

Three Wishes Study Guide

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Plot Summary

Three Wishes takes place in present-day Australia. The novel opened with accounts, told from several different witnesses, of a brawl which took place in a restaurant between triplets who were there to celebrate their birthday.

The triplets were Cat, Lyn, and Gemma Kettle and the novel gives the backstory that led up to the night they fought with each other in the restaurant. Cat's husband Dan told her that he'd had a one night stand with a woman who he met in a bar. Lyn was very angry with Dan for his behavior despite the fact that Lyn met her husband, Michael, while he was still married to another woman. Gemma was woken up by a phone call from a man called Charlie: a locksmith whom Gemma had stood up the previous night. Charlie came over to Gemma's house and they went out on a date. The triplets sat outside the house of Angela, the woman Dan had an affair with, and Cat asked Angela for directions.

Cat and Dan began marriage counselling during which Dan revealed that he had had sex with Cat's sister Lyn before he and Cat had become a couple. Lyn protested that she thought Cat already knew. Lyn offered to host Christmas Day at her house and Gemma said that she would bring her new boyfriend Charlie to meet the whole family.

Cat found out she was pregnant. Dan said that he wanted the baby. On Christmas Day, Charlie's sister's car broke down so he brought her with him to Lyn's house. His sister was Angela, the woman Dan had an affair with. Cat told Gemma that she would have to break up with Charlie. Over Christmas dinner, the triplets' divorced parents Frank and Maxine announced that they were dating again.

Cat had a miscarriage. She checked Dan's phone bill and saw that he had been calling Angela, despite assuring Cat that it had been a one night stand. Cat told him to move out. Gemma broke up with Charlie. Lyn began having panic attacks and confided in her ex-boyfriend Joe, but not with her husband Michael. Gemma found out she was pregnant. She decided not to tell Charlie because she didn't want to keep the baby. She suggested that Cat should adopt the baby and Cat agreed.

The triplets went out for a birthday meal together during which Gemma told Cat that she had changed her mind and wanted to keep the baby. Cat threw a fork at Gemma and it stuck into her stomach, making her bleed. Cat fainted and broke her jaw. Gemma started having contractions and Lyn called an ambulance. Gemma went to hospital in the ambulance and Cat and Lyn got a ride with a man who had witnessed the fight in the restaurant.

Gemma phoned Charlie from the ambulance and he arrived in time for the birth. They decided to raise the baby together. Dan told Cat that he was moving to Paris with Angela: something he and Cat had always dreamed of doing. Cat's mom told her to move on with her life.



Lyn's ex-boyfriend Joe visited and told Lyn that he was looking for an author who could write for teenagers and Lyn suggested Cat would be good at it because of a newsletter Cat wrote for Lyn's teenage step-daughter Kara. Cat agreed to write a book proposal.

Frank and Maxine got remarried. Lyn hired the man who gave them a ride from the restaurant to the hospital as a photographer for the wedding. Cat asked the photographer out on a date and he said yes.



Chapters 1 – 3

Summary

Three Wishes is set in modern day Australia. It alternates between the perspectives of the Kettle triplets - Cat, Lyn, and Gemma – and various strangers who have observed the behavior of their family at different times in their lives.

In the Prologue, a third person narrator reflects that people sometimes become part of a performance by making a spectacle of themselves in public. One such example was an incident in a seafood restaurant in Sydney, Australia, the details of which have not yet been revealed.

“The Birthday Brawl”, tells the story of an intense argument in a seafood restaurant, from the perspective of lots of different people who witnessed the event, but not from the perspectives of the three protagonists in the incident itself. Three women were having a meal together. Towards the end of their meal, the waiting staff brought out three birthday cakes – one for each woman, because they were triplets. The three women took a turn reading something out loud, after which one of them stood up and started loudly yelling at the other two, one of whom was pregnant. The shouting triplet accidentally threw a fork at the pregnant triplet and it stuck into her belly and she started bleeding. The shouting triplet fainted, cracking her jaw against the side of the table, and the third triplet rang an ambulance.

The end of the chapter is told from the perspective of the mother of the triplets, who went to meet them at the hospital afterwards and found them there, laughing.

Chapter 1, is told from the perspective of Cat Kettle, one of the triplets. Their mother, Maxine, fell pregnant as a result of a one-night-stand with their father Frank and they were pressured into getting married. Cat recalled the night that her husband, Dan, told her that he had had a one night stand with a woman who he'd met in a bar, but that it didn't mean anything and he still loved her. After work the next day, Cat went to meet her two sisters, Lyn and Gemma, to tell them about what had happened with Dan. While she waited for them, she remembered the first time she and Dan had met.

In “The Cabbage Leaf Trick”, a nurse who was working in the hospital when the triplets were born remembers seeing how difficult their mother found it to breastfeed them all and that their mother cried her eyes out the third day after they were born.

Chapter 2 is told from the perspective of Lyn. Lyn argued with her teenage step-daughter Kara and struggled to take care of her infant daughter Maddie. Lyn thought about what Cat had told her about Dan being unfaithful and Lyn's husband Michael told her that she didn't need to worry about him being unfaithful. Lyn had a tense conversation with Georgina, Kara's mother. Lyn was polite to Georgina because she had still been married to Michael when he met Lyn and Lyn felt guilty about breaking up



their marriage. Lyn read an article about herself in a women's magazine that made her feel really embarrassed. Lyn's mother Maxine came over and told Lyn she looked terrible. Maxine told Lyn she wanted to talk to her about something, but Lyn had to go. Gemma called Lyn to tell her that Cat was sitting outside the home of Angela, the woman Dan had an affair with.

Chapter 3 is told from the perspective of Gemma. Gemma was woken up by a phone call from a locksmith called Charlie. Gemma was supposed to meet him for dinner the previous night but she stood him up because she forgot. Gemma apologized, the locksmith came over to her house, and they went out for breakfast. Gemma was a house sitter and had to call the locksmith when she accidentally locked herself out of the house she was supposed to be looking after. Gemma remembered going with Lyn to meet Cat, who was parked outside of the Angela's house. They asked Angela for directions but didn't tell her who they were or why they were there.

In "Perms and the Pill" a woman remembered seeing Maxine trying to look after the triplets in the late sixties, but they were behaving very badly. The woman and her friend who saw Maxine got prescriptions for the contraceptive pill later that day.

Analysis

By opening the novel from the perspective of bystanders at the soon-to-be infamous birthday fight, the author sets up the central theme of the novel: perspective. From the perspectives used in the opening sections, it is impossible for the reader to get a handle on the causes, implications, and effects of the events which took place that night in the restaurant. Only by slowly coming to understand the background and attitudes of all the characters involved in the fight throughout the course of the rest of the novel, can the reader make an accurate interpretation of the events depicted during the opening sections. Like the bystanders in the restaurant, at this stage, the reader can only guess at what might have caused such a dramatic incident.

The opening also sets up mysteries which will keep the reader guessing for the rest of the novel, by not giving away enough information for the reader to be able to guess which triplet is which. At later stages in the novel there are times when any of the triplets could be pregnant and simmering arguments between the three of them which could result in any one of them ending up hurling a fork at either of the other two. This structural device keeps the reader guessing for the rest of the novel.

Throughout the novel the author draws comparisons between Cat and her father Frank and between Lyn and her mother Maxine, while Gemma is not compared to any other family members. These comparisons (or lack thereof) help to explain the defining features of each triplet. Cat, like her father Frank, is reckless and forthright, often at the cost of her personal relationships. Lyn, like Maxine, is organized and efficient, but often at the cost of emotional warmth and compassion. Gemma, without a family figure with whom she can strongly identify, is cast adrift in her life and struggles to understand who



she really is and what she really wants out of life, instead choosing to go along with what everyone else in the family thinks of her and her situation.

There are two central one-night-stands in the novel which are the driving force of the plot: Frank's one night stand with Maxine which resulted in the conception of the triplets, and Dan's one night stand with Angela which resulted in the destruction of his marriage with Cat. Although Dan admitted to his infidelity in Chapter 1 of the novel it is not until much later in the narrative that it becomes apparent to the reader that this will mean the end of Cat's marriage. This remains uncertain largely through the depiction of Frank and Maxine's relationship: the reader can see that another union in Cat's life has been salvaged despite infidelity, which keeps open the possibility that Dan and Cat (like Frank and Maxine) will be able to save their marriage.

"The Cabbage Leaf Trick" is the first of the sections (other than the account of the birthday brawl) in which strangers from throughout the Kettles lives reflect on having seen the triplets. This one starts at the very beginning of their lives, when they are still in the hospital after being born. The nurse reflected on how sorry she felt for Maxine. This chapter increases sympathy for Maxine's character, who could otherwise come across as cold or lacking in compassion. Later in the novel, Gemma will come to understand how difficult it was for Maxine to raise all three of them, often singlehandedly.

The background of Lyn's marriage with Michael gives a new twist on Cat's situation with Dan. The sisters cannot dismiss the validity of Dan's actions or openly criticize Angela without implicitly criticizing Lyn and Michael's behavior as well. Both Michael and Dan had affairs with younger women whilst they were married and eventually left their unhappy marriages in order to be with the other woman. Despite these similarities, Michael is consistently portrayed sympathetically in the novel whereas Dan is depicted as the villain of the piece.

Gemma's absentmindedness is introduced in Chapter 3 as merely a character trait, but later in the novel – when Angela showed up on Christmas Day – it became apparent that locking herself out of the home she was house-sitting was the catalyst event which eventually led to the discovery of Dan's ongoing affair and the destruction of Cat's marriage.

