

This Is Where I Leave You Study Guide

This Is Where I Leave You by Jonathan Tropper

(c)2016 BookRags, Inc. All rights reserved.



Contents

This Is Where I Leave You Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	3
Section 1: Chapters 1 - 5.....	5
Section 2: Chapter 6 - 11.....	9
Section 3: Chapters 12 - 18.....	13
Section 4: Chapters 19 - 27.....	17
Section 5: Chapter 28 - 31.....	21
Section 6: Chapters 32 - 40.....	24
Section 7: Chapter 42 - 50.....	28
Characters.....	32
Symbols and Symbolism.....	37
Settings.....	39
Themes and Motifs.....	41
Styles.....	46
Quotes.....	48



Plot Summary

This Is Where I Leave You, by Jonathan Tropper, begins as Judd Foxman answers a call from his sister, Wendy. Wendy tells her brother that their father has died and that the funeral is the next day. She also tells him that their father's last wish was that they sit Shiva, a Jewish mourning ritual that lasts seven days. As Mort was an atheist, Judd finds it hard to believe that this was his last wish. However, he agrees to go through with it.

The next day Judd is about to leave when his estranged wife, Jen, shows up at his basement apartment. Judd has been living in the apartment since he found Jen having sex with his boss, Wade. Jen had been having an affair with Wade for a year, but Judd knew nothing about it until he found them in bed. Jen has come to tell Judd that she is pregnant. She was pregnant once before, but she lost the baby. Since Judd thinks that the baby is Wade's, he makes a remark that hurts Jen and leaves.

Everyone is at the funeral except for Mort's youngest son, Phillip. The rabbi presiding over the service is an old friend of Judd's older brother, Paul. When they were in high school, the rabbi's nickname was Boner. Paul gives the eulogy. Finally, Phillip arrives. Before leaving, he breaks down and cries. He is the only member of the family who does so.

Back at the house, an old friend of Judd's mother, Hillary, and her son greet them. The woman's name is Linda and her son's name is Horry. Horry suffers from brain damage due to being hit in the head during a bar fight. Before then, he had dated Judd's sister, Wendy. He is happy to see Wendy, and she cries when she sees him.

The next day Boner comes by to prepare the house for sitting Shiva. The siblings try to get out of doing it, but Hillary comes into the room and forces them to stay. People start coming to the house. At one point, Judd decides he needs a break and goes into the kitchen. Linda is there, and he confides in her. She knows that he wants to go out, so she asks him to pick up Horry who works at the store which Mort owns and operates with Paul's help. He picks him up. Horry tells Judd that Penny, a girl Judd used to like, works in the store. He suggests that Judd go in and talk to her. Judd says that he will some other time. That night, Judd has a recurring dream in which he has a prosthetic leg instead of a real one. Judd's dream returns throughout his stay at the house, but they change in content and meaning as he grows.

Judd finally does talk to Penny, and the two go out. The renewal of their relationship comes to an abrupt end, however, when Jen calls while Judd is out with Penny. As it turns out, Judd (not Wade) is the baby's father. Jen calls Judd because she thinks that she might be in danger of losing the baby. He meets her at the hospital and everything is fine. Upon hearing the baby's heartbeat, he begins to accept the fact that he is going to be a father for the first time.



During the seven days, Judd makes up with Paul whose baseball career ended before it even started due to a Rottweiler attack that would not have happened if Paul had not tried to get revenge for Judd's sake. Paul accepts the fact that he needs his family to help run the business and agrees to let Phillip work for him as long as Judd shares the burden. Wendy puts her feeling for Horry in place. The children find out that Linda and Hillary are a couple – a relationship that Mort approved of.

When the seven days are finally over, Judd goes to Maine to consider his options in life.



Section 1: Chapters 1 - 5

Summary

In Chapter 1, Judd Foxman's sister, Wendy, calls to inform him that their father, Mort, has died after his long battle with stomach cancer. During the conversation, she tells him that the funeral will be the next morning and that their father's last wish was for them to sit Shiva, a Jewish mourning ritual that lasts seven days. Apparently, this was his last wish even though he was an atheist. Judd cannot believe that the family is going to go through with it, but Wendy stresses the fact that it was their father's dying wish. Their brother, Paul, told her about it. She has left a message for their younger brother, Phillip. Since they have no idea where he is, or what physical state he is in, they are not sure that he is going to attend. The conversation ends abruptly when Wendy asks Judd, in a tactless manner, how his life is going.

It is the next day in Chapter 2. Judd is packing when his soon-to-be ex-wife, Jen, drives up. He has not talked to her for some time, even though she has tried to reach him. The two separated after Judd found out that Jen has been having an affair with his boss, Wade. Even though Judd has moved out of the house (he now lives in the basement of an old couple's home), he has conflicting feelings towards Jen. She is there now to tell him that she is pregnant. She was pregnant once before, but the baby died three weeks prior to the due date. Judd references that fact in a way that hurts Jen. Before he drives off, he tells her that he hates her.

As readers find out in Chapter 3, Judd and Jen got married young and thought that their marriage would always be perfect. Even so, their relationship succumbs to monotony. The day Judd discovers Jen's affair with Wade is Jen's birthday. They plan to go to dinner, but he comes home early with a birthday cake for her. She always takes her birthday off. When he gets home, Judd knows she is there. So, he takes the cake, with lit candles, upstairs to surprise her. When he gets there, he is the one who gets the surprise. Jen and Wade are in his bed having sex. Judd stands there for a while, not believing what he is seeing. Then he attacks Wade with the cake, setting Wade's private parts on fire. In the commotion, Wade accidentally breaks Jen's nose. Judd goes downstairs and smashes Jen's grandmother's china. After Wade, the police, and the paramedics leave, Jen tries to apologize and explain herself, but Judd refuses to listen to her. He asks her how long the affair has been going on and finds out that it has been going on for a year. Judd leaves, but he has nowhere to go. He creates a scenario that includes moving to Maine and starting a relationship with another damaged person, but he decides he needs to stay closer to home. He finally rents the basement apartment in an old couple's house and becomes a hermit.

Chapter 4 moves back to the present. The family, with the exception of Phillip, is at the funeral. Judd, Paul, Barry, and Judd's uncle and cousin are carrying the coffin. After they lower it, Judd goes to his mother's side. She advises him on ways to deal with his grief. She is a psychiatrist who wrote a famous book on parenting. The rabbi presiding



over the service was Paul's best friend when they were children. His nickname back then was Boner. He has just begun the service when Phillip arrives driving a Porsche. Wearing moccasins, he fumbles with his tie. Finally, he gives up. He greets the family and, without thinking, calls the rabbi by his old nickname, Boner. Paul reads the eulogy which Judd says sounds more like an acceptance speech for winning the Most Dedicated Son Award. At the end of the service, the family shovels some dirt in the grave. When it is Phillip's turn, he does so and then falls on his knees and starts crying.

The family returns home in Chapter 5. Linda Cullen, Hillary's (Judd's mother) closest friend, and her son Horry greet them. The mother and son are almost part of the family. Horry had once dated Wendy. Now, however, he suffers from brain damage due to a blow in the head during a bar fight when he was in college. Wendy hugs Horry when she sees him and starts crying. The family eats lunch. They can hear Wendy's daughter, Serena, crying upstairs. Wendy ignores it. Downstairs, her son, Ryan, is banging on the piano. Her husband, Barry, tries to get him to stop, but only because he is on the phone and the background noise is bothering him. Paul's wife, Alice, has been helping Linda serve the meal. She and Paul have been trying to have children and now she is on fertility drugs. She looks at Ryan with a strange smile. Suddenly, the kids are quiet and then Philip's phone rings. He goes outside and the family members rush to the window to see what is going on. From there, they see him kiss a well-dressed woman who does not seem to be his type. When he comes in the house with her, he introduces her as Tracy, his fiancée. Before that, she was his therapist. Then Cole, one of Wendy's children, comes downstairs with a training potty in his hands. He is proud of the fact that he has made a T-shape with his poo. He shows it to Barry, but he is not interested. Then, the proud boy tosses the potty in the air. Everyone ducks. Cole's poo lands on Paul's plate.

Analysis

This section introduces the Foxman family and the novel's narrator, Judd, whose views color the reader's perception of events and people throughout the story.

It does not take long for readers to realize that Judd comes from a dysfunctional family. They are cynical, even when traumatic events occur, like the death of the family's patriarch and the demise of Judd's marriage. They do not know how to show emotion. When Judd describes the funeral, he talks about the weather and Boner's history. He cannot show grief because that means showing emotions. The only one who can grieve openly is Philip – the black sheep of the family. He horrifies the others when he breaks down and cries. To the family's credit, they are slightly envious of his ability to be emotional. The scene in which Cole throws his poop in the air and it lands on Paul's plate symbolizes just how dysfunctional the family really is. Their meals – a symbol of gathering, communication, and community, are a disaster.

This section also invites readers to think about parenting issues. Paul, Judd, and Wendy are like their father due to the way their parents raise them. Philip, however, was both coddled and ignored and turned out more like Hillary. Barry, Wendy's husband, does not



connect emotionally with his children. Wendy is there for them, but she pretty much lets them act independently. She lets Serena cry instead of giving into her. Is this the way her parents raised her? How will her children end up? Will they be a repeat of the Foxman clan?

It is interesting that at the same time Judd loses his father he loses his wife. Along with that, he loses his identity. While Judd seems to be going to his father's funeral as just something else on his to-do list, he grieves the loss of Jen, or maybe he grieves the loss of his idea of love. As Linda says, Judd is a romantic. He buys into Hollywood's idea of love just as much as anyone else. So, when he sees Jen with Wade, his view of love dies. He grieves the loss in the same way a love-struck teenager would view it. He first shows the denial, then anger, and then depression. How can a teenager have a successful marriage?

Finally, this section ponders questions about the role of religion in one's life. Mort was an atheist. Yet he wants his children to sit Shiva. Why? Is it hypocritical for them to do so? None of them are religious. What about Boner? Growing up, he let his friends sneak in and look at his father's pornography collection. He smoked pot and listened to rock music. Did he become a rabbi because, for some reason, it fits his purpose or because he has really turned to religion? What purpose does religion serve in one's life?

As readers learn about the characters in Judd's life, they must remember that they are seeing them through Judd's eyes. Is his view the view of reality? Are Jen and Wade really the bad guys, or did Judd somehow play a role in their betrayal of him? By showing his relationship with his family, the author alerts readers that Judd may not be as innocent as he wants readers to think.

Discussion Question 1

What does the fact that the Foxman siblings are willing to sit Shiva tell you about them as a whole?

