their shared interest in what happened to their sister.

When Riley is faced with the double surprise that Lisa is alive and that Lisa is actually her mother, she is relieved at first. However, once she learns about Lisa/Jade's current life in Seattle, she feels isolated and left out, robbed of her mother. Riley is somewhat overemotional in her approach to everything in the plot. With everything viewed through the lens of her being left out and alone, she is a somewhat unreliable narrator.

Lisa MacPherson/Jade

The overwhelming question regarding Lisa, who changes her name to Jade, is whether or not she deserves to get away with causing the death of another. There is a surprising amount of varied opinions regarding this matter. As a character, Lisa/Jade shows no extreme behavior or emotions regarding the trauma. She is regretful that she has to leave her family behind and only peripherally misses Riley or Danny. Only her bond with her father shows real depth of feeling. Even when the reader learns that she was sexually assaulted by her violin teacher, it is presented mildly.

Lisa/Jade truly comes alive in the presence of music. Her joy in the music store, her vast knowledge of music, and the way she connects while playing the violin all demonstrate what makes this character tick. It is gratifying that she is able to build a life around music and love; she forms a bluegrass band with her wife and her wife's cousins.

At the end of the day, she is a young woman who did what she had to do (with her father's help) and ended up making a life for herself. She is a survivor.



Danny MacPherson

For all the mildness his sister Lisa projects, Danny is anything but mild. Although the novel paints him as a wounded soldier who suffers from PTSD resulting from his tour in Iraq, it could be suggested that Danny's issues begin when his sister "commits suicide." He mentions several things to Riley that demonstrate this: that he felt "abused" by their parents, that after Lisa died their parents basically withdrew and left him and Riley to fend for themselves, and that even before Lisa's death the entire family revolved around her. It's no wonder that as an adult, PTSD or not, Danny is as resistant to exploring his family's history as Riley is insistent upon it. He feels like he was the least important of the MacPherson children, and he certainly has evidence to support it.

When he hears that Jade is alive, Danny is set on turning her in so that she can face trial for the death of Steven Davis, and as his experience is so different from Riley's, his opinion is valid. In truth, Danny's view of Lisa/Jade is the opposite of Riley's; both viewpoints give the reader a chance to decide with whom they agree.

The book ends with little hope that Danny and Jade will reconcile. Riley will be forced to sit between her 'siblings' and try to make a way loving them both. However harsh it may sound, Danny's opinion is vital to the story to provide balance.

Jeannie Lyons

Jeannie wears many hats in this story. She was Riley's mother's close friend, Frank's (Riley's father) lover after his wife died, and Lisa's caretaker when she lived out her pregnancy away from her family. With so many varied roles for the MacPherson family, the novel reflects many different aspects of her personality.

She is at the same time warm and supportive of Riley, and controlling and grasping of any information about Frank or Lisa. Jeannie seems to wield her superior knowledge of them over Riley to seem more deserving and important. When she hears how little Frank left her in his will, she is visibly disappointed. When Riley is slow to respond to Jeannie's push to get the house ready to sell, she is petulant.

On the whole, Jeannie isn't very likable, particularly for the section of the novel where the author is putting her forward as a possible culprit. Only towards the end of the story, when the secrets are revealed and Riley is more than ever in need of support, Jeannie's affectations seem to drop and she becomes the friend Riley needs.

Tom Kyle

Tom Kyle is also a character that the author offers as a red herring, and he fits every description of a possible culprit. He is everything that is unappealing and unlikable: gruff, disheveled, ungrateful, rude, meddling, and at times threatening. In this way he fills the role well. In truth, he's a man who made a mistake, that Frank MacPherson



needed to rely on in a moment of dire need; Frank pays Tom for his help the rest of his days, 20 years or more. Tom's purpose in acting how he does probably boils down to money - as much as he can get out of Frank MacPherson's estate, the better, but when all secrets are revealed, he's just an unpleasant man with a few big secrets.

Verniece Kyle

In a way, Verniece turns out to be a less likable character than her husband. His faults are at least on display. Verniece hides her true nature under southern charm, luring Riley into trusting her so that she can extort the RV park in exchange for information about Lisa. Like her husband, she is poor and probably a little bit desperate, wanting to cash in on Frank's death as much as she can. It doesn't make her a despicable person; the worst about Verniece is how she plays with Riley's obvious emotional state. In the end of the story, the Kyles have each other, and the pipe collection that Frank left them, Verniece's ploy for more having come to nothing.