"Perms and the Pill" continued the perspective from "The Cabbage Leaf Trick" in which other women who didn't know Maxine pitied her for having triplets.

Discussion Question 1

What mysteries are established by the author in "The Birthday Brawl"?

Discussion Question 2

How is Lyn's life contrasted with Cat's?



Discussion Question 3

What is Gemma's attitude to relationship when the reader is first introduced to her in Chapter 3?

Vocabulary

melodrama, infuriating, accumulating, flamboyant, excessive, squinting, appalled, despised, fossils, fondue, languid, exuberant, tizz, contraptions, scuttling, jangling, consciousness, psychotic, intimacy, chortling



Chapters 4 – 12

Summary

In Chapter 4, Cat and Dan went for marriage counseling with a woman called Annie. A series of emails revealed Lyn's plan to host Christmas at her house, instead of having it at Maxine's house like they usually do. Gemma planned to bring Charlie the locksmith along to meet everyone. Cat and Dan had a fight in a taxi and Cat got out on her own. She bought a bottle of champagne in a bar and drank it all alone in a park. At their next counseling session, Dan revealed that he had dated Lyn before he had dated Cat.

In Chapter 5, Lyn tried to call Cat to talk about the revelation but Cat kept hanging up. Lyn remembered her year traveling around Europe which was cut short because Gemma's fiancé was hit by a car and killed. Lyn met her husband Michael, who was married at the time, on the flight home for the funeral.

In Chapter 6, Gemma went to visit their grandmother, Gwen Kettle. Nana Kettle absentmindedly told Gemma that her husband, Gemma's grandfather (who the family called Pop) had never liked Gemma's fiancé, Marcus. Gemma remembered the day that Marcus was killed and her first day back at work.

In "The Ferry" a commuter remembered seeing Frank and the triplets running to catch a ferry. They looked like they were having a really good time.

In Chapter 7, the triplets met up for lunch. Lyn told Gemma that she'd lost her virginity to Dan and told her not to tell Cat, but Gemma's face gave it away. They were approached by a woman who had read the article about Lyn in the women's magazine. Gemma spent more time with Charlie and he told her about his family. One of his sisters was having an affair with a married man. Gemma had a nightmare that she'd had a baby with Charlie and she'd forgotten about it and it had died.

In Chapter 8, Dan told Cat that he had forgotten that he'd had sex with Lyn. Gemma went to Cat's house and noticed that she had the number for Charlie's locksmith business pinned to the fridge. Cat found out she was pregnant.

In "The Magical Caramel Sundae" a bereaved person remembered seeing the triplets in an ice cream parlor when they were teenagers. One of them was upset about a boy and the other two tried to cheer her up by buying her a sundae which they claimed was magical. The narrator remembered it was the first time they'd laughed since the loss of their loved one.

In Chapter 9, Cat told Dan she was pregnant. Cat pitched a new advert at work. Her nemesis Rob didn't like it, but her boss Graham thought it was great. On Christmas Day, everyone went to Lyn's house. Charlie came over to introduce himself to Gemma's family and brought his sister with him because her car had broken down. His sister was Angela, the woman Dan had an affair with.



In Chapter 10, on Christmas morning, Lyn had an erotic dream about her ex-boyfriend Joe. Lyn recalled that the first Christmas after their parents' divorce was the first Christmas the triplets didn't stay together. Gemma and Cat went on holiday with Frank and Lyn stayed at home with Maxine. After Angela and Charlie left, Cat told Gemma that she would have to break up with Charlie.

In Chapter 11, Frank and Maxine announced to the family that they were dating again.

In "Diving Like Dolphins" a man remembered seeing the 18-year-old triplets diving into the ocean in unison and how he had fantasized about them for months afterwards.

In Chapter 12, Gemma went to see Charlie on Boxing Day. Charlie told Gemma that Dan had ended his affair with Angela when he found out that Cat was pregnant. Gemma told Charlie that she always breaks up with her boyfriends around the six month mark and Charlie said he intended to last longer than that. Gemma remembered the night before the funeral of Marcus, her fiancé. Cat and Lyn had stayed with her. When Marcus was hit by the car, Gemma remembered that her first thought was "I hope he's dead."

Analysis

Chapter 4 introduced Cat's alcohol problem when she responded to having an argument with Dan by drinking an entire bottle of champagne on her own in a park. Cat's drinking is not treated very seriously by the author, despite it arguably contributing to her later miscarriage and resulting in her being arrested and banned from driving after she caused a car accident whilst driving under the influence. Alcohol played a prominent role in all of the triplets' lives but most negatively affected Cat. Later in the novel, after a booze-filled evening ended up with her throwing a fork at Gemma, Cat swore off drinking although she changed her mind about this before the end of the novel.

Although the revelation that Lyn had previously had sex with Dan is introduced as a major incident in the novel, it did not ultimately impact the way the story turned out. Instead, it served to highlight Dan's shifty, untrustworthy character, and provide the author with the opportunity to further explore the feelings of sibling rivalry between identical twins Cat and Lyn.

Chapter 5 explored the background of how Lyn and Michael's relationship began, which was similar to the way Dan and Angela's relationship began.

Chapter 6 introduced the character of Gwen "Nana" Kettle. When Nana Kettle remarked in passing that Pop Kettle (the triplets' grandfather) had never liked Gemma's fiancé Marcus it foreshadowed the revelation in later chapters that Marcus was abusive towards Gemma.

Chapter 7 toyed with the theme of different perspectives by bringing the triplets into contact with a woman who had read about Lyn in a women's magazine. The magazine article had made Lyn's life look perfect and had made Lyn herself look like an amazing



person. This exchange was ironic as it occurred during a lunch between the sisters in which Lyn revealed that she'd once had sex with Cat's husband: hardly the perfect and straightforward life that the stranger imagined for her.

When Charlie mentioned to Gemma that his sister was having an affair with a married man it initially appeared as if the detail was included in order to show the heightened bonding between the couple: they were starting to reveal more about themselves and their family backgrounds. This detail is also important because it set up the arrival of Angela at the Lyn's house on Christmas Day. The set-up of that moment is continued in Chapter 8 when Gemma discovered Charlie's phone number pinned to Cat's fridge.

Chapter 8 is the first time the reader gets a hint about the events of the birthday brawl. Cat found out she was pregnant in this chapter, giving the reader reason to believe that Cat will be the pregnant triplet injured by a flying fork on her 34th birthday.

"The Magical Caramel Sundae" showed that it's impossible for people to know the positive effect that they've had on the lives of strangers. The girls' caring attitude towards each other helped lift the spirits of a stranger who was suffering.

Chapters 9 and 10 brought all the threads of the story crashing together when Gemma's boyfriend Charlie brought his sister – who had an affair with Cat's husband – to Lyn's house on Christmas Day. Angela's family relationship with Charlie further softens her characterization: she is not depicted by the author as a slut or a homewrecker, rather just a normal human being caught up in a very complicated dynamic. This is the moment in the novel when the potential for Gemma and Cat's joint happiness becomes intertwined, and it appears as if one of them will have to sacrifice their happiness for the sake of the other.

When Frank and Maxine announced they were dating again in Chapter 11 it gave a new perspective on the chapters dealing with the triplets' childhood as the reader now knows that their relationship will have a happy ending, despite the difficulties in their marriage when the girls were young. This also gives rise to the possibility that Dan and Cat will follow suit and repair their marriage the way Maxine and Frank were able to.

Gemma's revelation, in Chapter 12, that her first thought after Marcus was hit by a car was to hope that he was dead, furthers the foreshadowing of Marcus's abuse which began with Nana Kettle's revelation that Gemma's grandfather had never liked Marcus. The reader is left to guess for the time being why Gemma would wish for such a terrible thing.

Discussion Question 1

How seriously did Dan and Cat take marriage counselling?



Discussion Question 2

Was it wrong of Lyn not to tell Cat that she'd had sex with Dan?

Discussion Question 3

What role does Nana Kettle play in the novel?

Vocabulary

pelting, gobsmacked, psychopathic, constructive, aphrodisiac, superiority, unerring, horrendously, ramrod, flailing, cicadas, typecast, succumbed, revelation, naive, conception, bewildered, strident, concave, exploited



Chapters 13 – 18

Summary

In Chapter 13, it was revealed that Gemma's fiancé Marcus used to make violent threats against Gemma, but that Cat and Lyn never knew about it. On New Year's Eve, Cat had a miscarriage.

In Chapter 14, Gemma, Lyn, and Maxine went to comfort Cat. Dan went out and Gemma asked him where he was going. Maxine revealed that she had a miscarriage when the triplets were three. Cat remembered when the three of them used to play netball when they were teenagers. Maxine and Frank both used to come to watch their games but they didn't sit together. Cat reflected that if the girls hadn't been great at netball then their dad wouldn't have bothered to come, but their mum would have been there to support them regardless, even though she didn't enjoy netball. Cat sank into depression over her miscarriage. Dan tried to convince her to get out of bed but she refused. They had a fight in which Cat called Angela a slut and Dan defended her. This made Cat suspect that his relationship with Angela had been more than a one night stand. Cat found Dan's phone bill and saw that he had been calling Angela.

In "Heads of Tails, Susi?" someone remembered seeing the triplets gambling with their grandfather in a pub.