Discussion Question 2

After discovering Jen's affair with Wade, Judd thought about going to Maine. Then, he decided that he needed to stay closer to home. Why do you think he made that decision? What does this say about his character? What would you have done in his situation?

Discussion Question 3

Judd's mother is a psychiatrist and an expert on parenting. What is your opinion of her parenting skills thus far?



Vocabulary

offhandedly, chafe, watershed, evasion, banter, expletives, decrepitude, inscrutable, mediator, affiliate, flinched, bludgeon, conundrum, marquee, entreaties, pallbearers, phenomenon, painstakingly, impermanence, integrated.



Section 2: Chapter 6 - 11

Summary

Judd remembers when he first met Jen in Chapter 6. He did not have any classes with her, but he would always see her on her bike. One day he calls out to her, and she stops. The two start talking. According to Jen, she knew that she was going to marry him from that moment. Judd blames Hollywood and its romantic comedies for making everyone think that life works that way. He also says that instead of falling for the notion, he should have been running his life.

It is later on the same day in Chapter 7. Boner comes to the house to prepare it for Shiva. He brings five low chairs that the family members are supposed to sit, and he covers the mirror because there should be no signs of vanity. They are only supposed to reflect on their father's life. The siblings still cannot believe their father wanted them to do this and try to get out of it in spite of Boner's reassurance that this is what he really wanted. Judd is about to usher Boner out of the house when their mother comes and tells them that they are grounded. In other words, they are going to go through with it.

While they sit and wait for people to arrive, Judd glances at a scar on Paul's hand. It continues to the inside of his forearm. It is from a Rottweiler's bite. Paul notices Judd staring. He gives him a harsh look and, self-consciously, hides the scar. Paul has not directly spoken to Judd since he arrived. Judd believes that the reason could either be because Paul blames him for the bite (that ended his baseball career before it started) or because he had dated Alice in high school before Paul had started going out with her. The two brothers start trading verbal jabs with other in a passive aggressive manner. They only stop because the guests begin to arrive. The chapter ends with a flashback. Judd, Paul, and their father went fishing. During the outing, Paul accidentally hooked Judd's ear. Judd remembers that even though Paul apologized, he still acted as if it were Judd's fault.

In Chapter 8, the guests keep on coming. Judd and his family members talk to them, answering the same questions over and over again. Most of the people who come are senior citizens. Interacting with them makes Judd think of mortality, growing old, and the sad state he is in now - a man with nothing. He goes into the kitchen and talks with Linda. He feels bad for not thinking about her for all of these years, especially since she was like his second mother. Knowing that he wants to leave the house, but his car is blocked, she lends him her car and asks him to pick up Horry on the way back. He is working at the family's store. On the way to the store, Judd thinks about how his father had enjoyed them when they were young, but he did not understand them when they grew up. Horry comes to the car. As he and Judd talk, Judd senses that Horry feels animosity towards Linda. Horry tells Judd that a girl he used to like, Penny Moore, works in the store. He thinks that she might like to see Judd. Judd wants to wait until some other time to see her.



When Judd returns to the living room in Chapter 9, he finds the house full of guests. His mother tries to match him up with the daughter of one of the guests. Judd gets out of it by making a statement that he knows the girl's mother will not approve. After everyone leaves, the family goes to bed. Judd finds out that his family has already made the sleeping arrangements. He gets to sleep in the basement. Once there, he checks his messages. Jen has been trying to reach him for a while and has left another message. She wants to be on friendly terms so that they can have an amicable divorce and she can feel that he has forgiven her. She has taken different approaches to get him to return her calls. This time she says that she will empty their joint bank account. He decides to go to the bank in the morning to beat her to it.

Later that night, in Chapter 10, Judd has a recurring dream. In the dream, he is walking through the town alone. Then, he realizes that he has a prosthetic leg, but he does not know why he lost his real leg. When he wakes up the next morning, he hears Phillip and Tracy upstairs having sex. He goes into the bathroom. When he returns, his mother is in the room. They hear Phillip and Tracy again, prompting Judd's mother to comment on Tracy's age. She says that Phillip must be working through some mother issues. She then proceeds to lounge around in a way that is too sexy for Judd. She tells him more than he wants to know about her sex life with his father.

The circuits blow in Chapter 11. Judd goes to try to reset them and finds Alice trying to do the same thing. As Judd resets the switch, his towel falls off. Alice remarks that it is nothing she has not seen before and goes back upstairs. Later, when the family is together, they share memorable moments with their father. Wendy's shares the time she had her first period. Phillip tells about a baseball game in which the coach started yelling at him and Mort had come to his defense by knocking the coach out. Tracy does not approve of how he had handled the situation. She walks out when Phillip does not agree with her view. Now it is Judd's turn, but he cannot think of anything. He just remembers how jealous he had been when he rode to Paul's baseball games with his father.

Analysis

Judd is really in love with the idea of being in love. He sees Jen riding her bike. The scene sounds like something out of a movie. He finally gets to talk to her, and they click. However, they do not really know each other. They do not share any classes together. Their only bond is their love for each other and their romantic view of what love should be. This feeling is what they think will take them through the rest of their lives together. It is an unrealistic view. When this love fades, Jen looks elsewhere for the support she needs because Judd cannot give it to her.

Judd has relationship problems with others, too. This section gives readers an insight into his relationship with Paul. Even though they do not know exactly what happened, they now know that there was a life-changing incident, for Paul anyway, that has caused a rift between the two brothers. In addition, one wonders whether they ever really got along when Judd tells readers the story about his fishing trip with Paul and his father.



Has Paul always held some sort of grudge against Judd? It seems that way until the reader finds out that Judd was jealous of Paul. Here is the influence of the unreliable narrator. Who is really "at fault" when it comes to his relationship with Paul. Is it Paul, or, as in his relationship with Jen, does Judd also play a role?

The issue of what makes a good parent appears in two of this section's scenes. When Judd picks up Horry, he senses that Horry resents Linda for not letting him be more independent. Given Horry's state, is it realistic that Linda would let him live on his own? What would be better for Horry - to live as independently as he can under the watchful eye of Linda or to live on his own and become lost or maybe even die? What do good parents do - try to protect their children or send them out to survive on their own?

Hillary faces the same dilemma when it comes to Judd, although to a lesser degree. Judd feels that part of him is missing now that Jen is gone as evidenced by the fact that he dreams that he has a missing limb. Hillary senses this and tries to help by playing matchmaker. Judd, like Horry though, wants to be independent. He does not want his mother trying to fix his life for him, so he rebels like the teenager he is instead of telling her, like an adult, that he is not interested in finding someone else and, even if her were, he does not need her help.

Foreshadowing occurs with the mention of Penny and Alice's appearance in the basement. Will Judd end up with one of these women. Finally connecting with Penny would lead to the ending of the ultimate Hollywood romance. An Alice storyline would create drama, especially considering Judd's relationship with Paul. Still it would follow the Hollywood storyline as the two dated when they were in high school. Would Judd, however, betray his brother as he has been betrayed? Readers must read on to find out.

One thing that they know for sure, however, is that Judd does not connect emotionally to his father. The other's have unconventional memories of their time together, but Judd does not have any. He just remembers being jealous of Paul. This fact shows that Judd may not have had the power he thought he had. Maybe he has always been, or at least felt like he was in the shadow of others. Finding out about Jen's affair simply reinforces his feelings of inadequacy.

One final point to note is Judd's description of how his father wired the house. This shows Mort's character. He does things himself the best he can. The result may look okay on the outside, but in reality, his efforts can create something that does not function properly. This is the way he raised his children. Still, even though he did not have all of the answers, he did not let this stop him in doing his best.

Discussion Question 1

Has Hollywood skewed people's perspective when it comes to love? Support your opinion.



Discussion Question 2

Is Judd ready to meet another woman at this point in time? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 3

What do you make of Judd's recurring dream?

Vocabulary

impulse, surveyed, ironically, petition, tentatively, grappling, perspective, congenital, perimeter, grudgingly, jugular, credibility, epic, ragged, bewildered, immortalized, bereaved, rendering, temperamental



Section 3: Chapters 12 - 18

Summary

In Chapter 12, Judd and his siblings look on while Mr. Applebaum, an old friend of the family who is now a widower, flirts with Hillary under the guise of giving his condolences. When he leaves, everyone comments on his actions. Hillary pretends that she does not know what they are talking about.

Judd makes it to the bank in Chapter 13. He is there to withdraw \$16,000 from his joint bank account with Jen. This will leave her access to a few thousand dollars. As he waits to get the money, he daydreams about the good-looking bank teller who is helping him.

Chapter 14 goes back to Judd's first meeting with Wade after finding out his affair with Jen. It takes place in Wade's office in the presence of the radio station manager, Stuart, who also serves as the HR manager. Wade offers his apologies, and Judd uses rude language to inquire about the affair. They finally get to the reason for the meeting, which is to offer Judd a raise. With no job offers in front of him, Judd is about to sign the contract when Wade tells him that he loves Jen. His admission makes Judd go berserk. He tears up the contract, throws a chair at Wade, and leaves the premises.

In Chapter 15, some young people finally come to the Shiva. The group consists of three girls who are Phillips's friends. Tracy comes back while they are flirting with Phillip. He introduces her to them, but leaves out the part about her being his fiancée. She calmly shakes hands with the girls. Judd talks to Linda at the end of the day. She asks him to pick up Horry again. She also tells him that Horry hates her. Judd suggests that maybe he needs his independence. Linda tells him that he cannot take care of himself. She also tells him that it is not easy for Horry to see Wendy. Then she suggests that Judd go and see Penny.

Judd takes Linda's advice in Chapter 16 and goes to see Penny at the store, or the Place as his father had called it. She's happy to see him and they catch up. Both of them remember the pact they made one summer before college when her boyfriend was backpacking. If they were not married by the time they were 40, they would marry each other. When Judd returns to the car, Horry is waiting for him. He's having a mini seizure. Once it is over, Horry asks if he saw Penny. On the way home, they pass the place where the Rottweiler attacked Paul. Horry also talks about the time he hit Wendy during one of his angry fits before they had gotten the dosage of his medication right soon after his release from the hospital. She had tried to help care for him, but after the incident Linida had suggested that she go back to college and she had. When she came back, she was with Barry.

The recurring dream comes back in Chapter 17. This time he is making love to Jen. Then it is Wade who is with Jen and he is watching as he tries to get his prosthetic leg



back on. Then he is with other people. The Rottweiler that attacked Paul suddenly appears and starts attacking him. He wakes up.

In Chapter 18, the power goes out again and Judd runs into the Alice in the basement with only his towel, again. She breaths in the scent of baby shampoo, leans against him and tells him that she loves that smell. He tries to turn the conversation in another direction. The lights come back on. Alice tells Judd that he can always talk to her if he needs to and kisses him on the cheek.