Frank MacPherson

Perhaps the character most worthy of dissection in this novel is the father, Frank MacPherson. He surely displays a range of interesting characteristics, but their unifying trait is a desire to keep his family together. This truth is most obviously displayed in his planning and executing Lisa's fake suicide and escape. Rather than watch his daughter go through a jury trial and deal with the effect on the remainder of his family, he takes a huge step. And though he tries to keep his daughter far away and stay out of touch, the reader can see him slowly relent out of a desire to see Lisa well and happy.

His death prior to the start of the novel is an effective plot device: the reader, rather than having a glimpse into his mindset, simply has to guess about his motivations, his struggles over 20 years of deception, the decision to tell his wife on her deathbed, and most regrettably, the way Riley and Danny had to suffer. Did Frank notice how Riley and Danny were affected, or was he too wrapped up in his own secrets?

Celia

Celia is the girl who immediately falls in love with the mysterious and talented "Jade." What is interesting about Celia is that she doesn't balk when she hears Jade's story. Not only does she not react strongly and turn Jade into the police, but she keeps Jade's secret for the 15 years they live as a married couple, before Riley finds out who Jade is. She is protective of Jade's past, to the extent that she is willing to shut the door on Riley's face when she first shows up at their concert. For the reader, if they believe in Jade's shot at redemption, Jade's happy life with Celia is a relief: a successful music group, love and marriage and children, and a vibrant community in Seattle. As a character, Celia is the cornerstone of Jade's support in her new life.



Steven Davis

Steven Davis is the stern and brilliant violin teacher who reportedly sexually assaults a young Lisa MacPherson. When he hears later that Lisa has had a baby, he shows up at her house threatening to take her, and in an unclear case of something akin to self-defense or "defense of one's child," Lisa kills him. For his sexual assault of a young girl, the reader can join in feeling that Davis got what he deserved. As a character, the reader learns little about him other than this fact.

Sonya Davis

Sonya is the widow of the murder victim Steven Davis. She is the mysterious woman from the Prologue who watches as the police search the Potomac river for a body with no success. Rightfully, she feels that Lisa should pay for killing her husband. When Riley speaks to her, she is an old and bitter woman who has never seen her life righted again after the loss of her husband.

From what the reader can see, Lisa never made her accusation of Steven's assault known, so his wife is unable to speak for her husband's actions. She sees only that Lisa caused his death. For the plot, she provides movement to the story in the form of a Private Investigator hired soon after Lisa's disappearance; when Riley talks to Sonya on the phone, she is able to give Riley the few facts he gleaned all of those years ago. It is this information that allows Riley to travel to California to find the first clues that eventually lead to Lisa/Jade, her sister, her mother.



Symbols and Symbolism

Music

Music is a symbol of belonging, especially for Lisa/Jade. This is evident when she buys a secondhand violin in San Diego and finally feels at home when she plays through all hours of the night. Although her father told her never to play the violin again, or "her talent will be recognized," Jade can't stay away, even going as far as studying music education in school. It is her great gift and talent, and using it is almost healthy for her. She is finally able to use her gift when she starts a bluegrass band with her girlfriend Celia and Celia's cousins.

Franciscan Ware Dishes

Riley's "mother's" dishes symbolize a sense of loss and yearning for the past. These dishes, with their recognizable hue and apple pattern inscribed on its edges, are mentioned several times in this story. Riley tries to feed her brother on them and he protests. Lisa/Jade eats off of them in San Diego and Portland and feels a prick of sadness for her lost family.

Lisa's violin

For Lisa, her violin, particularly the special one she calls "Violet," symbolizes her rare gift and talent, which she misses in her new life in San Diego. She was, before the murder, on her way to becoming a very talented and successful musician. Violet, which she had to leave behind, is a symbol of her gift and how she lost the chance to use it to its highest potential.

For Riley, the line of violins displayed in her father's office are ghostly, symbolizing a sister lost and never known.