In Chapter 15, Maddie hit another child while they were out shopping and Lyn had a panic attack in a car park but she decided not to tell Michael about it. Michael told Lyn he wanted to start trying for another baby but Lyn said they had to wait because of Cat's miscarriage. Lyn received an email from an old boyfriend called Joe. Cat called Lyn and told her she'd been in a car accident and that the police were coming to arrest her because she was drunk. Lyn asked Cat what she was wearing and raced to the scene of the accident in identical clothes. By the time Lyn got there it was too late and Cat had already been arrested.

In Chapter 16 Charlie told Gemma he loved her and Gemma said that he didn't. The chapter recounted the numerous incidents in Gemma's relationship with Marcus in which he was verbally and physically abusive towards her. Dan moved out and Gemma and Lyn came home with Cat the first time she'd been into the house since he left. Marcus proposed to Gemma on a ski trip, during which a stranger had warned Gemma that she should leave him because his behavior was unacceptable. Gemma broke up with all of her other boyfriends whenever they did something that reminded her of Marcus.

Chapter 17 depicted the night Cat confronted Dan about his ongoing affair with Angela. Dan said he had been unhappy with their relationship for a while because Cat was so competitive and treated Dan like a moron. Cat told him to get out. She went to a pub,



got drunk, and had a car accident. Cat went back to work seven days after her miscarriage without telling any of her colleagues what had happened.

In Chapter 18 Cat struggled with insomnia. She got up and decided to drive to Angela's flat to see if Dan was staying there, which he was. Cat slashed the tires on both of their cars and Angela and Dan came out of the apartment and caught her doing it. Gemma came to Cat's office to tell her that Angela and Dan were thinking of taking out a restraining order against Cat. Gemma told Cat that she'd broken up with Charlie. Cat got very drunk and woke up one morning in bed with her boss, Graham Hollingdale. Graham said he had an open marriage and would like to have a relationship with Cat, but Cat declined.

In "Venus on the Dance Floor" a man recalled trying to hit on one of the triplets at a nightclub but that all three of them had run away from him to dance with each other when their favorite song came on.

Analysis

Although the triplets were very close to each other throughout their lives, there are still significant things that they didn't ever share with their sisters. This was introduced earlier in the novel, when it was revealed during a counseling session that Dan had originally dated Lyn before he began his relationship with Cat. This was potentially one of the less believable elements of the novel, as it seemed unlikely that this had never once come up in conversation over the many years that had passed since Cat and Dan got married. The secrets that the sisters kept from each other became more disturbing in Chapter 13, when it was revealed that Gemma was in an abusive relationship which Cat and Lyn were unaware of.

The discussion of Maxine's miscarriage in Chapter 14 is an important moment in the triplets' relationship with their mother. Maxine is presented as a difficult and emotionally distant woman during the triplets' adult lives, but other sections of the novel serve to increase the triplets' (and the readers') sympathy for Maxine's character and the struggles that she has had to endure in her life. This relates to the novel's theme of perspective. When the girls were children, it appeared to them as if their father was a better parent than their mother because he was more fun, lighthearted, and relaxed despite the fact that Maxine was the more responsible parent. As they got older, the triplets slowly and separately learned about the sacrifices Maxine had made for them and gained perspective about why she behaved the way that she did.

Lyn's fist panic attack in Chapter 15 marks a turning point in the story arc for her character. Up until this point Lyn has been defined in the novel (and has defined herself) as the responsible one who is on top of everything and always knows what to do. Lyn's character must learn to let go of control and allow others to help her. Lyn's experience with panic attacks is the first chink that appears in her armor which will eventually lead to her accepting more support from her husband Michael. Chapter 15 also raised the



possibility that Lyn would be the pregnant twin assaulted with a fondue fork at the birthday brawl, when Michael proposed that they should start trying for another baby.

Chapter 16 gave a new perspective on Gemma's character. Up until this point the reader has been more inclined to trust Cat and Lyn's interpretation of Gemma's personality: that she is flaky and too scared of commitment to stick with a boyfriend for longer than six months. Lyn also argued that Gemma was addicted to a chemical released by the body during the early stages of romantic relationships. This chapter revealed to the reader that Gemma's failed relationships stemmed from the psychological damage inflicted on her by her emotionally and physically abusive fiancé Marcus. This chapter added depth to Gemma's character and offered the reader an insight into her personality that the other characters didn't have access to. By asserting her power to end her relationships with her 14 ex-boyfriends, Gemma was attempting to take back the power which she had abdicated in her relationship with Marcus.

Chapter 17 continued the exploration of different perspectives by finally offering the reader some insight into Dan's behavior. The chapter revealed that Cat and Dan had very different perspectives on their marriage and that the verbal sparring and competitiveness that Cat felt was proof that they had more fun than other couples actually made Dan feel bad about himself and unhappy in the relationship. This was a difficult moment for Cat as, up until this revelation, she was able to tell herself that her marriage troubles were all Dan's fault, but was now forced to confront the fact that she had been making him unhappy through her own actions.

Cat struggled again with different perspectives in Chapter 18 when she saw herself from the perspective of Dan and Angela while she was slashing their tires. Cat realized that she had become a story in their lives, rather than part of a shared life with Dan.

Discussion Question 1

Was Maxine a good mother?

Discussion Question 2

What do you think caused Lyn to start having panic attacks?

Discussion Question 3

Did Cat and Dan have a good marriage before Dan's affair?



Vocabulary

idioglossia, telepathic, ravenously, unseemliness, racked, legislated, righteously, demented, phenomenon, lighthearted, sophisticated, momentum, frantically, niggling, contemptuous, ferocious, insomnia, groggily, coldblooded, accumulating



Chapters 19 – 24

Summary

In Chapter 19, Lyn began an email correspondence with her old boyfriend Joe without telling Michael about it. Lyn confessed to Joe that she had been having panic attacks. The whole family went with Cat for her court case. Cat was banned from driving for six months. On the day of Maddie's birthday, Joe rang and left a message with Michael for Lyn saying that he had lots of advice for her about her panic attacks. At Maddie's birthday party, Kara discussed a sheet of paper with Cat but Lyn didn't know what it was. Lyn came down with chickenpox and had to go home.

In Chapter 20, Lyn woke up in bed covered with chickenpox. Michael took care of her and Kara brought a craft project that they could do together, making something for Maddie. Kara told Lyn that Cat had been writing an advice column for Kara and her other teenage friends and that it was really funny. Michael complained about the roles they played in their marriage saying that Lyn was Wonder Woman and he was Goofy. Four days later, Gemma announced that she was pregnant. Gemma said she wasn't going to tell Charlie that she was pregnant and that Cat was going to adopt the baby.

In "The Twist" a woman recounted seeing the triplets in their early twenties, out shopping with their mother. Maxine started doing a dance called The Twist while they were in a record shop and the triplets joined in.

In Chapter 21, Charlie told Gemma about Cat slashing Angela's tires and told Gemma that she needed to make sure Cat left his sister alone. Gemma responded by telling Charlie that she didn't think they should see each other anymore. When Gemma found out she was pregnant she decided that Cat should adopt the baby before she'd even left the doctor's office. Cat was initially reluctant but Gemma talked her into it. Lyn did not approve of the plan and felt strongly that Gemma should tell Charlie, since it was his baby. Gemma revealed to Lyn that she'd made a lot of money on the stock market by investing the money that she got when Marcus died.

In "Tchaikovsky and Guacamole" a woman recalled seeing the entire Kettle family together at an opera in the park event. She remembered how charismatic the family was and thought they were very entertaining.

In Chapter 22, Gemma and Cat went for Gemma's ultrasound. Cat told Gemma about Kara's new boyfriend and Gemma called Kara to warn her not to let the boyfriend treat her badly. Gemma told herself that she forgave herself for staying with Marcus for so long. Cat painted the nursery in her house. Frank and Maxine moved in together. Gemma spoke to her stomach and accidentally called herself the baby's mum.

Chapter 23 recounted the birthday dinner which was first introduced in the Prologue, this time from the triplets' perspective. Gemma revealed that she had some letters that



the girls had written to their older selves when they were fourteen. They each took a turn reading the letters. Lyn's life had turned out exactly how she had imagined. Gemma had imagined having lots of children. Cat's letter didn't mention wanting children at all. Gemma told Cat that she had changed her mind and wanted to keep the baby.

In Chapter 24, Cat threw a fork at Gemma which stuck in her stomach. Cat fainted, breaking her jaw on the side of the table. Lyn rang an ambulance. Gemma told Lyn that she was having contractions. An ambulance took Gemma to the hospital. A man from the restaurant gave Lyn and Cat a lift to the hospital and laughed at their jokes. Gemma phoned Charlie from the ambulance and he arrived at the hospital in time for the birth.

In "Soap Bubbles on the Corso" someone recounted seeing the family together with Maddie and Gemma's little baby. The woman noticed that one of the sisters was really sad and wanted to tell her that eventually whatever was worrying her wouldn't matter anymore.

Analysis

Chapter 19 further explored the novel's theme of Infidelity, this time through the lens of emotional infidelity rather than sexual infidelity. Although Lyn did not have sex with anyone else she was unfaithful to Michael by confiding about her emotional problems to another man while not telling Michael about it. This relates to Lyn's role in the Kettle family as the responsible one who always keeps everything together. Lyn felt more comfortable talking to Joe, a relative stranger, than she did talking to someone in her family because Joe didn't have a preconceived idea of what Lyn was like and how she would behave.