During breakfast, Paul brings up the subject of Mort's will. He has left half of the store to Paul. Paul's siblings are to split the other half. Hillary doesn't have to worry about money due to her royalties, Mort's insurance and the house. Paul wants to buy out his siblings. Phillip shocks everyone by saying that he wants to buy out Judd and Wendy and help Paul with the store. He can be the marketing guy. Paul does not hide the fact that he is against the idea. As they talk, Paul realizes that Tracy is giving Phillip money. He calls Phillip a whore and the two of them begin to physically fight. They are about to take the fight outside when Jen suddenly appears, distracting Paul and everyone else. Hillary greets her as if nothing unusual is going on. Jen gives her condolences. While this is going on, Phillip punches Paul and knocks him out.

Analysis

The idea of love is a predominate theme in this section. While Judd and his siblings are mourning their father at the Shiva, the senior citizens who come also face their own mortality. One way to deal with this is try to recapture one's youth and that is what Mr. Applebaum and Hillary do as he flirts and she basks in the attention he gives her. They are not the only ones who behave like teenagers, though. So does Judd when he goes to the bank. He daydreams about the teller just as a teenager would daydream about someone they have a crush on. The difference between Judd and Mr. Applebaum is that the latter takes action while Judd continues to act powerless, like a love-struck puppy.

Lust also appears in this section when Phillip's old friends come to the house. His interaction with the girls compared to Judd's daydreaming and Mr. Applebaum's flirtation shows three different takes of romantic relationships. Mr. Applebaum flirts like a teenager, and Hillary responds in the same manner. It is reasonable that at his age, Mr. Applebaum wants companionship more than anything else. Hillary may want someone to balance her as Mort had done. Judd, once again, shows that he is in love with the idea of being in love. It does not matter who the girl is. They are interchangeable. Phillip makes a distinction between lust and what he thinks is adult love. He can fool around with his old girlfriends. For him, they do not represent adult love. Nor do they fulfill his need to find someone who will provide structure in his life. If anything they may be looking for him to do the same for them. In which case the relationship would be like the blind leading the blind. Tracy, on the other hand, represents mature love to Philip. With her, he has give and take. Thus, she is the one he chooses to marry to satisfy his need for boundaries and his wish to become an adult.



In this respect, Philip is ahead of Judd who is still a teenager. He takes one other step that moves him ahead of Judd when he says that he wants to be part of the family business. Still, everyone (even Tracy as evidenced by the way she greets Phillip's friends) knows that he has not matured yet.

Horry and Wendy represent a love lost. Horry still loves Wendy. Now she is there with her family, a family that could have been theirs. He knows that there is nothing he can do to get her back.

There is still hope for Penny, which brings up the notion of a second chance at love. Readers see that she has not led the life she expected to lead. Perhaps, she and Judd can reunite.. Alice also reappears, flirting with Judd. At the end of the section, Jen shows up.

Judd's dream shows that he is still dealing with the feeling of not having power, feeling less than whole, and thinking that he, not Paul, had deserved the Rottweiler attack. Judd's memory of his meeting with Wade show how humiliated he feels as everyone at the station knows what is going on. On top of that, Wade tells him that he loves Jen with someone else in the room. Judd feels that he is powerless to do anything and throws a tantrum, just as a spoiled teenager would do.

Finally, the brothers show, once again, how they solve difference - by fighting as their father had taught them to do by punching the coach with whom he disagreed. They take the expression that they are a family of fighters literally.

Discussion Question 1

Hillary does not seem to mind that Mr. Applebaum was flirting with her. His behavior shocks everyone else, though. Why is everyone shocked? What does it say about Hillary's character? What does it tell about the characters of the others?

Discussion Question 2

In your opinion, why does Judd tend to daydream? What does it tell you about his character?

Discussion Question 3

What do you think of Paul's reaction to the fact that Phillip wants to help him run the family business? How would you have reacted under the same circumstances?



Vocabulary

reluctant, resounding, compassionate, decency, gait, discernment, articulate, conciliatory, ramifications, furrowed, nonplussed, catastrophes, obliterated, searing, stunned, absorb, jabbering, surreal, wincing, hustles



Section 4: Chapters 19 - 27

Summary

In Chapter 19 Jen gives her condolences to Judd. She tells him that she needs to talk to him but does not say much more because she has to go to the bathroom to throw up. Judd follows her and knows from the look in her eyes what she is going to say. The baby is his.

Judd does not believe her at first (Chapter 20). Finally she tells him that she knows for sure that he is the baby's father because Wade is sterile. Judd enjoys the irony of the fact. Then both Judd and Jen lament that they wish she had known she was pregnant before affair. They are about to have an intimate moment when Tracy comes outside to do yoga. Philip trails behind her. Tracy does not stay outside for long though. When Philip tells Jen that he is going to help Judd get laid by women that are 10 years younger than he is, Tracy marches off. Philip stays and Jen tells him that she is pregnant.

As Chapter 21 begins, Judd thinks about what kind of father he would have been to the baby who had died. He remembers how happy he had been when he and Jen had found out about the pregnancy because it was not easy for her to get pregnant. Next, he remembers when she had called him telling him that she thought something was wrong. He had tried to make light of her worries, but she said she was going to the hospital anyway. He had rushed there as well, but ended up being too late. As a result, Jen had to deal with the news that the baby was dead alone. He felt that she still resented him for being late.

Chapter 22 brings readers back to the present. Jen and Judd go their separate ways. Jen goes to a hotel to spend the night and Judd joins his family inside the house. Philip also comes downstairs, fresh from a fight with Tracy. Hillary and Wendy get on him for messing with Tracy. Their opinion of his behavior does not help Phillip's mood. He is about to leave when Paul walks in and punches Philip (it is payback time). The two make up. Philip decides to tell everyone that Jen is pregnant with Judd's baby. The family does not take the news badly, with the exception of Alice, that is. The news sends her running upstairs in tears.

Philip takes Judd for a ride in his Porche in Chapter 23. The brothers talk about their respective partners. Judd thought they were going to lunch, but Philip's plans to drop him off somewhere because he has something to do. Judd tells him to drop him off at the ice-skating rink. Penny is there skating when he arrives. She gets Judd a pair skates and the two skate holding hands until the rink opens to the public. Judd has to wait a while for Philip to pick him up. When he does, Judd remembers something that he and Phillip used to do that made their father laugh. He also notices that Phillip's T-shirt is inside-out.



In Chapter 24, the family has to put up with an overweight neighbor who only talks about the renovations that are going on at her house. She is so heavy that her chair cannot support her weight. It finally breaks and she ends up on the floor. This event clears everyone out of the house. The family uses the time to comment on Jen's and Judd's baby. Hillary even suggests that Judd and Jen could get back together.

Later that afternoon in Chapter 25, Judd and Wendy are at the pool while Ryan and Cole play. The two adults talk about Judd's life and he mentions that he saw Penny. Wendy encourages him to give it a try with her. Horry comes out to tell them that they have to go back in the house because that uncle Stan is there. Wendy gets up, but slips on her magazine and falls in the pool. Horry jumps in in a flash to rescue her. He tells her that Barry should treat her better. Judd cannot tell if Wendy's cheeks are wet because of tears or from the want in the poo.

In Chapter 26, the family talks to uncle Stan. Paul had gone to the store, but now he comes back and goes straight upstairs. Someone gets Hillary talking about toilet training. Suddenly everyone hears what Paul is doing upstairs from the sound coming from Wendy's baby monitor receiver. He and Alice are having sex. Everyone just sits and listens until Linda unplugs the receiver. When Paul comes down later everyone has funny looks on their faces, but Paul has no idea what is going on.

In Chapter 27, Penny comes to the house. She and Judd go out to the pool and kiss. When she leaves, Judd calls Jen on her cell phone, but it is Wade who picks up. Judd hangs up and calls again, but hangs up again when Wade picks up for a second time. Finally Jen picks up on the third try and confirms to Wade that the caller is Judd. He wants to talk but she says she is tired. After hanging up with her, he calls Wade's number and hangs up when he answers.

Analysis

The parallels between the women at this juncture in Judd's life become clear in this section. When he was in high school, Judd doted on Penny. She led him along then, but made sure that she kept in him in reserve so that she would not be lonely when she got older by making the pact with him that the two of them would find each other and get married if they were still single by the time they were 40. Now her life has not turned out the way she hoped that it would and she is chasing Judd.

Jen is similar in that Judd doted on her from afar until he was finally brave enough to talk to her. While they did get married, she strings him along for an entire year while she has an affair with his boss. Now that she is pregnant and her life is not turning out as she had hoped, she has come running back to Judd - not completely though. She still has Wade by her side and when Judd finally says that he wants to talk (after she has been chasing him all this time), she tells him that she is too tired to do so.

Another noteworthy element is the revelation of the problems in Jen's and Judd's marriage. He was not there for her when she needed him and the problem goes back to



his personality. As he said at the beginning of the novel, the family members not only approached situations that called for sincerity with irony, they could manage to evade them as well. This is what Judd does when Jen says she thinks something is not right with the baby. While Judd cannot deal with real situations, he can still romanticize unreal ones. He imagines what kind of father he would have been. Now that he knows he is going to be a father, he runs away.

Essentially, both he and Phillip run away from their responsibilities. Phillip probably runs away to Chelsea, but the name does not really matter. Judd runs away to Penny, but he says that she could have been anyone. He does not even tell Penny about the baby as Phillip did not tell the girls that Tracy is his fiancé. The two brothers are just alike in this instance.

Horry, represents a contrast to Judd and Phillip. He is there for Wendy in her time of need. He gives the impression that he always will be. Maybe this is why Wendy encourages Judd to talk to Penny. Maybe she thinks that the two of them have the same type of bond she has with Horry. With Penny, however, there is some hope of making a relationship work while there is none with Horry.

While Judd is running away from being a father, Alice is desperately trying to be a mother. Paul, though, seems to be going through the motions just to make her happy. If she succeeds in having a baby, what kind of parents will they be if they do not share the same passion for parenthood? What kind of marriage will they have?

On a finale note, Hillary's response to the news that Jen is pregnant with Judd's baby shows how open-minded she is and her parental instincts. She realizes the difference between sex and a relationship and how being a parent can make one calm down, or at least see things differently. Readers may wonder whether she knows this because she experienced it.

Discussion Question 1

What kind of father do you think Judd would have been to the baby that died. Will he be a different type of father now? Support your answer.

Discussion Question 2

Why do you think Wendy decided to marry someone like Barry when someone like Horry was her true love?

Discussion Question 3

Should Jen and Judd get back together? Why or why not?

