

The Story of a New Name Study Guide

The Story of a New Name by Elena Ferrante

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Plot Summary

All of the characters are back in the second book of Elena Ferrante's Naples series, *The Story of a New Name*. Lila is married to Stefano. She is immediately disgusted with him because he made a deal with the Solara brothers. For Lila, Stefano is a different person, not the kind man she married but a weak man who will deal with the devil to make some extra money. Their honeymoon is terrible. Lila tells him of her anger and that she will not sleep with him. He beats her into submission. She returns home with a swollen face, but her family looks the other way.

Meanwhile, Elena is back in school. She is very distracted from Lila's wedding. She drowns her sorrows in sexual encounters with Antonio and hopes that something amazing will happen to her. She barely skates through the last few months of school with minimally passing grades.

The girls hook up over the summer, and Lila asks Elena to come and study in her apartment. Elena is entranced with Lila's apartment, almost too distracted to study.

Meanwhile, Stefano and Rino have gone into business with the Solara brothers, to open a shoe store in Naples on the Piazza. The Solaras have also invested in Stefano's new grocery store. Lila helps Stefano in the grocery store, although Michele Solara thinks she would be effective working in the new shoe store. On the piazza in Naples, Michele sees a photo of Lila in her wedding dress that the dressmaker has displayed. Stefano goes to the shop, with Elena, and asks the dressmaker to remove it, but it is a very popular photo. Since Lila is very beautiful and she is wearing Cerrullo shoes, Michele asks if they can take the photo, enlarge it, and hang it in the store. When Stefano will not agree to this, Elena and Lila make a bet. If Stefano changes his mind, Elena must make perfect marks the next year in high school. If not, Lila must return to school.

Antonio is drafted into the army, and Elena tries to get him exempted by going to Michele Solara and asking for him to use his connections. This move makes Antonio mad and he ends the relationship with her. After seeing Elena a handful of times with Nino Sarratore, he is already jealous and sure that Elena is cheating on him. While Elena wouldn't mind having a relationship with Nino, she sees him one day after school with a very beautiful and classy girl. Nino sees Elena a few times, and is always kind; once he actually kisses her on the cheek, but the next minute he is kissing his girlfriend. Elena is confused and depressed and feels she will never match the class of the girl he is kissing.

Stefano refuses to hang the photo; Elena pushes Lila to join her in school, but she is pregnant. There is unrest in the shops- Michele is engaged to Gigliola, but wants Lila to be the one at work in the shoe store. Pinuccia, now engaged to Rino, works in Stefano's grocery, and he wants to be the shoe store manager. For a time, the men compromise and let the girls run the store together. Eventually Stefano agrees to let Michele hang the photo of Lila in the store, but Lila spends 2-3 days changing the photo, covering her eyes with paper and paint and making the photo abstract. Pinuccia and Gigliola can't



stand the photo, but Michele likes it. Soon after this, the shoe store opens, and Lila loses the baby.

Elena returns to school and is doing very well. She still sees Nino now and then. Lila is depressed; she wasn't excited about being pregnant, but the tension and nerves of losing the baby is worse. She goes to work in the grocery for Stefano, helping the neighborhood people out now and then with extra money if they need it.

After Christmas, Pinuccia finds herself pregnant and she and Rino must marry immediately. Professor Galiani invites Elena to a party and she asks Lila to go with her. At the party, the other young people there are excited to see Elena. The young people discuss books and politics and pay no attention at all to Lila. Elena feels valued in this element. While there she sees Nino, and discovers that the young girl she'd seen him with is the Professor's daughter Nadia. Elena has a wonderful time at the party, but as Stefano is driving the girls home, Lila is extremely rude and cruel, belittling Elena and making her and her friends look foolish. Elena's feelings are hurt and she cuts Lila off for months.

In the interim, she spends time with other neighborhood kids. Antonio returns from military service after having a nervous breakdown. The Peluso's father dies in prison, and the mother kills herself soon after. Rino and Pinuccia are married. Through all of this, Lila and Elena don't talk. Elena takes a job at a bookstore after school is over, and sees Nino often. He sometimes kisses her and holds her hand, he tells her that he will be on Ischia for the summer with a friend; that she should join him. Soon after, several neighborhood kids come to Elena to tell her that she should talk to Lila; that Lila needs to visit the doctor, but she will not until Elena will talk to her again.

Elena finally consents to see her; Lila apologizes for her behavior and sees the doctor, who says she isn't strong enough to stay pregnant. He recommends a vacation. Stefano rents a house on Amalfi, and Lila begs Elena to come, promising to pay her whatever she'd have made at the bookstore. Elena thinks of Nino and agrees if they can go to Ischia instead.

They rent a house on Ischia for a month with Lila's mother and Pinuccia. Rino and Stefano come on the weekends and go back to Naples for the week. Elena quickly finds Nino and his friend Bruno Saccavo, and the five young people fall into a rhythm. For a while, Elena feels that Nino likes her, but she won't tell Lila how she feels. He continues to solicit her attention, hold her hand, even kiss her. But suddenly the tables turn and it's obvious that he's infatuated with Lila. Their attraction grows, is obvious. Pinuccia, who is heavily pregnant, leaves. Elena catches Nino and Lila kissing, and the affair blows open. At the end of the trip, before Stefano comes to stay for a full week, Lila begs Elena to cover for her so that she can stay in Nino's house alone with him. Elena agrees because it's better to stay in their lives than to lose them both. The night Nino and Lila are together, Elena goes to the house that Nino's family is staying at, and sleeps with Nino's father, Donato.



After their night together, things unravel as Elena is shocked that they would carry on with Lila married. She sees Michele Solara and Gigliola on the beach one day, and Nino and Lila emerge from the water holding hands. Stefano shows up a few days later, angry because he heard the story. There are beatings and fights, and the next day they all leave, and Lila and Elena are basically finished.

Elena finishes her last year of school, her friendship with Lila gone cold, and gets a scholarship to a university in Pisa, all paid for. Just before she leaves for Pisa, she happens to stop by the shoe store on the Piazza to see if Lila is around. She is there, with Nino, and announces to Lila that she is pregnant. She goes back over the year and tells Elena the story: after the return from Ischia she doesn't see Nino for months, and then he shows up one day at the grocery. They begin their affair again. Lila acts as docile as possible to Stefano and does whatever he asks so she can see Nino in secret. Soon it's too hard to find a place to see him, so she manipulates the men into letting her work at the shoe store; Nino sees her there in the afternoon when the store is closed for the hottest part of the day. This lasts for months. Lila begins to hide money, eventually rents an apartment for Nino. Eventually, she gets the courage to leave Stefano.

She moves in with Nino. It lasts three weeks. Meanwhile, Michele Solara has hired Antonio to work for him and sets Antonio out to find her. He does, and after he sees Nino leave her, he beats the mess out of Nino, making him promise never to go back to Lila. But he doesn't tell Michele; instead he tells Enzo and Pasquale. Enzo goes to the apartment and fetches Lila, takes her back to Stefano, but tells her that he'll always come back for her if she needs him.

Meanwhile, Elena is doing well at Pisa. She meets a young man and stays with him for two years- he takes her places and buys her things and helps her feel like she belongs. She does very well in school, and hears nothing of Lila, and only comes home but seldom. She makes it home for Easter and sees Lila. Lila tells her that after returning home to Stefano, his behavior goes very erratic. The baby is born, doesn't look like Nino or Stefano although it could be either. It's a boy, named Rino. Lila decides she must educate him and make him smart so he won't be poor. During this period she learns that Stefano has been sleeping with Ada much longer than she'd been with Nino. Their relationship deteriorates further. Stefano does what he pleases with Ada but is jealous and protective of Lila. Ada asks him to choose; he won't. She is pregnant, she demands that he forces Lila out; he won't. Finally, Michele Solara, to whom Stefano owes plenty of money, makes Stefano ask Lila to move in with him. Lila won't. Elena has, by this time, gone to Enzo and asked him to get Lila out of the marriage. Months later, after securing an apartment and a job for himself, he does.

During her last year in Pisa, Elena meets a new young man. He is the son of a famous professor. She graduates with honors but is not granted a job as a professor. Her boyfriend proposes to her. In a fit of reminiscence Elena writes down the story of her youth in third-person, novel form, and gives it to her fiancé, Pietro. Pietro gives it to his mother, who sends it to a publisher in Milan- Elena's novel is going to be published.



In the blush of pride and excitement of a fiancé and a novel, Elena goes to see Lila. Lila is living with Enzo in a terrible neighborhood and working in Bruno Soccavo's sausage factory. She looks terrible, but she is happy. Her son is very smart, and she and Enzo are working on something new together in their spare time. Lila has her hands on something exciting, and that drives her despite the sad conditions of her life. Elena is humbled; she thought she would lord her success over Lila, but she can't. The part in peace.

Elena's book is published. She goes to a bookseller's event and sees Nino Sarratore.



Chapters 1-6

Summary

Chapter 1 begins with Elena recounting a day in 1966 when Lila gave her a metal box that contained several notebooks she didn't want her husband to see. She also notes that "at that time" they were in a bad spot in their friendship, and yet the long history between them demanded that Elena take the notebooks, promising that she'd never read them. However, she did read them, the second she was on the train. They weren't diaries, although they did detail the events of their life together. It seems to Elena that Lila was making herself write, and the characters of the neighborhood were drawn with "ruthless accuracy." The stark details of their adolescence are laid out in the notebooks, and one night Elena dumps them in the river, wanting to be rid of Lila and her thoughts on their life.

Chapter 2 takes the reader back to the moment at Lila's wedding when Marcello appears wearing Lila's shoes. Elena watched the emotion and conflict play out between the newly married couple. She has a moment when she would like Lila to blow the wedding to pieces, scream at Stefano, and run off with her so they two can take on the world together. Lila leaves the reception hall, with Stefano closely following; and Elena can see that, for Lila, he is beyond forgiveness.

In Chapter 3, Elena watches Stefano and Lila return, Stefano all smiles and Lila's anger just simmering. She plays a good bride to everybody except the Solara family, and eventually they leave for their honeymoon on the coast. Their apparent reconciliation hurts Elena for more than one reason: for one, she feels even more alone, because Lila has attached herself to Stefano. Second, she feels certain that if Lila allowed such a huge mistake, she must truly love Stefano, and the feeling of betrayal is unbearable. Elena feels caught again between her two worlds, and decides she must "lower" herself to the neighborhood again. Nino has gone, and she seeks out Antonio on the terrace to apologize. Antonio is angry at her and feels embarrassed by her, but Elena insists that she chooses him, and they walk home together.

Chapter 4 opens with Antonio and Elena kissing passionately in the shadows. Again, Elena is thinking of Lila losing her virginity to Stefano, and feels she should do the same in order to feel close to Lila. She and Antonio find a shadowy abandoned building where Elena intends on having sex with him, thinking of Lila. She disregards the stigma, the fear of getting pregnant. They quickly move towards that end, but he eventually stops her, saying he wants them to be married, not in a dirty abandoned factory. He apologizes for pushing her too far, and they leave the factory.

In Chapter 5, Elena feels listless and tired. She skips school daily for weeks. Antonio is cautiously happy that she is so free, but he is still suspicious that she is seeing Nino behind his back. Elena does wish to see Nino, but she's also feels inadequate compared to him. As she's walking the streets one day she sees Pinuccia, Stefano's



sister, who tells her that Lila is back, and also that she (Pinuccia) is engaged to Rino Cerullo. Elena even catches a glimpse of Lila getting out of Stefano's car, but she is covered in a scarf and dark glasses. Elena is hurt that Lila hasn't come to see her. As she turns from Lila to walk the long way around the courtyard, she finds Lila has approached her. She tells Elena that she didn't want her to see her, and they sit on the step, and Lila takes off her scarf and sunglasses.

In Chapter 6, Lila tells Elena the story of what happened when she and Stefano left the wedding. Elena had thought that Lila had quickly forgiven Stefano; in truth, she had littered him with curses and anger the second they left the reception. Stefano explained to Lila how vital it was to have the Solaras on your side when you want to do business in the neighborhood. He needed their money, their position, and their approval. He tells her that her father and brother were in on the business the whole time. He says that Marcello had begged him for the shoes Lila made, and that she had agreed.

Analysis

The author sets the reader squarely back in the middle of the action in these opening chapters. Only the first chapter, which takes place over a decade in the future, remind the reader that Elena and Lila are eventually adults, no longer teenagers, and have a regular life hopefully free of the violence and drama that permeate these novels. Yet, Elena tells the reader from the future that she and Lila were in a "terrible" time in their friendship, but that she takes the notebooks anyway. Lila doesn't want Stefano to see them. The notebooks are a Pandora's Box; Elena reads them against Lila's request, and after a few days, can't handle the raw and detailed emotion of them. She chooses instead to toss them in the river. She says, as she watches the notebooks sink into the water, that she wanted Lila's insight to sink as well, that Lila will no longer be in her head or attached to her in that way. The story zooms back to the day of the wedding, when Lila sees Marcello wearing her handmade shoes.

There are many emotions going on in this pivotal scene. Lila feels angry and betrayed by her new husband. Lila is nothing if not transparent in her emotions, and for Stefano to ally himself with the Solaras behind her back is the biggest deception imaginable. Her anger is apparent to everyone in the room. For Elena, the moment of high drama accompanied the second Nino left the wedding reception, and her short period of feeling an intellectual connection, of feeling above her birth and her peers, is gone. She is once again caught between two worlds. Elena struggles with her identity consistently during the plot, and it is at its most intense now, when she feels like she is losing Lila forever to a world after which she can't follow. Again, Elena puts intention to the feeling that she should lose her virginity that night, just as Lila is going to, and the next few chapters chronicle her following up on that plan.

The author uses the setting to show the wrongness of her aims, however. Elena is even thinking of Lila having sex with Stefano, but they are in a seaside hotel, on linen sheets, in a luxurious bed. Elena and Antonio, by contrast, make their attempts in a dirty, abandoned canning factory, with the sound of scurrying mice in their ears and leaning



up into a corner. Elena is so set on keeping pace with Lila she doesn't care, but Antonio does, and he stops her. She goes home listless, and this mood follows her for the next chapter, when she skips school for days on end until Lila returns. It is interesting to note that school is Elena's one thing; she's good at it, she feels intellectual and special there, as opposed to being regularly overlooked in the neighborhood. However, in her emotional distress, school is the first thing to go.

Elena is hurt when she learns that Lila has returned from her honeymoon without coming to see her. She feels ready to let Lila go and allow herself to be discarded, although she has already discarded herself to throwing school over. Lila appears and tells her about her honeymoon. The scarf and sunglasses are hints at what Lila has been hiding, and the issue of Stefano and the Solaras, the author hints, will not go away. Elena says early in chapter two: to Lila, the marriage was already over.

Discussion Question 1

Is Elena disappointed or relieved that she and Antonio end up not having sex?

Discussion Question 2

Is Lila's anger at Stefano reasonable? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Nino's exit catapult Elena back to feeling she must live "in the neighborhood"?

Vocabulary

agitation, ironic, allusions, brazier, asserted, sporadic, meticulous, vestige, animatedly, unsmiling, intolerable, cultivating, lewd, convulsion, obliterate, alienation, languid



Chapters 7-12

Summary

Lila and Stefano drive to the hotel in which they are supposed to stay. They are both ill at ease. Lila almost feels as if she is seeing Stefano for the first time. When they reach the room, Stefano tries to smooth over their argument with a kind, easy manner, but Lila is unresponsive. They go to dinner, they walk around the city of Amalfi; Stefano talks constantly and Lila remains quiet. Eventually they return to the room. Lila's head is filled with displeased thoughts about her new husband, from his voice to his looks to his demeanor. He tries once more to convince her of why an alliance with the Solaras was necessary. Once back in their hotel room, they wrestle as Stefano attempts to make love to Lila; she is unwilling, and eventually he consummates their marriage by force, pinning her down with his weight and hitting her more than once to subdue her.

In Chapter 8, the honeymoon has ended and Lila's parents have come to visit the new apartment. Lila's brother and father chastise her for being too sensitive about the Solaras matter. They celebrate that Rino (Lila's brother) has proposed to Pinuccia (Stefano's sister). Nobody makes mention of how brutally Lila's face is beaten.

In Chapter 9, the action returns to Lila telling Elena about the honeymoon, and about how wrong she was about the Carracci family. Lila says that Elena should study at her house, where it is quiet, because she wants her to be nearby. Elena questions where she belongs in Lila's life, in school, in the neighborhood. She misses her studies but is unclear how they are of value to her. She wanders around the schoolyard and sees Alfonso. They discuss Stefano and Lila, the violence. That night, Elena sees Antonio again and she tells him when she finishes school, they can be married.

Chapter 10 opens with Elena struggling to make up for loss in in her studies. She is very behind in her subjects. Her meetings with Antonio must be curtailed, and he is jealous and worried. She likewise finds it difficult to study at home, and eventually ends up at Lila's house. She and Lila discuss marriage, and Stefano; the beatings, yes, but they also talk around the sex. Elena is interested in the details, because she's interested in Lila, and her own sexual experience with Antonio makes her curious. However, Lila mostly discusses Stefano in a detached manner, as if he's a person on the periphery of her life. Lila allows Elena to talk for a little while, and then forces her to study.

In Chapter 11, school is coming to a close when the building suffers some damage. The classes are curtailed, but the workload is doubled. Elena spends most of her spare time at Lila's, studying. Once Lila lets her take a bath and use all of her accessories. She's excited to let Antonio see her and smell her, but he isn't impressed; he tells her she always wants to do what Lila does. But he is right, in a sense; Elena is especially charmed by Lila's clean and modern home. In this period, Lila develops a fear for books; she fears she is losing her former intelligence. Furthermore, Elena realizes that Lila is more lonely now that she is married. One day they look at Lila's wedding album and see



photos of Nino, and Elena's crush on him is renewed. Lila, however, sees the picture of Nino and proclaims him skinny, ugly, and arrogant. Elena is ashamed and says she doesn't like him anymore.

In Chapter 12, Elena feels unhappy most of the time. The reason for much of her unhappiness is Antonio. He is uptight, jealous, and clingy. Moreover, he is worried about his mother and about getting drafted. Elena learns that Stefano was exempted years ago from the draft because his mother was a widow. She begins to look for a way to get Antonio exempted. She learns that Stefano, with the help of the Solaras, paid somebody illegally for his exemption. Lila learns that her husband had allied himself with the Solaras long ago. Elena is concerned with sending Antonio to the Solaras for help.

Analysis

These chapters begin with Lila's recounting of her honeymoon to Elena: the establishment of what will become the cycle in Lila's marriage to Stefano. Disdain, violence, manipulation, force--the reader sees that the first night of marriage is the first of many in which Lila will use words to wound Stefano, and he will return her disdain with force. He consummates their marriage with force, and the reader gets a glimpse of what Lila called "the ghost of Don Achille" showing itself in its anger and cruelty. Stefano will, in the future, work hard to keep his temper calm, but Lila will often spark it with her ugly words.

A theme that is explored more in this story than the first novel is how, in this setting, a wife must submit to her husband, and divorce is unspeakable. The first example of this is when Lila returns from her honeymoon with a split lip and a swollen, bruised face, and her family comes over for Sunday dinner and doesn't say a word.

The action returns to the present, where Lila asks Elena to study at her own house, "to have you nearby." For the girls to spend each day together is both a blessing and a curse. Their friendship is so unhealthy--more so in this novel than its predecessor in the series--they absolutely cannot regard one another without jealousy. Lila wishes Elena to succeed in school, and forces her to study to that end. However, by offering her home, she has her hands on Elena's life and is exercising control. Elena has all of the freedom one can imagine, to the extent that she has secret trysts with her boyfriend, not to mention the gift of an education. However, she is so charmed by the beauty of Lila's home she can't see her own life. Both girls are unhappy and depressed.