Collections

Frank MacPherson's various collections symbolized his attempt to fill the hole his daughter's "death" left in his life. He collected many things and displayed them in his house in various curio cabinets. Danny sees these collections with disdain, but Riley mentions that the collections were her father's way of coping with Lisa's death.

Teachers

The author has a great love for teachers, and also presents the idea that teachers are a vehicle for a young person to find their dreams. With the exception of Steven Davis, all



of the teachers in this story are warm and loving, and Celia's family is made up completely of teachers. While Riley is not a teacher, she is a school counselor, one charged with helping young people find their way again. Because Lisa MacPherson was a girl that lost her way, emphasizing teachers and counselors is one way the author reminds the reader of that.

Jade necklace/Jade

Jade's white jade necklace symbolizes the changing point in her life, when she faked her own death and left all she knew and loved to start over alone. The necklace was a gift from Jeannie after Riley's birth. It is made from white jade, and this is where Jade finds inspiration for her new name. The pendant is a memorial to Riley, the baby she had, gave up, and was forced to abandon; the baby she protected from harm and was almost harmed herself. More than that, it is a manner of identifying her as Lisa MacPherson, and when her father cautions her to leave it behind, he is really cautioning her to leave her attachment to Riley behind.

Mothers

The author uses the word "mother" and gradually defines that role throughout the novel to show that "mother" can be seen as a role that is not necessarily dictated by biology.

The word "mother" takes many different forms in this novel. For Riley, Lisa was the form of a sister, but Jade is her actual mother. Riley mentions Deb, the woman she thought was her mother, very seldom throughout the novel, demonstrating that perhaps she didn't have a close relationship with her. By the end of the story, Jade has resumed the role of mother in Riley's life, filling a hole she didn't know she had.

On the other hand, Jeannie Lyons serves the role as "mother" to Lisa when she is pregnant and cut off from the life she knows. During this time, Lisa is able to relax and be vulnerable, and Jeannie fills a very important need for Lisa. During that time, she is a mother figure to the young, scared girl, and a bond is formed that lasts.

Childhood Innocence

The author demonstrates that childhood innocent is often preyed upon by adults, whether purposefully or indadvertedly. Sometimes children are victimized purposefully, in the case of Steven Davis and Lisa MacPherson. However, sometimes the victimization is unintended and more subtle, such as when Deb MacPherson tries to rewrite Danny's memories of the day Steven was killed, thus making him feel devalued and setting him up for later problems.



The forest

For Danny, the 5-acre parcel of land is his kingdom, and the copse of pine trees are his refuge. This character spends a lot of time inside his own head, running from his own fears and demons. However, the quietness of the forest is a welcome contrast to his own mind, and it is literally the only thing he needs in his life. Danny wants nothing and wants for nothing, and that makes him an enviable character.

Tom and Verniece Kyle

The author holds them up as a cautionary tale to display not only where lies and deception can land a person, but how ugly motives and a black heart make the difference. In a cast of characters that are equally good and bad, the Kyles are the only characters with no visible redeeming value. One can argue that Lisa MacPherson lied and deceived as much as Tom and Verniece did, but the author specifically points to their ugly thoughts and motives, while showing that Lisa was at her core a soft and sensitive person.



Settings

New Bern, North Carolina

Most of Diane Chamberlain's books take place in small-town North Carolina. New Bern is a small town on a river that flows inland from the Atlantic. It's not quite on the coast, but is close enough to the Outer Banks that it has a coastal feel. For the purpose of this novel, New Bern is small enough for the town residents to be familiar with each other, but large enough for Riley to still feel isolated after her father's death. It's also far enough away from big-city news that the MacPherson family was able to escape the news of Lisa and start a new life away from town gossip.

Alexandria, Virginia

The MacPherson family started out in this near-DC suburb when the father, Frank, worked for the U.S. Marshal service. This was the location of Lisa's violin talent, her lessons under Steven Davis, the alleged murder and consequential fake suicide on the Potomac River. It's an important location because it's close to the U.S. government, and is also close enough to DC that the story would have been very public. The move to NC was vital to leave the location of gossip and go to a new place where the family was unknown. It also represents a break in Riley's memory; she has little recall of the life in Virginia, only that it existed.