Vocabulary

reeks, exacerbate, festering, impulse, proposition, distillation, myriad, zenith, periphery, reparations, perfunctory, lingering, sputtering, invariably, emphysema, mortified, enunciating, gesticulating, indiscernible, miraculously



Section 5: Chapter 28 - 31

Summary

In Chapter 28 Judd remembers the night when the Rottweiler bit Paul. He had gone to a house party. Alice, a girl he liked, was there. She was the same Alice who later marries Paul. Judd is trying to cross the room to kiss her when he accidentally knocks a drink out of the hands of a tough guy named Tony Russo. Tony responds by kicking Judd below the belt. Alice helps get Judd to the upstairs bedroom to lie down. He falls asleep. When he wakes up, she is gone. On his way home, Paul shows up in their father's car. He has heard about what happened at the party. He tells Judd that they are going to get revenge. Judd argues against it, but he goes along with Paul anyway. When they get to Russo's house, they find find him with two friends. Paul walks up and punches him out. A woman comes out of the house with a Rottweiler on a lease. Judd and Paul start to leave, but they are not fast enough. The woman lets go of the lease and the dog chases the boys. Judd escapes by jumping on top of the car while Paul dives in the the car through an open window. He cannot get it up fast enough though and the dog follows him. Russo finally gets the dog off of Paul, but by that time, it has already done its damage. Judd takes Paul to the hospital. The doctors say that he saved Paul's life, but Judd feels that Paul does not see it that way. He thinks that he blames Judd for the attack.

Back in the present, in Chapter 29, Judd wakes up, climbs on the roof and sits in a place that he and his brothers and sister used to sit when they were teenagers. From there, he sees Wendy coming from Linda's house and, a few minutes later, Linda leaving his house to go home. He decides to take a shower and while he is there, the electricity goes out again. He goes to fix it, but almost electrocutes himself in the process. The shock manages to knock him out. While he is unconscious, he sees himself playing in a park as a child. He is having fun. Suddenly, another kid throws a toy in his face. Mort is there. He comforts him and calls him Bubbie. Hillary is there when he comes to. They both admit how much they miss Mort and start crying.

It is Saturday in Chapter 30. The family does not have to sit Shiva because it is the Sabbath. Instead, they have to go to the temple for a memorial service for Mort. Part of the service requires the family members of the deceased to read a passage in Hebrew in front of the congregation. Since Judd does not have anything to wear, he wears one of his father's suits. He is surprised that it fits him. The family goes to the service and reads the passage. Surprisingly, they all find the experience moving.

After he sits down, Judd finds a joint in his father's pocket. He shows it to Philip, and the two go to a classroom in the Hebrew school that is next to the temple. They smoke the joint. It is not long before Paul joins them. The brothers bond, but they also set off the fire alarm. Everyone knows that they set off the alarm, but they manage to leave before the firemen come.



In Chapter 31, when Judd gets home, he goes to sleep. Alice is in his bed when he wakes up. She wants him to have sex with her, as she hopes that Judd's sperm can do what Paul's cannot. Judd tries to object, but he gives in to her. That same day, he goes to the hotel to meet with Jen. She wants to talk to him about working together to raise their child. He does not want to hear any of what she has to say. She explains to him why she had the affair. She says that things changed after the death of their child. She felt as if he blamed her and only saw her as the mother of the dead baby and the mother of their future baby. He no longer saw her as his wife. He was not there emotionally for her. He does not want to hear this either and leaves.

When Judd gets back to the house, Penny calls. He goes to a movie with her. They go to see a romantic comedy and make out during the movie. Afterwards, they go back to Penny's house to have sex. Judd feels disconnected. When he gets home, Wendy and Barry are fighting. Barry says that he has to leave to close an important business deal. Everyone else is in the living room. Philip is looking at some old photos when he finds one with their father's reflection in the glass. He is laughing in it. They think that the image is ghost-like. Philip says that he had thought that he had seen their father in the study the night before. Upstairs, Serena starts to cry. Judd starts to go upstairs. Hillary reminds him that Wendy and Barry are letting her cry, but he goes upstairs anyway to comfort her.

Analysis

An important element in this section is the emotional breakthrough the family finally begins to make. First, in the basement Judd and Hillary cry together and admit how much they miss Mort. Later in the temple, the family gets emotional after reading to the congregation.

The latter point highlights the theme of the role of religion. Throughout the novel, religion has brought the family together. Through it, they have the sense of community they that they cannot create on their own, as evidenced by their meals together. The community as a whole, though can touch them and they get this community through religion. The brothers even bond, without fighting first, at the temple. They are not perfect yet, though. They still manage to cause trouble and they bond over a joint at the temple. It is a start, though.

This section also serves to give readers more information about Judd's, Jen's and Paul's characters. Paul takes his responsibility for his family seriously and he protects them in the way he learned from his father - through fighting. So, when he finds out what happened to Judd at the house party, he goes to defend his brother.

There is more evidence that Judd never had the power he thought he had. In love with romance, he is so busy trying to reach Alice to give her a kiss that he is knocked over which leads to the fight. Albeit he is in pain, he does nothing to defend himself. He also is not a good judge of what he does to upset people. He thought that Jen never forgave him for being late when she lost the first baby. In reality, the problems in their marriage



are much deeper than that. She is mature enough to explain it and accept her responsibility for what has happened between the two of them. He does not even want to hear how he had played a part in the meltdown of their union. Instead, he runs away to Penny again, knowing that she is not the solution to his problems.

As Judd also has relationship problems with Paul, readers wonder if his assumption as to why Paul is mad at him is correct. Could there be a deeper reason that has something to do with how Judd treats Paul? Why, for example does Judd have sex with Alice, betraying his own brother especially considering his recent situation? Does he feel that he has something to prove? Judd may not only be running away from his responsibilities, he could also be running away from himself.

It is interesting that Judd's dream in this section does have him without a limb. This time his father is there to comfort him. Now he is beginning to look to his father for the answers about how to be a father and a man that he did not get when Mort was alive. Judd did not even know his father very well. He did not even know his father's build. He is surprised that he can wear his father's suit. He is also surprised to find a joint in the jacket pocket. At the end of the section, Judd goes upstairs to comfort Serena much like he himself, would like someone to comfort him.

Finally, the joint reveals something about Mort's character. Whether he had it for medicinal purposes or not, it shows that he had an open-mind to smoke it at all.

Discussion Question 1

Is Judd or Paul the better brother? Justify your reasoning.

Discussion Question 2

Why do you think that he has sex with Alice?

Discussion Question 3

In your opinion, is Penny good for Judd? Is Judd good for Penny? Give reasons for your answer.

Vocabulary

grazed, constricted, compound, sockets, tentative, archenemy, quorum, androgynous, sacramental, cavernous, gratuitous, abundance, anatomically, calligraphy, legacy, garnering, transliterated, emanating, discreetly, uninhibited



Section 6: Chapters 32 - 40

Summary

Judd is having another one of his reoccurring dreams in Chapter 32. This time, he is with his father in the garage. His father is working on fixing Judd's prosthetic leg. When he is finished, the leg is suddenly his real leg. Judd wakes up from his dream, but closes his eyes again, trying in vain, to find his father.

Judd is up on the roof early in the morning in Chapter 33. He is thinking about Jen and Penny when Wendy joins him. She tells him that Barry is off because it is really important that he closes the deal he has been working on. She is not worried though. He tells her that he slept with Penny. While they are talking, Linda leaves the house to go back to hers. Judd has already figured out what is going on. Wendy does as well after only asking a few questions. Judd tells Wendy that he knows she slept with Horry. She says that Horry is grandfathered in. In her alternate universe with her rules, it is that simple. Tracy comes out to go for a swim. Both Judd and Wendy feel sorry for her for being with Philip and the family.

Boner and some of Paul's high school friends come by Chapter 34. They talk and joke around and everyone is careful to avoid talking about the fact that Paul was not able to fulfill his destiny as a baseball player. Next an old friend of Judd's comes by. He fills Judd in on what everyone they went to school with is doing. He, himself, is fat, tired looking and has been laid off. He watches the kids while his wife works. Judd realizes how much his old friend has changed.

Peter Applebaum comes back to the house in Chapter 35 and starts flirting with Hillary again. It is not long before Linda comes out of the kitchen and whispers something in his ear. He follows her into the kitchen. Hillary follows the action, looking concerned. The sound of raised voices comes from the kitchen and then Applebaum emerges looking as if the life has been taken out of him. Some relatives from Hillary's side of the family come by looking like a family on a Christmas card. They end up looking at Hillary's and Mort's wedding album. Meanwhile, outside, a baseball game is going on. Paul is the pitcher. Boner is up to bat. He strikes out twice. Under the third pitch, Paul's shoulder gives out and the ball hits Boner in the face. There are no hard feelings, though, and the two men hug each other.

In Chapter 36, two of Judd's old co-workers come by. They tell him that they miss him at the station. When they leave, Judd knows that he will not see them again. The thought saddens him. Later, Hillary tries to play matchmaker again. Judd gets angry about the way they are treating him (like he cannot get anyone on his own) and lets everyone know how he feels, embarrassing his mother in the process. While she is talking to him about his actions, she comes up with a witty statement and goes to write it down.



Due to his outburst in Chapter 36, Judd gets to leave shiva in Chapter 37. He takes Wendy's boys to an amusement park. Wendy tells him that Ryan likes to wander off, so he decides to ask Penny whether or not she wants to go. She agrees. Everyone is having fun when Jen calls. She has been bleeding and she is afraid that she is going to lose this baby, too. Penny figures out what is going on and gets mad at Judd for not telling her about the baby. She opts to stay at the amusement park when he leaves.

After dropping off the kids (Chapter 38), Philip takes Judd to the hospital. It turns out that it was a false alarm, however. The baby is fine. Jen and Judd listen to the baby's heartbeat. Judd begins to think that maybe he and Jen can get through this together when Wade walks in. The two men begin to argue and the doctor kicks them out of the room. The argument continues in the waiting room. Judd tells Wade that he bets that he was hoping for a miscarriage. Wade tells him that he did not chase Jen. She approached him. Judd tries to punch Wade, but misses. Wade has Judd up against the wall when Philip comes in. He punches Wade. Security escorts the brothers out. When they get to Phillips car, Judd notices Wade's Maserati. With the help of a tire iron Philip hands him, he takes his rage out on the car.

When Judd gets home in chapter 39, everyone is fighting. Hillary is fighting with Linda. Linda leaves the house crying and there are tears in Hillary's eyes too. Wendy wants to know what is going on. Hillary says that is none of her business. When Wendy accuses her of keeping family secrets, she says that it has been a long time since they were a family. Allison and Paul also fighting because of the baseball game and Tracy and Philip of fighting due to his - fighting. The two brothers come downstairs, decide to cancel shiva (putting up a sign that says so) and Judd joins them as they go out.