With this framework laid, the author can turn to wider issues in the neighborhood that will play through the course of the novel. Antonio wishes to avoid the draft, he learns that Stefano was exempted because he was the main man of the household. When it later comes out that Stefano actually used the Solaras' contacts to pay his way out, Lila is incensed. Stefano has obviously been allied with the Solaras for a very long time. This knowledge, and Lila's anger, foreshadows a long and twisted entanglement



between Stefano and the Solaras, between whom Lila is able to play and manipulate to her own ends.

Perhaps the most telling foreshadowing is Lila's quick dismissal of Nino Saratorre when she sees his photo in her wedding album. By the end of the novel, Nino has become her great love (so far), and yet she calls him "skinny and ugly" to Elena. Elena, rather than sticking up for Nino and making her feelings known, says she doesn't like him. This will haunt Elena as she watches Lila take Nino away from her.

Discussion Question 1

What qualities does Nino possess that set him apart from the neighborhood boys?

Discussion Question 2

What are the advantages and disadvantages of Elena's daily visits to Lila's apartment?

Discussion Question 3

What is the significance of Stefano's relationship with the Solaras?

Vocabulary

intimidated, vaguely, subservient, discomfiture, brusque, anxiety, rancor, coherence, emphatically, intensified, feigned, sententious, turmoil



Chapters 13-18

Summary

Elena avoids Antonio; school increases in difficulty. One day she sees Nino in the hall with Professor Galiani, the woman who identified Elena's talent in the first novel. Elena feels intimidated by them both. The next day he approaches her with an article and asks if she'll read it. She's very excited that he asks for her help. When she sees him again, he doesn't listen to her opinion; he is already upset that the professor has dismissed it. Nino thanks her and kisses her on the cheek. As she stews in excitement about this, she sees him walk around the corner and meet up with a classy and beautiful girl a bit younger than herself. He embraces and kisses her. As Elena turns away in despair she sees that Antonio is there, waiting on her.

In Chapter 14, Elena has a time convincing Antonio that she and Nino are just friends. He begins to act erratically, even miss work, because he is worried about the draft and about Elena. His sister Ada reports this, and accuses Elena of not focusing on him enough. She returns to seeing him often, but his behavior is frantic and it is difficult. She asks Lila if she should ask the Solaras for help. Lila muses that there can't be much difference between Stefano, the Solara brothers, and her own brother, Rino: they are all men that do as they please. She then offers to go with Elena to speak to the Solaras.

Chapter 15 finds the girls taking on the very risky venture. At the Bar Solara, Michele Solara tells Lila that the wedding dressmaker has a photo of her displayed in their window. Lila steers the conversation back to Elena, and Antonio, and how they may avoid his military service. Marcello says he'll look into it, because he likes Elena. Michele brings the conversation back to the photograph, telling Lila that she looked beautiful in the photo, especially her shoes. He is about to open a shoe shop in Naples proper, in partnership with her family, and he wants to use the photograph to advertise the shoes. To everyone's surprise, she tells them to ask Stefano's permission.

In Chapter 16, Elena goes to see Antonio to tell him what she did for him, and he is angry at her. They return to Lila's house; Stefano is there, suspicious that Lila has gone to the Bar Solara. She tells him of the conversation with the Solara brothers, that he is to go see them the next day. He complains good naturedly and leaves the room; the girls start imitating Stefano, and then Antonio, and burst into giggles. As Elena leaves, she hears Stefano shouting curses at Lila.

Chapter 17 recounts Elena worrying about Lila and Stefano's violence. As she returns home, Antonio comes down to see her. He explains all of the reasons her visit to the Solaras disrespected him, and breaks it off with her.

In Chapter 18, Elena is in low spirits after Antonio's speech, and worried for Lila. She does poorly in school. At home her mother says Stefano would like her to go with him to the dressmaker, the one who displays Lila's photograph. In the car on the way, Stefano



tells Elena how rebellious and difficult Lila is. In a roundabout way he asks for her help managing her friend. He believes that it is Lila's rebelliousness that prevents her from getting pregnant. Would Elena please help him convince Lila to work in the second grocery he opened, the one in Naples proper? Once at the dressmaker, Stefano talks rudely to the shop owner, who is flustered. Lila is beautiful, they have received lots of business and interest because of the photo.

Analysis

The entanglements between Lila, Stefano, and the Solaras deepens in these chapters. It begins with the girls going to visit the Solara brothers. Although Marcello probably truly loved Lila in the first novel, she rejected him for Stefano. In this plot, the older, smarter brother Michele seems to see something of himself in Lila. He is shrewd and cruel--even to the extent that he mentions all the people he'd marry in front of his fiancée, Gigliola. The conversation boils down to a photograph Michele saw in the dressmaker's store in downtown Naples, a stunning photo of Lila. This photograph will become a toy and a pawn between Stefano and the Solaras, and Lila will play between the two for more power. There is also some indication in this early chapter that Michele will eventually try to take Lila away from Stefano, but the reader should ask if Michele is any better.

Nino Saratorre shows up again in these chapters. This early in the story, he is painted as a likable character. Intense, possibly arrogant, but generally good. The author does a good job of helping the reader feel how Elena feels about him. He kisses Elena on the cheek, providing hope for a few seconds, before Elena sees that he has a girlfriend, one so polished and beautiful she feels she can't compare. This should indicate to the reader and Elena that Nino really just feels friendship and regard for Elena, and that his kiss isn't romantic. It is important here for Elena to see his girlfriend, and for Antonio to see Nino kissing Elena on the cheek. After this, Antonio descends even further into despair, and Elena has a hard time controlling him.

Not long after the visit to the Bar Solara, Antonio leaves Elena, with a heartbreaking speech about how she never respected him. This is easily proven--it can be argued that Elena was fond of Antonio and enjoyed being loved, but she doesn't show that she loves or respects him.

In the scene back in Lila's apartment, when Stefano learns that Lila dressed up to visit the Bar Solara and ask the brothers a favor, the two girls spend a scant few minutes living in a world outside the real one they inhabit. For that moment, they are truly girls--giggling about boys, mocking them, making light of the 'trouble' they are in. It is literally, in the combined pages of the first and second novels in the series, one of the only honest and lighthearted moments between these two friends: one of the only times the reader sees them unmasked and truly loving each other without strings.



Discussion Question 1

What are some indications of Lila's manipulation of the Solaras and Stefano?

Discussion Question 2

Discuss Antonio's reasons for leaving Elena. Are they valid?

Discussion Question 3

Explain Elena's vacillation between wanting to marry Antonio and wanting to leave him. What motivates her to either decision?

Vocabulary

tormented, complicate, profusion, deliberate, restraint, predicament, equivocal, syntax, nuance



Chapters 19-24

Summary

Elena passes with less than standard grades, a testament to how far behind she had grown after Lila's wedding. She feels despair at doing so poorly, but the Professor gives her some books for the next term. She's not feeling at her best--he's lost Antonio, and by proxy his sister Ada. She looks for Nino at the school, but sees his girlfriend. Lila, she finds, is angry at her for going with Stefano to the dressmaker without telling her. Lila has cooled towards her, neither heated nor rude, but she doesn't confide in Elena anymore. She goes to Lila's house one day, and Rino and Pinuccia both show up as well. They disappear into a separate room for a while; Lila indicates that this is a normal occurrence. A while later, Rino mentions again that the Solaras want to put Lila's photo in their new shop in Naples. The battle for who is going to run the new shop is detailed: Rino has a fiance, as does Michele, and then there's Lila. When they ask Elena what she thinks, she says Stefano would never allow it, so Lila challenges her--if she is right, Lila will go back to school. If Elena is right, she must make the highest grades possible.

In Chapter 20, Elena finds a summer job taking the girls to the beach again. She goes to visit Maestra Oliviera and finds that she has taken ill and gone to the hospital. On her way home she finds Ada and Antonio frantic because they can't find Melina, their mother. Elena goes to help, Antonio curses at her, and they find her in the water, dirty and muddy, but alive.

In Chapter 21, Elena goes to Lila and finds her in an ugly, spiteful mood. She spends evenings with their friends and hasn't invited Elena along. She's also been out with Antonio. Elena is hurt and ready to go when Lila finally shares important news with her. Stefano refused to put the photograph in the shop. She then tells Elena to 'wait' on the outcome of the bet. Elena feels a flood of anger at Lila for always pushing to be the best. It is followed by shame at the thought. She leaves.

In Chapter 22, Elena's mind does a complete turnaround. Surely Lila's problems are worse. Surely it would be wonderful to study with her again. She wonders if Lila is saying farewell to her youth and her wholeness, being swallowed as a female by the needs of the neighborhood: husband, children, years of being a mother.

Chapter 23 opens in late July, with Elena at the beach with the young girls she cares for. She takes her books and tries to read them. Marisa Saratorre shows up, with Alfonso. Elena asks after Nino, and Marisa reports that he's graduated and gone to London to learn English. Lila shows up with Antonio, and the friends experience several tense minutes. Elena pushes Lila on the bet, that she should enroll in school, and Lila responds that she is pregnant.

During Chapter 24, Lila becomes manic, helping Stefano at the new grocery store in Naples, and often to visit the new shoe store on the Piazza. She manages everybody



and tries to oversee everyone. After wreaking havoc in both locations, she goes back to the old grocery and works there. Her work is successful at all locations. Elena visits her one day and Lila doesn't look or sound good. She is generous with Stefano's money--sharing with the people in the neighborhood that have needs. She asks if Elena needs book money. Meanwhile, the men hash out the management of the shoe store. It is decided that the fiancées in question, Pinuccia and Gigliola, will manage the store together, as long as Stefano allows the photo of Lila to be displayed. She goes on to tell Elena that she lost the bet; the conversation continues as Lila shares how much she hates being pregnant and hates children. Elena encourages her to spend some time with her charges. It works for a while, and then one of them falls and busts her lip.

Analysis

Some huge plot developments happen in these chapters. Rino and Pinuccia are sneaking over to Lila's to have sex--Pinuccia hints that she may have a child before Lila does, which is foreshadowing, even though the two aren't married yet. Rino is definitely the least intelligent in the match of wits between himself, the Solaras, and Stefano. If he wasn't such a violent, repulsive character, he may be a sympathetic one. As it is, he uses Lila's superior intelligence and wits to curry favor with the other men. A new store, funded by the Solaras but selling Cerullo shoes, will soon open on the Piazza, and the store will become very significant as the story progresses.

The scene where Lila invites Elena over and then proceeds to treat her cruelly is very interesting. The reader can see Lila's personality displayed--she spends hours being rude to Elena, has her on the brink of being so disgusted she's going to leave, and then pulls her back into the fold with some juicy information. Lila is so erratic the reader may not often think of her as narcissistic, but she very much displays those tendencies in this scene. The reader may wonder what Lila feels she must continue to take from Elena; she who on paper has everything, while Elena is still poor, single, and not nearly as pretty. The bet they make is a loaded one, although Lila would never make a bet that she may lose.

In these chapters the reader learns that Nino has graduated and left Naples for London to learn English and study the economy. Here the author introduces one of her themes: feminism. Here Elena exclaims-- "why may a woman not do as he has done?" It is a pertinent question, and the reality is that it is out of the question for the two main characters. Nino is a man and may do as he wishes after school. As girls, Elena and Lila must study, marry, or work. There is no traveling about. In this same scene the reader learns that Lila is pregnant, and the author uses language that has become common descriptors of Lila--the baby is "a force that she must subdue". Lila feels that the baby is an enormous imposition, that sex is disgusting, and that Stefano has planted something in her that she must rid herself of. This language foreshadows the eventual miscarriage and the rumors that Lila forced the baby to die by sheer will.



Discussion Question 1

What veins of feminism are evident running through these chapters?

Discussion Question 2

How is the store on the Piazza dei Martiri used as a pawn between the three families?

Discussion Question 3

How has Elena's symbiotic attachment to Lila changed from when they were younger?
Has it stayed the same?

Vocabulary

presumptuous, traumatic, phantom, feigned, frivolous, proprietor, decrees, placate,
tactfully



Chapters 25-30

Summary

Elena loses her job with the little girls. Lila is too busy with the new grocery store to really notice. She actually tells Elena that she is waging war against everybody around her that has allied themselves with Michele. She is wound tight with anxiety and Elena is worried for her. The night the new grocery store opens, Lila is terrible and provoking to Stefano. As the new shoe store on the Piazza prepares to open, she gets worse. The pregnancy has confused and bothered her, and she takes her angst out on everyone. Soon Lila has an idea--she will let the men display the photo "but only in her way". Elena goes with her to make some changes to it. Lila disfigures the photo with strips of black paper, making it abstract, but still beautiful. Rino, Pinuccia, and Gigilola are openly against it, but once Michele proclaims it good, Lila has won.

In Chapter 26, Lila decides the photo needs more color, and Michele gives her a blank slate to do as she wishes to it. She and Elena shut themselves in the shoe store for a few days working on the photo. The girls work together in great joy, creating something; rather, taking something and physically changing it to something else.

As Chapter 27 opens, the shoe store on the Piazza has opened. Elena sees but can't verbalize how money alone doesn't close the gap between 'having' and 'not-having'. There's a quality there that she feels the lack of. Alfonso, Stefano's brother, is put to work in the shop, and in the brilliant lighting and beauty he seems to light up himself. Elena notes that Alfonso is 'concealing another person'. The shoe store is named "Solara", not "Cerullo". Lila asks Rino about it--do they owe money to Signora Solara? Lila goes off for a walk with Michele, and Stefano watches her angrily. When she returns, she looks drained and visits the restroom; she emerges bleeding, the beginning of a miscarriage.

In Chapter 28, Lila has lost the baby and goes back to work in the new grocery store. She takes this new phase in her life to calm down and confine her energies to the grocery store. Stefano's mother appreciates this and begins to take Lila's side whenever Stefano and/or Pinuccia complain about her. For Elena, school begins, and she seems to get her groove back. Now that Nino is gone, Professor Galiani focuses all of her efforts on Elena, who is short on her supplies. Maestra Oliviera is sick and unavailable to give her the latest books. Elena asks Alfonso if they can share books; the next thing she knows, Lila has purchased all of her books and has reminded her of the bet--that Elena must make the highest grades that year.

At the beginning of Chapter 29, Elena is infused with energy because of the brand new books. Galiani begins to give Elena old newspapers to read as well. With nobody else to talk to, she shares her new knowledge with Lila, who only half listens. Lila, on the other hand, is obsessed with the origin of the Solara family's money, and of Stefano's. The fact that she doesn't own anything bothers her. Meanwhile, in her perusal of local



newspapers Elena finds an article that praises the new shoe store, in particular the panel of the photo Lila and Elena made. While looking for further articles, they find one that criticizes it heavily--written by Donato Sarratorre.

In Chapter 30, the shoe store is wildly popular due to the press. In particular, the shoes Lila designed years ago are very popular. The business partners decide Lila must design something new, but she refuses. Gigliola and Pinuccia, who run the shop, are jealous at the importance the men assign to Lila, and their anger begins a string of fights that extend to their respective fiances--Rino and Michele. The shop and the shoes continue to be a power struggle between the three families; Michele threatens to put Lila in charge of both girls in the shoe shop. This suggestion causes a massive argument, during which the photo of Lila literally bursts into flames.

Analysis

These chapters focus mainly on the continuing power struggle regarding the shoe shop, which is owned by the Solaras and Stefano but is filled with shoes made in the Cerullo factory. At the beginning of this struggle is the photo of Lila, which she uses--with great success--as a bargaining tool to get what she wants. For two chapters Elena and Lila work on the photo together. It is one of the rare times in these pages that the girls are unified and not carrying some hidden agenda against one another. Elena mentions the joy she has in the shared creation. The author lets the reader know that Lila is literally trying to make herself over with the photo. She is taking the image of her in wedding attire and remaking it, erasing it, and destroying it. This symbolizes how she feels about her choices in marriage, the life she now feels trapped in. The author finishes this long and eloquent passage--nearly two chapters in duration--with Lila's miscarriage, and the timing is not accidental. Just as the young girl finishes remaking her own image as an expression of her emotions, expressing her desire to erase the form of 'Signora Carracci', the baby destroys itself in her womb. The entire section is powerful and very telling of Lila's character.

Ferrante plants several seeds in these chapters which will develop as the plot continues. One is that Michele emerges as the true 'enemy' in the story. While Stefano has the ability to beat Lila when he wishes, she always says that she'll heal and be better than before. However, everybody in the story: Stefano, Rino, Pinuccia, Gigliola, and even Marcello, Lila, and Elena, truly fear Michele Solara. His influence, his money, and his cruel intelligence all make him a formidable force. What's more, he is open in his admiration of Lila, and this will only become more of an issue as the story continues.

In these chapters the author first makes mention of Signora Solara holding the keys to the neighborhood. This is fleshed out in the two novels that follow this one, but much of the Solara family funds come from loan-sharking. Lila offhandedly muses to Elena if Stefano borrowed money from Signora Solara to fund the grocery--this foreshadows a time at the end of the book, when Stefano is squeezed in all directions to pay back his loans. The author only once mentions the Signora's "little red book", but the mention is overlaid with fear and foreboding.



The reader also sees Alfonso Carracci blossoming in the shoe store. Elena and Lila both note that he seems lit from within in the posh and fancy shop. Elena also says that Alfonso seems to be "hiding another man within"--an oblique reference to Alfonso being a homosexual, which is mentioned in the first novel in the form of childhood teasing. However, as these events take place in the mid-1960s, in a provincial area of Italy, Alfonso's preferences are forced to stay in the dark. As the novel progresses he stays in the shoe shop, where he feels most comfortable, and also continues his respectable relationship with Marisa Sarratorre.

Discussion Question 1

Discuss Lila's purpose in transforming the photograph for the shoe store.

Discussion Question 2

How does Elena's mother feel about her daughter- her education, her friendship with Lila?

Discussion Question 3

What does Lila mean when she realizes she's 'become Signora Carracci?'

Vocabulary

timidity, precision, engulfed, subsequent. banal, bewilderment, ottoman, enthralled, dissipated, haphazard, stimulating



Chapters 31-36

Summary

The men blame Gigliola for the fire because of her smoking habit, who, in turn, accuses the photo itself, because it is of the devil. Life goes on, except that Michele starts hanging around the grocery where Lila works, rousing Stefano's ire. Lila is bitter during this time. The fiancées, Pinuccia and Gigliola, still upset over the attention Lila receives from Michele. They in turn work on their men to settle the matter. Stefano and Rino approach Michele and ask him to leave Lila alone, but he overcomes them with his superior intelligence: Lila, he claims, would make the store in the Piazza shine, and they were wasting her in the grocery store. Stefano won't allow that, but he will urge her to design new shoes. Lila refuses. She is in low spirits and asks Elena to stay near her.

In Chapter 32, Lila tells Stefano and Michele that she will design shoes, but then she actually asks Rino to do it and just tell them they are her designs. Elena spends deliberate time with Lila; they go to the movies, to lectures, often they have a good time, at least until they get back to the neighborhood and its issues. Pinuccia winds up pregnant, and Stefano is furious because it comes to light that Lila has been allowing the couple to meet in their house.

Chapter 33 sees a rushed wedding for Rino and Pinuccia, and Professor Galiani invites Elena to her house for a party. Elena is immediately afraid to go to the party. Lila offers to go with her.