Dealing with chickenpox in Chapter 20 is an important moment in Lyn's character arc because her illness forces her to finally accept help from other people. Once Lyn became more open to accepting help, rather than insisting on doing everything herself, her relationships with her family improved. Michael felt able to express his concerns about the roles they played in their marriage and Kara became more forthcoming and caring towards Lyn. The chickenpox is symbolic of Lyn's role as a martyr in the Kettle family. Gemma and Cat both contracted chickenpox when they were children while spending Christmas with Frank. Lyn didn't catch chickenpox at the time because she chose to stay home with Maxine rather than join in the fun with the others, out of the belief that sacrificing her own needs would make her mum feel better.

Gemma's announcement that she was pregnant in Chapter 20 indicates to the reader that she may be the pregnant triplet who was assaulted with a fork in the seafood restaurant.

Chapter 21 dealt with the role that Gemma played in the Kettle family. She had always considered herself to be irresponsible and unreliable which meant that her first reaction to hearing she was pregnant was to decide that she was incapable of raising the baby. The author hints that the role Gemma played in the family may not be indicative of her



personality as a whole when Gemma revealed that she made a lot of money on the stock market by analyzing market trends.

Chapter 22 showed Gemma's growing maternal instincts through her concern about Kara's boyfriend and the moment when she accidentally thought of herself as the baby's mum. Forgiving herself for not leaving Marcus is a central turning point for Gemma's character as it allowed her to embrace her desire to have a family and to pursue a new romantic relationship with Charlie.

Chapters 23 and 24 closed the circle that was opened in the Prologue by recounting the infamous birthday brawl, this time from the perspective of the triplets themselves. The reader now knows that it was Cat who threw a fork at her pregnant sister (Gemma) and Lyn who called the ambulance.

The letters that the triplets read out loud show the extent to which the women have or haven't stuck with the roles that they played as children. Although Cat ended these chapters in a state of despair, the letter marked a turning point in her ability to recover from everything that happened to her during the course of the novel: by reading the letter, Cat discovered that marriage and children had not always been her priorities in life and that it might be ok for her to leave those things behind.

The fork-throwing triplet was very much presented as a monster in the opening sections, with other patrons appalled by her behavior. However, the context of the rest of the novel allows the reader to understand why Cat became so unhinged and how devastating Gemma's revelation that she wanted to keep the baby after all would be. From this point on the reader is in the dark about how things will work out for the triplets as the narrative overtakes the moment set-up in the Prologue.

The seeds of Cat's happy ending are planted by the author in Chapter 24 when Cat and Lyn met a man who finds their antics amusing rather than disturbing who Cat later asked out on a date.

Discussion Question 1

Why didn't Lyn tell Michael about her panic attacks?

Discussion Question 2

Why did Gemma always break up with her boyfriends?

Discussion Question 3

Do you think Gemma should have broken up with Charlie because of Dan's affair with Angela?

Vocabulary

boogie, conceivably, erotic, ravaged, croaked, nightie, calamine, roulette, murky, miniscule, pedantic, encroaching, salacious, ultrasound, benevolently, strained, disdainful, pointedly, frivolous, sobriety



Chapters 25 – 28

Summary

In Chapter 25, Dan told Cat that he needed to speak to her and they met in a park. Dan told her that he'd been offered a job in Paris and that he was moving there with Angela, which Dan and Cat had hoped to do when they were still together. Cat told Dan that she would be ok and that she wished him well but that she needed him to leave her there without saying anything else about it.

In Chapter 26, a burglar broke into Nana Kettle's home and attacked her. The rest of the family went to visit her in hospital and were shocked by her black eye and how frail she had become. Nana Kettle's assault became a famous story on the Australian news media. Nana Kettle decided she didn't want to live in her house anymore and moved into sheltered accommodation. Maxine and Cat helped her to pack her things. Maxine told Cat to pull herself together and move on with her life, like Nana Kettle was doing, instead of dwelling on everything that had gone wrong. Maxine said that France was Dan's dream, not Cat's, and that Cat should come up with some dreams of her own. Cat reflected that it was only her pride holding her back and that her career had been going very well during the time that her personal life was falling apart. Cat went to Lyn's to meet her ex-boyfriend Joe who was visiting from America. When she got back in her car later that night she was very excited but the reader does not yet know why.

In Chapter 27, Lyn got ready for a visit from her ex-boyfriend Joe. Kara convinced her to wear something revealing, which Michael didn't approve of. When Joe arrived, it turned out that he had gained a lot of weight since Lyn had last seen him which Lyn and Michael somewhat cruelly thought was hilarious. Joe worked in publishing and told Lyn that he was looking for a new author to write material for teenage girls. Lyn showed Joe some of the newsletters that Cat had written for Kara and her friends and Joe thought they were fantastic. He asked Cat to write a proposal for a book. Maxine told Lyn that she was going to propose to Frank.

In Chapter 28, Gemma worried that she wasn't a good enough mother. She took her baby, Sal, to stay with Charlie's parents who didn't like Gemma because she had left it so late before she told Charlie that she was pregnant, and also because they associated her with Dan who had convinced their daughter Angela to drop out of law school and move to France with him. Maxine came to help Gemma cope with the baby and Gemma realized how difficult it must have been for Maxine to have three babies at once. Maxine said that Lyn had said the same thing when Maddie was born and that she was looking forward to Cat one day having the same realization.

Frank and Maxine got married for the second time. Lyn booked the photographer: it was the man from the restaurant the night of the fight who had given Lyn and Cat a ride to the hospital.



In the Epilogue, Olivia, the waitress from the restaurant where the triplets had their infamous fight, recalls seeing the family again on the day of Frank and Maxine's wedding. Cat told Olivia that she was going to ask the photographer out on a date and Olivia thought, from the look on the photographer's face, that he'd said yes.

Analysis

Chapter 25 is an important turning point for Cat because it marked the moment when she stopped trying to deal with her life situation by becoming angry and aggressive towards Dan and instead started to accept her circumstances, despite continuing to find the experiences she'd been through to be profoundly upsetting.

The burglary and assault on Nana Kettle in Chapter 26 affected different members of the Kettle family in different ways. Perhaps the most profound effect was what happened to Frank. Frank had been defined during the triplets' childhood as the carefree fun-loving parent who was always telling Maxine to relax. As with the other characters in the novel, Frank's role changed as the family grew older. The assault on his mother, Nana Kettle, made Frank more aware of the dangers in the world than he had previously been. Having always imagined that nothing bad would ever happen to him or his family, Frank was faced with a new reality when something terrible happened to his mother. This changed Frank's perspective and he became much moodier and more aggressive, echoing the way Maxine felt during the triplets' childhood when she was constantly vigilant about their welfare and worried for their safety.

This incident in Nana Kettle's life also had a profound impact on Cat, who is the triplet who most identified with Frank. Through Nana Kettle, Cat saw someone else going through a profoundly difficult experience but picking herself up and bravely starting a new chapter in her life regardless. This chapter also deepened the depiction of Maxine, who was depicted as critical and overly harsh in other chapters (for example when she criticized Lyn's outfit and pointed out what a terrible picture of Kara had been included in the women's magazine.) Here, Maxine's no-nonsense straightforward advice is accurate and exactly the sort of wakeup call Cat needed to make her stop wallowing in self-pity.

The revelation in Chapter 27 that Lyn's ex-boyfriend Joe had become overweight was an anti-climactic ending to the building tension between Michael and Lyn, which had been caused by Lyn's emotional infidelity. The implication of this chapter is that there was no chance of Lyn committing sexual infidelity with Joe because of his weight, which is an unnecessarily cruel suggestion in a novel that featured two female characters who struggled with body image issues (Kara, who strongly disliked her legs, and teenage Lyn who disliked being flat-chested). Joe's interest in Cat writing a book proposal offering advice to teenagers opened a new chapter in Cat's life, showing her that Dan leaving her for a younger woman needn't mean the end of Cat enjoying herself or feeling fulfilled.

Chapter 28 showed the extent to which Gemma's life had changed during the course of the novel. When the novel opened, she was single with no children and no certain



profession. At the end of the novel, she is in a committed relationship with Charlie and they have a baby. The opposite path happens for Cat. At the start of the novel she has a successful established career, she is married to Dan, and they are trying for a baby. By the end of the novel Cat is childless, single, and embarking on an entirely new career path. The different outcomes for Gemma and Cat in the novel demonstrate that there is not only one path to happiness: both sisters are happier at the end of the novel than they are at the beginning, even though they have opposite lifestyles.

The concluding chapter, written from the perspective of the waitress who served the triplets at the birthday brawl, brings the novel full-circle by concluding from the perspective of an outsider. Olivia's opinion that the photographer said yes when Cat asked him out gives the reader hope that Cat will find her happy ending after all.

Discussion Question 1

What effect did Nana Kettle's assault have on the rest of the family?

Discussion Question 2

Why didn't Charlie's parents approve of Gemma?

Discussion Question 3

What role does Joe play in the novel?

Vocabulary

ghoulishly, functioning, saintliness, smarmy, whimpering, arthritic, incapable, parallel, splotches, quavered, peremptory, camisole, meditation, condescension, studiously, enthralled, unhygienic, epic, revelation, irritable



Characters

Cat Kettle

Cat Kettle is one of the Kettle triplets: the novel's three central characters. Cat is arguably the main protagonist in the novel as it was her breakup with Dan that triggered the events of the novel and the author chose to end the story by focusing on Cat taking steps to start her love life again. During the course of the novel Cat's whole life fell apart: her husband left her for a younger woman, she had a miscarriage, her sister Gemma changed her mind about letting Cat adopt her baby, and Cat began a brand new career from scratch. Cat's life began to improve when she stopped being aggressive towards Dan and his new partner Angela and started focusing her energy on rebuilding her own life.

