

Trail of Broken Wings Study Guide

Trail of Broken Wings by Sejal Badani

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Plot Summary

In *Trail of Broken Wings* by Sejal Badani, Sonya is returning home after many years. She has received word that her father, Brent, is in a coma. This is the first time that a reluctant Sonya has been home since she left after college graduation. She knows that returning means that she must face the years of physical and psychological abuse Brent inflicted on her, her sisters, and her mother. As Sonya reconnects with her family and faces accusations of neglect, she takes on a temporary position at the hospital, where she teaches photography as a form of therapy to the patients. There, she begins a friendship with Brent's doctor, David. The friendship starts to blossom into a romance, though Sonya is afraid of getting too close to anyone. She eventually reveals that she is addicted to pornography where men hurt women. She thinks that she is too damaged to love anyone. David believes otherwise. He persuades Sonya to believe in herself and give love a chance.

Ranee, Sonya's mother, has lived with the guilt for not protecting her daughters from her husband for many years, though she knows she did what she could to survive herself. Despite everything, Ranee stayed with Brent until he slipped into the coma, at which point she immediately wrote for Sonya, begging her to come home. Through the course of the novel, it is revealed that Ranee was slowly poisoning Brent, so that Sonya could finally be free to come home. Ranee only told her she wasn't wanted so that Sonya could escape and have a better life. Seeing that Sonya is holding David at bay because she is afraid of love, Ranee tells him the truth about what she did to Brent, asking David to let Sonya know it was out of love. Sonya and David decide to destroy the evidence.

Trisha, one of Sonya's sisters, was always Brent's favored daughter, whom, for whatever reason, he did not beat. The most beautiful of the girls, Trisha has been treated like a princess. She marries a man who can provide her with a lavish lifestyle. Trisha loves her husband, Eric, but keeps a terrible secret from him. Though he is eager to start a family, she is afraid to bring a child into the world after her abusive childhood. So, she uses birth control without telling him. When Eric discovers the truth, he leaves her. This triggers a memory for Trisha which she has kept buried for years. Although her father never beat her, he raped her when she was a teenage girl. She had since blocked out the memory. Devastated by the return of the memory, she re-evaluates the close relationship she once thought she had with her father, Trisha finally opens up to Eric and tells him the truth. Eric agrees to go to counseling with her and help her work through her memories.

Marin, the oldest daughter, believed she could win back her father's love by becoming successful. A deeply disciplined woman who has built many walls around herself, Marin pushes her teenage daughter, Gia, to strive for perfection. Marin holds her husband, Raj, at a distance. When Marin learns that Gia has been beaten by her boyfriend--which she accepts, because Brent told her he used to beat Marin--Marin realizes the damage she has done to her family by not being honest with them, especially when Raj threatens to leave and Gia wants to go with him. Marin finally opens up to her daughter and reveals her vulnerability to save her family.

Section One (Pages 1-46)

Summary

Sonya, the youngest daughter, left home many years before and never returned. Her mother, Ranee, calls to tell her that her father is in a coma and asks her to come home. Marin, the oldest daughter, sits at her father's side and recalls going for ice cream with him when she was a little girl. Marin had dropped her cone, and her father had slapped her-- the first time he ever hit her.

The family waits for Sonya's arrival at the home of the middle daughter, Trisha, and her husband, Eric. Marin thinks Sonya won't come, but she finally arrives. After they eat, Marin and Sonya argue about her leaving. Trisha makes peace, even though she also feels abandoned by Sonya; the two were very close as girls, but Sonya didn't come to her wedding. Trisha feels some guilt because she was always the favorite child and escaped some of the horrors her sisters went through. Her husband wants to have a baby, but Trisha is hiding a secret from him.

Sonya finds it strange to be at home after so many years away. Some things have stayed the same, but some have changed, such as her mother now playing music in the house. Ranee seems happy to have her home, but Sonya hints at something her mother did at her college graduation that caused her to leave. In her old bedroom, she locks the door to sleep.