In Chapter 34, it is the night of the party, and Stefano drives the girls and leaves them at the apartment. The girls immediately meet Professor Galiani's son Armando, who is very complimentary of Elena. Most of the kids at the party seem to know her by reputation, and she feels at home in the academic environment. She thrives on their approval, and particularly in the fact that none of them seem to notice Lila. At the professor's urging, Armando introduces Elena to his sister Nadia; she is the beautiful girlfriend of Nino Sarratorre.

In Chapter 35, Elena meets Nadia and finds her delightful. Nadia and Nino engage her in a lively conversation and she feels good. The young people dance; Nino asks Lila to dance but she says no. Elena revels in the intellectual conversation and joins in at one point. Nino, Nadia, and the Professor are impressed, and then Lila asks if she can leave.

In Chapter 36, in the car on the way home, Lila treats Elena with extreme rudeness, making fun of her friends and the way Elena acted around them. To Stefano, she disdains the professor's home and children. She is very spiteful and hurts Elena excessively. When they arrive at Elena's house, Stefano tells her not to take Lila seriously, that she's joking.



Analysis

These chapters begin with the girls drawing close together. After the fire and the miscarriage, Lila feels as if she is a destructive force, and many people in the neighborhood agree with her. She begs Elena to stay close to her while the men discuss ways to design new shoes and ways to involve Lila in the Piazza shop. The girls spend a lot of time together; Elena makes an effort to involve Lila in her life with her friends. Lila begs her, "stay near me, even if you're better than me." This is the last time for a while that the girls will be in sync, and Lila's words to Elena, "even if you're better than me," are truly foreshadowing what happens at the end of these chapters.

In the meantime, Stefano will not let Lila work at the Piazza, but he will let her design new shoes. She doesn't want to, in fact she gives a long speech that the initial pair of shoes she designed were for Rino, to save him from poverty. Now that he is an adult, and has shown himself to sell her out on every occasion, the inspiration is gone. She tells Rino to design the shoes himself and she will put her name to them. This is an interesting realization on Lila's part, and further fleshes out the symbol of the shoes from the first novel.

The main event in these chapters is the party at Professor Galiani's house. There is a lot going on in these scenes. The author does a brilliant job of building up Elena's self-confidence, only to have Lila tear it down. In the first novel in the series, Elena is constantly evaluating herself only as compared to Lila. Finally, at the age of 17, Elena has developed a sliver of confidence on her own, buoyed by her academic success. At the party, she shines. The students know her and respect her. They ask her opinion, they ask her to dance, they get drinks for her. She speaks with confidence on academic subjects and commands the conversation. Elena feels the best she's ever felt, truly in her element. The reader learns from Elena's future-reference of Lila's notebooks that watching this process deeply hurts Lila. Lila wants to go to the party to get a break from Stefano and the grocery. She is used to winning attention with her looks and her wits, but she is summarily dismissed at the professor's home. One should note that Lila never says she's specifically jealous of Elena as much as she is hurt because she realizes her life will always be about marriage, the grocery, and children. How Lila reacts to Elena is one of the hardest passages to read in the novel--she is so spiteful, mean, and hurtful, making fun of Elena and her friends and throwing her marriage in Elena's face. In the space of a moment she has shot through the hard gained confidence that Elena enjoyed for a short time.

The other notable event from the party is the reintroduction of Nino Sarratorre, whose beautiful girlfriend from earlier in the story is the professor's daughter Nadia. Nadia, who is 15, turns out to be a lovely girl. Elena and Nino enjoy lively conversation, and at one point Elena sees him ask Lila to dance. Later, Lila will say that Nino's asking her to dance was the beginning of an enlightenment for her.



Discussion Question 1

What does Michele mean when he says Lila needs to command?

Discussion Question 2

Discuss Elena's conflicting feelings about Lila going with her to Professor Galiani's house.

Discussion Question 3

What is Lila's true aim in the way she treats Elena after the party?

Vocabulary

wrangling, circumspect, obstinacy, marveled, intimidated, sedately, infuriated, recalcitrant



Chapters 37-42

Summary

Elena starts chapter 37 by announcing that the party leads to a long separation from Lila. With all of Lila's difficulties, she had never deliberately humiliated her friend. Elena finishes school and takes a job at a bookstore in Naples without speaking to Lila. She sees Armando, but her self-confidence is dashed from Lila's treatment, and she puts him off. Soon after, Nino shows up and takes Elena out for a walk. He gives her a journal to read and they discuss the Professor and her family. He suggests an article for Elena to read, and tells her to give it to Lila next. Elena learns that he will be on Ischia for the summer. He promises to see her again soon.

In Chapter 38, Elena attends Rino's and Pinuccia's wedding reluctantly. It's not as classy as Lila's and Stefano's wedding because Stefano says he doesn't have enough money to spare. Elena attends the wedding with Marisa and Alfonso, who are still together. Alfonso is turned out beautifully. During the reception, Lila sits next to Michele and acts obnoxious, and Gino the son of the pharmacist accuses Alfonso of being a homosexual. Marisa responds by planting a passionate kiss on Alfonso. Elena admires Marisa, and regrets not being better friends with her because she was always wrapped up with Lila.

During Chapter 39, Elena dances with Lila's father. After an awkward, silent waltz, he asks her to visit Lila. The summer drags on, boring. Elena is bored at the bookstore. In the midst of the summer stupor, Carmen, Ada, and Pasquale come to see Elena. They are all hard on her for failing to keep up with Lila, no matter what Lila may have done to Elena. They report that Lila is in poor shape and won't go to a doctor, and that only Elena is able to make her go.

In Chapter 40, Elena goes to see Lila, who tries to make Elena swear that she wasn't angry with her. Elena refuses, and Lila offers an apology and agrees to go to the doctor, who reports that Lila is young and weak--physically. The doctor suggests swimming to strengthen her body. Stefano wants to take a house and send Lila with her mother and Pinuccia so she can swim and relax and regain her strength. She asks Elena to come, but she has to work. Lila promises to pay Elena whatever the bookstore would have paid. Elena refuses, hard pressed to spend two months with the volatile women and their husbands. Nino appears the next day, charms Elena, holds her hand and kisses her, saying goodbye for the summer. The next day Elena goes to Lila and says she'll join her at the beach, if they can go to Ischia, to Nino.

Chapter 41 opens on the port in Ischia: Stefano, Lila, Rino, a pregnant Pinuccia, Nunzia, and Elena. The group is already tense and it's only the first day. The husbands leave; Elena is eager to see Nino.



In Chapter 42, the girls go to the beach. Elena stays too long, looking for Nino, and gets sunburned; she then has to stay out of the sun all week, although she continually tries to make her way to Forio, the village where he's staying. She takes the girls to Nella's house, who tells her that Nino is around.

Analysis

The tension that has been mounting for a while breaks after the party, and Elena in her hurt and humiliation takes a break from Lila. Looking back, Elena realizes that Lila felt the need to humiliate her in order to better endure her own humiliation. But at the time, Lila's words continue to wound and burn, and Elena goes on with her life without seeing her. The author doesn't say exactly how long goes by, but a few months at least; school has let out, and Elena has found a job. She feels completely justified in living her life without her friend. When the professor's son Armando comes to see her, she doesn't engage with him. Lila's words still sting, Elena realizes that "Day by day the sense of myself that had so unexpectedly expanded after the party diminished." In one car ride, Lila has reduced Elena to a young girl again. At Rino's wedding, Lila watches for Elena. The reader can see that Lila wishes for her friend to be back at her side, but she is a force unto herself and doesn't make any move towards fixing things. Lila's friends and family see it, though: Lila's father asks Elena to visit his daughter. The reader may wonder why everybody is so willing to give Lila what she wishes when she behaves so terribly. The author inserts no sense of judgment or justice in the novel: as the story moves along, the reader sees that Lila is who she is, and Elena is who she is. Neither of them are very good at learning lessons from their mistakes.

The character of Nino, whom the author has dropped in here and there throughout this novel and the previous one in the series, appears in the bookstore to see Elena. School is out, he is not in London. He comes around now and then to see Elena. They go for a walk, he gives her a journal that happens to feature an article he wrote. The reader may begin to wonder what Nino is all about. He has a girlfriend, yet he pays attention to Elena. Is he after the praise and interest she willingly shares when she sees him?

The sense of injustice surrounding Lila's actions increases when the neighborhood group comes to Elena and chastises her for dropping Lila. They actually say, "it doesn't matter what she did; we have to remember what she's done for the neighborhood." Lila is who she is, and she is ill and needs motivation to visit the doctor. Her apology to Elena is lacking, but the reader can take comfort that she at least knew the reason Elena was angry.

Ischia is the setting for the bulk of the novel. With the girls there without their husbands, and Nino and his friend down the beach; for Elena, the magic of the sun and sand is bound to affect somebody. Elena "feels reckless and glad about it"--she sees the trip as her opportunity to finally move things along with Nino, who, when he said goodbye to her the week before, kissed her and caressed her hand.



Discussion Question 1

Elena accuses Lila of having "the gaze of the neighborhood." Is this true?

Discussion Question 2

What are Nino's feelings towards Elena?

Discussion Question 3

Discuss the manner in which Elena is 'forced' to allow Lila back into her life.

Vocabulary

destitute, irascible, dissolute, petulant, incongruously, trite, hastened, discourteous, spendthrift



Chapters 43-48

Summary

Lila teases Elena, that she conned her into visiting Ischia so she could see Nino. Elena refuses to admit this. The girls find the Sarratorre family on the beach. The girls immediately start good conversations with Donato and Lidia and the younger kids, and eventually, way out at sea, Elena glimpses Nino swimming. At the time, Donato is helping Lila learn to swim, and when Nino sees the girls, he's a little bit rude. He gives Elena his address and leaves without saying goodbye.

In Chapter 44, Lila and Pinuccia are dissatisfied with Nino's manners, but think Donato is wonderful. Elena doesn't want to defend Nino, but she wants the girls to understand how awful Donato is. Elena, tired of Lila's high-handedness, announces that when the husbands arrive, she is going to see Nino. Lila slyly reminds her that she's paying her, and says she didn't bring Elena there for fun.

During Chapter 45, the husbands have arrived. On Sunday morning, Elena goes to the beach without them, returns to find them gone, and meets up with them again in the afternoon. Lila and Penuccia announce that they saw Nino on the beach, and that he's an amazing swimmer. Nino has a friend names Bruno Soccavo, whose family owns a sausage factory. The husbands encourage Elena to take Bruno over Nino because he has money. Elena decides to walk to Nino's house. They go for a walk around Forio. They talk politics, and he takes her hand. In town, they run into the two couples on their scooters. After exchanging pleasantries, the couples speed away and leave Nino and Elena. Nino makes a rude comment about Stefano.

In Chapter 46, Elena meets Nino's friend Bruno. They arrange to meet the next morning on the beach. Once back in the house, Lila teases Elena, but her mother comes to Elena's aid. The next day, Lila is in a foul mood towards Elena. Within a few hours, Lila has picked up swimming very easily. The boys show up. Nino and Elena immediately start talking academics, and Bruno is at once attentive to Pinuccia, while Lila watches everything quietly. They leave after a while, and again Nino comments what a shame it is that Lila got married and didn't continue in school. That evening, Lila is pensive and calm, and just before bed, asks Elena for one of her books.

During Chapter 47, the five young people settle in a routine. The boys study in the morning, see the girls in the late afternoon, and resume studying. Pinuccia mentions that Nino is constantly talking. Nino's behavior is erratic, and Elena finds herself trying to get a handle on his personality. She wishes she and Nino had an easier manner. Lila always listens attentively to their conversations and sometimes encourages them, but seldom joins in. One day she finally does, and makes a good argument against Nino. When alone, Lila and Pinuccia criticize Nino and force Elena to defend him.



In Chapter 48, when the boys visit at the end of the week, things take a different turn. Pinuccia is in a poor mood, and Lila, who has just read Elena's volume of Beckett's plays, begins a conversation with Nino about the theatre. Nino, who has always told Elena that the literature doesn't interest him, asks Lila if he can borrow the book, promising to Lila that they can discuss it the next day. When Lila says she'll be with her husband, Nino is visibly annoyed.

Analysis

The next few groups of chapters all deal with the time on the beach. At the beginning of the summer vacation, there is hope for Elena, that she will finally find time to make things happen with Nino. He is happy to see her. They talk politics, they walk in the market, they hold hands. The reader must wonder how Nino truly feels about Elena, in light of his girlfriend back in Naples, and his growing interest in Lila's affairs. For it is very soon that the reader can see what Elena is slower to perceive: Nino admires Elena, even likes her, and respects her brilliance, but Lila excites him. The reader is slowly watching the inevitable happen--Nino falling for Lila. Lila, for her part, is interested in being part of the conversations, but one cannot tell at this point if she returns Nino's fascination. The reader already knows that Lila feels uneducated. She is brilliant, but uneducated. It is very interesting to note, and it is clear foreshadowing for Lila's future, that when she asks Nino specific questions about how his political theories look in real life, with real people of the neighborhood, he doesn't know how to respond. For Nino, it is all intellect and academics, but Lila, who is entangled in the lives and issues of Pasquale, Carmen, and the like, understands the political issues from ground level. Nino may be able to write about the political problems of the city, but if anyone can change lives in a tangible manner, it will be Lila.

These chapters are difficult to endure because Elena is once again going to lose to Lila, but the reader must wonder if Nino is worth the trouble. He's obviously fickle, unreliable, and unfaithful--he is supposedly attached to Nadia Galiani, back in Naples--and both Lila and Pinuccia, for their lack of education, can clearly see his faults, where Elena cannot. He is on the pompous and arrogant side, and controls the conversation so that he can appear smart. For Elena, who desperately wants to be known as smart, this is an understandable habit. But for Lila and Pinuccia, who live a real life with real concerns--finances, marriage, children--Nino's high-handed conversation grows ridiculous.

At the close of these chapters, when the husbands are coming back again and Elena hopes she will get a day alone with Nino, Lila mentions the return of Stefano and the reader sees obvious irritation in Nino, signaling his growing feelings for Lila.

Discussion Question 1

What is behind Nino's propensity to control and direct the conversation?



Discussion Question 2

Discuss the motivation behind Lila's ill treatment of Elena on the beach trip.

Discussion Question 3

Discuss the ways in which Elena is an unreliable narrator, particularly during the events in Ischia.

Vocabulary

fatuous, contours, prudently, disdainful, rancor, helm, blotches, precarious, allusive



Chapter 49-54

Summary

In Chapter 49, Lila is in happy mood and Elena is not. She then surmises that Nino must have told her he'd be at Barano to lure her there to see him; she decides to visit him there the next day. The husbands show up, and Lila is unexpectedly affectionate while Pinuccia is still irritable. Elena wants to read what she thinks will impress Nino the most, but she's not sure what that may be. She's irritated how much work she has put into her education, and Lila has only to say one offhand remark about a play to entrance Nino. She notices that she's missing a book, and finds it in Lila's room.

In Chapter 50, Elena is confused about what she should do, and decides not to go to Barano, where the Sarratorre beach house is, but goes to their beach instead. Rino and Pinuccia are there, and Pinuccia is still in a bad humor. Lila and Stefano appear, and Lila is in a fantastic mood. When the group discusses the boys, the wives stay out of it, as if Elena is the one who is seeing them. The husbands tease Elena about her two boyfriends. The day passes quickly and the husbands prepare to leave; Elena finds Lila with the missing book and asks why Lila wants to read so suddenly. Lila replies: it's none of your business.

In Chapter 51, it's Monday and the husbands are gone, and Nino appears at the beach early. Bruno is gone, Pinuccia is irritable, and Nino begins by listing the wrongs his father has committed. Suddenly he slaps a big kiss on Elena's cheek, saying, "I'm really happy to see you." He repeats the gesture with Lila. For a few minutes they discuss the plays of Beckett, and then Nino playfully drags both girls into the water. Bruno arrives, and Pinuccia's mood improves. The group has become intimate friends, with inside jokes and ease of manner and routine. Lila more often begins academic conversations, which Nino doesn't know how to handle.

Chapter 52 opens that evening, with Pina still in a bad mood and Elena as well, for having to sleep with her that night. When she wakes, Lila is reading one of her books again. Lila asks her if she likes Nino, seriously, and Elena says no. At the beach, the girls are all in a tense mood. The boys come, their moods just as bad. Nino asks Lila what they will do when the husbands come. Elena offers that she's free, and Nino asks her if she will spend the day with him.

In Chapter 53, Lila, Nino, and Elena go for a swim. They begin with their hands linked together, and then Nino and Lila separate from her and swim far out, farther than she is comfortable going. Elena is worried about Lila, but they don't return, so she goes back to the beach. Bruno is there alone; Pinuccia has gone back to the house and says she is returning to Naples.

Chapter 54 approaches the climax of the emotions that have been building in intensity during the weeks at the beach. Pina is really trying to return to Naples; Elena finds her



packing her bags. Lila returns from the beach in a daze. Pina is still in her bathing suit, uncontrollable, erratic. Lila hears the husbands approach the house and tells Pina to pull herself together. The two married girls share a look, a moment; information passes between them but Elena can't discern what it is. At the end of it, Pina gets up and gets dressed.

Analysis

The procession of Nino's feelings for Lila are more obvious in these chapters, but not yet to Elena. It is notable that the wives are careful to leave themselves out of the recounting of stories of Nino and Bruno; as if Elena is the only one spending time with them. It is ironic and a bit sad that the husbands think these two young men are all focused on Elena, when almost the opposite is true. Nino's actions continue to confuse. After the weekend away, he kisses Elena and says how happy he is to see her; he seems sincere, and his followup action to Lila seems almost an afterthought. Is this congruent with the suspicion that he is falling for Lila?

Pinuccia's behavior becomes increasingly erratic. She's in a bad mood for most of these chapters, bouncing between frantic and calm, excited to see her husband and excited to see Bruno. She says at one point that if Bruno won't be at the beach, she may as well not be there. The reader can surmise that Pina has become attached to Bruno, as Lila is growing attached to Nino, but the two girls are handling their feelings differently. The moment in the last paragraph of chapter 54, when their eyes meet, it is as if Lila is saying, "I understand you. The fairy tale week with Bruno is over, and reality with Rino is back. But it is reality and there is no escaping it." However, knowing the differences in Lila's and Pina's character, one wonders if Lila will follow her own advice. When Lila and Nino leave Elena behind for their long swim, it is as if the initial swim far away is a symbol for their initial foray into their affair: Elena is left behind. Afterwards, the author describes Lila's face as, "repressing joy and fear at the same time." It is an apt description of how standing on the brink of forbidden love would make one feel.

Perhaps the most interesting words of advice in this section come from Nunzia, who seeks Elena out to try to share why Pina's and Lila's behavior is so odd. Marriage, she basically says, is a mixture of love and hate that a woman has to deal with. Perhaps the most intimate statement is: "one day you're getting hit, the next kissed."

Discussion Question 1

Explain the significance of Nunzia's musings on love and marriage: "she had loved Fernando very much but she had also hated him."

Discussion Question 2

What are some reasons for Pinuccia's erratic behavior? How are her struggles similar to Lila's? How are they different?



Discussion Question 3

What are some indications that Elena is missing what's happening between Nino and Lila?

Vocabulary

revert, ardent, listless, exuberance, feigned, malingerer, effusiveness, evocative, revulsion



Chapters 55-60

Summary

The husbands arrive and Lila is even more affectionate than the previous weekend. Pina is happy to see Rino, and immediately begs him to take her away. The ensuing discussion is tense. Rino loses his temper and Stefano takes Lila out to dinner. Rino and Pina disappear into the bedroom. Elena is forced to console Nunzia, saying it must be the pregnancy. Late in the night, Lila comes into Elena's room. She tells her that Nino kissed her.