One of the novel's major themes is Family Roles, which is explored by the author through comparing each of the triplets to their parents. Cat is compared with her father, Frank, who was always the more reckless, less responsible parent in comparison to her mother, Maxine. The triplets repeated dynamics from their childhood into their adult relationships. As a child, Cat was always competitive with Lyn and wanted to have things just because Lyn had them and as an adult she wanted a marriage and children because Lyn had those things. As a child, Cat used to accept sacrifices from Gemma which would make Cat happy, whilst taking something away from Gemma and as adults Cat accepted Gemma's suggestion that Cat should adopt her baby.

Cat was reckless, critical, and unsympathetic to people around her which caused her to behave in self-destructive ways throughout the novel. Cat had an alcohol problem which led to numerous instances of poor decision making, beginning with her relationship with Dan which began when Cat was drunk. During the course of the novel: Cat potentially triggered a miscarriage due to binge-drinking when she was unaware that she was pregnant; went to bed with her boss Graham Hollingdale when she was drunk despite not being attracted to him in the slightest; and was arrested for drunk-driving and banned for six months as a result of causing a car accident when she was drunk.

Lyn Kettle

Lyn Kettle is one of the Kettle triplets and Cat Kettle's identical twin. Lyn is a successful businesswoman who is hyper-organized and responsible. She criticized her sisters Cat and Gemma for not having their lives as sorted out as hers and offered endless advice and extracts from self-help novels to try to get them onto a better track.

Lyn was compared to her mother Maxine, who was the responsible parent when the triplets were growing up. Lyn, like Maxine, sacrificed her own happiness for the sake of others but ended up making other people unhappy in the process by becoming emotionally distant and critical. Lyn's tendency to sacrifice herself for the sake of others



appeared in her adult life when she tried to impersonate Cat in order to save her from failing a breathalyzer test after Cat was caught drunk-driving.

Lyn started to change as a person when she developed a problem with panic attacks. She felt unable to admit this to any of her family, including her husband, because of her reputation as being the sensible one. The big moment for Lyn in the novel came when she contracted chickenpox, which forced her to accept help from others rather than martyring herself by insisting on doing everything herself.

Lyn's past provided context for the struggles that Cat was facing. When Lyn met her husband Michael, he was already married to another woman – Georgina – and Lyn's relationship with Michael broke up his marriage to Georgina. This dynamic is repeated in Cat's life, with Cat in the role of the wronged woman when Dan's affair with Angela led to the breakdown of their marriage. This provided a context for what happened to Cat which didn't allow the Kettles to fully blame Dan and Angela for the situation, because to do so would be to cast judgement on Lyn and Michael as well.

Gemma Kettle

Gemma Kettle is one of the Kettle triplets. Whereas Cat and Lyn are identical, Gemma is a fraternal triplet and doesn't look like the other two. Gemma's position as the "odd one out" triplet defined all of her relationships and actions during the novel. Lyn identified with their mother Maxine while they were growing up, whereas Cat identified with their father Frank. This, once again, left Gemma as the odd one out, without any clear allegiances or sense of herself. This lack of a sense-of-self continued to affect Gemma as an adult as she struggled to separate her own thoughts, feelings, opinions, and desire from those of her family.

Gemma plays the role of the catalyst in the novel when she locked herself out of the building she was house-sitting and called Charlie, a locksmith whose number Cat gave her. This event triggered the eventual arrival of Angela – Charlie's sister and Dan's new lover – at Lyn's house on Christmas Day. Gemma's irresponsibility caused her to lose the keys and her disorganization made her dependent on Cat to provide her with a phone number for a locksmith (a number which appeared in Cat's house because of a promotional fridge magnet given to Dan by Angela the night they met.) Gemma's belief that she would always be irresponsible and flaky led her to suggest to Cat that Cat should adopt Gemma's baby.

Gemma had an abusive relationship with a man called Marcus who she was planning to marry before he was killed in a car accident. Gemma never told her sisters, or anyone else, about the abuse. As a result of the psychological and emotional damage caused by Marcus, Gemma sabotaged all of her subsequent relationships. Her family mistakenly believed that Gemma's relationships never lasted because she was flaky and unreliable, not realizing the trauma that her relationship with Marcus had caused. Gemma's relationship with Charlie allowed her to heal from the wounds of her past and recognize her desire to raise their child, rather than giving him to Cat for adoption.



Maxine Kettle

Maxine Kettle is the mother of the Kettle triplets. She married their father, Frank, when she fell pregnant but they divorced when the triplets were still children. Once the triplets were adults, with the stress of raising them removed from their relationship, Maxine and Frank began dating again and got married in the novel's final chapter.

Although she was supposedly quite wild in her younger years, having the triplets forced Maxine to become organized and responsible. Once the triplets were adults, Maxine persisted with this persona in a way which made her seem harsh, critical, and emotionally distant. Like Lyn, Maxine is a control-freak who is addicted to stress. As the triplets got older, and when Lyn and Gemma had their own children, they began to have more sympathy for Maxine because they realized how difficult her life must have been when they were children.

Frank Kettle

Frank Kettle is the father of the Kettle triplets. When they were children, the triplets always viewed him as the more fun and carefree parent but as they got older they came to understand that Maxine was the more responsible parent.

When Frank's mother was attacked by a burglar his carefree attitude to life changed and he was unable to be as relaxed as he used to be before, when he used to imagine that nothing bad would ever happen to him or his family.

Nana (Gwen) Kettle

Nana Kettle is the grandmother of the Kettle triplets and the mother of Frank Kettle. When Nana Kettle was attacked by a burglar in her home it changed the lives of other members of the family, most notable Frank and Cat. Frank became less relaxed and more anxious about things going wrong in the world.

Cat learned a positive lesson when she observed Nana Kettle pick herself up and start a new life after the burglary despite the hardships she endured. Nana Kettle's resilience inspired Cat to believe that she, too, could rebuild her life after all of the tragic events of the novel.

Dan

Dan is Cat's husband. Dan played a catalytic role in the novel when he had an affair with a woman called Angela. Dan is also the villain of the novel. More so than any other character, Dan is portrayed unsympathetically. Whereas different perspectives are offered on the behavior of other characters, Dan is largely presented as sleazy,



deceitful, and unkind. Dan became unhappy with his marriage to Cat because she was always very competitive with him and made him feel like a moron.

Angela

Angela is the woman whom Dan had an affair and is also the sister of Charlie, the locksmith with whom Gemma fell in love with. Angela is treated surprisingly sympathetically and the author does not characterize her as a slut or a homewrecker, just a young woman caught up in a very complicated family dynamic. The knowledge that Lyn also had an affair with a married man gives a perspective on Angela's character that stops her from becoming the villain of the novel.

Charlie

Charlie is a locksmith who began dating Gemma when she locked herself out. He is the father of Gemma's baby Sal. Unlike Marcus, Charlie treated Gemma well. Charlie was responsible for one of the most explosive incidents in the novel when he brought his sister Angela to Lyn's house on Christmas Day, unaware that she was having an affair with Cat's husband. Charlie is a counterpoint to the negative characterization of Dan which serves to show that not all men are bad.

Michael

Michael is Lyn's husband. Michael left his first wife, Georgina, after having an affair with Lyn. Despite Michael's past behavior it is never implied that there is a risk that Michael will also be unfaithful to Lyn. Michael complained about the role Lyn had assigned him in their family: he was Goofy while she was Wonder Woman. Michael persistently tried to help Lyn, but she always refused and insisted on doing everything for herself.

Kara

Kara is Lyn's step-daughter, Michael's daughter from his first marriage. Kara is a teenager who struggles to communicate with her parents. She found it easier to talk to Cat about her problems and Cat's entertaining advice for Kara and her friends eventually resulted in a new career path for Cat as a writer.

Maddie

Maddie is Lyn and Michael's infant daughter. She misbehaved in ways which caused Lyn to feel out of control and prompted Lyn to start experiencing panic attacks.

Georgina

Georgina is Michael's ex-wife. Lyn felt obliged to be excessively nice to Georgina and accommodate all of her demands because Lyn felt guilty about stealing her husband.

Marcus

Marcus was Gemma's fiancé. He was hit by a car and killed before their wedding. Marcus was emotionally and physically abusive towards Gemma and the psychological damage he caused continued to affect Gemma's relationships with men for several years after his death. The money Gemma received after Marcus died allowed her to become financially independent by investing in the stock market.



Symbols and Symbolism

Car Parks

Car Parks are a symbol of Lyn's inability to handle everything that life throws at her on her own. Although Lyn projects a confident and responsible demeanor at all times, the strain of dealing with her young daughter Maddie became too much for her on a shopping trip which resulted in Lyn having a panic attack in a car park. Rather than confront her problem, or tell her husband or sisters about what was happening to her, Lyn decided to repress her anxiety problem which was symbolized in the novel by Lyn deciding to avoid car parks altogether.