The family visits Brent in his hospital room. They discuss pulling the plug. The doctor in charge, David, hasn't been able to figure out why Brent is in a coma. Marin becomes overwhelmed and insists on leaving with her husband, Raj, and their daughter, Gia. Marin wants Gia to get into a good college and pushes her hard. Though she and Raj have been married for a long time, Marin keeps him at a distance, trying to maintain control in her life. She remembers being told she would marry Raj and being afraid to leave her sisters because she had such a close relationship with them, almost like a mother. Ranee regrets not protecting her daughters from Brent. She is elated to have Sonya home but realizes she's forgotten some important details about her, like her favorite food. Sonya can't forgive Brent, but Ranee can remember him when he was kinder.

Analysis

One symbol that is referenced in this section is the symbol of music being played in the house. This may seem like a small thing, as most people are able to play whatever music they want to in their own homes. However, for Ranee and her daughters, this marks a major transition, since Brent used to forbid having music play. Something as simple as buying the CDs she likes and being able to put them on whenever she wants

without fear of repercussions indicates the kind of fear Ranee and her daughters had lived under and the new freedom they are experiencing now that he is in a coma.

Freedom emerges as one of the main themes of the novel, as evidenced in this kind of symbolism, as well as other points throughout the text. Freedom is usually associated with some kind of war or tyranny; for Ranee, Sonya, Trisha, and Marin, that kind of tyranny was experienced within the walls of their own home, which felt as though it were constantly in a state of war. Simple things that others might take for granted--such as listening to music, choosing one's own clothes, pursuing a particular profession, etc.--feel like great moments of liberation for these women, who have lived so much of their lives in fear.

This section contains a great deal of foreshadowing. A secret is referenced that Trisha is keeping from her husband, Eric, though it is not yet revealed. This fits into a larger theme of secrets. The women of the novel all have to keep a part of their life a secret from loved ones, which often leads to them becoming distanced from the people they love the most. Another foreshadowed moment is hinted at when Sonya suggests she left because of something that occurred at her graduation, though she doesn't yet reveal what happened.

Another theme referenced in this section is that of keeping up appearances. Brent's entire family coordinates their clothing and activities to keep anyone from finding out about his beatings. Yet, Brent also has to keep up a facade. An incident at work shows Brent pretending to drink coffee so that he can fit in with his coworkers and keep up the appearance of being like everyone around him.

Discussion Question 1

What does Marin's experience with the ice cream cone on her birthday teach her about depending on other people? What is some evidence from this chapter that shows how this has impacted her as an adult?

Discussion Question 2

What do the different names that the daughters call their parents suggest about their relationships with their parents?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Sonya always lock the doors, even in her bedroom at home? What does this suggest about her life in that house?

Vocabulary

shards, resilient, waft, remnants, fortitude, memorialized, prism, sanctuary, ploy, beckons, relentless, status, void, exacting, acquisitions, saturated, agitation, delectable, authentic, immaculate, genetics, luxuries, necessities, blunt, permeates, attire, counterpart, cavity, replica, perfunctory, convulses, regales, palpable, enhance, assessing, ordeals, truce, relaying, kneads, sparse, reputable, forging, heritage, insurmountable, reverie

Section Two (Pages 47-95)

Summary

Sonya visits her father again in the hospital. She recalls graduating from Stanford and telling her father she wanted to be a photographer instead of going to law school. Her father berated her, telling her she was stupid and that nobody ever wanted her. To Sonya's surprise, her mother agreed, which is why she left home. In the hospital, she bonds with her father's doctor, David, but she's wary of her feelings for him.

Trisha visits with Sonya, and she is surprised with how much Sonya has changed and how different they've become. She recalls how different their childhood experiences were; Trisha was always her father's favorite and was never beaten. Sonya tells Trisha she's leaving, but Trisha begs her to stay. Sonya reluctantly agrees. Marin receives a phone call from Gia's principal. In gym class, the teacher has noticed that Gia is covered with bruises. Marin is overwhelmed with memories of her own abuse. She recalls right before her wedding, when she accidentally burned Brent's suit and he beat her while her sisters watched.