In Chapter 56, Lila explains the event in further detail. They were swimming, Lila had leaned against Nino for support and he had kissed her. She had pushed him away and Nino had told her how long he had loved her. Lila responded never to do that again. She waits for Elena's reaction, and Elena says she would never want to be kissed by Nino. Lila seems to sense that she is lying, but admires the brave face she has put on it, and leaves. Elena realizes that she had been probably too successful in hiding her feelings for Nino. Elena decides that she can view their love from a distance, like a beautiful, poetic, unattainable thing. Because Lila is married, it is impossible. The morning comes and she rushes out to meet him.

Chapter 57 opens on the beach, where Elena meets Nino for their day together. He suggests renting a boat to row out to a mountain for a short hike. He tells Elena about the kiss. He doesn't speak in broad generalities, as is his way, but specifically of Lila and himself. Elena tries to tell Nino to give up; that Lila will stay with Stefano, how close and affectionate they have been all summer, and how much he loves her. Elena feels important as the go-between for Lila and Nino, the two people she loves the best. When she returns to the house, all is in an uproar because Pina has gone home.

In Chapter 58, Lila confides that she thinks Pina was distraught because she had started to like Bruno; and yet Bruno, according to Lila via Nino, is interested in Elena. Lila asks Elena if Nino told her about the kiss; Elena lies and says no. Elena ponders Lila's information about Bruno and Pina, and mentally applauds Pina for the strength to run back home to her husband. The next day the girls go to the beach and the boys are already there; except now, Bruno attaches himself to Elena so that Lila and Nino may stay together. Elena tries to be polite to Bruno but the conversation is hard going. Eventually Nino asks if they can meet in town after dinner. Elena says no, and then Lila chimes in and says they can meet the next night after dinner, when she has to call Stefano. When the boys leave, Lila chastises Elena for leaving her alone with Nino all day. They quarrel; Lila is irrational.

In Chapter 59, the boys show up at the beach early so they can spend the evening with the girls. Lila explodes at them, saying they should study when they want, not plan around her and Elena. She takes her bag and returns to the house. Eventually Elena returns to the house and tells Lila she overdid her tantrum. That evening, Lila dresses



herself beautifully for the trip into town and they meet the boys in Forio. While at the ice cream parlor, Lila leaves to call Stefano and Nino soon follows. Elena sits with Nunzia and Bruno for a few minutes before getting up to explore. She finds Lila and Nino kissing passionately in a garden.

Chapter 60 details the next few days, cementing the affair between Nino and Lila. They hold hands, they run off, they swim away together, they kiss. Elena is upset and disgusted at their behavior. Nino brings a letter to the beach, from Nadia. Lila, showing the Lila the reader has known all along, nastily asks about it and then takes it and reads it aloud, making fun of Nadia's childish phrases and words. She challenges Nino to leave her, and he responds with his own challenge: that she leave Stefano. Lila is incensed. She makes a grand speech to Nino about making such a foolish suggestion, and leaves.

Analysis

Finally, the tension breaks in this group of chapters. Pina leaves, overcome with her attraction to Bruno. Lila says that Bruno actually likes Elena. Nino kisses Lila. Many emotions boil over in the space of a few pages.

Lila tells Elena immediately what happened, but Elena and the reader can see how this has affected the usually cold and unflappable Lila. Elena remarks that she looks like she is confessing while trying to hide something even more confessable. Lila is married, and untouchable, but somehow the author has let the reader know that Nino has touched her deeply. Elena is overcome with sadness; Nino has been the boy she has loved for so long. However, due to the nature of her relationship with Lila, she cannot make her hurt known. She tells Lila she would never kiss Nino; Lila probably does not believe her, but admires her strength.

It is noticeable that Elena is the dependable one that mops up after everyone's emotional breakdowns. When Nino loses his temper, Elena comes to help clean up. She consoles Nunzia. In her mind, she makes excuses for Nino's reprehensible tendency to kiss her, kiss Nadia, kiss Lila. When she and Nino spend the day together discussing his love for Lila, she is pleased to be the hub between the two of them, the confidante. She uses the term 'centrality.' Because she can't have him, she is content to clean up their mess. However, this early in the game, Elena still feels like his feelings won't get him anywhere. After that first kiss, Lila told him no, never to kiss her. Lila is married and certainly wouldn't betray Stefano. Elena truly feels like she will be happily be Nino's emotional crutch when he can't have Lila.

However, for the next day or two the reader ironically sees Lila behaving in the same erratic, overblown way that Pinuccia had when she was dealing with her feelings for Bruno. Irrational outbursts, contradictory claims--Lila's emotions are in flux just as Pina's were. It is obvious to the reader what is happening, but still not to Elena. It is not until the evening in Forio, when she finds them kissing, does Elena finally feel a real break in her feelings for them both. She hates them both, disgusted that they would both throw



away their commitments so easily. The reader may ask, would Elena, given her irrational attachment to Nino, do the same?

In her pondering of Lila's and Nino's affair, Elena recounts how Lila operates in the world: "Lila knew how to make things happen."

Discussion Question 1

In Nino falling for Lila, are Elena's feelings of betrayal justified? What are the issues involved there?

Discussion Question 2

What are the parallels between Lila's affection towards Stefano, and Nino's affection towards Elena?

Discussion Question 3

Discuss Elena's assertion that Nino and Lila are "like fallen divinities, once so clever, so intelligent, and now so stupid, involved in a stupid game."

Vocabulary

conciliatory, prudent, proficient, sublime, elective, affinities, utterable, gratified, centrality



Chapters 61-66

Summary

They leave the cafe and Lila is overwhelmed with emotion at kissing Nino. She specifically says, "I'm not like Pinuccia, I can do what I want." She goes on about Nino for most of the night while Elena listens. Eventually she tells Lila that Stefano will be there soon and they will have to return to reality. Lila lashes out and defends Nino, accusing Elena of always disparaging him. It is too much for Elena, who has been defending him to her all summer. Elena explodes and reminds her that Pinuccia was behaving better than she.

In Chapter 62, the girls stay away from the beach all day. In the afternoon Lila gets ready to see Stefano, and dresses herself beautifully, greets him serenely. However, when Stefano mentions the shoe store and the Solaras, Lila immediately loses her composure and they spend the evening fighting. The next morning Elena goes to see Nella, the owner of the Sarratore beach house, but only finds Donato. The rest of the family is in Forio with Nino. Donato walks with Elena a while; he apologizes for abusing her the few summers before. He goes on to say that Elena is much more beautiful than she thinks, although she should get new glasses and a new bathing suit. She feels gratified by his compliments until he brings up Nino; then she feels like he is playing with her. Elena feels like if she could just see Nino, maybe she can get him to love her, since Lila was certainly leaving him. She finds him at his house; he gives her a letter for Lila although Elena tries to convince him that they are leaving. Nino is melancholy and proclaims he's done studying.

Chapter 63 opens with Elena leaving Nino at the beach and going home alone. Stefano awaits her; he asks what they have been doing, why does Lila want to leave Ischia for Amalfi? He turns his irritation on Elena and blames her for Lila's caprice. Elena takes the letter to Lila, which essentially says that Nino promises to break it off with Nadia. Elena is shocked that it is not over; they will stay on Ischia and Nino and Lila will continue. Lila immediately turns on her charm again, acting affectionate with Stefano and smiling. She rides with him to his ferry trip home. Before leaving, Stefano apologizes to Elena, but in it is a veiled threat to keep Lila in line.

In Chapter 64, Elena warns Lila that what she is dealing with is dangerous and foolish. Lila exclaims that she is paving the way for girls like them--that a classy boy like Nino has just left his classy girlfriend for an uneducated housewife. Lila grows serious and says that the feeling of loving Nino is so wonderful she'll do anything to keep it. The next day at the beach, Bruno seems to be actively trying to seduce Elena. She has to tell him no several times, forcefully. Later that night, when the boys have gone, Elena tells Lila that she isn't going with them anymore, that she cannot stand to have Bruno touch her.

In Chapter 65, the girls begin seeing the boys from morning until midnight, and Elena tries to stop them by pleading headaches and refusing to go with them. She continues



to warn Lila about her husband's wrath. Elena allies herself with Lila's mother, asking her to go places with them. Nunzia is on her guard that something is going on. The next night they go to Bruno's house--a very wealthy house. Nino and Lila disappear and leave Elena with Bruno. In the taxi home, Elena cautions Lila about getting pregnant. Lila confirms that she and Nino have not had sex yet, but if they did he would use a condom. A discourse on birth control ensues. When they return home, Lila asks Elena to lie for her so she can spend the night at Nino's house while Bruno is gone. Their time at Ischia is almost over; Stefano will come back soon and it will be done. She begs Elena for help. Lila makes several grand speeches, exercises her force, and Elena agrees.

Chapter 66 opens with the many lies Elena must tell Nunzia to help Nino and Lila. Nunzia at first refuses, but Lila is too powerful, and gets her mother to agree. Elena feels the weight of the ironic turn of events, and justifiable anger at Lila. She wishes death and destruction on them both.

Analysis

During this section chapters, the readers watch as Elena's heart is dragged about, and Lila plots her most dangerous move yet. The danger in what she's doing is foreshadowed in Stefano's parting words to Elena, in which Elena reads, "tell your friend that if she goes too far again, it's over." Lila, who had been perfectly behaved all summer, was irascible that last weekend, overwhelmed by what to do about Nino.

Early on, Elena goes to Barano in hopes of seeing Nino, but sees his father instead, alone. Donato apologizes for how he "let his emotions go too far" (he sexually assaulted her) a few years ago. (these events occurred in the first novel in the series) He also tells her that she's more beautiful than she gives herself credit for. This meeting is a shade of something that's coming up soon--an indication of how Elena will deal with her bruised and battered heart.

Elena suffers during these chapters. In this stretch of plot between the moment Nino and Lila start, and when the plot is hatched the spend the night together, Elena is poised in tension, wondering where the affair will go. In great optimism she believes that Stefano's arrival will signal the end, before it really started. Nino would be crushed, she would be his supportive friend, but it really couldn't go anywhere else. When Nino writes Nadia to end his relationship with her, Elena is appalled that it is continuing, that "Lila is going to win." At this point Elena feels a deep regret that she didn't lay claim to Nino when they arrived. Of course, the need to claim a young man to two married women shouldn't be required, but she realizes the mistake she made in trying to cover up her feelings in order to save face. She spent the summer minimizing Nino, minimizing her feelings for him, and she lost him to Lila. The reader, and Elena, may wonder if it would have mattered??

The section of chapters ends with Lila asking Elena to cover for her so she can spend the night with Nino. Elena has warned Lila more times than she can count; warned her



about Stefano, warned her about the wrongness of the whole thing. Lila is convinced that she has finally experienced real love with Nino, and that she won't again. Soon, she argues, vacation will be over and she will go back to Naples with Stefano. This is their last chance, her last chance to have real love. How Lila really wins this argument is by playing to Elena's natural desire to be a part of everything Lila does. While no, she cannot spend the night with the lovers in Bruno's house, she can make the glorious night possible for them--her two favorite people. She reminds Elena that they are allied against the world. The world tells women "No, you can't," but this was Lila's way of saying "Yes, I can," and Elena can be part of that.

Discussion Question 1

Expand on Elena comparison of Lila's affair with Nino to Lila's disfiguring the wedding photo.

Discussion Question 2

Why doesn't Elena believe Donato's compliments towards her?

Discussion Question 3

Does Lila really believe she's invincible, or does she know her behavior is self-destructive?

Vocabulary

conjugal, contemptuous, patter, melancholy, relinquish, encumbered, rambling, discourse



Chapters 67-72

Summary

Elena is at the beach watching Nino and Lila swim off alone and hears a familiar voice. It is Michele Solara and his fiancée Gigliola. They ask where Lila is; Elena says she's swimming. She is tense and nervous, worried about Nino and Lila being caught by neighborhood people. Elena surmises that Michele came specifically to see Lila about the new shoes. Eventually Nino and Lila emerge from the water, hands linked, shoulders touching, close as can be. When Lila sees Michele she immediately pulls away. Elena introduces Nino around; Michele recognizes the name because Donato wrote a negative article about the shoe store. Michele asks Lila if she was sure Rino made the new shoes and she said yes. Michele tells Lila he wants her working in the shoe store by the end of the summer.

In Chapter 68, Elena is overwrought with tension. She tells Lila that Michele saw everything. Lila is not concerned and continues to plot with Nino. They go to the house and have a lovely evening; Lila is sweet to her mother and serves her well. Throughout the evening and the next morning, Elena mentions everything that can go wrong, and yet, the next morning she drops Lila at Nino's house. The cab takes her to Barano, to Nella's house.

The beginning of Chapter 69 finds Elena at Nella's house, begging to stay with her and the Sarratores for the night. Nella tells Elena that her cousin, Maestra Oliviera, always thought Lila was the best student, but then Nella disagrees. Lila, she says, sees Elena's value and so she wounds her on purpose. Elena feels satisfied but also understands that their relationship isn't that simple.

In Chapter 70, the Sarratores come up from the beach for lunch. Elena has a nice afternoon with the family; they play on the beach and have a nice dinner. Elena almost forgets about Nino and Lila. When the house is quiet, the family out at dinner, Elena goes for a walk on the beach. She lays on the beach and stares at the sky, filled with dark thoughts; she worries that she isn't good enough for Nino, for love, because she is too scared. She gives herself over to dark thoughts, and then Donato Sarratore shows up.

In Chapter 71, Donato and Elena talk on the beach for a while. He speaks in formless platitudes about how wonderful she is. She sees right through him, but decides to accept the mediocrity of the moment. She kisses him, and very slowly and without any pressure, she allows Donato to take her virginity. When it's over, Donato asks Elena when and where they can meet again. Elena tells him that they will not meet again; he's never to bother her again or she'll send Michele Solara after him.

In Chapter 72, it is the next morning. Elena wakes up at Nella's house satisfied and pleased, not at all regretful that she had sex with Donato. She takes a taxi to Forio to



pick Lila up from Nino's house. They don't speak at all on the way back. Elena wants to share her news with Lila, but on the other hand is afraid it will turn into a big comparison, and really, she doesn't want to hear about Lila and Nino. The event has detached them, from the world before Ischia, and from each other.

Analysis

While on one hand, these chapters could be showing the final consummation of two people in love, there is definitely a feeling of breaking in these chapters.

One may wonder what would have happened to Nino and Lila if they had had their one night and gone back to their respective lives. However, Lila is put on the defensive due to the surprise visit of Michele Solara. His visit is the catalyst that sets the affair on a different path. Until Michele shows up, Lila and Nino were going to have "one last night" and then return to married life, university life. However, with Michele's visit comes the near certainty of detection--of Stefano finding out what is going on in Ischia between Lila and Nino. The visit is also key because Michele Solara is not someone you want to have information to hold over your head.

Elena takes Lila to Nino's house and proceeds to Nella's. Nella shares words about Lila, about her cruelty, and the fact that Elena is of higher quality. While the words are kind, Elena realizes that their relationship is more enmeshed than that. However, Nella does make an incisive comment about Lila when she says that Lila "knows how to wound." A quick glance at the past several years of the friendship bears this statement out. What is interesting about this is that Nella had only met Lila the one time that the entire crowd visited the house in Barone. The people of the neighborhood have grown up around Lila and Elena, and Elena does not receive such support from other places.

While on the beach alone, Elena has varied dark thoughts, many about fear. She fears that Lila deserves to "win" Nino, because she was unable to take the risks to get him. Lila was willing to be driven by love, but Elena is generally driven by fear. In the dark of the beach she is assaulted by her fears. She is in a low place, and then Donato Sarratore finds her on the beach. What happens next is very interesting: Elena allows Donato, encourages him, to make love to her. Given the history of Donato's sexual assaulting Elena several years before, it is surprising that she would allow it. However, she is motivated by the need to grasp her own life and have her own experiences, because she has been peeping into Lila's and Nino's affair for the past week, and she wants to do something for herself. She is able to disassociate the experience from who she is with, and as far as the reader knows, she never tells a soul about it.

Discussion Question 1

What does Lila mean when she says, "things will go as they should go"?



Discussion Question 2

Why is Lila unworried about seeing Michele Solara on the beach?

Discussion Question 3

Is Nella correct when she says that Lila wounds Elena because she sees that Elena has a higher quality?

Vocabulary

profusely, intimate, verification, catastrophic, scenario, paradoxically, incantation, evocation, primacy, pirouette, precarious, hypnotic, tremulous, infinitesimal



Chapters 73-78

Summary

Elena reminds the reader that this story is being told from forty years in the future, and that she is gathering much of her information from Lila's notebooks. Lila wrote pages and pages about the night with Nino; not about sex, but about love. Lila writes that the marriage to Stefano had all but killed her; had certainly deadened her inside. But from the moment that Nino asked her to dance at the party, she felt awakened. Lila tells Elena none of this in the moments after their night together; her gain was Elena's loss. To Lila, Nino wasn't a summer fling, but a growing feeling inside of her. However, Elena feels that old feeling from their early youth, that whatever Lila gains, she loses.

In Chapter 74, they return to the house, and Lila is feverish with excitement for Nino. She wants to study what he studies so she can help him learn. Elena starts reminding her that her husband would arrive any minute; Lila asks if Elena thinks she can keep pace with Nino's studies, and Elena says no. She tries to implore Lila to leave Nino alone and let him live his own life, but she won't listen. Elena tells her that she's done with both of them.

At the beginning of Chapter 75, Stefano arrives. It is immediately apparent that the group is tense and anxious. He asks Lila about swimming with Nino--he heard from Ada, who heard from Gigliola, about Lila and Nino holding hands. Lila gives him nothing, in fact she responds with anger and insults. A huge fight ensues, in which Stefano shoves Lila into the bedroom and demands to know what's been going on. Elena and Nunzia try to reason with him from the other side of the door. They finally hear Lila basically say, "yes, you're right. Nino and I did all the things you're suspecting, and I hate you. Happy now?" Her voice is so biting and sarcastic that Stefano chooses to believe she's lying.

In Chapter 76, it is dawn, and Stefano emerges from the bedroom telling Elena and Nunzia to pack up. Nunzia chastises him for the mess he made in the kitchen during the fight, and he coldly reminds her that he pays for everything she ever does. Lila follows soon after, with dark glasses and long sleeves; she doesn't speak to Elena or her mother. As they leave the island Elena decides that she will leave the neighborhood, Nino, Lila, and everybody else; she will be detached and move on. Once back in Naples, Elena retrieves her job at the bookstore and manages to buy her schoolbooks for the coming year. She schools her emotions to the lowest reaction possible: Lila still had everything, including Nino, and Elena is filled with resentment.

In Chapter 77, school begins again. Elena is 18 and it is her last year. Alfonso tells her that when he is done with school he will marry Marisa, even though he will probably not be allowed to work in the shoe store "once Lila comes to work there." He reports that Lila has acted mad ever since their vacation. Elena continues to work hard. She gains extra money through tutoring and gives it to her mother. Professor Galiani, she notices,



is less friendly than in previous years. Near Christmas the teacher finally asks Elena what she knew about Nino--that he broke up with Nadia very unpleasantly, and she was upset and wondered where he'd gone. Elena swears to the teacher that Nino did not leave Nadia for her; the professor goes on to say that someone had seen him drunk and that he'd stopped studying. Elena decides that neither he nor Lila have sought her out; she would go her own way and not worry about them.