Push-Up Bra

Kara bought Lyn a Push-Up Bra when Lyn contracted the chickenpox. This was a symbol of Kara's love for Lyn and her growing understanding that Lyn suffered from the same sort of anxieties and issues that Kara suffered from, even though Lyn presented herself as in-control and on top of everything. When Kara was worried about the way her legs looked, Cat told her that Lyn was always insecure about being flat-chested. Although Lyn didn't know that Cat had said this, Kara's gift of the push-up bra was symbolic of her sympathy and love for Lyn.

Crafty Case

The Crafty Case was a box of craft supplies which Kara and Lyn used to play with when Kara was younger, but that Kara had lost interest in as she reached adolescence. The Crafty Case became a symbol for Lyn of their lost closeness and her sadness over their lack of emotional connections during Kara's teenage years.

When Lyn contracted the chickenpox, her emotional barriers to her family members came falling down and Kara became more emotionally engaged with her once again. This was symbolized by Kara suggesting that she and Lyn should collaborate on a craft project together to make something for Maddie, calling back memories of the time they spent playing with the Crafty Case when Kara was younger.

Toy Football

Dan bought a Toy Football and gave it to Cat as a present for their unborn child when he found out that Cat was pregnant. When the toy football first appeared it was a symbol for Dan's desire to be a father and his commitment to healing the problems in his marriage with Cat. However, after Cat had a miscarriage, the football became a symbol of everything that Cat had lost, causing her to dissolve into tears when she found it in the wardrobe the day that Dan moved out of their shared apartment.



Bun

Bun is a type of cake popular in Australia. It is symbolic of the strong family bond between all of the Kettles. Although the Kettle family is not especially good at being honest with each other and sharing their emotions, they are always there for each other and show up at times of need. During these times, the emotions and love that they do not openly express for each other is symbolized by bun. Each time one of the family undergo some form of emotional duress, the rest of the family show up and share bun with each other.

Cat's Newsletter

Cat wrote a newsletter for her teenage niece Kara and her friends answering their questions and offering them advice about how to navigate the emotional problems they were facing. Cat's newsletter is symbolic of her untapped talent. Throughout the novel Cat was entirely focused on the drama of her personal life: Dan's affair, her miscarriage, and the eventual end of her marriage. The newsletter showed that there was more meaning in Cat's life than just her marriage and childlessness and that she had a lot to offer the world beyond the issues of her personal life. When Cat left her job towards the end of the novel, the newsletter offered her a new career path when Lyn's ex-boyfriend Joe read it and encouraged Cat to write a book proposal.

Alcohol

Alcohol is symbolic of Cat's emotional problems. Rather than confronting her issues head-on, Cat turned to alcohol throughout the novel to help her deal with the collapse of her personal life, with disastrous results. During an argument with Dan, rather than address her feelings or discuss what was happening, Cat got out of their shared taxi and drank a bottle of champagne on her own, an action which she later blamed for her miscarriage. Cat was arrested for drunk driving, banned for six months, and ended up in bed with her boss as a result of her drinking. After throwing a fork into Gemma's pregnant belly during an alcohol-fueled birthday dinner, Cat promised God that she would quit drinking, although she later recanted that sentiment.

House Sitting

House Sitting is symbolic of Gemma's inability to launch a life of her own. Gemma's relationship with Marcus left her feeling worthless and destroyed her sense of self. Because of this, Gemma looked to outside sources to define her life rather than looking within to connect with her true self. Gemma's lack of a spiritual home was outwardly symbolized by Gemma's lack of a physical home: rather than renting or buying her own home [which she had enough money to do] Gemma spent her life as a house sitter, living in other people's lives and occupying their space rather than creating a life of her own.



Chickenpox

Chickenpox is symbolic of Lyn's martyr complex and her refusal to accept help from others. Lyn caught chickenpox as an adult because of her insistence on sacrificing her own happiness for the sake of others when she was a child: Gemma and Cat both had chickenpox as children on a holiday with Frank which Lyn refused to go on out of sympathy for Maxine. When Lyn got chickenpox she was forced to accept help and kindness from Michael and Kara, which she usually refused. By allowing others to help her, and by admitting to her own vulnerability, Lyn deepened her emotional connection with her husband and her step-daughter.

Gemma's Engagement Ring

Gemma's engagement ring was symbolic of her relationship with her emotionally and physically abusive fiancé Marcus. After Marcus died, Gemma gave the ring to a busker on the street despite the fact that it was worth a lot of money. Cat thought that this was evidence of how flaky and irresponsible Gemma was, but in fact it was symbolic of Gemma's desire to rid herself of everything Marcus gave to her and to escape from the psychological damage that their relationship had caused.



Settings

Dan and Cat's Apartment

Dan and Cat's apartment is a location associated with suffering and the destruction of Cat's marriage. Dan and Cat were at home in their apartment when Dan first broke the news to Cat that he had an affair. After Cat's miscarriage she became depressed and wouldn't leave their apartment. When Dan moved out, Gemma and Lyn came home with Cat the first time she'd been there since Dan took his things away, in order to help her adjust to the new reality of the apartment.

Angela's Apartment

Angela's apartment is a location of obsession for Cat. Cat frequently went to Angela's apartment while she was obsessing about Dan's affair. On one occasion, Lyn and Gemma joined Cat outside the apartment and Cat asked Angela for directions without revealing who she was.

Later, when Cat and Dan separated, Cat wanted to know where Dan was staying, so she drove to Angela's apartment to look for his car. When she saw that he was there, she slashed the tires of his car and Angela's car, which caused the couple to consider taking out a restraining order.

Lyn and Michael's House

In the women's magazine article, Lyn's house is depicted as perfect, idyllic, and enviable, but in the novel it is a scene of lots of strife and drama, most notably on Christmas Day when Charlie brought Angela to the house. It is a mixed location for Cat who had to see Angela there, but also opened up a new career path there when she met Joe.

Nana Kettle's House

Nana Kettle's house was a location of safety and happiness for Nana Kettle until she was attacked and burgled there, which changed the way she felt about her house and meant that she didn't want to be there anymore. Nana Kettle's decision to move on from the past (symbolized by her decision to move on from the house) inspired Cat to move on with her life after her miscarriage and divorce.



Gemma's Temporary Home

The house Gemma was house sitting during the novel was a catalyst location because Gemma getting locked out of the house was what brought Charlie into her life and what brought the details of Dan's affair out into the open. The house symbolized Gemma's lack of a real life, because she chose instead to occupy other people's homes rather than creating a life and home of her own.

Hospitals

Hospitals are scenes of despair and joy in the novel. Despair when Nana Kettle was hospitalized after being attacked by a burglar, which caused Frank to burst into tears. Joy when Gemma gave birth to Sal. The hospital where Sal was born was a comic location when Maxine arrived after hearing about the restaurant brawl only to discover Cat and Lyn laughing in the emergency room.

Seafood Restaurant

The seafood restaurant was the location of the novel's central event: the argument between Cat, Lyn, and Gemma during their thirty-fourth birthday celebration. Although the argument was bitter and emotionally traumatizing, the depiction of this event (and the perspectives of the other patrons in the restaurant) are dealt with comically by the author, making the restaurant a comedic location rather than an emotional or harrowing one.



Themes and Motifs

Perspective

The central theme of the novel is Perspective. This theme is most clearly explored through the use of chapters told from the perspective of several different characters who were involved in the events of the narrative alongside chapters giving the perspectives of strangers who encountered the Kettle family at various different stages during their lives. Although many of the recollections of the Kettle family's past are negative or traumatic in the eyes of the family themselves, from the perspective of strangers it was always possible to see the good things about their lives and how many positive things were happening. The strangers were always able to sympathize with the family and see what they had going for them, even at times when the family themselves were unable to see this.

Cat is the central protagonist and her journey as a character is all about learning to gain a new perspective on her life. One of the reasons Cat's marriage with Dan failed was because their perspectives on their marriage were so different to each other: whilst Cat felt their competitiveness was playful and made them superior to other couples, Dan found it demoralizing. One of the hardest things for Cat to handle was when Dan's perspective of Cat changed: he no longer thought of her as his partner, instead viewing her as his deranged ex-wife who had come to slash his new girlfriend's tires. Cat's realization of how crazed she must have seemed from Angela's perspective was one of her lowest moments in the novel. Nana Kettle's new life helped change Cat's perspective on her own life and the possibilities that lay before her.

Lyn's life looked perfect from the perspective of strangers and she was written about in a women's magazine in a way that made her life look like something that other women should envy. However from Lyn's perspective she was struggling with problems like an unruly child and panic attacks. Lyn was embarrassed by the prospect of appearing less than perfect in public in case it damaged the perspective that strangers had on her life: when Maddie threw a tantrum at the mall and Lyn forgot to pay for her shopping, she overheard another customer commenting that she was Lyn Kettle and Lyn feared that the reality of her existence would have a negative effect on the perception strangers had about her life.

The reader is given two different perspectives on the events of the birthday brawl. In the first instance, the reader is presented with the birthday brawl from the perspective of a bystander: the reader doesn't know who any of the characters are and has no insight into why they behaved the way that they did. The second time the novel covers the events of the birthday brawl the reader is presented with events from the perspective of an insider. By this point in the novel the reader has an understanding of the backstories and motivations of all of the key players and understands exactly how and why events unfolded in the way that they did.



Family Roles

Family Roles and the way certain family members get typecast by the rest of the family is a major theme in the novel. During the course of the story, each member of the Kettle family underwent a shift that changed the role that they played in the family. The theme was introduced by Charlie when he told Gemma that the problem with families is that they typecast you. The triplets – in particular Lyn and Gemma – suffered from playing a certain role in the family drama long after it had continued to serve them well.