San Diego, CA

San Diego is where Lisa relocated with her new identity. Again, the location doesn't seem to be vital as much as the area's characteristics - the area of San Diego she landed in is filled with drifters who are unlikely to ask questions about Lisa's past. There, she is able to carve out a new place for herself, make friends, and fill her new identity.

Seattle, Washington

Seattle is where Lisa - now Jade - eventually lands in her new and full life, with a wife and a family. She eventually buys a cafe there and starts a bluegrass band, in which she is able to use her talent at the violin and fulfill her love for music. When Riley traces her sister down she finds that Lisa/Jade has created a very full life for herself. The reader is at odds with this: does she deserve it?

Asheville, North Carolina

As a location, Asheville only exists in stories and flashbacks. Jeannie Lyons, the real estate agent, friend of the family, and lover of Riley's father, had lived in Asheville for a



hazy time in Riley's memory. As the mystery unfolds, it becomes known that Lisa, who found herself with an unwanted pregnancy, went to Asheville to live with Jeannie and have her baby in private. Even later, it becomes known that the baby she had in that private location is Riley herself. When Riley finds her birth certificate, which denotes her birthplace as Asheville, the pieces begin to fall into place.



Themes and Motifs

Family

Although Riley has grown up with a relatively happy and stable home-life, there is still something missing. Aside from the death of Lisa, which happened when Riley was so young it barely made an imprint on her mind, Riley feels as if she had a present mother, father, and brother. However, at the beginning of the story, her father's death has left her feeling very empty and alone, even though she still has her brother Danny. It is this drive for family that keeps Riley digging into the secrets of the past although they may hurt and may reveal things about her family she wishes she didn't know.

It is the thread of family, and what one may do to protect them, that weaves through the story of Riley's father, Frank: the man who risked his own neck to keep his daughter out of jail. It is also prevalent in Lisa's new life in San Diego, where she takes her own risks in order to surround herself with people who make her feel safe. In a small way, this story is about Riley's father and sister as well as Riley herself.

Only in Danny does the reader see this thread snapped, but even in his refusal to emotionally attach to his family the reader sees a defense mechanism resulting from Danny's childhood feeling of rejection. As a child, he thought himself rejected after Lisa's death, living with ghosts for parents in the shadow of his dead sister. These childhood feelings resulted in his acting out and set him up for a host of problems after his tour in the army, including nightmares and depression. So although Danny doesn't cling to the family as Riley does, the reader can see how the family is affected Danny's life.

Belonging

Although closely related to the thread of Family, Riley is also highly motivated by the idea of belonging. The reason she feels so alone after her father's death is because she has no more people to surround her. Although Danny is still alive and well, he is not a comforting or supportive presence. This feeling is intensified by the fact that Riley ends a relationship just before the action in the novel begins.

With all of the shock that naturally accompanies the truths Riley uncovers throughout the course of the novel, her immediate reaction is almost always a feeling of being left out. She feels left out of the truth about Lisa's murder and death. She feels left out of Danny's small circle of friends and comforts. When Jeannie Lyons mentions facts about her father that she didn't know, Riley feels left out of a part of his life. When she learns that her sister - actually her mother - is alive and well in Seattle, she feels left out of Jade's family progression. These feelings are natural, but go beyond the simple emotion of missing her family. Riley longs to feel included and is hurt by spending so many years in the dark.



Even in Lisa/Jade's story in California, the reader sees her comfort when she belongs. When Charlie introduces Jade to his granddaughter Celia, there is an immediate feeling of belonging that soon blossoms into love. Jade is also motivating by attaching herself to a group, such as Celia's family, and this attachment stays strong for decades and results in the bluegrass band Jasha Trace.

Perspective

Because this story hinges on secrets from the past, the author has the freedom to present the story from several different perspectives, which she does to present a conflicting - yet true - portrayal of Lisa/Jade. For example, Riley learns many faces of her sister, Lisa: from Jeannie, the close family friend that helped Lisa through her unwanted pregnancy. From Danny, who saw his childhood sucked into the vortex of Lisa's drama. From Caterina, Lisa's last violin teacher, and from Sondra Davis, whose husband Lisa killed. In truth, each of their perspectives on Lisa have a little bit of truth to them, even though they also contradict each other.

The author explores these varying perspectives throughout the story. The reader sees Jade as a musical star, a doting mother and wife, a loving daughter to Frank, and also a fugitive from the law, a person who abandoned her young daughter and lived a life without her. All sides of Jade are true.