In chapter 40, Paul, Judd and Phillip up go to the local dive bar. Horry he is also there, talking to a pretty girl. So is Chelsea, one of Phillips old friends who came to the shiva. Paul gives Philip some money to change the song in the jukebox. He bets that Philip will touch three girls on his way over there. Philip ends up touching four. When he returns, the brothers begin to argue. The Rottweiler incident comes to the forefront. As it turns out, Paul takes responsibility for the attack. He is mad at Judd though because he did not even bother to visit him when he had the operations he needed because of the attack. Judd did not even know how many operations he had had. During the conversation, Paul get so angry that the bouncer has to come in case there is a physical fight. Paul calls Judd a bad brother and leaves. Philip and Judd stay and get drunk. Judd goes to the bathroom and sees Horry kissing the girl he was with earlier. When he gets back to the table, Philip and Chelsea are gone.

Analysis

There are a lot of noteworthy elements in this section.

Paul's and Judd's relationship goes through a major breakthrough in this section as Paul finally tells Judd why he has been mad at him for all of these years. As in the breakdown of his marriage with Jen in which Judd did not step up to his role as a



husband, he failed to step up to his role as a brother to Paul when he needed his support. With Paul the situation is even worse than that with Jen as Paul had stepped up for Judd.

Judd also makes a breakthrough in that he finally begins to feel like a father in this section. Still, however, others fight his fight. He is powerless as he tries to punch Wade and misses. Phillip comes in and does it for him. The only thing that Judd can beat up is something that cannot fight back, a car. Judd may be moving in the right direction though with the help of the memory of his father who gives him his own leg to stand on in the dream he has in Chapter 22.

This section also helps to characterize Wendy. While Judd acts like a romantic teenager, Wendy sees love and relationships as an adult. She has made her own rules regarding what works for her and she follows them. Barry is not the romantic's ideal of a husband but a relationship with him is realistic and provides her with other things she and the children need. A relationship with Horry though is out of the question as he cannot provide anything for her in his current state. She knows it and accepts it instead of wallowing in a romantic dream world. She also shows that she has changed some during the seven days when she does not say anything when Judd tells her that she committed adultery when she slept with Horry.

Foreshadowing occurs in this section as well. The relationship between Linda and Hillary is becoming more obvious. Judd and now Wendy, see Linda leaving the house early in the morning. Linda does not like Mr. Applebaum flirting with Hillary and the reason is not just because Mort has just died.

Judd also makes a commentary about his view of religion when he talks about Boner. After the breakthrough the family had at the temple, readers may wonder if Judd's assessment of Boner is really correct. Bone may not look like a typical rabbi, he does not have the background one would expect a rabbi to have, but could this make the church more feasible for the younger generation? Does religion give Boner something that he did not find in his life before he became a rabbi and does this something make him a better man? Readers do not really know the answer to these questions as they only see Boner through Judd's eyes. In this section, though readers see that Judd seems to judge other people almost to justify his own actions. For example, he tells Wendy that she committed adultery in sleeping with Horry. Yet, he had sex with his own brother's wife. Even worse, he did it so that she could get pregnant. The chances of Paul raising his nephew and not his son is even worse than Wade raising Judd's child. In his description of Boner, it could be possible that Judd is judgmental because Boner has found something that he has not.

Discussion Question 1

What is the significance of Judd finding that he has his own leg back in his dream?



Discussion Question 2

What do you think of Boner? Do you think that Judd's assessment of him is correct? Explain your answer.

Discussion Question 3

Why does Judd neglect to tell Penny about the baby? What does it say about his character?

Vocabulary

encroaching, dissipates, groggy, exempted, subprime, congregants, impressions, realigning, sheathed, unfurling, predatory, infatuation, detachment, reciprocation, pathological, mortified, smothering, genuinely, benign



Section 7: Chapter 42 - 50

Summary

Chapter 41 finds a drunk Judd walking down Route 21. Wade drives up next to him, gets out of his car and punches him. Judd does not fight back. Wade tells him that he was right about him. He had hoped he could be different but he is not. Now he has his excuse to leave Jen, so he is. Judd is really confused now. He goes home, wipes the foam off the mirror, surveys his wounds, and goes to sleep on the floor.

Judd's dream comes back in Chapter 42. This time he is sitting naked in his shiva chair. His uncle Stan is sitting next to him. Both Jen and Penny come into the room. Jen looks beautiful and like she belongs there but Penny looks awkward. Then Judd sees Mort in the back of the room. He is holding a baby. He heads for the door. Judd tries to go after him, but cannot because he is not wearing his prosthetic leg. The door closes behind his father as Judd falls to the floor. When he wakes up, he is calling his father's name.

Chapter 43 finds Judd going out on the roof and finding Tracy there. She asks whether or not Philip is sleeping with Chelsea. Judd does not confirm that he is, but he says that knowing Philip it will be either her or someone else. Tracy is pensive and says that she plans to break up with Philip after the shiva. She follows the piece of news with advice for Judd. She tells him that he needs to find him before he will be able to find love. After she has gone back in the house, Judd sees Horry's date leaving his house. Her behavior is strange so he goes to check things out. Horry is having a seizure. He stays until it is over. Judd goes back home and takes a shower. When he comes out Alice is on his bed. She is there this time to apologize and see if everything is okay between the two of them. He tells her that she has a good marriage, but the obsession with having a baby is jeopardizing it. She knows that Judd is right.

Chapter 44 marks the last day of the shiva. The brothers all have scars, but they are there. Linda has not yet appeared since her argument with Hillary, but then she does. Hillary runs over to her. They kiss and leave the house together. Peter Applebaum knows there's no hope for him now and he leaves.

The siblings discuss what they just saw in Chapter 45. Horry tells them that they prefer the term bisexual. He does not tell them much more though and reminds them that this is his mother too. Phillip tries to kiss Tracy, but she will not let him. Instead she breaks up with him.

In Chapter 46 Judd goes to see Jen who is back at home. She does not look happy when he sees her. He runs a bath for her and they have a real conversation. Jen expresses a wish that things can work out between them, but Judd is not sure. She tells him that the baby is a girl. They kiss and fall asleep. When Judd wakes up the next morning, he feels at home in his old home, but still is not sure that he and Jen can reconcile. He leaves.



When Judd returns to Hillary's house in Chapter 47, he finds Phillip up on the roof threatening to jump if Tracy leaves. Hillary treats him like a child having a tantrum. Tracy leaves. Philip tries to come down, but falls instead. After the ambulance comes and takes care of him, Hillary and Linda explained that relationship. Mort had known and approved of it before his death because at least Hillary would not be alone. Judd realizes that Mort had never wanted them to sit shiva. It was Hillary's idea. Hillary confesses saying that Boner had no choice but to go along. It was the only way to get them all together and she needed them. The siblings cannot believe it, but their opinion does not phase Hillary. Phillip gets up and hugs Hillary and Linda. He is okay with the relationship. Then he collapses.

In chapter 48, Wendy gets the kids ready for bed and she and Judd talk about her relationship with Barry which works for her. There's no question about her and Horry getting together. He is a fantasy. She says that with him there is only history and useless love. Judd feels sad because she does not believe in romantic love. When Judd goes down to the basement, he finds Philip they're going through his bag that contains the money he got from the bank. Philip says that he is broke and Paul won't let him join the company. Judd suggests that he work for Paul before he works with him – to prove himself. Philip agrees that this is a good idea. Judd tells Philip that he can take \$1000. Philip shows him that he already has.

Judd goes to Penny's house in Chapter 49 to apologize. She is cold at first, but then when Judd leaves, she goes after him. She hugs him and tells him that their packed is still on. Judd agrees. They kiss one more time before just leaves.

The shiva ends in Chapter 50. Boner comes by and tells the family that it is customary for the family to walk around the block. While they do, Paul and Judd discuss Philip. Now that Mort is not there to get him out of trouble when he finds it, it is their responsibility. Paul will hire Philip, but Judd has to keep his shares in order to share the burden. He apologizes to Judd for his behavior at the bar and warns Judd about the consequences of anger. Wendy leaves. Judd sees Horry looking from his window with his hand on the window pane. He imagines that Wendy is doing the same in the car before it drives off. Paul takes his father's watch, even though it hasn't worked for ages. Instead of saying goodbye to everyone, he tries to sneak out of the house, but Linda sees him. He tells her that he approves of her relationship with his mother. Not long afterwards, Judd is at the gas station with Phillip's sports car. He tries to decide where to go – to Jen's, Penny's or Maine. He chooses Maine for the night and decides he will figure out more the next morning. He puts on country music and drives away.

Analysis

This is a section of revelations, useful advice, and growth.

It is interesting that in the first chapter of the section, Judd is walking down Route 21 as he does in the first dream he tells readers about. He is still helpless as Wade comes



and punches him, but in essence Wade gives him the chance to get back what he felt like he was missing when he tells him that he has left Jen.

The dream that comes afterwards is the one in which his father is telling him that he needs to make his own decisions based on his own terms. They may not lead to perfection, but as a man and a father this is what he has to do. It is his responsibility. No one else can do it for him. In addition to that, he gets excellent advice from Tracy who tells him that he needs to do what he has never done before he can truly find love. Instead of running from woman to woman, he needs to learn how to feel comfortable being alone. She seems to follow her own advice as she leaves Phillip since she knows that their relationship is not going to work.

After the dream and the talk with Tracy, readers begin to see a difference in Judd. He goes to make sure Horry is okay when he sees Horry's date from the night before leaving the house. When he sees Alice in his bed, he gives her useful advice. She really appreciates it and this fact shocks him because he thinks that he has no idea about anything. The point is, at least now he is taking action and behaving like an adult instead of a love struck teenager. He does not see Alice as someone to have sex with or his old girlfriend. He sees her as Paul's wife.

Later when he goes to see Jen, he continues to act in a mature manner. The two talk. He does not even have sex with her. He knows that it will not be easy for them to get back together, if they can at all. So he does the manly thing and leaves. He also does not hide from Penny. He goes to apologize and leaves on good terms with her. When he finally leaves his mother's house, he goes to Maine to spend time alone before making any decisions.

Paul has also grown now that he has spit his venom at Judd. He apologizes and gives Judd useful advice about not letting anger take hold of him. He has a man to man conversation with Judd for the first time in the novel to discuss the family business and he takes over the fatherly role of looking after Phillip, with Judd's help. Whether Phillip will become the man he wants to become is still unknown, but with his improved support system he may have a chance to do so. Paul also shows how he has become more open minded by expressing his support for Hillary's and Linda's relationship.