During Chapter 78, Elena visits Pina, who has just had her baby. She is very unhappy and complains about Lila for most of the visit. Elena learns that Lila has taken to working in the Solara shoe shop on the Piazza. Gigliola and Pina were both bumped out to other places. Lila dresses fashionably each day and has already remodeled the shop. Pina points out that everyone must give in to Lila. What's more, Michele, dissatisfied with the latest shoe designs from Rino, had take Lila's original design (from the first novel) and contracted a different factory--NOT the Cerullo factory--to build the shoes, which were being sold in the Solara store under the Solara name. Rino and Stefano had protested to Michele and were turned away. Michele even told them that if the other Cerullo shoes don't sell as well, he'll take them out of the store. Stefano could be financially damaged. Lila had said to the men, "I told you so," and begged to be released to the shop; Stefano had agreed because he'd hoped Lila could keep the Solaras from ruining him.

Analysis

Elena returns to Naples in the wake of Lila's night of passion with Nino. The friends never discuss it, and something has broken between them. Although they can't speak properly once Stefano arrives and blows up at his wife, by unspoken agreement the girls do not continue their friendship. Elena feels betrayed, yes, but also is compelled to act on the crushing fear and inactivity she'd felt on the beach. She is determined to not sit and do nothing, but to move forward and leave the tangle of the neighborhood behind. She even tells Lila, as they discuss Lila's desire to keep the affair with Nino going, that she is finished with both of them, and she is true to her word. Months pass during which the friends don't speak at all. It is different from when Elena was merely angry at Lila from her treatment after the Professor's party. It is anger and resentment towards Lila for taking Nino, for "taking possession of my own feeling and making it her own," but it was also a strong disapproval that they would carry on their affair while Lila is still married to Stefano.

Because these chapters are written strictly from Elena's perspective, the reader does not know what has occurred with Lila and Nino. The reader can only see Lila's progress through the eyes of others. Alfonso says she acted like a madwoman after Ischia, Pinuccia calls her a bitch. From the Professor Elena learns that Nino isn't studying and is rumored to be an aimless drunk. From Pinuccia's account, Lila has not returned to the pliable wife she was during the summer on Ischia.

The author cleverly inserts into this part of the story, where Elena and Lila's lives will diverge for the bulk of the remainder of the novel, the continuing feud between the



Cerullo, the Solaras, and the Caraccis. Maybe because of revenge for Lila, maybe because they are just terrible people, the Solaras brothers are beginning to purposefully put pressure on Stefano and Rino financially. They have designed and manufactured their own shoe behind Rino's back and are selling them in the store on the Piazza. The grosser insult is that it is the very shoe that Lila and Rino designed together, that Rino and Stefano willingly gave to Marcello in exchange for his help financing the new grocery. As Lila points out to the men with insulting laughter, it is their own fault for dealing with the brothers. The shoe is selling well, maybe better than any Cerullo shoes. In the midst of this drama--Rino is not sleeping at night, Stefano is losing money--Lila asks if she can work in the Piazza store. Her game, too, is dangerous, because Michele is dangerous. Pinuccia says Stefano allows his wife to work in the shoe store in hopes that she will influence the Solaras to ease up on her brother and husband, but who can say if Lila will play the game he is hoping her to play?

Discussion Question 1

Elena says, "I was losing something and Lila was gaining."- does this have to be true?

Discussion Question 2

When considering how Lila's brother and father never sought to help Lila when Stefano had beaten her, Elena thinks, "Men are all made of the same clay, only Nino is different." Is this true? Is Nino any different?

Discussion Question 3

Why was Lila telling Stefano "the truth" about Nino the way to calm him down?

Vocabulary

feverish, inhabited, grossly, audacious, impudence, despondent, pliable, evoked



Chapter 79-84

Summary

Elena gives in and asks Alfonso and Marisa about Nino. Marisa reports that Nino had gone through "a long period of madness," the cause of which nobody knew, but eventually he had come through it and started studying again. Elena is glad that he is seemingly back on track. She devotes herself even more to her duties. Occasionally she sees the girls from the neighborhood, and each person has their own tale of difficulty. Ada, who has recently come to hate Lila but feels sympathy for Stefano, tells her that Antonio was discharged early from the military because of a nervous breakdown. She sees him soon after, thin and nervous, and exchanges small talk with him. Elena takes regular walks with him. They meet with Pasquale and Enzo, who also did military service. Enzo lost his father while he was away, and Pasquale's father passed away in prison. The friends are all together one day when they find Carmen and Pasquale's mother, Signora Peluso, hanged herself upon hearing the news.

In Chapter 80, Antonio takes a job doing odd things for Michele Solara, which is not ideal but gives him money and helps him feel useful. Elena takes her high school exams and passes. The examiner asks if she'd like to study at university, and offers her the chance to take another exam, one that would give her a free university education if she does well. She applies to the university, in Pisa, and does as many jobs as she can to earn money. She travels to the city to take the exam, does very well, and is offered the chance to come and study for free.

Chapter 81 details the last bit of Elena's life in the neighborhood as she prepares to move to Pisa. She says goodbye to each of her neighborhood friends. Before she leaves the city, she walks all over Naples to view her home for the last time. It is afternoon, when all of the shops have their shutters lowered, and Elena finds herself at the shoe store on the Piazza, which likewise has its shutters down. Elena knocks and Lila comes to the door. She is very happy to see Elena; hugs and kisses her, and shares her genuine joy at the opportunity to study. After their quick exchange, she turns to the corner of the shop and calls; Nino comes from the locked bathroom door. Lila quickly tells her friend the facts she had purposefully kept hidden from Elena to protect her: she was two months pregnant, she was ready to tell Stefano everything and leave him.

In Chapter 82, they all sit down, Nino with visible discomfort, while Lila tells the story: when she started working on the Piazza, Nino started visiting her there during the quiet afternoon hours. After hiding money for many months, Lila had an apartment rented, where they would hide and await the baby. Elena leaves them politely, wishing them well, hoping it was the last time she would ever see either of them.

During Chapter 83, Elena begins the story of her study in Pisa. It is hard at the beginning. Although she is intelligent, she feels unpolished and judged for her accent



and her inflection. She seeks out the difficult people on purpose, winning them over, and studies with rigorous self-discipline. She makes friends, finally meets a young man named Franco Mari, a Communist, with whom she will spend the next two years. Franco comes from a wealthy family and serves to lend Elena polish and entree into circles that would have been closed to her. He buys her new clothes, new glasses, takes her to Paris, and teaches her about sex. Elena shares in a few paragraphs the extent of their relationship. Eventually he fails out of school and they drift apart.

In Chapter 84, Elena returns to the story of the neighborhood and the drama of Lila's life. She does not know what has been happening to Lila; only she assumed that, because Lila was living a life of adventurous, dangerous love, she must be happy. Elena warns the reader that she returns to life from Lila's perspective, starting the day the boat pulled away from Ischia, from Nino.

Analysis

The early part of this section continues Elena's dogged determination to make it through her last year of high school with her head down, focused away from Lila. However, she finds she must learn that Nino is well, and asks after him. The most interesting part about Marisa's report on Nino is that his obsessions have tended toward film, fiction, and theatre, rather than politics. With resentment Elena realizes what she has wasted on him: "I had neglected the things I liked to conform to what Nino liked." She also realizes that the rock of his intellect is not as firm. That Nino, too, is changeable.

After spending so much time on the war with the Solaras, the author spends a bit of time catching the reader up on what is happening in the neighborhood. Enzo, Pasquale, and Antonio all went to the army together, and they are all returned. Antonio was discharged early because of a nervous attack. Elena spends time with him, just as friends, and realizes they have no feelings for each other anymore. She tries to help him feel more at home. However, when the widow Peluso hangs herself, he suffers a setback and can only feel better doing Michele Solara's dirty work. This fact of Antonio's job will come back around--the author will not waste this small development.

Finally, the reader gets to see Elena reach out and grasp something--she follows her own advice to live her own life and try hard for something she wants. The lesson of Nino was hard-learned, but the benefit Elena receives from taking her path into her own hands is huge. The privilege to study for free in Pisa will change and shape her, and will give her a much-needed respite from the tangles of the neighborhood. It is interesting to note that when her examiner asks her about the poetry she chose to write about, she says, "nothing is fated to last, even poetry."--is such an appropriate thought for what she had experienced the past year in her neighborhood and friend group.

The author gives the reader a glimpse of exactly where Lila and Nino are--pregnant, together, using the afternoon siesta in the shops to meet and make love. Lila uses Michele Solara's hold on her husband to gain entree into the shoe store so she can use it for her own purposes. She tells Elena, after Elena rudely asks why stop lying now,



after all this time, that suddenly she would rather die than live with Stefano. At the very end of the section, Elena promises that she will take the reader back over one year, to the day they left Ischia, to see how Lila has managed to keep Nino and Stefano at the same time.

Discussion Question 1

What made Elena decide to knock on the door of the shoe store to see Lila?

Discussion Question 2

What purpose does Franco Mari serve in Elena's life?

Discussion Question 3

What dangerous assumptions does Elena make about Lila's life?

Vocabulary

punctiliously, disoriented, garishly, reconciliation, condolences, hypochondriac, deliberately, flaunt



Chapters 85-90

Summary

Lila is desperate to see Nino. She considers various schemes on how to reach him. One day in early September, Nino appears in the grocery store, drunk. Lila acts quickly and propels him out of the store and back to her house. Her mind is a tunnel and she doesn't see or think of anyone. They make love, and then the reality of what could happen occurs to Lila, and she forces him to leave. In the meantime she acts as pliable as possible to everyone around her.

In Chapter 86, Lila's first priority is to get Nino back to himself. He is obsessed with having her constantly, and when he's not with her, he drinks and smokes himself into oblivion. Lila encourages him to return to studying, so they could be one in mind as well as in body. Nino realized that to keep Lila, he must start studying again. They split their time together between making love and discussing books. Lila's friends aren't sure what's happening, but they cannot complain. She is, for the most part, docile. Stefano realizes it is better for her to be docile than for him to force a confrontation to find out what is driving her behavior. Lila spends these months excited to see Nino constantly. Lila removes herself from seeing the situation with any dose of realism, instead simply visualizing pieces of a game that need moving around. She has visions and fears.

During Chapter 87, she finds the shoe store as a place where she can see him for longer stretches of time. On purpose, she inserts herself in the midst of the conflict she had studiously avoided. Rino, threatened by the Solara shoe brand, feels she is betraying him. Stefano wants to use her to negotiate for several sums of money which he owes to Signora Solara, and Michele just really wants to possess her. She handles them all. Every bond and loyalty from her past is swept away in the wake of Nino. Lila's decision to leave her comfortable home and work causes confusion and annoyance to the people of the neighborhood. Lila, who has always been a force and yet always had allies, begins losing her allies. Michele, who is smarter than the rest, is always around, always tries to kiss her and manage her. Lila threatens to leave the shoe store. She is tentatively happy during this period, and Nino starts to be productive again under her care.

In Chapter 88, Lila prepares to tell Stefano about Nino and the baby. She sets the stage with a packed suitcase, a knife hidden nearby, a delicious meal and a clean apartment. Stefano returns from work and Lila tells him right away. At first Stefano thinks she's had an issue with the Solaras, which scares him because he couldn't afford to have an issue with them. Lila says she wants to leave him, tells him calmly that she didn't love him and their marriage didn't make sense. Stefano comes after her, and she dashes to the kitchen to take up the hidden knife. He backs away, saying how much he has done for her and how much he loves her. He disappears to the bedroom. Lila is unsure that he actually believes her. She waits a second, puts the knife down, and follows him to tell him all about Nino. But he's fallen asleep.



In Chapter 89, Stefano goes about his business like the conversation never happened. He goes to the Cappuccio house and calls for Ada, who is sitting in the house with her fiance, Pasquale. He chats aimlessly with the couple for a while, and goes home, pretending Lila is at her family's house. It is harder to keep the charade when she doesn't show up at the shoe store, and finally Stefano spills the news to his and Lila's parents. The Cerrullo family is angry and blames Stefano for all of the problems, among them the closing of their shoe factory due to competition from the Solaras. The family wonders if maybe she has gone to stay with Elena. The family writes to Pisa to see. Ada goes to help Stefano, which causes strife with Pasquale. Alfonso is sent to the shoe store, and Michele tells Antonio to "find her", and to "start with Nino Sarratore."

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In Chapter 90 finds Lila taking the metro to Nino, feeling like she was leaving a bad situation for a good one. The apartment she found for her and Nino is paid three months in advance and decorated cheaply; yet it makes Lila happy, so happy she does not notice the apartment's drawbacks. Nino arrives in great joy. They study together until 3am.

Analysis

These chapters move from Elena's life in Pisa and move backwards to Lila's life, starting right after she left Ischia with Stefano. The recurring emotion in her and Nino is frenzy--they are frantic to see one another, moved by a love that Lila tells Elena she hopes she will one day experience. When Nino finally shows up in the grocery one day, they are driven only by attraction. It is incredibly risky, that first day. They could have seen or been seen by any number of people. The reader should again be impressed in these chapters that Lila is able to compartmentalize what is happening with Nino. At home she is able to act as pliable and agreeable as possible. It is also incredibly clever how she inserts herself, for the first time, into men's business to get placed in the shoe store. This is not what Stefano wants because he fears Michele Solaras's attraction to his wife; however, as he owes the Solaras money, he hopes that Lila's presence will help with the debt repayment schedule.

In this period the reader sees that Nino is not as lovely as originally thought. The first glimpses of a stubborn, childish nature are evident in his lack of motivation to study, and that Lila has to help him write his articles. Lila has completely rearranged her life for Nino, but the author demonstrates that it may not have been the best idea. Furthermore, Michele continues his attachment to Lila, even trying to kiss her; she can only escape his advances by threatening to leave the shoe store. Michele's intelligence, shrewdness, and cruelty should show the reader that he is a formidable enemy, and not going away anytime soon. His chilling words to Antonio- "Find her" should let the reader know the



lengths to which Michele will go to find Lila and return her to the shoe store where she belongs.

During the period of her work for Michele, Lila goes to work each day "like she forgot she was Signora Caracci." The neighborhood women judge her for taking a perfectly good husband and apartment and leaving it all day for a job in a store. This is another thread of the author's devotion to feminism--why should Lila have to stay home all day when she's successful in the shoe store?

Finally, in chapter 89 there is a hint of something new--a possible liason between Stefano and Ada. The author does not allude to it until this chapter, but Ada is the first person Stefano runs to when Lila leaves, and Ada starts cooking and cleaning for him in Lila's absence.

Discussion Question 1

Describe how Stefano's personality is based on his childhood.

Discussion Question 2

How is moving in with Nino an extension of Lila's cutting up the photo of herself?

Discussion Question 3

Are there any early indications that the affair between Lila and Nino won't last?

Vocabulary

disorderly, precise, magnified, cleaving, phenomenal, autonomy, dissipated, irrevocable, rupture, excrescences



Chapter 91-96

Summary

Chapter 91 opens with a report: Lila and Nino live together for 23 days. The days begin in great bliss. Lila never misses her old life, her old home or friends. She does not worry about money. Only Nino matters. They go out at night, and one night Antonio is on the streets, and she recognizes him. That night begins a mounting tension between the them. He is distracted and irritated all of the time. Eventually Nino confesses that he finds her excessive in her conversation. He starts going out in the evenings without her, and not going to sleep at the same time as she. Finally, because of his mounting tension and her forceful personality, they get into a fight one night and Nino leaves.

In Chapter 92, Nino (as told to Elena) returns home. He desires Lila, but is afraid of her. He is mostly afraid of the baby, and decides he really should disappear and study. He is on his way to Bruno's to borrow some money and leave town, but he finds himself walking towards the small apartment in the rain, really driven by sexual desire more than anything else. Suddenly he is assaulted, shoved, and beaten; a voice repeats to him, not angrily, that he should leave Lila and never return to her. Nino repeats his attacker's words and faints.

In Chapter 93, the author reveals that Antonio is the one who beat Nino, but he does not tell this to Michele. On the contrary: Antonio tells Michele that although he found Nino, he never did find Lila. In truth, Antonio had been following them for days. He was curious about Lila, and jealous of Nino, who had attracted the love of both Lila and Elena. Antonio, who tells this story to Elena long in the future, afterwards helps Nino to a nearby pharmacy and leaves him there. He then goes to see Enzo and Pasquale. He tells them where Lila is and asks them to help her. At first, Pasquale is hesitant--Lila is an adult, she made her choice. It is Enzo who asks for the address and promises to visit her.

In Chapter 94, Enzo goes to see Lila. After his military service, Enzo has become a very quiet, very intolerant man. He easily finds Lila's apartment and goes straight to the door.

Chapter 95 tells of Enzo's visit to Lila. She had, in the meantime, realized Nino wasn't coming back and was angry and humiliated. Although she realized they were not a good match, it was still awful to fail after so short a time. Suddenly the apartment feels squalid and poor, although poor no longer equates lacking money. To her, it equates lacking love. The door rings, and it is Enzo. He looks around her apartment and tells her it is time to go. They exchange a few words; Lila finds that Stefano did not send Enzo. He goes through the apartment picking up her belongings, and then tells her that he has always loved her. Then, to return to Stefano, because she shouldn't be living in filth. He goes on to say that if Stefano hurts her, he will kill him; and if she wants to leave him again, he will come and get her. She goes with him.



In Chapter 96, Enzo takes her home, and waits in the street to make sure Stefano does not beat her. Stefano did not beat her; he acts as if she actually did go to Pisa to see Elena. Lila gives no explanation for her actions, and the next day she tells him she is pregnant, and that the baby is not his. Stefano laughs and promises to make a new start. Lila goes on to reject the notion of seeing anyone at any time--no family or friends at all. Michele comes to see her often, but she doesn't let him so he shouts at her through the door. When Rino comes to complain to her about his life, she sends him away and tells him to take care of himself. Only her mother and Stefano's mother are a comfort to her. Finally, she emerges, and starts reading all about pregnancy and babies. Carmen Peluso begins to harbor deep resentment against Lila, who had pretty much done as she pleased and did not suffer for it. Enzo broke off their engagement soon after Lila's return. It is during this time that Elena returns from Pisa for Easter, and Carmen catches her up on everyone's life, especially Lila's. Nino, Elena hears, has gone to Milan to study, and so when she sees Lila by chance over the break, she knows more than Lila; what is more, she surmises that the affair with Nino had yielded her nothing. They catch up with very surface small chat and go on their way.

Analysis

For all of its exciting beginning, the story of Nino did not turn out to be very exciting. Nino learns quickly what others already know about Lila--her force, her extreme nature, and her commitment to whatever is in front of her. While they are living together, she is fiercely committed to his studies, so she forces him to work and write and rewrite, and because Lila brims with thoughts and ideas, she spills over onto Nino. Lila says that living with Nino gave her the feeling that anything was possible. It is a short time before the relationship collapses over Lila's power and Nino's lack of power. In these chapters the readers see a side of Nino that is spoiled, immature, and very unlikable. And compared to Lila, who, for all of her faults, is so strong, Nino looks positively childish. He doesn't want to study, he doesn't like the apartment, he doesn't like how Lila is always pushing him. Mostly, though, Nino allows the tension of the pregnancy drive his discontent. He doesn't want to be responsible for Lila's baby. The reader may wonder what would have happened had Nino actually gone back to her, had he not been waylaid by Antonio Cappuccio. But thanks to Antonio, the plot swerves and Enzo enters onto the scene.

One of the author's amazing talents is that she does not waste one bit of information. The smallest tidbit that is shared, even 800 pages ago, is still relevant years down the road in the plot. Enzo is one of the very first characters introduced in the first novel, and is only sprinkled throughout most of the last handful of years, but he is reintroduced here and becomes very relevant. Every detail about Enzo is still important; mostly that he loves Lila with an everlasting love, and expects nothing in return--the first, perhaps the only--man in the story that fits that description. He takes her back to Stefano's and promises to return to get her if she needs him--another detail that will not go unused by the author.