When Riley learns that Lisa may be alive, she wants to find her so she can cherish her and have another family member to love her, while Danny would love to see Lisa pay for what she did. Danny and Riley are both right to feel the way they do, although their perspectives oppose each other strongly.

Redemption

In this book, each character is searching for some type of redemption, and the author gradually suggests that everyone yearns for redemption in one way or another - or one thing or another - and not everyone will agree on whether that redemption is "worthy," so it is up to the individual whether they let others influence their journey of redemption or not.

This story revolves around Jade's successful life. Despite the horrors she experienced during her teen years, she is able to become a successful businessperson, wife, mother, and musician. The unspoken question is does she deserve such happiness? Is being raped and sexually abused punishment enough for killing Steven Davis, or is more required? How can Jade atone for her crimes?

Jade struggles with this, especially when Riley plainly tells her how much she and Danny suffered in their childhood. Danny in particular is the author's proof that Lisa's disappearance yielded very real consequences. When Jade is young, she wants to be a teacher; this is one way she wants to atone for her past, to help other young people find



their way. Lisa's life was all about the violin, but Jade can help reclaim lost youth and preserve their childhood.

If Jade struggles with this question, Danny does even more. He feels that Jade should absolutely be punished and that she does not deserve the life she has made for herself. When he learns how she was treated by Steven Davis, his conviction only flags marginally: yes, Davis may have been a terrible person, but Lisa actually took the life of another human, and this is an undeniable fact. Danny's black-and-white view on this topic is probably related to his own past. He tells Riley that the things he had to do in Iraq were so terrible they were unthinkable. They dehumanized people, and for this, Danny feels his own need for redemption.

Empathy

As the story progresses and reveals more about Lisa's past, the author urges the reader to be empathetic before passing judgment on any of her characters. Lisa acted as a scared 18-year-old who had been victimized her entire life by a trusted adult. Frank acted as a father who was frightened to see his daughter spend her life in prison. Sondra Davis acted as a woman who lost her husband and never saw his death brought to justice. Celia acted as a woman who only wished to protect the woman she loved. Danny acted as a damaged young man who has never had anybody fight for him.

Riley is a school counselor. From the beginning of the story she says that she chose this path because of the ghost of her dead sister, who was so depressed she took her own life. Helping kids, preventing them from following Lisa's path, has always been Riley's quest. However, she also says that she doesn't feel effective at her job because she sees her sister in every case, and this leads to a lack of objectivity.

All of these characters have different angles and committed varied sins across the narrative, but the author asks the reader to empathize with each one of them and not let their judgement be colored.



Styles

Point of View

This novel is written in first person throughout; however, the perspective shifts from character to character. In the Prologue, the speaker is the wife of the man that Lisa killed. During Part One, the perspective is Riley's throughout. For Part Two, the perspective shifts between Riley and Lisa, her sister. Eventually, during this section, as the reader sees Lisa's story evolve and change, the point of view changes to Lisa's updated identity - Jade. In Part Three this trend continues, shifting perspectives between Riley and Jade until the climax of the story. After that, Riley finishes her telling of the story, still in First Person.

Although the shifting perspectives can be distracting, for this story it is vital because the reader needs to know what happened once Lisa left Washington DC with Tom. In one way, it shows the depth of the deception against the rest of the family, especially as Jade and Celia form a family and share it with Riley's father. Watching them grow as a family while Riley and Danny flounder a bit brings home the effect Frank's choices had on the other two children, especially Danny. The reader can empathize with Riley for all of her feelings of loneliness.

Language and Meaning

The language in this novel is not complex. In many places the sentences are short and choppy, but this helps the reader understand Riley's mental state as she progresses through each new secret revealed after her Father's death. Many of the glimpses into her mind display short emotional outbursts, which make total sense given what she is going through as the plot evolves.

Structure

Because the point of view shifts so often between Riley and her sister, the chapters tend to be very short, particularly later in the story as the plot starts moving rapidly towards the climax. While this could be distracting, it does lend to the pace of the story, drawing the reader in and getting them involved in getting to the end of the story.