Wendy gives Judd a lesson that he seems not to get at the time but later does. Her life shows that things may not have turned out the way one plans, but one cannot let that make them bitter and angry. Instead one has to define their own rules and keep going. Like Mort, one's actions might not be perfect, but one cannot let that stop them. By calmly leaving Jen and deciding to spend some time alone, it seems as if Judd has decided to spend some time learning how to run his life and determine what his rules are.

Finally, Hillary's actions show that her ways may be unorthodox but she is the best parent she can be when she admits that sitting shiva was her idea and not Mort's. It was, however, the only way she could get all of the children together. While there they fought and Judd even had sex with his brother's wife, in the end her tactics do help



them emerge as stronger people and a stronger family unit. Mort could be unconventional as well. He approved of Hillary's relationship with Linda because he could leave knowing that Hillary would be taken care of.

Discussion Question 1

Why doesn't Judd fight back when Wade punches him?

Discussion Question 2

Do you think that Wade did / does love Jen? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 3

Did Judd make the right decision to leave the his house and go to Maine? Why or why not?

Vocabulary

resignation, tentative, lingering, tattered, unsolicited, proffered, forlorn, ragged, postpartum, profound, conviction, defiance, inexplicably, haphazardly, convulsing, gargoyle, manipulative, thesis, symmetry enlightened



Characters

Judd Foxman

Judd serves as the novel's narrator and main character. He has three siblings: Paul; Wendy; and Philip. Jen is his wife. Wade is his boss, and Penny is an old friend from high school whom Judd liked but never really dated. Alice is his sister-in-law. Since Judd is not a teenager, this is not a typical coming-of-age story. However, Judd does end up on a journey towards maturity. He finds himself along the way. By the end of the novel, he has transformed himself into an adult who is willing to take the responsibility for his own life.

One of the big issues Judd faces is growing up even though he is already an adult. When readers view the timeline of his life, they realize that Judd never really has been on his own. He got married right after college. There was no "alone time" as Tracy puts it for him to find his own identity. He acts like a teenager even in his marriage. When he goes to visit his family, Jen is his ally. This is reminiscent of a teenager who rebels against his family and needs someone there to back them up. When Jen wants to talk to him after he finds out about the affair, he behaves like a child. He either he will not talk to her or he says mean things to try to hurt her. He throws tantrums, and chairs, as well.

His job is an extension of his college days. He produces a show hosted by a man who talks about sex, cars, sports and money. He is like his boss in that he thinks about girls in terms of sex.

Judd, himself, references the fact that it seems as if he is beginning his life and not in the middle of it when he takes inventory of his life and notes the fact that he does not have a wife, a child, a job, a home, or anything else.

As the story progresses, however, Judd does begin to find himself. His dreams depict this fact. At the beginning of the series of his dreams, he is without a leg. This represents the fact that he does not have Jen. Then, his father shows up. He gives Judd his real leg to stand up on. He can now stand up on his own and has the tools to move forward. In his mind though, Judd is not really ready. He wants to talk to his father about being an adult and a father. As he gets closer to finding the answers, his father walks out. Judd has to become his own man according to his own rules. The incident with Jen was a shock, yes, but his reaction is not just because of the affair. His reaction is based on the realization of what he has not done and who he has not been.

Jen Foxman

Jen is Judd's estranged wife. She has been having an affair with Judd's boss, Wade, for a year. Even though she has done a terrible thing by having an affair with Wade and having sex with him in the bed that she and Judd share, she does not seem to be a bad person. On the contrary, her biggest negative trait is her insecurity. She always wants to



fit in to keep up appearances. She makes Judd exchange a perfectly good, but inexpensive watch, for a more expensive one even though he was happy with the old one.

Her insecurities contribute to her dissatisfaction in her marriage. She thinks Judd sees her as a failed mother when she loses the baby and now after finding out about the affair, he sees her as a failed wife. His behavior after the death of their first baby did not help. Jen is a sensitive person who cares. One feels that she really means it when she asks Judd why he did not tell her about his father's death and when she gives Hillary her condolences. Judd's mean words hurt her. Her sensitivity caused her to have to mourn the baby. Judd, like other members of his family, cannot express emotions. He could not give her the support she needs. She admits that what she did was wrong, but says that Judd is not the innocent victim he plays. He played a role in the deterioration of their marriage. All in all, she is more of an adult than Judd. At least she takes responsibility for her actions.

Paul Foxman

Paul is Judd's older brother. Of all of the siblings, he is the one with a personality the most like his father. Paul is serious, and he likes to settle issues with punches. He literally follows in his father's footsteps by helping him with the business, which his father built to pass on to the children. His father realizes that Paul deserves to step into shoes. When Paul's father dies, he leaves half of the business to Paul. Paul has shown that he is willing to step into this role and do what is necessary to protect his family.

Mort does have another side, though. Mort laughed. Mort approved of Hillary's relationship with Linda. Mort even stayed married to a flamboyant person like Hilary. These are traits that Paul does not develop until the end of the novel. Towards the end of the novel, he realizes that his anger is poisoning him and he officially takes his role as the head of the family by realizing that it takes a family to keep the business running. Also someone has to be there for Philip. This is now the family's responsibility. Philip can work at the store, but Paul needs Judd's help as well.

Wendy Foxman

Wendy is Judd's sister. Many elements in her life parallel those in Judd's life: marriage issues; kids issues; past love issues. There is a big difference between the two, however. Wendy portrays strength. She has come to terms with her identity following her own rules. Yes, she would like to have a life with Horry, but it is impossible. She tried to be with him after his injury and it did not work. Barry might not be the perfect husband when it comes to romance, but he provides for the family. As Barry himself says, he does what he does for the family. Wendy knows she benefits from his hard work. She is smart enough to realize this and even though it may frustrate her at times she is wise enough not to give it up. Judd laments that she is not that she is not the same person she was when they were growing up, but she has learned a lesson that Judd has yet to



learn. Just because your life does not turn out the way you thought it would does not mean that you have to hold grudges, bitterness, and anger in your soul. You just move on.

Phillip Foxman

Philip is the youngest child in the Foxman clan. He is different from the other three children in that he shows emotions, likes to have fun, and gets into all sorts of trouble. In essence, he is much more like Hillary and his father. Still, even though he is footloose and fancy free, he seems to be searching, as kids do, for discipline. Thus, he starts dating Tracy, an older woman who used to be his psychiatrist. In addition to trying to find a wife who will impose some type of structure in his life (and ground him much as Mort grounded Hillary), he tells Paul that he wants to become part of the family business. While the family members still question his ability to mature, he at least knows that he needs to do this for himself. He is taking a step in the right direction.

Hillary Foxman

Hillary is Judd's mother. She is a free spirit who freely talks about sex and potty training her children. Much like Philip, she needs someone to ground her. Mort fulfills that purpose. With him gone, Linda now carries the torch. Even though Hillary operates in an unorthodox manner, she still manages to be there for her children when it counts. If it were not for the fact that she bought them together to mourn their father, they would not have made the breakthroughs they made during the course of the story. The breakthroughs will help them move forward in the future.

Linda

Linda is Hillary's closest friend. Later, the children find out that Linda is also Hillary's lover. When the children were growing up, she took on the more traditional role of mothering them. Judd often has down to earth talks with her in the kitchen. The only person she has problems with is Horry, who wants to live independently, but cannot. Linda is not a bad mother. She shows dedication to her son by giving him as much freedom as she can, while still being there for him when he needs it. Her dedication extends to the Foxman family, taking care of the kids when they were children and now being there to ground Hillary.

Horry

Horry is Linda's son. He is funny and kind. He does not feel sorry for himself. Still, readers cannot help but feel sorry for him because his seizures and other consequences of his brain injury prevent him from living a fulfilling life. A relationship with Wendy is out. He can get other dates, but they run when he has seizures. The seizures can occur at any time. He longs to live his life on his own, but he cannot. He



resents his mother for not allowing him to have more independence. However, he knows that this is the way that it must be.

Alice Foxman

Alice is Paul's wife. She used to date Judd a long time before she and Paul got together. In fact, she is the Alice that Judd is trying to reach to kiss at the house party when he knocks the drink out of Russo's hands. While she is desperate to have a baby, she is wise enough to realize that she has a good marriage and that she should take care not to let her pregnancy obsession risk it.

Tracy

Tracy is Phillip's girlfriend. She was also his psychiatrist. She is similar to his mother (Linda) in that she is an older woman and a psychiatrist. In other ways, she is the complete opposite. She is straight-laced. This is what attracts Philip to her. She gives him the stability he desires. At the same time, he gives her access to a fun lifestyle that she would not dare to live on her own. She is smart enough to realize their relationship is not working. She graciously leaves. It is interesting that Tracy, who is not a member of the family, gives Judd the best advice he receives in the novel while they are talking on the roof. Following Tracy's advice allows him to begin to take control of his life.

Penny

Penny is a girl Judd liked in high school but never dated, although they did fool around with each other. She is like the high school sweetheart whom guys run into when they return to their hometown in romantic comedies. There is a difference this time though. Penny and Judd were never a couple. When he was interested in her, she played the tease, keeping him in case she was not married by the time she turned forty. Now she is ready for him because things did not work out for her as planned. Judd, however, is not ready for her. The question remains as to whether they will ever be ready for each other at the same time.

Wade

Judd's wife is having an affair with Wade, who happens to be Judd's boss. Wade is the opposite of Judd. He is an alpha male. He has the looks women love and the words that women want to hear. This fact bothers Judd, even more than Wade's betrayal. Wade is everything that Judd is not. Whether or not Wade is trying to grow up and really does love Jen is a question that is hard to answer as Judd is the narrator and readers see Wade through his eyes. Still, Wade does try to stay with Jen. It would be hard for any man to raise the child of another man, especially under the circumstances that he finds himself in with Jen and Judd. Jen even calls Judd when she thinks she's having problems with the pregnancy. Wade is already the third wheel and the baby has not

even been born, yet. It is not surprising that he decides to leave Jen. Whether he does so because Judd's description of him is correct or because he knows that it will never work with Jen now that she is pregnant with Judd's baby is unknown.



Symbols and Symbolism

The Title

The title symbolizes the theme of love and loss. Judd, Hillary, Penny, Tracy, Horry, Wendy, and even Wade lose someone they love in some form or other. They cross paths with each other and now it is time to say goodbye and move on to live on their own.

Jen's Grandmother's China

Inherited fine china represents tradition, history, and love. It links generations and serves as a memory of those who previously owned it. Judd's smashing of Jen's grandmother's china after he finds out about the affair symbolizes that all of this is a sham in their marriage. Knowledge of the affair has put an end to the illusion of a happily married couple.