Discussion Question 1

Elena has an unconscious stirring that she tries to repress- a hope that the baby would not be born. What does this say about Elena?

Discussion Question 2

What does Nino mean by Lila's "too intelligent ignorance"?

Discussion Question 3

Antonio muses about Lila: "What is it with that girl: courage, or madness?" Answer Antonio's question by giving textual support.

Vocabulary

prodigal, ingenuousness, morbid, agglomerate, effeminate, trite, converged, modality, florid



Chapter 97-102

Summary

From far away in Pisa, Elena thinks often of Lila and wonders how the pregnancy is coming along. Finally, at Christmas, she hears from Carmen that Lila had a difficult birth that required surgery. It was a boy; after some dispute with Stefano, Lila names him Rino. Elena grows quiet, and Carmen accuses her of being a snob. Elena is home for Christmas and feels out of place. Her parents don't know how to talk to her and her friends no longer travel in a group. Everybody is fighting in some way or another. Elena manages to go for a walk with Enzo, who has studied his own way to an engineering degree. He says nothing the entire walk, until the last minute, when he tells her that Lila is a wonderful mother.

In Chapter 98, Lila adjusts to her life with the baby. She takes him for walks, feeds him. She draws the irritation of Ada and Carmen. Stefano is not hostile to the baby, but he is inattentive and indifferent. Once in the park she notices a funeral--Enzo's mother. She happens upon an old, bent woman, who addresses her. It is Maestra Oliviera, her old teacher. She asks what Lila is reading--Ulysses. The teacher tells her that she had been great, destined for wonderful things. Lila is upset, doesn't want to feel like her life is wasted, so she answers with impudence. Suddenly Lila fears that she is from unintelligent stock.

Chapter 99 sees Lila obsessed with stimulating her son's intelligence. She reads all about how to make him smart with games and books and songs. For a while after the baby's birth, Stefano's and Lila's relationship is merely tolerant, but when Rino is a few months old, it deteriorates again. For a while Lila is taking care of Rino's son, Dino. Pinuccia in general does not like this, and Rino is having so much difficulty in the shoe business with his father and the Solaras that he needs all the help he can get. Rino's baby is happy and animated in Lila's presence. Stefano is unhappy that Lila is more interested in being a mother than being a wife; he accuses the siblings of being lazy and lax, that they are the reason the shoe business is failing. Stefano and Rino get into a huge fight.

In Chapter 100, the separation widens between the two families. Lila starts visiting Rino's son on her own. Pinuccia, who is overwhelmed by Rino's business problems, one day loses her temper and tells Lila that "Stefano is perfectly right to cheat on you." Lila goes home and ponders this remark. While she does not care that Stefano has another woman, she fears for how Stefano may eventually treat her. The child has made her afraid for her future. She starts keeping the house just as Stefano would like it, but this does not help. Stefano is broke, the Solaras have all but ruined the shoe business, and he blames Lila for everything. He is increasingly hostile. One day she goes to the shoe store and visits with Alfonso and his friend, another well-dressed young man with excellent manners. She recalls her days in the shoe store with Nino; Michele comes in and takes her for coffee. While they are together he tells her she



should leave Stefano--he has a house in Naples, he will put her there so she can do and she wishes. He promises not to touch her; that he only wants to have her around. She notes that Michele is speaking seriously, not in his joking, leering tone. All the same she tells him no. He becomes impatient and tells her that she may want to keep him in mind, because everybody in the neighborhood knows that Stefano has taken Ada as a lover, years before--before Lila had gone to Ischia to meet Nino. She tells Michele that all of the men make her sick.

In Chapter 101, Lila is calmed by the information, because Stefano cheated before she did. That night, when Stefano returns, she tells him she knows all about Ada. She says she doesn't care what he does or with whom, as long as he leaves her alone. However, Stefano denies the whole thing and maintains that their marriage is perfect, that he loves her, and then he essentially rapes her.

Chapter 102 sees Stefano losing his grip on his marriage and his business, and tightening his grip on Lila. He does what he likes with Ada while forcing Lila to stay home all the time. When Pasquale finally learns that his fiancée had a long standing affair with Stefano, he goes to Stefano, and they fight. Rino is upset that Lila is no longer coming over to play with his son, so he takes his anger out on Pinuccia.

Analysis

There is a lot of high drama in these chapters, as the tension in Lila's marriage increases towards the breaking point. The reader recalls that Elena is the narrator here, and that the story of Lila's birth and marriage is told to her in pieces by the neighborhood residents and by reading Lila's notebooks. Early in this section, Carmen tells Elena that even her voice has changed--that she doesn't "talk like us" anymore. Carmen refers to the accent of Naples, of the neighborhood, that Elena has fought hard to remove from her diction while at University. Elena does and will continue to struggle with self-image and a fear that she doesn't fit in; she continues to remake herself in another's image. When Elena is home for Christmas, she specifically avoids seeing Lila; she is afraid to see Lila's baby, afraid he will look exactly like Nino. Although Lila tells Stefano consistently that the baby is not his, the author does not make this clear. For one thing, with Elena as narrator, there is only Lila's word on which to rely, and Lila is willing to use the baby's paternity as a way to wound her husband. Obviously, Lila was having regular sexual relations with Nino, but the reader can assume that Stefano was also actively seeking out attention from her. In order to placate Stefano, Lila would have been willing to have sex whenever he asked. So really, either man could be the father of her baby, and at this point in the story, the author doesn't say who the baby looks like.

Motherhood puts Lila in a stupor until she realizes that it's up to her to stimulate her baby's intelligence. She fears that her family has bad genes, and that she must fight against them to make Baby Rino smart. This is interesting; Lila is obviously intelligent, and if the baby is Nino's, he will certainly have genetics on his side. However, Lila imprints on herself Maestra Oliviera's assumption that her life has been wasted, and sets out to make sure her baby won't waste his life.



The last two chapters in this section are filled with tension in Lila's marriage. Stefano, despite Lila's attempts to make their home suitable, is increasingly upset over financial issues largely caused by the Solaras. Lila cannot do anything about this, but when she learns about Stefano's affair with Ada, things get worse. Stefano's behavior is erratic and unfair and only supports the author's claims of the inequalities in marriage--that Stefano's freedom in sleeping with Ada makes him doubly jealous and suspicious of Lila. His main focus of jealousy is not Nino, but Michele, who is the author of all of his financial difficulties. He is right to fear Michele; who did in fact proposition Lila and ask her to move into his apartment so he could "watch and listen to her." Although the reader can assume that Michele probably has some sliver of real feeling for Lila, he still wants to possess her, as do most of the men who proclaim their love for her.

Discussion Question 1

Discuss the almost universal failure of the men in this section of the story to support and protect their women.

Discussion Question 2

Discuss possible reasons the author isn't forthcoming about who Baby Rino's father is.

Discussion Question 3

Why does Stefano behave the way he does after Lila confronts him about Ada?

Vocabulary

deigned, cumbersome, amid, surly, prosaic, qualm, lunatic, explicit, amplifying



Chapters 103-108

Summary

Elena arrives home for Easter in the midst of the drama with Lila. Her mother is eager to decry Lila's lot in life. Many of the neighborhood's residents come to Elena to discuss the issues, in particular how badly they were offended. Elena tries to be reasonable with each person that complains to her. Ada in particular interests her, and she enjoys being the source for everyone's advice and consultation. At first Elena fears that seeing Lila will make her feel small and insignificant once more, but on the contrary, Lila is small and fearful and needs Elena to calm her and hold her. In a rush Lila confesses Stefano's behavior, and gives Elena the box of notebooks, the very ones on which this narrative is based.

In Chapter 104, Elena takes the box unwillingly. They sit with the baby and eat; Lila mentions that she barely remembers Nino except that she thought she loved him. Lila asks Elena if she is happy, compliments her looks; and then, she tells Elena to go to Enzo and ask him to fetch her, before Stefano kills her.

In Chapter 105, Elena goes to see Enzo and repeats the words Lila asked her to: "Lina told me to tell you that she tried, but she couldn't make it." Enzo does not react and so Elena elaborates that things are bad for Lila. Elena goes home, and on the train begins to read Lila's notebooks. She feels at once bad about herself and passionate in the memories of their childhood. Lila's secrets throw her into a depression; she is overwhelmed at her own pettiness. She throws the notebooks into the river so she will not have to deal with them anymore.

In Chapter 106, the action returns to Pisa, to Elena's last year there. Her love for University has faded, maybe in part due to Lila's notebooks. She feels only mostly accomplished, that there is still a lack that she cannot make up for on her own. She feels there is an intangible element that other people have, that as a product of the neighborhood, she will never have. It is family connection, it is polish, it is something that she has never been able to grasp. With her first boyfriend, Franco, she was able to hide behind him, but in this stage of the story Franco is gone, and the students, she feels, can now see her for what she is. She is afraid, and fears she will always be so.

Chapter 107 continues this theme of Elena's depression. Her fellow students think she is loose, because she willingly slept with Franco during their relationship. He is gone now and she carries a stigma. One afternoon, she is stinging from a few comments from fellow students, when a young man approaches her and apologizes for their behavior, and is own inability to stop them. He is a young man she doesn't know very well--Pietro Airota. They become friends quickly; he is very smart and Elena is impressed with him. Suddenly, she is respectable again. She meets his family and they are delightful. Pietro's father is a very famous professor in Genoa, his sister as well. The family talks



constantly of Issues; Elena uses scraps of knowledge picked up over the years to impress them, and it works. She basks in their approval.

In Chapter 108, the success with Pietro's family goes even further to convince her that simply being smart wasn't enough. The intangible thing she's missing will keep her from ultimate success, she fears. Thus, her relationship with Pietro is even more important, to gain respectability and strength from him. They meet in secret for sexual encounters; it is oddly reminiscent of Antonio. Elena feels that she doesn't love him; she is with him to cling to his strength and keep the fear of knowing nothing away from her.

Analysis

Some big developments in Lila's life happen here--the notebooks, the reason for this narrative, return to the forefront. The future Elena hints at the notebooks in the very beginning of this novel, but here the reader sees how and why they exist, and why Lila must transfer them to Elena's hands. Tension with Stefano grows, Lila is a nervous creature. At the very end, Elena asks Enzo to go and fetch her, and the action leaves Lila for several chapters.

The reader returns to Elena's life--her last year at Pisa, her life without her boyfriend Franco, who lent her respectability for a few years but was sent home for failing his exams. It is a good question to note: is it Franco's departure or Lila's notebooks that "remind" Elena of the elemental something that she lacks? Something in Lila's words return Elena to the feeling of a young girl, missing out on the elusive thing that helps her fit in and feel a part of the educated crowd. Even with Elena's high marks and brilliant grades, she feels like an outsider. One might put their finger on Elena's origin as the culprit--a product of "the neighborhood", with its dialect and coarse accent and high drama, something that the wealthy students of Pisa can see on her.

Regarding the neighborhood, there is language in these chapters painting the neighborhood as a 'kingdom', with Lila its reigning queen. While Elena may have conquered the university, the Normale in Pisa is a tame, predictable, benign kingdom in comparison with the teeming drama over which Lila reigns. As a result, Elena feels that her conquest is shallower than her friend's.

While she was with Franco, she could hide behind his own wealth and privilege, but when he is gone she is exposed again. Here Elena's thoughts spin out of control, making her even more susceptible to depression. There is foreshadowing here of Elena's inability to stand on her own, despite her accomplishments and successes. She needed Franco. And by the end of the section, she has attained a new young man to make her feel safe, relevant, belonging--Pietro Airota, whom she will eventually marry even though she says she doesn't love him. He is essentially a more posh, educated version of Antonio. Awkward, grateful to have the voluptuous and sexually willing Elena available to him.



Regarding Pietro and Franco, it is interesting that throughout the novel, the author has made much of Lila being the girl that all of the neighborhood boys fall in love with: Pasquale, Enzo, Stefano, Michele, Marcello, and Nino are all at some point infatuated with her. However, as one student in Pisa says to Elena: "what do you do to do men?"-- Elena is equally successful in attracting young men, and in Pisa her conquests are wealthy and influential.

Discussion Question 1

Discuss Lila's desire to educate the children in the neighborhood, and thus turn the tide of the poverty and lack. From where do these ideas stem?

Discussion Question 2

Elena says that "Lila's words diminished me."- is this effect Lila's fault, or a function of Elena's own lack of self confidence?

Discussion Question 3

Discuss Elena's "almost": What does she mean by having "almost" succeeded in Pisa? Does Lila possess the elusive quality Elena is seeking?

Vocabulary

litany, expound, sterilized, chaotic, infatuations, tempestuous, instinctive, orientation, sanctioning, apprehensive, subjunctives, skirmishes, mediation



Chapters 109-114

Summary

In the beginning of Chapter 109, Elena grows very ill with the flu. She manages to call home and report that she cannot come home, and eventually her mother shows up in Pisa with food and means to nurse her back to health. It is a long day, with Mrs. Greco yelling and limping and cooking and banging and gossiping about the neighborhood, her chief aim to raise Elena above all of the neighborhood girls, Lila in particular. It is almost as if her mother came to ensure Elena's health so she would not die and remove her position as the girl in the neighborhood who got out, who made it.

In Chapter 110, Elena recounts what her mother tells her about Lila. Apparently, Ada and Gigliola had gone to dinner with Michele and Antonio, and during the outing, Gigliola tries to help Ada find a way to get Stefano out of his marriage to Lila. Ada is relieved to have Gigliola, to hear that she is justified in her affair with Stefano. Ada grows impatient and worried about the image she is presenting as "the other woman." Antonio is losing it, so Michele sends him to Germany for a long term job.

In Chapter 111, with Antonio gone, the only friend Ada has is Gigliola, Michele's fiancée and enemy of Lila. They decide that Lila must go. Ada tells Stefano he must do something about Lila. He agrees, but does nothing to change the situation. Ada becomes a sort of local hero among the girls of the neighborhood--the lover is always the romantic figure with whom the young people sympathize, and so Lila is looked on as the ogre of a wife. Between the emotional support of the neighborhood and the discovery that she is pregnant, Ada feels strong and in control. She goes straight to Lila to tell all. Her discourse is long and rambling--she criticizes Lila's housekeeping skills, warns Lila that she had better leave or else she will kill the baby. Lila tells her calmly that she's acting like her mother, Melina. Ada is insulted and cleans the house while Lila looks on.

In Chapter 112, Ada returns to the grocery; Stefano asks where she had been and she tells him. After work, Stefano beats her repeatedly for going to his house and "disturbing his wife and son." The next day, Ada is too battered to go to work; she returns to Lila and asks for a cup of tea. She comments that the baby looks like Stefano; Lila disagrees. Ada begins to clean the house again while Lila tends the baby. Stefano returns to the domestic scene of his wife and lover, dinner cooking, the house clean. He implores Ada to leave--the scene is not good for his business. Ada refuses--she is pregnant as well. At that moment, the Solara brothers send for Stefano. He muses over his situation: two women, two children, businesses in the red, money owed to Signora Solara--it must all be Lila's fault. The brothers wish to take his old grocery store as a guarantee on money he owes them. The shoe factory is almost bankrupt and they are tired of dealing with Rino. They will not do business with him until he takes care of his home life--having two women in the open is scandalous. Stefano returns home and tells Lila to leave, that he has found a nice house for her and the baby. The house is in fact



the one that Michele offered to Lila months before. Stefano is basically offering Lila to Michele in exchange for his debts. Lila is disgusted with Stefano and tells him so.

Chapter 113 finds Lila sitting in the bedroom trying to decide what to do. She is waiting on Enzo to get her. She is not afraid of Stefano, but Michele, who will eventually grow tired of her refusing him. She is very worried about her son, if he will grow up feeling loved and cared for. She only knows she must leave.

In Chapter 114, Lila emerges from her room, the house is empty. Ada and Stefano are both gone. Some time goes by. One day the phone rings--it is Enzo. He will be there to get her in ten minutes. Lila packs her bags. She leaves all of her jewelry behind. Enzo looks around the grand house and asks if she is afraid to leave it; he won't be able to give her those things. She is sure. Before they leave Enzo writes his address down for Stefano, to show that they are not hiding.

Analysis

Lila's marriage finally breaks, and it is a neighborhood effort. Stefano, in his hypocrisy and weakness, probably would have allowed things to go on in that state for much longer, but between Ada/Gigliola/Carmen, and the highly clever machinations of Michele Solara, Ada forces his hand. It is amazing how easily manipulated Stefano is. The reader can understand why Lila, who is such a wave maker, is so disgusted with how he allows things to happen to him. When the "nice little house" he offers to her is actually Michele's, she realizes that he is trying to barter her away to Michele in exchange for his debts. The reader can see Michele gently prodding Ada to "take what is hers"... to tell Stefano to "take care of his scandal" so they can finish their business. He manipulates all of them, and Lila can immediately see his influence and rightfully fears it. One wonders what Enzo has been waiting on to go get her; it was Easter when Elena tells him that Lila needs him, and November when he comes; but the answer is most likely that he was securing a job and an apartment so that he could have room for Lila and her baby. Enzo continues to astonish, in a story filled with men that are either hypocritical tyrants or weak and lazy.

Elena's visit from her mother is a wonder. At first the reader is filled with a warm feeling, that Mrs. Greco made the long, hard trip to care for her daughter. At this point, Elena reveals that her mother probably wanted to nurse her daughter back to health so she did not die and leave the Greco family without their great claim to fame in the neighborhood. What is also amazing here is Elena noticing how strong and tough her mother is, a little streak of feminism in a male-oriented neighborhood. How her mother navigated the trains and buses, with a limp, laden with food, no care for what the posh Pisa residents would think of her, and how her father would never have managed.

In these chapters the reader may feel sympathy for Ada as a victim. It doesn't seem that Stefano has much interest in securing Ada has his wife; Michele forces that to happen. In her varied conversations with the girls in the neighborhood, the reader can see Ada's desperation. Moreover, Lila's cool detachment when she reminds Ada that she is in the



same boat as her mother, Melina. It is a bold statement, but as usual, Lila is a step ahead of everyone else.

Discussion Question 1

Why is Lila afraid of Michele?

Discussion Question 2

Ada, Gigliola, Carmen- what is each girl's specific reason to hate Lila?

Discussion Question 3

What are some indications that Stefano never meant to take Ada in as a wife?

Vocabulary

combative, remorse, matrimonial, accusatory, barricaded



Chapters 115-120

Summary

The place where Enzo takes Lila is near the sausage factory owned by Nino's friend Bruno. This causes Elena to recall the summer on Ischia, with great repugnance, particularly her night with Donato Saratorre. She is in Pisa, finishing her thesis and struggling. She is at the same time happy and angry with Pietro, who is basically already been given a job as a teacher, but not her. She feels that he is brilliant but boring, and it angers her that his family name gets him in the door. Her advisor suggests that she teach at a teaching college, as if being a professor was an alien proposition. She goes through a few months of dissatisfaction at everything. Finally, she buys a notebook and writes down the story of her life in third-person, herself as a protagonist--the story of Naples and the neighborhood and Lila and Nino and Donato. After writing it she feels better, and begins to see Pietro again. She graduates with highest honors. Pietro takes her to dinner and asks her to marry him- he gives her a ring, she says yes and kisses him. Pietro gives her his thesis proof, and Elena gives him the notebook of her novel. They talk of their plans--he has to say in Pisa and finish his thesis, she has to return to Naples to teach at the teacher training college. They set a date for their wedding.