During childhood Lyn adopted the role of the martyr. She saw how much her parents' divorce was hurting her mother, Maxine, and decided to sacrifice her own happiness in an attempt to make Maxine feel better, for example when she refused to go on a Christmas vacation with Frank, Gemma, and Cat, instead choosing to stay at home with Maxine. This desire to take on other people's problems and fix them herself continued in Lyn's adult life; for example when she went to the scene of Cat's car accident in an identical outfit to the one Cat was wearing in an attempt to stop Cat being arrested for driving under the influence. A change in role was forced onto Lyn when she contracted chickenpox: she was too unwell to take care of herself and was forced to allow Michael and Kara to take care of her, instead of doing everything for herself.

Gemma had a less well defined role in the Kettle family during their childhood: Lyn strongly identified with Maxine while Cat strongly identified with Frank, leaving Gemma without any obvious allegiances. This played out in Gemma's adult life when she felt unable to assert herself or follow her own dreams, instead acquiescing to everyone else's opinion of her and what she was capable of. The whole family treated Gemma as unreliable and flaky which meant that Gemma feared she wouldn't be capable of raising a baby when she fell pregnant. Although devastating for Cat, Gemma's decision to keep her baby marked a turning point for her character because she asserted something that she wanted for herself rather than deferring to what everyone else wanted to happen.

Frank and Maxine also switched roles later in life. Frank was always the carefree risk-taker during the triplets' childhood but his attitude changed after his mother, Nana Kettle, was assaulted by a burglar. It had never occurred to Frank that anything bad might happen to him or his family and the shocking attack changed him into a much less relaxed and much more anxious person. Maxine, in contrast, mellowed as the triplets became adults and the burden of raising multiples was slowly lifted from her. She was once again able to embrace the more romantic and playful elements of her personality which were hinted at during sections such as "The Twist". This change was demonstrated through the rekindling of her romance with Frank.

Motherhood

Motherhood is a complex theme in the novel and is thought of in different ways by different characters. Although, socially, motherhood is thought of as a good thing and an important part of a woman's life and identity, the earliest depictions of the motherhood in the novel are negative. They feature Maxine becoming pregnant by accident and being



pressured by an unsympathetic society to keep the babies and to marry their father Frank. This resulted in an unhappy marriage that led to divorce during the triplets' childhood years. The first description of motherhood came in "The Cabbage Leaf Trick" and depicted Maxine as exhausted and distraught, unable to cope with the demands of having three babies.

The attitudes that the triplets each have towards motherhood are all subtly different. Cat was adamant for most of the novel that she wanted to have children and viewed her marital difficulties with Dan as obstacles in her quest to start a family rather than signs that she was perhaps in the wrong relationship. When Cat fell pregnant she told their marriage counsellor that the pregnancy meant they would have to solve all of their relationship problems before the birth. Maxine implied that Cat only wanted to be married with children because Lyn was married with children and the sibling rivalry that existed between the identical twins meant that Cat always wanted anything that Lyn had. Another aspect of the triplets' childhood dynamic that repeated later was Maxine's statement that whenever Cat was upset because Lyn had something that she didn't have, Gemma would try to soothe Cat by offering her something that belonged to Gemma instead. Maxine believed this was what Gemma was doing when she asked Cat to adopt her baby: giving her something that Lyn had which Cat did not have.

Lyn approached motherhood the same way she approached everything else in life: she was organized, meticulous, and refused to let anyone else assist her, even taking on most of the responsibility for raising Kara, although she was Michael and Georgina's daughter.

Gemma had frequent nightmares about having a baby and not being able to take care of it throughout the novel, which gave the reader some insight about how deep seated her fear of motherhood was and why she would give up her baby when she fell pregnant. Gemma struggled with feelings of guilt after Sal was born because she had been intending to give him away.

The triplets all found a new perspective on their relationship with their own mother through their experiences of pregnancy and motherhood. Lyn and Gemma both had realizations about how difficult and stressful it is to take care of a baby and came to understand how awful it must have been for Maxine to have to care for three of them at once. Cat became closer to Maxine by having a conversation with her about their shared experiences of miscarriage. This was especially significant because Cat had always been the least sympathetic towards her mother and the least understanding of her behavior, blaming Maxine for the divorce from Frank. In retrospect, as an adult, Cat was able to see how difficult it was for Maxine to raise them.

Infidelity

There are two main types of Infidelity depicted in the novel: sexual infidelity and emotional infidelity. Of the two, the author depicts emotional infidelity as the more insidious, potentially more damaging betrayal. The depiction of sexual infidelity in the



novel is balanced and the author refrains from passing judgement on people who have been involved in an extra-marital affair by presenting numerous different circumstances and numerous different outcomes for the affairs that featured in the novel.

The affair at the center of the narrative is Dan's affair with Angela which caused the breakdown of his marriage with Cat and almost led to the end of Gemma's relationship with Charlie as well. When Cat believed that Dan's affair was only a case of sexual infidelity – when he told her that his involvement with Angela was only a one night stand – Cat was willing to try to forgive him, salvage their marriage, and raise a child together. It was only when Cat discovered Dan's emotional infidelity – that he had called Angela on Christmas day and had been speaking to her in the aftermath of Cat's miscarriage – that she decided to call it off for good.

Cat's inability to forgive Dan for his infidelity contrasts with the behavior of her mother Maxine, who rekindled her relationship with Frank despite his infidelity during the triplets' childhood. By the time Maxine and Frank started dating again, Frank had forgotten the name of the woman he had an affair with which had led to his divorce from Maxine. This showed that his relationship with Maxine was much more important to him in his life as a whole than this one affair had been.

The other prominent affair in the novel was Lyn's affair with Michael which began when he was still married to Georgina and which ultimately led to him leaving Georgina and marrying Lyn. This presents a different view on infidelity to the view depicted in Dan's affair with Angela. Michael was unhappy with his relationship with Georgina (and it is later suggested that Georgina was unhappy too) meaning that this affair was a catalyst for a positive change in the lives of everyone concerned. Lyn felt guilty about "stealing" Georgina's husband, but hypocritically thought of Dan as a sleazebag for cheating on Cat. Lyn was also guilty of emotional infidelity when she confided about her problems and allowed herself to be vulnerable with her ex-boyfriend Joe when she did not behave in the same way towards her husband Michael. When Lyn learned to be more vulnerable and share her weaknesses with Michael, it strengthened their relationship.

Notably, in a novel that is otherwise quite balanced in its depiction of infidelity, it is only the male characters who committed sexual infidelity when they were married: Frank, Michael, and Dan. This is perhaps indicative of the novel's female-centric approach to life, families, and relationships in which the male characters are plot devices used to carry the story forward and reveal elements of the female characters' personalities, rather than fully-rounded characters in their own right.

Sisterhood

The theme of Sisterhood is explored through the relationships of literal sisters Cat, Lyn, and Gemma but also through a broader sense of the term Sisterhood as a feminist concept which suggests that women should value and support each other and help to shield each other from the mistreatment of men.



The sisters put their relationships with each other ahead of their own needs and the needs of the rest of the family (especially in the case of Lyn and Gemma). Lyn tried to illegally help Cat avoid being arrested for drunk driving and Gemma was willing to end a promising relationship with Charlie so as not to upset Cat. The men in the triplets' lives - Michael, Dan, and Charlie – all complained at one stage that the sisters were too close and that they felt left out and less valued because of their relationship with each other.

The relationships of the sisters are notable for their complete lack of female companionship with anyone from outside of the Kettle family. Lyn made mention of friends she had from university (who she characteristically kept track of via a spreadsheet) but she did not interact with any of these friends during the course of the novel. On the contrary, the sisters reacted to the other women they encountered as either a threat or a nuisance. Cat disliked her female assistant at work and was upset by the thought that the assistant had noticed that Cat was no longer wearing her wedding ring and, therefore, must know how much Cat was suffering. Cat also thought of Annie the marriage counselor with disdain. The sisters treated the woman in the café who had read about Lyn in the women's magazine with disdain and made fun of her for her comments about how much the triplets looked a like. When Lyn went to rescue Cat from the scene of her car accident, her emotions turned into anger towards the nearest woman who wasn't her sister. This was a woman called Laura who had called the police because she suspected Cat was driving drunk, and whom Lyn inwardly called a bitch when she arrived at the scene. Cat sided with Lyn when she had an affair with Michael while he was married, but held Angela to a different standard to her sister by calling her a "slut".

A woman Gemma met while on vacation with her abusive fiancé Marcus tried to extend the values of sisterhood to Gemma by telling her that she wasn't doing anything to deserve Marcus' anger and that she should leave him, but Gemma received this act of kindness as intrusive and unwelcome rather than caring and compassionate.

The possibility that the sisters needed to extend the sense of sisterhood they felt between the three of them to reach out to a broader spectrum of women was hinted at in the closing chapters when Lyn hired a woman to help her with her catering business and suspected that the two of them might become friends.



Styles

Point of View

The use of Point of View is one of the defining features of the novel. Rather than telling the story from the perspective of one central protagonist, or even from the perspective of several central characters who were all directly involved in the action of the narrative, the author chose to tell the story from the perspective of several family members as well as a series of strangers who encountered the family throughout their lives without ever actually knowing them. This has the effect of showing how different incidents can be interpreted differently and can hold different meaning for different people.