Quotes

Lisa never lived in the house in New Bern.
-- Riley (chapter 2 paragraph 4)

Importance: This quote is the first mention of the ghostly sister, and a hint that she was never a real part of Riley's life.

There are all sorts of abuse.
-- Danny (chapter 4 paragraph 5)

Importance: Danny says this to Riley when she offhandedly comments that their parents weren't that bad, that at least they didn't abuse them. As the story goes on, the reader learns that Danny suffered acutely from his parents' neglect, and particularly from the way they attempted to rewrite his memories.

I had a box of treasures and nobody to share them with.
-- Riley (chapter 8 paragraph 5)

Importance: Riley says this when Danny rebuffs her attempts to show him some old pictures and videos of them as children. For Danny, the past is a minefield and too dangerous to tread through; but for Riley, who is longing for family, the pictures are a way to keep a hold on the people she loves.

She took up all of the air in our family."
-- Danny (chapter 13 paragraph 4)

Importance: Danny says this about Lisa, and it demonstrates what he remembers most about his childhood. When Lisa was alive, the family was all about her musical abilities, and spent their spare time and money wrapped up in her gift. When she killed herself, the family was all about her loss, and the change in his family was obvious. He feels like Lisa took everything from him.

Your family was... is... your family. Your blood family.
-- Jeannie (chapter 15 paragraph 3)

Importance: Jeannie says this to Riley in response to Verniece's hint that Riley is adopted. Verniece is correct, of course, and this quote is Jeannie's clever lie that is cloaked in truth. Riley's family is, indeed, her blood family, because she was adopted by her grandparents.

Watching him (Matty) was agony in too many ways to count.
-- Jade (chapter 25 paragraph 5)

Importance: Jade says this when she goes to the campus in San Diego to watch Matty's orchestra play. At this point in the story, the reader may still suspect that Matty



and Lisa had a romantic attachment before her crisis. In any case, watching him his very difficult for her because she misses him, her family, her former life; but more than this, she misses the fact that she can never be a famous concert violinist, as he will be.

If Lisa wanted to see you, she could have found you.

-- Tom (chapter 38 paragraph 5)

Importance: Tom is correct in his statement, and starts the process of Riley wondering if her sister/mother even wants to have a relationship with her. He plays into her feelings of isolation, and it will be a prevalent emotion for her for the rest of the story.

I think if Jade's made a new life for herself, you should leave her alone.

-- Grady (chapter 42 paragraph 7)

Importance: When Riley meets Grady, he can't help but be honest with her about what he knows. However, he does caution Riley to keep away, especially if she wants the best for her sister. Because this story hinges so much on perspective, the reader can see Grady's point, but also understands why Riley wants to find her sister.

I feel so alone, Jeannie... Totally alone. Dealing with all of Daddy's stuff. And I feel responsible for Danny now. I worry about him all the time and I'm totally alone with that, too. Meanwhile, Lisa's surrounded by a happy, healthy, smiley family. Children and a partner and all those friends and Celia's family and I have no one!

-- Riley (chapter 48)

Importance: This quote is the heart of the story. Jade has successfully moved on, and the family she left behind is a shambles.

Someday this is all going to catch up to you, Lisa. But it won't be because of me.

-- Danny (chapter 59)

Importance: This is the point in the novel where Danny decides that Riley's happiness is more important than his idea of justice. This is where he decides not to turn Jade in to the police, despite his opinion that she should pay for her crimes.

When we're together, Jade and I don't talk about this past. We don't talk about mistakes or the deception. We talk about what Alex and Zoe are doing in school. About the music Jade and Celia are writing. About my job search. We take the kids to the park and museums, and we laugh a lot. I see the joy in Jade's face and I'm happy to know that I'm part of the reason for it.

-- Riley (Epilogue)

Importance: This quote encapsulates the decision to move forward with life. Jade's and Riley's past is a mess, and to parse out responsibility would be too difficult. For both of them, it's easier to move on with what they have.



Everybody has a scar, Riley...Maybe they've fought a terrible illness. Or they've lost a child, or been hurt by someone they love. But then again... maybe they've been lucky enough to find one.

-- Jade (Epilogue)

Importance: This quote circles back to empathy. Everybody in life has hurts and scars and reasons to behave the way they do. It is part of being human, and requires each person to try to be open-minded and forgiving to see another's perspective.