In Chapter 116, Elena returns to Naples to some difficulty. While she was not posh enough for Pisa, she is too posh for home, and feels out of place. She tries to look around for her neighborhood friends, but it is very true that going home is hard. Antonio had gone to Germany and, she heard, gotten married. She sees Alfonso in the shoe shop, who is really very handsome and cultivated. He is planning to marry Marisa soon. Pasquale and Carmen are both engaged to new people. Pina is in a terrible state--marriage to Rino is bad and she is unhappy. Finally Elena goes to see Ada, who is living in Lina's house, beautiful, elegant, happy. She has had a baby with Stefano, named Maria. She is a much more suitable match for Stefano and fills the role well. Ada has the best info on Lila. She tells her where Lila is, amazed that Lila and Enzo left, flaunting it to Michele. Ada gives her the address and warns Elena, "Tell her that the Solaras don't forget anything."

Chapter 117 returns to Lila. Lila's and Enzo's apartment is a smallish three-bedroom, not nice, a little shabby. As soon as they arrive, Lila tells him that she likes and respects him a lot, but she will not sleep with him. They can live together, but not physically. Enzo tells her she and the baby can have the bed, while he will take the cot. Enzo tells her that she can stay as long as she likes, and that if she is ever ready to love again, he will be waiting.

Chapter 118 demonstrates where Lila's mind is. She does not feel safe or easy. Rino is growing old enough to throw temper tantrums and cause problems. He is hungry, he is growing, she has no money for books or new clothes. Enzo works all day and shares what little he has with her, but she feels like the arrangement is not sustainable. Rino,



she fears, will lose the edge she has given him. One day, Stefano appears to visit "his son." He takes the boy for a while and returns, warning her that she and Enzo have taken a big risk. He returns just a few more times before ceasing the visits altogether.

In Chapter 119, Lila relates the visit to Enzo. He works all day, returns home to have a meal and sit with Lila for a small time, and then he goes to bed. One day she is out and sees Bruno Soccavo in a big fancy car. She asks him for a job at his factory. He buys her a coffee and talks to her for a while. At the end, he gives her a napkin with some writing and tells her to take it to the factory. The conversation ends with Bruno saying wistfully, "That was a wonderful summer." Lila agrees.

Chapter 120 returns to Elena, who is still at her parents home in the neighborhood, where she hears good news. She hears that Pietro had let his mother read her novel, who had sent it to a publisher friend in Milan, who loved it and wanted to publish it immediately. She calls Adele, Pietro's mother, and they discuss it. Elena is overcome with excitement and shame and worry. There is nobody around, nobody she can talk to about her triumph. Her friends are spread out and moved on and there is nobody to be excited for her.

Analysis

These chapters begin with Elena's volatile emotions as she tries to finish school. Her feelings can mostly be boiled down to jealousy that Pietro, who is brilliant but unimaginative, is so easily granted a job in the university because of his family connections, and the fact that he possesses the elusive "something" that she lacks. That she, with her top marks and brilliant grades, is not even considered for a similar position, but relegated to the teacher training college, only serves to support this discontent. Because Pietro's sister works in the university in Milan, she cannot blame it on the fact that she is a woman. After purging her shame into the notebook, in a sense purging herself of her history, her unfortunate origins, she is able to regain some equilibrium and see Pietro again. His method of proposal is odd; if Elena is not on the same page as he, he is still willing to give her the diamond ring as a graduation gift. Nonetheless, Elena is happy to marry him, although she has said before that she doesn't love him. She is such a contrast in this way to Lila, who loves so forcefully and definitively. With Lila, everything is sure and decisive, even her mistakes.

Elena returns home, and the neighborhood as changed, but she has, as well. Her childhood friends are scattered and have moved on, and Elena has the look and voice of the posh person she yearns to be but does not feel inside. From her friends she gets the news about Lila. Most chilling is Ada's parting words, "The Solaras don't forget anything." Lila and Enzo have decisively left the neighborhood behind. Their new place is near Bruno Saccavo's sausage factory, an irony that the author does not waste. Indeed, by the end of this section, Lila has seen Bruno and has asked for a job at the factory. Her motivation for this is purely financial- Rino is growing quickly and eating and she can't bear to make Enzo, who works 12-hour days, use all of his earnings on her. Enzo continues to distinguish himself--he has made his feelings for Lila clear, but even



though she tells him that "she can't feel anything" and will not be sleeping with him, he is content to have her under his roof. He only says that he will be there should she change her mind.

It is notable that during Stefano's visit, Lila tells him again that Rino is not his. This time, the reader sees that Stefano actually does not believe her. However, since loving Lila causes such trauma to him, it is easier to say, "that baby isn't mine, so I'm done with her." It is a twist on Stefano's motives--before, he wants to believe Rino is his at all costs to save his marriage. Now, he is ready to let that fact go so he can wash his hands of Lila. He, too, leaves Lila with a warning about the Solaras.

The section finishes with the surprising news that Elena's shame-purging notebook is going to be made into a novel. While it is gratifying that Elena will finally be recognized for her merits, her emotional state has grown tiresome, and she is mostly focused on the fact that there is nobody around to congratulate her.

Discussion Question 1

Is Elena partly responsible for the detachment she feels from her home?

Discussion Question 2

How are Antonio and Pietro similar and different?

Discussion Question 3

What possible clashes can be predicted between Lila and the Solaras, particularly with her new job at the factory?

Vocabulary

constitutional, inferiority, defective, arduous, enervating, vanquish, volubly, accentuated



Chapters 121-125

Summary

The publisher sends Elena 100,000 lire, with another 100,000 promised when she signs the contract. Her parents are amazed. She buys a new dress and goes to Milan to visit the publisher. She feels like the book is, at last, hers, despite being a girl and despite being from the neighborhood. Her editor praises her, praises the book, and discusses some small thread of power that he can't put his finger on. Elena feels very accomplished. They find her a hotel and pay for everything--the train, the hotel, and the food. She goes to Pisa to see Pietro, very happy. Pietro says he is not sure about the scene in the book where "the girl loses her virginity on the beach." It is very important and Elena does not want to lose its impact, but she changes what she can.

In Chapter 122, Elena has arrived home to sad news. Maestra Oliviero has died. Elena is very upset by this. The teacher left some notebooks to be sent to her. Elena looks through them and finds *The Blue Fairy*, which is a short book that Lila hand-wrote when the girls were 10. At the time, the teacher had pretended she never read it, and hurt Lila's feelings. However, Elena finds it among the stack, filled with praise and effusive comments that the teacher wrote. Elena reads through it, and in its pages she sees the "strong and powerful thread" that others see in her own book.

Elena feels she must see Lila. All hostility is over. She feels that she took something from Lila, and also wants to show Lila how connected they are. Even though her book is wholly different from Lila's, she feels it is proof of their bond, that with all of her education, she is most influenced by Lila. She makes the long trip to the address Ada had given her. She arrives there after many missteps and finds Lila not at home. A neighbor is there watching Rino. The girl tells Elena that Lila is at the sausage factory, and that the Soccavos are not nice people. Enzo, she says, works with trains. Elena asks how to walk to the factory.

In Chapter 124, Elena arrives at the sausage factory. Elena goes from place to place looking for Lila. A man tells her that they keep moving Lila from place to place "because she's a pain in the ass." Everybody at the factory is surly, unhappy. Elena finally finds her--she is sunken, thin. She ushers Elena out of the way. Lila asks if she has graduated, and Elena tells her about the book. The emotion moves across Lila's face slowly, but it does, and she smiles and kisses Elena's hand, saying she's happy for her. Elena notices that Lila's hands are a mess--it is from stripping meat off the bones. Elena wonders if she cannot ask Bruno for help, but Lila declares him the worst of all of them. Lila gets up to leave, but Elena hurries and tells her of the teacher's death, of *The Blue Fairy*, of the beautiful words she wrote as a child. Lila looks nervous and walks Elena out of the factory room. The scene is not as Elena thought it would be. She mentions the baby, the neighborhood, Enzo. At this last, Lila smiles and talks of Enzo's kindness, how they study mathematics together long into the nights. Her face lights and she is the old Lila, excited about algebra and math that she and Enzo study together. They are not



together, maybe another time. The girls have to part. The meeting did not go as Elena thought it would.

In Chapter 125, it takes Elena several days to regain her composure after seeing Lila's life. After a few weeks, she returns to Milan to see the publisher and feels like a great lady again. She passes Ada on the street, who barely recognizes her. For a flash she wishes to be chained to the neighborhood, to Lila, to something known. The book comes out and Elena is overwhelmed with the excitement and the reviews. She is photographed for the paper. None of her neighborhood friends congratulate her. They are kind and warm, and go on. She goes to Milan to speak at an event in a bookstore. She is unsure of what to say and is overwhelmed. She speaks, she runs on nervously, and the speaker of the event asks the room for questions. Elena is worn by the exercise, when the speaker allows for one more question. A man in the back criticizes Elena's critics, praises her writing. It is Nino Sarratore.

Analysis

The last chapters of the book produce several last points to consider. They start with great excitement for Elena, who has earned money and finally feels as if she has done something of her own, despite her origin and her gender. The reader has been waiting many pages for Elena to finally be at home with herself. But it is short lived, for when her old teacher dies and she reads Lila's childish writings, she finds Lila's story enmeshed in her own. The author is not clear about what this exactly means. Obviously, Elena did not plagiarize, as *The Blue Fairy* was not in her possession and she hadn't thought about it in years. However, something of Lila's writing style or thematic elements must bear resemblance to Elena's own, for she feels very strongly that she must see Lila and reconnect with her friend.

Seeing Lila again did not yield the warm hugs and reminiscences that Elena was expecting, however. Elena herself realizes, after the meeting, that she was probably, in the nicest way possible, coming to show Lila how accomplished she'd become, how beautiful, how lucky. However, Lila, with her dirty clothes and bloody hands and terrible job, has the edge on Elena again: Lila has learned that "Life" is really a series of bumps and turns, some mistakes and some not, but all opportunities, and that Lila has ridden the bumps and turns with great flair and passion. Indeed, even in her squalid apartment and lack of sleep, she is with a man that she likes and respects, doing something that energizes her and lights her from within. Can Elena, with all of her worries and fears and comparisons and jealousies and needs, say the same? It is really amazingly done by the author--Lila has spent the book pushing against the box her culture and time has put her in, stepping on people as she goes, even her best friend. In the end, she is poor and filthy while her friend is wealthy and accomplished. But which girl is content and which one is still trying to impress herself?

The book ends on this trend, with Elena speaking at a bookseller's event and crumpling under the weight of making a good showing, of impressing, even though she is the published author. At the last, the person who comes to Elena's rescue in the awkward



question and answer phase of the event is Nino Sarratore, reminding the reader that two more books continue the story of Elena and Lila.

Discussion Question 1

Explain the extent of how Elena copied Lila's book.

Discussion Question 2

What may the appearance of Nino Sarratore in the last pages foreshadow for the next book in the series?

Discussion Question 3

Discuss how Lila manages to remain content and happy amid such poor living conditions.

Vocabulary

imbecile, regress, sacrosanct, gesticulated, polemical



Characters

Rafaella Cerullo Caracci, "Lila"

Lila still contains all of the force and blunt edges of the first novel in the series. The author has done an amazing job at creating a character that is both extremely modern, yet trapped in the role of a 1960s housewife. Early in the novel she finds herself asking how she ended up married to Stefano, but because of the time she lives in she must submit: to sex, to his will, to his betrayal of her when he made a business deal with the Solaras. He beats her to make her obey, a happenstance which her mother mentions is oftent the way of a wife. Yet, Lila manages in several situations to manipulate her husband and get exactly what she wants: for example, the photograph in the shoe store, the undivided attentions of Elena, and especially, the love of Nino Sarratorre. She is a woman that knows how to pick and choose her battles. She has the capacity to be very kind-hearted (such as pulling money from the cash register and giving it to Carmen, Ada, and Antonio), and extremely cruel (such as when she makes fun of Elena after the Professor's party). The neighborhood's attraction to her is such that, after her terrible treatment of Elena at the party, when Elena (seemingly with good reason) withdraws from Lila in her hurt, several neighborhood friends come to visit Elena and criticize her for her decisions. The reader is both fascinated and repulsed by Lila, as are most of the characters in the book. She is extreme, and she is real.

Lenuccia Greco, "Elena"

The second installment in the series provides a more mature Elena. She is less dependent on Lila to feel important. During Lila's wedding she feels a sure epiphany in which she wishes to leave the neighborhood, finish school, and and be an intellectual. This conviction does waver, but it is not as dependent on Lila as it is on Elena's own development. In this narrative she sees how valuable she is to Lila, and that gives her confidence. When Lila begins her affair with Nino, for whom Elena has had feelings for many years, she is willing to cut herself off of the drama and not involve herself. She judges Lila, which she never could bring herself to do in their younger years. Furthermore, Elena has gained confidence in these years by her academic successes. She is a favorite not only to Professor Galiani but to her children. Elena's reputation precedes her. Although Nino eventually falls for Lila, it is Elena who commands his attention intellectually. Overall the author does a fine job of developing her as a character while still taking care that she is only 17 years old. She lacks Lila's extreme mood swings and capacity for cruelty. She is basically a good girl. Any resentment she deals with towards Lila is completely justified.



Nino Saratorre

Nino is, as Elena puts it, "the love of her life." While he only shows up sporadically in the first novel, he plays a major part in this plot. Nino is an aimless intellectual--he is addicted to the intellect itself, not necessarily what he can do with his knowledge and studies. He loves to talk and argue his point and share his knowledge. In the first novel, he seemed a sensitive young man, angry at his father for his treatment of Melina the widow, wishing to make his own mark on the world. He has always been attracted to Elena, even if not in a romantic way. Readers will remember that when he was 9 he asked Elena to marry him, and she was too flummoxed to say yes. When they visit Ischia for the first time, he kisses her because he feels she understands him. As they grow older, he respects her intellect, even visits her at work although he has a girlfriend. It is only when he falls for Lila does the reader wonder if they had misjudged Nino all along. Particularly when recalling how often Nino has kissed Elena or held her hand, his falling for Lila is confusing and hurtful. At the end of their affair, Nino is still the immature, aimless intellectual, unable to sustain his love for the forceful and intense Lila.

Stefano Carracci

Stefano is the calm, kindhearted, even-tempered grocer from the first novel that woos Lila and gets her to marry him. By the first chapter in the second novel, the readers can see that Stefano's calm demeanor is hiding the rough, controlling nature of Don Achille, the feared ogre of the neighborhood. Several times throughout the story, when Lila pushes Stefano too far, he loses his temper, and "the skin covering the nature of Don Achille is pulled back." In these situations Lila ends up being beaten.

Lila is a challenging wife. She offers little support and she is disrespectful time and again. Therefore, Stefano's irritation with her is somewhat justified. She never tries to make their marriage work. Instead, she changes her personality to get what she wants from him through manipulation. One may, at times, feel bad for Stefano, because Lila is too clever for him and is very good at manipulation. However, when the reader learns that Stefano was himself having an extra-marital affair, one that started way before Lila's affair with Nino, any amount of pity felt on his behalf disappears.

At the end of the day, Stefano is a lightly drawn, typical 1950s, small-town husband with an alpha male temperament. Why Lila thought, in their engagement, that he was any different is a mystery. She says that the night of their wedding the Stefano she knew "dissolved" into something different, and at that moment their marriage was doomed.

Michele Solara

Although Stefano is against Lila in the big picture--he's against her freedom of thought and education and movement and motion, it could be argued that he at least loves the skin of her. The same may be argued of Michele Solara, but more than loving Lila, it



seems that Michele wants to possess her. His willingness to display that life-sized photo of her in his store, his desire to have her work there constantly, his unbridled fury when she disappeared for the month, demonstrate that Michele's interests in Lila are more sinister than her husband's.

Michele is only in the periphery in the first novel, as the smarter brother of Marcello. In this story he emerges as the brains and the money of the neighborhood. He is the author of everything that goes on commercially, and has a stake everywhere. As the novel progresses the reader sees his character grow a bit more sinister--for example, he hires Antonio to basically do his dirty work.

In the end of the novel, Lila is working in a factory in terrible conditions--is it foreshadowing for Michele to make an appearance as an anti-union figure?

Antonio Cappuccio

Antonio is the son of the crazy widow Melina and the brother of Ada. At one time, Antonio was also Elena's boyfriend. Early in this novel, the military drafts him. Elena tries to get him out of it by asking Michele Solara for help. Between her meddling and jealousy for Nino, Antonio breaks up with Elena. Though Elena was fond of Antonio, she probably did not love him. As a mechanic, he was never going to rise far in the neighborhood. Elena vacillates for before deciding she does not want that as her fate. He is discharged early from the army because of nerves, and he is saved by Michele Solara, who gives him a job doing "things.," mostly dirty work. His main task in the latter part of the novel is to find Nino and Lila and to beat Nino into oblivion. That will ensure that Nino will not go back to Lila. He retains some semblance of honor by not telling these events to Michele.

Ada Cappuccio

Ada is sister to Antonio, daughter of the crazy widow Melina, and the lover of Stefano Caracci. She begins working in various places: washing the steps of the apartment building, then the Caracci grocery, and then the new grocery. Of all the neighborhood girls, Ada is of the lowest origin. When the Solara brothers 'take her for a ride' in their car in the first story, nobody bats an eye or makes a move to find out what they did to her in that time. For a while she is engaged to the Communist Pasquale Peluso, but she eventually leaves him for Stefano. The author deftly weaves Ada's affair with Stefano into the novel and hides it from the reader until the near end of the story. Their affair is of much longer standing than Lila's and Nino's, and yet Lila receives the brunt of the criticism when the marriage ends. Ada becomes pregnant with Stefano's baby, and Lila with all of her strong, unpredictable ways, befriends Ada in her time of need.



Enzo Scanno

Enzo kind of skates through the first novel, only mentioned a few times. His biggest appearance is early in the story, when, throwing a rock at Lila's face, he shocks the neighborhood by doing very well at solving math problems.

In this story, Enzo has grown up and is one of Lila's many admirers, but has the distinction of being the one man who loves Lila but doesn't want to take anything from her. For this reason, she trusts him. It is Enzo who takes her from the apartment she'd rented with Nino and returns her to her home. It is Enzo who takes her from Stefano for the last time and gives her a home for her and her son. She is very clear that she can't have a physical relationship with him, and though he is clear in his feelings for her, he is content to know that she is safe.

In a novel filled with some reprehensible characters, Enzo is humble, intelligent, dependable, and trustworthy.

Rino Cerullo

Rino is Lila's older brother. His character changes little from the first novel through the second. He has an overblown sense of his own importance, doesn't take responsibility for his own actions, feels entitled to receiving what other people have, and is lazy. While Lila is traditionally wild about her older brother, she does reach a point in the story where she realizes his flaws.

The reader will also note that he fits the same mold as Stefano, as far as what type of husband he is. Like Stefano, he has high expectation for Pinuccia to be obedient, a good cook, a willing sexual partner, and very fertile. When he's not pleased, he explodes and uses violence to express his anger. When the shoe factory turns against him at the hand of the Solaras, he throws a tantrum as if he's a child.

Yet, Lila names her son after him, perhaps hoping to make her brother over in her mind.

Pinuccia "Pina" Caracci Cerullo

Pinuccia is Stefano's sister and Rino's wife, so the two couples are naturally together much of the time. Connected by blood, marriage, and business, Rino and Pina are natural companions to Lila and Stefano. They are also lesser forms of their counterparts: As Rino is the lazier, whinier, less industrious version of Lila, given to complaints rather than action, so Pinuccia is to Stefano. One feels bad for Pinuccia, who naturally pales in comparison to Lila and yet is supposed to be her best friend and companion. They work together and practically live together.

Pina does distinguish herself in a surprising way: when the girls are on Ischia for the summer, Pina spends a lot of time with Nino's friend Bruno Saccavo and develops

feelings for him. However, unlike Lila, who thinks very little about how her choices will affect her life or family, Pina demands to be removed from the situation, from the vacation, to keep her heart pure. In this, she behaves in a much more thoughtful and mature manner than her sister in law.