One example of different interpretations of the same action comes through the contrast of the characters of Lyn and Angela. The reader, and the Kettle family, naturally empathizes with Lyn as a kindhearted person and one of the main characters. However, Angela is a character who neither the reader nor the family has natural sympathy for, because of her involvement in the destruction of Cat's marriage. By explaining Lyn's behavior when she first began her affair with Michael (at a time when he was still married to Georgina) the author provided a perspective on Angela's behavior that stopped the reader from thinking of her as a villain or a character with whom it was impossible to have any sympathy.

The chapters told from the perspective of strangers showed how easy it is for people to become wrapped up in their own problems – as Cat did – without keeping in mind the positive aspects of their life or the wider implication of the experiences encountered over the course of a lifetime. Although many of the recollections the Kettles had of their shared past were negative, strangers were able to see what a happy life they all had.

Language and Meaning

The novel is told from a vast number of different perspectives and the author highlights the switches in perspective through her choice of language.

Lyn's anxious and highly-strung personality is indicated through her internal monologue which featured a series of questions, concerns, and responsibilities which she needed to fulfill: "Dan was a horrible cheating sleaze... She must remind Michael to call his mother for her birthday... Why did Dan even tell Cat? What did it achieve? ... If Maddie slept for another hour or so, she could prepare for tomorrow's meeting at the bakery." Chapters told from Cat's perspective use judgmental and condescending language that reflects those aspects of Cat's personality: "What makes you so special? Look at you! You're not that pretty or smart!" Chapters told from Gemma's perspective feature language which reflects her inability to concentrate on herself and her own life, instead looking outwards to others and their opinions, but also noticing details in a poetic and



descriptive fashion that is missing from the other chapters: “The sun was streaming through the open window, a breeze gently lifting and dropping a faded lace curtain.”

The chapters told from the perspective of strangers feature different language choices which hint at the background, gender, and personality of the narrators. Some are enthusiastic (“I love it!”), others wistful (“for me, it really was a magical caramel sundae”), and some vulgar (“If only those girls knew how many nights they spent with me and a box of Kleenex under the duvet.”)

Structure

The novel is told in the third person, past tense, with an omniscient narrator for the chapters told from the perspective of the Kettle family and in the third person past tense in the chapters told from the perspective of strangers who have encountered the family throughout their lives. The novel moves back and forth between these chapters without adhering to a strict structural pattern. The chapters told from the perspective of the strangers occur in a kind of chronological order. Although the reader is given no clue as to when the recollections themselves are happening, they are presented in chronological order in relation to the Kettles: the perspectives begin with the birth of the triplets and end with Maxine and Frank’s second wedding.

The central structural device used in the novel is the Birthday Brawl, an event which is introduced before any of the individual characters. The reader knows from this that one of the triplets will be pregnant and one will be angry enough to throw a fork at her, but there are no clues about which is which. The author gives reasons for the reader to suspect that any of the triplets could be pregnant by the time they reach the birthday party. After the introduction of the Birthday Brawl, all of the events are told in chronological order leading up to the night at the restaurant, which builds anticipation and suspense as the reader tries to figure out what will happen to provoke one of the triplets throwing a fork at another.

After the narrative catches up with itself in Chapter 23, the reader is left guessing about what will happen next because there are no further clues about how the story will end. Although it was apparent that one triplet would be having a baby, there is no other sense after Chapter 23 about how events will resolve themselves. The suspense is lower in the final chapters after the revelation of who was who in the brawl.

The author returns to the perspective of a stranger in the final chapter, closing the novel in the same manner in which she opened it. This gives the reader the sense of having peered into the lives of the Kettle family and then moving away again into the position of a stranger in the final chapter.



Quotes

By early the next day at least a dozen versions of the story were doing the rounds of office cubicles and coffee shops, pubs and preschools. Some were funny, others disapproving; many were censored, a few were spiced up. Of course, not one was the same.

-- Narration (Prologue paragraph Final)

Importance: The Prologue introduced the novel's central theme of Perspective by discussing how one event can be interpreted in endless different ways by different people based on their own backgrounds, perspectives, motivations, and how much prior knowledge they have of the other people involved in the event.

Waking up was Gemma's least favorite thing. She resisted it daily. Even when she was woken up by a phone call, like now, she continued to fight consciousness by keeping her eyes squeezed shut, her breathing deep, and not concentrating too hard.

-- Narration (chapter 3 paragraph 3)

Importance: This is how the author introduces the character of Gemma. It functions on two levels: on a superficial level it is a literal description of Gemma waking up, which shows the reader her laid-back lifestyle and lack of obligations and commitments. In terms of subtext, the passage refers to the fact that Gemma was sleepwalking through her life trying to avoid really engaging with who she is and who she wants to become.

Competition was an aphrodisiac for Cat and Dan. Their relationship was all about smart verbal jabs and wild wrestling for the TV remote and flicking each other with tea towels.

-- Narration (chapter 4 paragraph 15)

Importance: This third person narration in a chapter told from Cat's perspective appears to be a factual account from an omniscient narrator about the nature of Cat and Dan's marriage. Later, the reader discovers that this was actually Cat's own warped perspective and that it did not match how Dan felt about their competitiveness.

But they weren't meant to happen to her. Other, more fragile people were meant to have panic attacks. People in need of looking after. OK, if she was being completely honest – slightly silly people. Not Lyn.

-- Narration (chapter 15 paragraph Second section, paragraph 52)

Importance: Lyn's revelation that what happened to her in the car park was a panic attack revealed the extent to which she looked down on other people who struggled with mental health problems as well as the extent to which she held herself to an impossibly high standard of perfectionism and invulnerability. Lyn defined herself as a person who did not suffer problems the way other people suffered.

Gemma felt terrible. But somewhere deep inside she felt a tiny hard kernel of pleasure.

-- Narration (chapter 16 paragraph Final)



Importance: Gemma reflected on how she felt when she broke up with each of her 14 successive boyfriends. This line revealed that it was not commitment-phobia, as Lyn suggested, but was a way of Gemma taking back the power which she felt she gave up during her relationship with Marcus. By breaking the hearts of other men, Gemma felt pleasure in her power.

We've always been so competitive. Sean's mentioned it. How we were always making little digs at each other.

-- Dan (chapter 17 paragraph 14)

Importance: Dan used these words to give Cat a new perspective on their marriage. Prior to this, Cat had thought of their competitiveness as one of the strengths of the marriage, but at this point she discovered that from Dan's perspective it was the major weakness of their relationship. The quote revealed that there were problems in their marriage which ran deeper than Dan's affair with Angela.

She wasn't hurting Michael. The only person who could conceivably think that was, well, Michael. She knew he'd be hurt. If the situations were reversed, she'd be hurt.

-- Narration (chapter 19 paragraph 2)

Importance: Lyn did not commit sexual infidelity against Michael, but she was emotionally unfaithful to him by confided in her ex-boyfriend Joe instead of him. Lyn tried to rationalize her behavior but knew that she would be hurt if Michael treated her the way that she treated him.

You're Wonder Woman and I'm – who am I? I'm Donald Duck. No. I'm Goofy.

-- Michael (chapter 20 paragraph Second section, paragraph 8)

Importance: Michael complained to Lyn that the way she had defined their roles in their marriage made Michael feel useless and like he wasn't contributing anything to their relationship. This echoed Dan's complaint to Cat that the way she treated him made him feel like a moron. Unlike Cat, Lyn was able to alter the way she behaved toward Michael, embracing his offers of help and treating him as an equal in their marriage, rather than a subordinate.

Say thank you to toll collectors. Your mum collected tolls once. Toll collectors are HUMAN BEINGS. She meant Aunty Gemma of course. Not your mum. Aunty Gemma.

-- Gemma (chapter 22 paragraph Final)

Importance: The author showed Gemma's growing maternal instincts during her pregnancy by having her reflect on all the advice that she wanted to hand down to the baby. In this quotation, Gemma's internal monologue revealed that she had started to think of herself as the baby's mother, even though she had agreed to give the baby to Cat.



It helped her to walk by parents pushing their strollers, without wanting to stop and scream with savage rage at those smug, carelessly happy women, 'What makes you so special? Look at you! You're not that pretty or smart! How did you manage to have a baby? When I can't?

-- Narration / Cat (chapter 24 paragraph 9)

Importance: Cat's internal rage at strangers is demonstrative of her condescending and judgmental attitude towards other people. Cat's sense of pride and superiority caused her to resent other people who she deemed less special than she was. Later, Cat was forced to acknowledge that her pride was holding her back and she was aiming her condescending judgmental attitude at herself when she should have been focusing on the positives.

Not many people get a chance like you've got. I hope you're not going to mope around forever, throwing cutlery at people whenever you don't get your own way.

-- Maxine (chapter 26 paragraph Third section, paragraph 36)

Importance: Maxine's advice throughout the novel was usually cutting and critical and the triplets resented her for being too harsh. In this instance, Maxine encouraged Cat to make the most of her life in her usual straightforward no-nonsense style, but also gave Cat the push she needed to make a positive change in her life.

Her battle with car parks and panic attacks wasn't quite over yet, but she was confident she would win. She would take a calmer, more relaxed approach to life – even if it killed her.

-- Narration (chapter 27 paragraph 3)

Importance: Lyn changed the least out of all the characters in the novel, as reflected in this quotation where she used her usual perfectionist and controlling attitude in response to her newly-found need to relax and let go of control.