Judd's Dreams

Judd's dreams symbolize where he is on the journey of learning how to take responsibility of his life. In the dream that he's been having since he left Jen, he has a missing leg. The missing part is Jen. After Mort's death, however, his dreams change. The meaning focuses on the need for Judd to come to terms with his father and to start feeling like a man. His father gives him the ability to get a new start by giving him his leg back. Later, he inspires Judd to take responsibility of his life through the realization that Mort did not always know the right thing to do, but he tried, no matter what.

Meals

Meals are a symbol of coming together. They should be a time when one can find strength and comfort in the food and company. It is a bad sign when a meal goes wrong and that is what happens when the Foxman's eat together. Kids cry and make noise and Barry is on the phone during their meal after the funeral. Poop even lands on Paul's plate. That represents just how dysfunctional the family is. Even when the brothers go drinking together, they end up fighting and separating. They even leave Judd to get home on his own. Smoking a joint together goes somewhat better, but even then they manage to cause problems by setting off the fire alarm.

The Basement

The fact that Judd is living in the basement symbolizes the fact that he has not yet grown up. The basement is fine when one is a teenager and wants space away from



their parents, but Judd has returned there as an adult. Once he begins to take responsibility for his life, he leaves the basement and goes to Maine.

Tracy

Tracy represents boundaries and stability. This is why Phillip decides to date her and tries to marry her. He thinks that having a wife, especially one who gives him the discipline he craves, is what he needs to begin living as a mature adult.

Horry and Paul

Both Horry and Paul symbolize what could have been. Both of them had promising futures ahead of them and then one incident changed everything. For Horry it was the bar fight and for Paul it was the Rottweiler attack that ended his baseball career.

The Electricity in the House

The electric wiring in the house symbolizes Mort's personality. He always tried even though he did not always do things correctly and he did not always know what he was doing. This trait is why his children face growing-up issues. He tried to raise them well, but as he did not wire the house properly, he did not make the emotional connection with his children that they needed.

The Pool at the House

The pool at the house represents the family's life. Everything looks perfect if one looks at them from a certain angle. Change angles and look deeper, though, and problems appear.

Jen's Birthday Cake

Birthday cakes represent comfort. One is around loved ones who are there to celebrate them. Judd wants to give this to Jen, but he is too late. The comfort she needed was when she lost the baby. He was not there for her then, however.



Settings

The Foxman's House

This is where the family gathers to sit Shiva. Forced to be together for seven days, the family lets out their hostility towards each other, deals with the past, and moves forward in ways that fit their identity. These are the first steps in becoming a close-knit family.

The Foxman's House is also the place where readers find traces of Mort's personality, such as the fact that he liked to do things on his own, such as electrical repairs. He even treated his own stomach cancer instead of going to the doctor earlier to see what was wrong. He raised his children in the same way. The result might not have been perfect, but he did his best.

Judd's and Jen's House

Judd has the perfect home on the outside. However, his wife is having sex with his boss. He leaves the house on a journey to discover how to be an adult and a father. When he returns he has grown as a man. It is after his return that he sees Jen as something other than a sex object for the first time. He has a real conversation with her as his wife.

Basement

Judd moves into the basement of an elderly couple's house after finding out about Jen's affair. While living in the basement, he tries to play the victim. He becomes a hermit and does not take care of himself. As Jen says, playing the victim does not work out well for him. Later, he must stay in the basement of his family's home. For Judd, a basement represents hitting rock bottom. Basements also represent where teenagers live or go to when they want to get away from their parents. Judd acts like a teenager, even though he is a grown man. Once he learns how to act like a man, he leaves the basement.

The Synagogue

Mort's memorial service takes place in the Synagogue. With the community of the congregation around the family, the family's sarcasm flows away. Finally, they feel emotions.

The Hospital

When Jen goes to the hospital because she feels like she might be losing the baby, Judd finally feels like he is going to become a father. This scene is in contrast to his

previous visit to the hospital when he was late and Jen had already lost the baby. This time he gets to share in the joy of listening to the baby's heartbeat. Where the previous hospital visit killed their relationship, this one may have breathed life into it.



Themes and Motifs

Heartbreak of Betrayal

The discovery of betrayal can change one's life in a matter of seconds. It causes one to lose trust, and, perhaps, to lose someone who shared a close relationship. Furthermore, it can lead to self-doubt and a loss of power, as one wonders how they could not have known what was happening.

In Judd's case, the affair leaves him helpless. He says that his brain knows that he cannot handle the reality of seeing his wife having sex and with Wade in his bed. So, when he first walks in on them, it tries to protect him until he is ready to deal with the truth, as well as one can. The truth is harsh. Not only has his wife betrayed him, but so has his boss. Judd even betrays himself by still wanting Jen, even though he displays anger towards her on the surface. Later, he finds that Jen and Wade have been going out with his old friends. These people have now also betrayed him by easily exchanging him for Wade.

Prior to the discovery of Jen's affair, Judd thought that he was in control of his life and, perhaps, the lives of others. He was Jen's husband and would assure her during her insecure moments. He sees himself as the man behind Wade's show. Once he finds out what the two people closest to him have betrayed him, he shifts into a powerless position. He faces humiliation. He leaves his home. He goes to the office and faces the humiliation of seeing how the radio station has reduced his life to figures only to be humiliated even more when Wade says that he loves Jen. Later, he cannot even talk to Jen on her own so phone because Wade picks it up when he calls. Judd's lack of power also extends to his physical abilities. He tries to punch Wade in the hospital, but misses. Philip does the job for him. The only thing that Judd successfully attacks is an object that cannot fight back – Wade's car.

Judd's dreams also portray his lack of power. Part of him is missing. He needs his father's help to discover how to be a man and a father. He is stuck trying to figure out how he could have missed the signs of the affair. As time goes on, he learns that he cannot fix the situation while he dwells in the past. He has to let go in order to move on.

Identity Crisis

Before Judd finds out about the affair, he thinks that he has a good life. He works for a well known radio talk show host. He has a beautiful wife. When he finds out about the affair, his world collapses like a house of cards. Along with losing his wife and his job, he loses his sense of himself. Consequently, he begins to have a recurring dream in which part of him is missing. He also realizes that he needs to finally grow up and become a man. Manly men like Wade and Paul surround him. He looks to his dead father for



answers regarding becoming both a man and a father. Judd's father's role in the dreams is to help Judd mature

By the time Judd returns home to see Jen at the end of the novel, he has started taking steps in the right direction. He is not quite at the end of his journey, though, and he knows it. As a result, he follows Tracy's advice and tries to become comfortable with being alone in order to become the man that he wants and needs to become.

Role of Religion

The events that take place in the novel center around the family's celebration of a religious event – sitting Shiva. Yet, the person who was supposed to have requested it was not religious. The children are not religious. Philip even admits that he does not believe in God, but he thinks it would be nice to be able to do so. The children are about to devise a plan to leave when the mother makes them stay.

For her part, Hillary does not even dress in the manner that is appropriate for someone sitting Shiva. Judd and his siblings later find out that both she and Boner lied about the whole thing. None of this is very religious like.

Boner lies for the sake of getting support for the temple. He is the last person one would ever expect to become a rabbi based on his behavior in high school. In fact, he earned his nickname for inviting others to private viewings of his father's pornographic material. He also used to smoke pot with Paul and listen to Led Zeppelin.

At the temple Paul is known by his real name, but Judd calls him Boner most of the time. Is this out of habit, or is it because he really does not see Boner as a rabbi? Indeed, Boner tries to be a cool rabbi. Off duty, he dresses in jeans and flip-flops. When he comes to the house with Paul's old friends, Judd says that he could tell Boner would like to swear, like them. He does not because it would be bad for business.

None of the characters seem to be very religious. So are they all hypocrites, or is the novel making another statement about religion? Emotions surge for the first time in Judd's family when they connect with the congregation, which is a community, through the reading of a passage. Hillary uses the Shiva as a means to get the siblings together. Religion serves different purposes in the lives of its followers. One of those purposes is creating a community. It is the community that helps the family take steps that they cannot seem to take on their own in order to mature.

What Might Have Been

One of the themes covered in this novel is the idea of what might have been and how one cannot let this thought hold them back. One's life can be on a perfect trajectory. You have a baseball scholarship or you have found the perfect girl or you can think you have the perfect marriage and a great job. Then, in an instant, everything can change sending you down a path of disillusionment if you let it.



What would life be like if Judd had not decided to come home early and surprise Jen with the birthday cake? Would he have ever found out about Jen and Wade? Jen still would have discovered that she was pregnant. The revelation may have ended the affair. Jen and Judd would have had their child. Judd would have still had his job. The trauma that they go through in the novel would have been eliminated. On the surface that one incident may seem to have ruined Jen's and Judd's marriage. Yet in their case, the incident may have been a blessing because without it, Judd would never have matured. He would have been a biological father, but not a real father. Jen may still have felt dissatisfied and ended up having an affair anyway.

Paul's life changing event happened the night the Rottweiler attacked him. He was on his way to becoming a baseball star. The attack, though, ended his career before it even started. He had to settle for working for his father. The Rottweiler attack definitely changed Paul's trajectory. Readers have to wonder though whether the place where Paul finds himself is really a worse place than if he had continued with baseball. Would Paul have been a star or would he have failed and ended up coming back home and working for his father anyway? What would have happened to the family business if none of the children had participated in running it before Mort's death? After the attack, anger fills Paul. He compares it to a poison. With Mort's death, however, comes the release of the anger and the willingness to take his role in supporting the family and keeping it, and the business, running.

Horry's story is different from both Judd's and Paul's. While one can argue that their life-changing events fueled their growth as people, Horry's ended the possibility of him ever being able to live a normal life. It also ended the possibility of ever being with the love of his life, Wendy. Yet, even though Horry's story is sad, he does not take the disillusioned path that Judd and Paul follow after their pivotal moments. Horry would like to be more independent, yes, but he makes the best of his world. He works, he dates, he laughs and he makes jokes. He even takes advantage of his time with Wendy.

Readers sense that Penny may have faced a pivotal moment in her life as well. She says that she tried to make something of herself, but failed. She seems to now be in limbo, trotting down her own path of disillusionment.

From these stories, readers see that one can plan and do all the right things. In the end though, one does not know when their life can change in an instant. The key is to move through that point and not get stuck in what might have been.

Love and Loss

What is love? Is it something spiritual, physical, intellectual, or all of the above? Are the different stages of love such as young love, Hollywood style love, and realistic love – what one has when they have passed through the stages of lust and young love into the type of love that endures. The novel explores the answer by presenting several different relationships.