Symbols and Symbolism

Lila's Photo

The photo of Lila is used as a pawn, both by her and about her. Michele shows great interest in the photo and wants it for the shop on the Piazza. Lila desires this to happen, but pretends it doesn't matter, which calms Stefano down initially. Then the other men convince Stefano to allow it, and then Lila butchers it, symbolizing what she feels has happened to her since marrying Stefano. Like most things that Lila puts her hand to, it works, and people are amazed at her boldness and talent.

Physical Money

The author mentions several times the physical act of Lila throwing money around- here to Pasquale for the dentist, here to Ada for some new makeup, here to Carmen, here to Elena for new books. The sight of the money changing hands is important. It shows that the passing of the thing from one hand to another is important, and also that Lila and Stefano have enough money that she can take it from the cash register without a second thought and share it with her friends.

Cerullo's Shoe Store

The shoe store, like the photo displayed there, is a pawn in the power play between Lila, Stefano, and the Solara brothers. At first, it is run by the fiancées of the principle owners- Gigliola and Pinuccia. Michele often suggests Lila to run the shop, as a way to get Stefano and Rino to do as he pleases. The times that Lila does work there, the shop is very successful, like a dream. The shop becomes a dream place for a while- it's the location for Lila to meet her lover, Nino, in the afternoons when the shops close for a few hours after lunch. It is the dream space for them for the better part of a year. Later in the story, when Lila leaves the shop and Stefano's brother Alfonso takes over, the author obliquely suggests that Alfonso uses the afternoons there for the same purpose, except to meet his homosexual lover. In that way, the shop is a place where anything is possible, an oasis in a world where, truly, many things aren't possible for these characters.

Melina

Melina is a symbol of youthful feminism. While she once was a vibrant young woman, her life - as a wife and a mother- has worn her down and taken away her bloom, her beauty, and her youth. This is also repeated in the Peluso widow, who eventually hangs herself. Lila is on a pursuit to stay young and relevant; she constantly fears the losing her life's importance. The author occasionally shows the reader a glimpse of Melina to remind Lila and Elena what is the eventual fate of women like them.



Mrs. Greco's Limp

Elena's mother, who remains unnamed and is only referred to as "my mother" across hundreds of pages, has a limp. A limp that Elena constantly describes in great detail. Elena mentions several times that she's afraid that she will eventually be crippled like her mother. She even dreams of waking up like her mother. Mrs. Greco, like Melina, is a symbol of the eventual fate of women in the neighborhood. They lose their figure; they lose their bloom and luster; they lose their energy. They lose all of these things in pursuit of husbands and family, of which there are no shining examples in the novel.

Children

It's no surprise that in the setting for this story, having children is important and should be a sought after goal. However, children were also a measure for success, proof that one was a good wife, and proof that God had bestowed his blessing on a marriage. For Lila, who doesn't wish to become pregnant anyway, the delay in that event casts a shadow on her previously elevated status in the neighborhood. When she is pregnant by Stefano, and miscarries, the assumptions that she is a witch are even more pronounced. By contrast, Pinuccia and Rino conceive before they are even married, and rather than receiving criticism for having sex before they are married, the couple is praised and rushed through a wedding. Pinuccia is praised for her fertility.

Education

If education was important in the first installment of this series, when Elena was allowed to continue and Lila was not, it is even more so in this novel. Elena both graduates high school at the top of her class and is given a free scholarship to Pisa, where she takes a degree in literature. In all ways she excels past what Lila possibly can, although she still feels her lack of breeding wherever she goes. Lila, in turn, feels her lack of education when she goes to the Professor's party with Elena, but by the end of the novel she has made peace with the 'accomplishment' of education as just another thing that comes and goes. For Elena, who lacks the natural grace and confidence of her friend, her education is what she has that sets her away from the neighborhood and makes her different.

Swimming

All of the exciting events happen on the beach in Ischia. Lila has to go there to swim, in order to better be able to conceive, and with the help of Nino she learns quickly. Elena is unable to keep up with them, and the whole thing is like the developing relationship between Nino and Lila. As they fall for each other they swim longer and farther each day, leaving Elena behind. Although Elena is very special to both of them separately, with their affair they are going somewhere she can't follow.



Socio-Political Unrest

Although only slightly referenced directly, the author is constantly laying the groundwork for political clashes. Pasquale is a committed Communist, Elena's future father-in-law a committed Socialist, and their neighborhood experiences constant clashes and fights between various political groups. Antonio, when he sees Nino and Lila walking through the streets, is trying to put down a Communist riot. There is consistent discussion among the characters about economic fairness, how people become poor and rich, and what little those in power do to help. Characters like Pasquale, Carmen, and Antonio find themselves unable to find good jobs and gain any sort of wealth. In the end of the book, Lila is working in a bad position in a poorly run factory, setting the stage for further class warfare in the next installment.

Books and Writing

There are several references to both reading and writing in this story. It is mostly used to separate the educated from the uneducated. When Lila revives her interest in life and in education, she begins reading again and writing furiously in notebooks to get her mind working again. Nino, the epitome of the educated elite in this story, both reads and writes articles for journals and papers. Furthermore, Elena mentally compares writing styles- hers vs Lila's vs Nino's- for similarities and skill level. For Elena, the ultimate accomplishment is publishing her novel, and even then the author brings the trio back around: Elena sees shades of Lila in her writing, and in the end, Nino shows up to praise her.



Settings

Ischia

Ischia is an island where the neighborhood residents go for a vacation during the summer. In the first novel, it is where Elena spent so much time with the Saratorres, which ended in Nino's kiss and Donato's sexual assault. In this novel, Elena goes with Lila, Pinuccia, and Nunzia to the island for a long break. The husbands come over for the weekend; Lila is supposed to be swimming. However, Ischia is where Nino and Lila fall in love and begin their affair. In many ways, it is a place where innocence is lost for both girls. Elena loses her virginity there to Donato Saratorre, and when they leave Ischia the girls cease communicating for months on end.

The new Carracci grocery store.

The 'new' Carracci store is important because it's an upgrade from the one in the neighborhood. It's implied that the money to open it was borrowed from the Solaras, and Lila is bounced between working there and working at the Solara shoe store. The store is important because it's one of the vehicles of Stefano's financial difficulties, and also a place where Lila works when she is staying out of trouble with Stefano.

The Solara Shoe Store

The Solara shoe store is a large part of this novel. It is financed in part by the Solaras and in part by Stefano, with shoes made by Rino and Fernando Cerullo. Therefore, three families all have interest in the store. Aside from the basic power struggle at which the store is the center, it is the place where, for over a year, Lila meets Nino Saratorre for their affair. It is also the location of the enlarged photo of Lila in her wedding dress, which is also an important pawn in the game.

Lila and Stefano's New House

The Carracci's home is new and fancy, unlike anything in the neighborhood. Elena often goes there to study, and is amazed at the carpet, the fixtures, the bathtub, the balcony, and the kitchen. Everything is new and beautiful. However, the Carracci's marriage is unhappy, and so is the apartment. It is the scene of many fights and beatings.

The University in Pisa

With her high scores in high school, Elena is granted the opportunity to study in Pisa for free. Like Lila's house, Elena marvels at her own room, her own bed, and her own desk. She has an unlimited supply of books, food, and classes. It is undoubtedly the place

where Elena blossoms, although she always has a difficult time shedding the Naples accent and the look of the neighborhood.



Themes and Motifs

Feminism

Much more than the first novel in the series, this story carries heavy feminist themes. The author is contemporary, but the setting is the mid-1960s, the neighborhood still small and provincial. Lila and Elena are sixteen when the book begins, at the age when they should be looking at the wide open opportunities ahead with excitement. However, they find themselves in the bind in which women sat for centuries: they could marry or study. Barring those, they could work, like Carmen or Ada, but it was best to also have a man if a young woman was just going to work in a shop.

Both Lila and Elena are frightened that their lives will mean nothing. In many ways, this fear is bigger than their competitiveness or their jealousies. The old, sagging, directionless figures of Melina and Mrs. Greco are the symbols to these two girls of the aimless life of the average woman. Marriage, children, and then what? Growing old from the care of them, and nothing else. This is the fear.

When Nino Sarratorre graduates from high school and takes off for London to learn English and hang around the Economy school with no job and no firm plans, both girls are envious. They look at each other and say, "were a woman to do that!" Men are allowed to do as they please with women--Elena's college boyfriend Franco is encouraged to have as many women as he'd like, while Elena is thought to be 'easy' because she was one of them.

In many ways, both girls are able to achieve meaning by the time the book ends, when they are twenty-three. Elena has earned a college degree and written a novel. Lila has 'truly loved' Nino, although it was short lived. She has a child. At the very end, she is learning numbers and math with extreme joy and fervor. Lila, at least, has learned that things are not as important as loving your life every day.

Submission

Because the first novel in the series is focused on the childhood and early adolescence of Lila and Elena, the author has little need to delve into the nature of marriage in the time of place of 1960s small town Naples. The first novel contains a very few references to the common nature of beatings, not only between husband and wife but between husband and children.

However, in this novel, because Lila is (at 16) a married woman, the nature of a submissive wife is a much more prevalent theme. The reader sees it first in Nunzia's many references to Lila "doing what her husband asks," as well as asking for Stefano's permission to do anything outside the home. These standards are set long before Lila embarks on an affair with Nino.



On their wedding night, Stefano beats Lila until she will consent to have sex with him. Even then, she does so unwillingly. When the honeymoon has passed, everybody ignores the bruises and swelling on Lila's face and arms. It is, according to Lila's mother, what wives have to endure in a marriage. "One moment you're beaten and the next, kissed," she says to Elena at one point in the story. Lila's highest calling is to be certain that everything in Stefano's life is exactly how he likes it.

Tied to the expectation of submission in marriage is Lila's envy that Elena, who is unmarried, is free to do however she pleases. More than once she reminds Elena that marriage means bondage, in a way. What is ironic is that, due to their personalities, it is Lila who ends up doing much of what she pleases, and Elena who feels trapped.

Love

Love sounds like it may be a trite way to summarize the many emotional entanglements going on in this novel, but it actually is a deeply important factor behind the characters' motivations. The main plot event in this story is Lila's affair with Nino: events conspire that lead up to the affair, and the remainder of the plot is affected by Lila's choices.

Lila finds that going with Nino is an emotional imperative. She is far above being merely physically attracted to someone. Her motivation to begin her affair is based on how Nino makes her feel. She says in her notebooks that she was nearly dead from her marriage to Stefano--which is not based on love at all, but power and control. Nino, on the other hand, is interested in her mind and welfare and has no interest in caging her, so it awakens Lila to a feelings she has never had. Several times she says that whatever happens to them in the future does not matter because she gets to experience it. She prays that Elena has a chance to experience the same feeling.

Elena, on the other hand, finds that the emotion of strong love is a repellent to her. While pondering the upheaval of Lila literally risking everything to be with Nino, she realizes that experiencing such a strong, overwhelming desire is alien to her. Not only alien, but fearful. She stares at the ocean and feels small and dysfunctional, unable to love or strive for a man the way Lila reached out and snatched Nino away from her. For the next year of her life, while she ignores Nino and Lila, she imposes on herself a strict sort of emotional detachment. She does not want to engage and she is afraid that she cannot.

Material Success

Many of the plotting in this story revolves around the gaining of material success for men of business: Stefano, Rino, and the Solara brothers. Second only to the affair between Lila and Nino, the politics of the neighborhood comprise a large part of this story, and the politics of the neighborhood are all tied to business pursuits.

When Stefano Carracci gave Michele Solara the shoes that Lila made, he was not only handing over the shoes, he was (the reader finds out later) borrowing money from the



Solaras with which he opened a new grocery store. He also goes into partnership with the Solaras for the shoe store on the Piazza, which sells Cerullo shoes. This partnership with a certain enemy is the cause of a lot of tension between Stefano and the other men throughout the story--tension at the center of which is usually Lila.

Lila volleys between working at the grocery and working at the shoe store, and whichever plays she's working at experiences high success. The men complete over her cleverness and style, which translates into money.

Whereas gaining a good education was a focus in the first book, gaining wealth is more of a focus in this one. Elena notices all of Lila's clothing, her jewelry, her shoes. When she studies at Lila's apartment she spends much time in awe of the fixtures, the carpet, and the furniture. On the other hand, although Elena is a highly successful student, she mentions often how much her parents complain that she doesn't bring any money in. Only during the summer can she earn a few lire doing odd jobs while school isn't in session.

Class Distinction

A thread of class distinction runs through this plot for all of the characters. Elena, who, despite achieving the highest amount of education of anyone in her neighborhood, feels uneasy around people of breeding and accomplishment. She spends her time in Pisa hiding behind boyfriends to feel like she belongs. She begins her last year in Pisa weighted down with depression and the feeling that she will never be equal to the people who were born into privilege.

Lila, who was born poor but marries one of the wealthiest young men in the neighborhood, achieves a sort of class-leap, but to her detriment. After her failed marriage, she willingly leave the posh apartment and find clothes to be rid of the tangles of the neighborhood. She has the change to hop to an either higher level as the kept woman of Michele Solara, owner of multiple businesses and an even nicer home than Stefano's, but she turns it down.

For the most part, the kids of the neighborhood disdain the wealthier people. For Lila, Enzo, and Pasquale, there is a desire to break the cycle and change things--Lila begins with a plan to educate every child in the neighborhood. They want to actually do good, not just talk about it--something Nino Sarratore decries against.



Styles

Point of View

The author has chosen to tell the story in first person, from Elena's perspective. However, the author cleverly allows the reader into Lila's mind, because at the beginning of the story- the reader remembers that at the beginning of the first novel, Lila has disappeared, at age sixty-six- Elena recalls a box of notebooks Lila gave her when they were eighteen, saying she couldn't let Stefano read them. The notebooks tell the story of the few years described in this novel; because Elena is essentially reading Lila's words, the reader can be in a place where Elena was not. The author handles this very well, never forgetting which story belongs where or to whom.

Language and Meaning

The author's language is beautiful, lyrical; yet, it is sometimes stark. She leaves nothing to the reader's imagination. She is always very clear, even to the extent of shocking the reader or making them uncomfortable. The thoughts of her characters are realistic, and she communicates such truth through language.

Structure

At the beginning of *The Story of a New Name*, Elena recounts that Lila has disappeared, at the age of sixty-six. She then recalls that Lila gave her a box of notebooks when they were young. The remainder of the novel tells the years from a mixed perspective between the two girls. At times, Elena will break in during the "present time" and remind the reader that she is telling the story from Lila's notebooks. The story is non-linear in a few places.



Quotes

If I want something, I just have to act like a little whore.
-- Lila (chapter 33 paragraph 4)

Importance: Elena asks Lila how she got Stefano to allow her to go to the party and how she managed to get him to agree to drive them to the party, This quote is Lila's answer. It is accompanied by a look of revulsion and self-disgust. By this point in the marriage Lila has learned how to work Stefano, and she cannot stand it.

"Lila, Lila: she wanted to exceed and and with her excesses make us all suffer.
-- Elena (chapter 38 paragraph 4)

Importance: Lila is a force of nature; all of the characters recognize this. In her drive to control and manage, she crashes into everyone around her like a moving planet. Her path to what she has set her eyes on knocks people over in the process.

"What should I understand, Lila? You're the lucky ones, who are married."-
-- Elena (chapter 47 paragraph 2)

Importance: Although Elena says this sarcastically in order to get Lila off her back about Nino, there is underlying truth there. To Elena, Lila and Pinu are lucky to be married. Their decisions are made, there's no questions or open paths stretched out before them. Besides that, the glory of being loved and having children. Elena's casual remark reveals the desire underneath.

For your whole life you love people and you never really know who they are. Fernando was both good and bad, and she had loved him very much but she had also hated him.
-- Nunzia (chapter 49 paragraph 5)

Importance: This quote refers back to one of the major themes of the novel, wives' submission to their husbands. Nunzia goes on to say, "one minute you're getting beaten, and the next one, kissed." Marriage is for life, and sometimes you love your man and sometimes you don't. Fighting and beating is part of the package.

"He was as profound in confronting the great problems of the world as he was superficial in feelings of love."
-- Elena (chapter 56 paragraph 4)

Importance: Elena refers to Nino in this quote. In watching him fall haplessly for Lila, a married woman, she compares the meticulousness of his academics with the thoughtlessness of his affair with Lila.

"And I was unable to resist: on the one hand I said that's enough, on the other I was depressed at the idea of not being part of her life, of the means by which she invented it for herself.



-- Elena (chapter 65 paragraph 3)

Importance: This quote refers to Lila begging Elena to help her sneak away with Nino. Lila uses all of the weapons at hand in her arsenal, and the to Elena, the lure of being counted important to Lila is one of them. To be involved in their secret is more important to Elena than being left out of it, however painful it may be to witness it.

She knows how to wound, it's written in her face, it's enough to look at her forehead and her eyes.

-- Nella (chapter 69 paragraph 3)

Importance: This quote happens in a conversation between Elena and Nella. Elena is visiting Barone while Lila is with Nino. It seems as if Nella can tell that Elena feels the lack when compared to Lila, something almost nobody else in their circle of friends can see.

She deserved Nino, in other words, not because she thought that to love him meant to try to have him, not to hope that he would want her.

-- Elena (chapter 70 paragraph 3)

Importance: This quote reflects one of the many dark thoughts Elena has in the 36 hours that Lila is alone with Nino. She feels like she doesn't deserve him because she doesn't know how to chase him and make him love her. Elena struggles for years with self worth and self confidence; she didn't tell Lila she liked Nino when she had to chance.

"Men are all made of the same clay, only Nino is different.

-- Elena (chapter 75 paragraph 4)

Importance: Elena thinks this after reflecting on how little the men in Lila's life have stood up for her against her husband's beatings. It also foreshadows Elena's tendency to blame other people for Nino's insufficiency. She is certain that he is different, but for the reader who has watched him hurt Elena and Nadia in pursuit of Lila, one can't be sure. It is certain, however, that this occurrence is not the last time that Elena will fail to see Nino's flaws.

Like the sea on a calm day. Or like a sunset. Or like the sky at night. It's like fake powder patted on over the horror. If you take it away, we are left alone with our fear.

-- Elena (chapter 80 paragraph 3)

Importance: Elena utters this phrase when she is taking her exam to graduate from high school. In her paper for her exam she had written that everything is temporary. When her professor asks her to elaborate, this quote is part of Elena's answer. Poetry, she says, is just the world's way of covering up the fear and temporary nature of things in the world.



How easy it is to tell the story of myself without Lila.
-- Elena (chapter 84 paragraph 3)

Importance: Elena says this after taking a short chapter of 8-10 paragraphs to describe the first two years of her life at the university in Pisa. Because her story is so entangled with Lila, those events take pages and pages not only of events, but of thoughts and worries and fears and motivations. When Elena leaves for Pisa, she is leaving Lila behind in her mess with Nino, determined to keep out of their drama. As a result, her life is Lila-free for years, and seems to happen in a different universe, one void of the highs and lows that Lila's presence brings.

You confused my ideas. Because you're like a drop of water, ting ting ting. Until it's done your way, you won't stop.
-- Nino (chapter 91 paragraph 5)

Importance: Nino says this to Lila during their last fight, after which he leaves her and doesn't return. In their short time living together it's apparent that Lila is a force and Nino is not. She overpowers him at every turn. She forces him to study and write and re-write, and he cracks under the pressure of who she is. Their affair is almost completely based on physical attraction, so when Lila attempts to enter his academic world, he can't stand it.