At the beginning of the novel Judd, even even though he is in the adult in years, is stuck in his teenage days – and so is his view of love. Whether it is the fault of Hollywood films or not, he is in love with the idea of love. Prior to the break up, his relationship with Jen never matures into a partnership. In fact, he does not even realize that she needs him. Even Phillip realizes that a relationship is give-and-take and tells Judd that yes, he takes from Tracy, but he gives to her as well. Judd feels sad that Wendy is not a romantic and is not like she was when she was a teenager. This is true, but it is normal. Wendy is much more mature than Judd. She realizes that a life of Horry in his current state is unsustainable. She may not like the fact that Barry is not around much, but she realizes that she and the family reap the benefits. Her role is to support him and the kids.

Mort and Hillary provide the optimal example of true love. She is a free spirit and he is straightlaced. In that respect, they complement each other. They have great sex, but sex is not the core of their relationship. In the end, they are partners. This partnership makes it possible for Hilary to care for Mort during his long illness and for Mort to let her go, knowing that someone will be there to take care of her after he is gone.

None of these elements exist in Judd's marriage. As a result, he and Jen drift apart. Judd continues in his teenage mind frame, imagining a life with every pretty girl he sees. Something does begin to change in him though and maybe this is why things do not seem quite right with Penny. He is not a teenager anymore and neither is she. They may skate holding hands and make out in the movie theater, but the reality of their adult lives looms over them. The ice skating rink opens, letting the real world in. They go to Penny's apartment which shows the state of her adult life. Jen calls, reminding Judd that he is going to be a father.

As soon as Judd begins to grow up, he gains the ability to finally talk to Jen like a partner. He goes off to be alone at the end of the novel because he realizes that this is what he needs to do if he wants to find true love in the end.

It is interesting that Judd deals with the loss of love like a teenager, first being in denial when he sees Jen and Wade together and then becoming angry and depressed. He does not grieve the loss of people, however. He does not grieve the death of his father or the loss of his first baby.. Once he is able to mourn his father, he is also able to look at love as an adult.

Family

Families are not perfect. At times, they may seem more like a curse than a blessing. Mort may not have been the perfect father, but he was able to import family ethics. They all put up with Philip in spite of his behavior. Paul stands up for Judd when he finds out what happened at the house party. Philip punches Wade for Judd. In the end, Paul realizes that he needs the family to ensure the success of his father's legacy, the business, and Judd is now man enough to step in.



The novel also comments on what makes a family. Judd says that Linda was like a mother to him. Doing the Shiva, he communicates his feelings the most with her – in the kitchen – the place for gathering community and nourishment. Later, his family becomes more open when he finds out that his mother and Linda are a couple. It may not be the typical family structure, but it does not mean that there is any less love in this family.

Mortality and Grieving

In literature, experiencing the death of someone tends to result in anxiety and leads characters towards self discovery. The circumstances surrounding Mort's death are no different.

At the beginning of the novel, readers suspect that Judd has a hard time facing mortality because he does not visit his father often during his final days. While he and his father were not close, there is no reason to believe that they were not on speaking terms. Consequently, Judd avoided his father because he did not want to face death. Once his father dies, Judd has another hurdle to overcome. He needs to learn how to grieve. At the funeral, Hillary tells Judd that there are different ways to express grief. However, all of the ways require one to express emotions – something that Judd cannot do. His inability to show his emotions when his first baby died brought about the rift in his marriage.

Engulfed in his own problems, Judd's first reaction to his father's death is like that of an observer.. At the funeral, he describes what a nasty day it is, compares Paul's words to a speech for the best son award, and gives readers the history of Boner – the unlikely rabbi. When Phillip cries, he says that they all look at him with horror and envy. The word "slightly" appears before both emotions. Slowly, Judd does learn how to grieve. He moves on towards acceptance once he discovers that he is going to be a father.

Doing the Shiva, everyone faces mortality, that of the dead person and their own. Judd observes his parent's friends, who are all old. The visitors realize that they themselves are close to death. Judd even realizes how he has aged and takes stock of his life. This is a step that he must take in order to be a man. One cannot stay a teenager forever. It is against nature.

Mort's acceptance of his own death is shown by his acceptance of Hillary's and Linda's relationship. It provides inspiration for his children, who are now ready to move on with their own lives.



Styles

Point of View

The narrative uses Judd Foxman's first-person perspective. As all of the events appear from Judd's perspective, readers have to take care to carefully consider what he reveals as his has biased views. In other words, he is not a reliable narrator. Thus, readers only tend to get a sense of the true characters of those surrounding him during conversations when they speak in their own voice. This is especially true of characters Judd has conflict with such as Jen, Paul, and Wade.

The point of view is fitting as the story in the novel is Judd's own story. By seeing everything from his perspective, readers can relate easier to him. What he sees and the reality of the situation when told by others, like Jen, Paul, and Wade makes readers think about their own lives. The "truths" the characters have twisted or failed to see help readers to understand how facing reality can improve their own lives.

When Judd talks about what is happening during the seven days, he uses the present tense. He does have flashbacks though. When they occur, he uses the past tense. This makes it easy for readers to follow the time period when the actions is occurring.

Language and Meaning

The language in the novel gives the impression that Judd is an intelligent man, at least book wise. The novel is poetic at times. As such, it is not too complicated, but the words flow. It is almost as if Judd is trying to compensate for the lack of power he has in other areas of his life by using mighty words. ("Words are more powerful than the sword.")

Technical words appear from time to time depending on what is happening in the novel. Terms from Judaism, financial terms related to Barry's job, and medical terms referencing Mort's illness appear from time to time in the text. Philip uses some entertainment industry terms when he tells people about his "work." In essence, though, as the characters are in and around their mother's home for seven days, the language is what one would expect to find in the household of well-educated people.

Structure

The novel starts before the Shiva ritual begins. The book is divided into sections marked by days starting with Wednesday and ending with Tuesday. Each chapter that makes up the days is divided into sections based on the time of day. Once the evening comes, readers know that a new day will begin. The author has divided the novel into short chapters of the equal size.

During the days, Judd does not only tell readers what is happening now. He also has flashbacks to the past. It is easy for readers to follow his mind as he uses the past tense to talk about the events he remembers.



Quotes

I have to smile, even as I chafe, as always, at our family's patented inability to express emotion during watershed events.

-- Judd as the Narrator (chapter 1 paragraph 4)

Importance: This quote summarizes the challenge Judd and his family members will have to overcome if they are to grieve. Readers also find out that the inability to express emotions has an influence on his marriage.

As the baby, he was alternately coddled and ignored, which may have been a significant factor in his becoming such a terminally screwed-up adult.

-- Judd as the Narrator (chapter 1 paragraph 5)

Importance: This quote sheds light on Phillip's character by explaining why he is the way he is. Readers can understand why he looks for discipline and stability from Tracy. He never had it growing up. The quote also shows that the family does have a bond as they all seem to accept Phillip's behavior and support him when he needs it.

It would be so much easier if she wasn't Jen. But she is, and where there was once the purest kind of love, there is now a snake pit of fury and resentment and a new dark twisted love that hurts more than all the rest of it put together.

-- Judd as the Narrator (chapter 2 paragraph 28)

Importance: In thinking this, Judd is betraying himself. He is trying to hate her because of what she has done. However, at the same time, he wants to protect her. It also shows how Judd romanticizes the idea of love. In reality, love can be very close to hate. It is not an emotion that one can represent in black or white.

Then, in his sophomore year in college, Horry got into a fight in a bar - details are sketchy - and the upshot was that someone took a sawed-off baseball bat to his head and now Horry is a thirty-six-year old man who lives with his mother and cannot drive a car or focus on anything for more than a few seconds.

-- Judd as the Narrator (chapter 5 paragraph 8)

Importance: This quote gives readers information about Horry's character and shows how one's life can change in a matter of seconds. It supports the theme of what might have been.

Linda diapered me, fed me, mothered me almost as much as my own mother, without ever being recognized for it.

-- Judd as the Narrator (chapter 8 paragraph 34)

Importance: This quote highlights the fact that families do not always fit the traditional model. In essence, the children had two mothers. It is interesting to note that this fact, in



a way, foreshadows the relationship between Hillary and Linda as the siblings end up having two mothers.

I was being offered a consolation prize. Numbers had been crunched, risks assessed, and they had estimated the value of my broken marriage at another thirty thousand dollars a year before taxes.

-- Judd as the Narrator (chapter 14 paragraph 25)

Importance: This quote highlights Judd's humiliation and his loss of power.

Wendy, who had seen too many movies, decided the best thing to do would be to throw her arms around him and hold on until her love calmed him, but he hurled her across the room, and when she came back he landed a solid punch, hard enough to break two of her teeth.

-- Judd as the Narrator (chapter 16 paragraph 77)

Importance: This quote reinforces Judd's feelings that people get their view of love from Hollywood movies. The quote also shows how unrealistic it would be to think that Wendy could have a satisfying relationship with Horry. Wendy was once as romantic as Judd is now. Wendy still has feelings. This incident seems to have jolted her out of her romantic haze because she came back with Barry.

That's the thing about life; everything feels so permanent, but you can disappear in an instant.

-- Judd as the Narrator (chapter 36 paragraph 30)

Importance: This quote highlights how quickly things can change in one's life. It also points to mortality. One can be here one day and gone the next, as can be the path that you thought your life would take.

Sometimes, contentment is a matter of will. You have to look at what you have right in front of you, at what it could be, and stop measuring it against what you've lost.

-- Judd as the Narrator (chapter 37 paragraph 14)

Importance: This quote sums up one of the steps one must take in the grieving process. It is necessary to accept that what is gone is gone and look for the good in what is there in front of you. It is a lesson Wendy learns when she tries to care for Horry and it does not work out. She leaves and comes back with Barry. He may not be her romantic ideal, but there is good in him. Judd realizes this, but he is not mature enough to be able to take this step.

She was lonely and angry and lost, and I didn't do that to her. You did that, all by yourself.

-- Wade (chapter 38 paragraph 68)

Importance: This quote points out the fact that Judd is also responsible for Jen's affair with Wade through his inability to connect with her on an emotional level.



You want to call me a lousy brother? I guess maybe I am, I'll own up to it. But maybe you are, too.

-- Paul (chapter 40 paragraph 74)

Importance: This statement represents a real breakthrough for Paul as he finally lets go of his emotions. He tells Judd what really bothers him about the Rottweiler incident. It also, once again, highlights the fact that Judd's inability to connect on an emotional level causes problems in his relationships.

You have to stop worrying about finding love again. It will come when it comes. Get comfortable with being alone. It will empower you.

-- Tracy (chapter 43 paragraph 41)

Importance: Judd seems to reject this advice when he first hears it. However, he follows it at the end of the novel when he goes off, alone, to take the next steps to become a man. It is a step he has never taken before, having married Jen at such a young age.