Ranee remembers the first time Brent beat her, when he had a difficult time at work. Now, Ranee and Sonya have a hard time connecting again. Ranee gives her a necklace that Sonya left behind, admitting she didn't think Sonya would stay away for long. Sonya tells her she knows why she left. Ranee visits Brent and tells him she refuses to die with him. She takes off the necklace he gave her for their wedding--the equivalent of a wedding band--and leaves it with him.

Sonya recalls running away from a relationship and beginning her career as a photographer. Sonya calls her agent and asks her to find her a job near Palo Alto. Ranee sees her visiting Brent; Sonya assumed she called her home to say goodbye to Brent, but Ranee says that isn't the case. Trisha recalls playing with dolls and always imagining them with lots of babies. Eric tells her that he's found a baby they can adopt but Trisha freaks out. Trisha visits Brent and tells him she won't know how to be a parent without his help.

Analysis

The theme of appearances is re-addressed in this section, again concerning Brent. David believes that Brent must have been a good man because of the appearance of having so many people that love him; his daughters and wife constantly stop by to see him, so David assumes that must mean he was a good man. In truth, most of them are stopping by to get some sort of answers from him, or to make sure that he hasn't woken and won't be able to hurt them again.

One symbol used in this section is the china cups that Trisha uses to serve tea for her and Sonya. Trisha notices how thin and delicate they are, and how easy it would be for



them to shatter. Though the patterns on the cup may be different, side by side it's difficult to tell them apart. Earlier in the novel, Trisha noted how much she and Sonya have grown to look alike. They, along with Raneer and Marin, all seem as delicate and fragile as these cups and as easy to break, though they are more resilient than they give themselves credit for.

Another symbol occurs during one of Marin's memories of being beaten by Brent. She recalls that whenever one of them is being beaten, Trisha always keeps vocal count of how long it lasts, and that Brent never goes past the number eight. This may seem like a strange way for Trisha to behave, but it is part of her coping mechanism for dealing with what is happening to her sisters. She feels helpless to intervene, but somehow feels as though she is being involved by counting along with him. Another strange coping mechanism that the daughters have is re-enacting the beatings and laughing about how strange and clown-like their father looked, as though it's all part of a game. As is noted earlier in the novel, if they don't laugh, then they would have to cry.

One final symbolic gesture in this section is when Raneer takes off her wedding necklace and returns it to Brent. The necklace is a symbol of love and marriage and was given to her by Brent on her wedding day; by giving it back, Raneer is essentially divorcing Brent and everything that he has done to her and her daughters, choosing to live the rest of her life without him.

Discussion Question 1

Why does David believe being a photographer might need more intelligence than being a lawyer? Are there different types of "smartness"?

Discussion Question 2

Trisha is surprised when she learns Sonya has given up sweets because she remembers Sonya as a girl who loved candies and cookies. What does this suggest about the distance between them? How have they changed since they were girls? How are their roles still the same?

Discussion Question 3

What is the practice of "sati" that Raneer witnesses at a funeral? How does this relate to her life?

Vocabulary

forge, blaze, vocation, inconceivable, wrath, sari, dejection, defer, perpetrator, downcast, conduit, interminably, imprint, mild, censorious, slew, interwoven, commiserate, indulged, disallowed, infinite, resigned, infuriates, suppressed, reprieve,

sync, matriculated, regime,, swayed, permeates, axis, immobile, slew, haggled, exudes, methodically, transgressions, contortions, subside

Section Three (Pages 96-137)

Summary

Marin recalls times she has prayed in her life and didn't feel like she received an answer. Now, Marin doesn't know how to confront Gia about her bruises. Marin finally confronts her and forces her to show her bruises. When Gia fights back, Marin gets upset and slaps her. She is immediately horrified. Marin asks if Raj was the one who did it, but Gia denies it and refuses to tell. Sonya goes to visit Brent again and encounters David. They talk about life and her photography. They connect, though she excuses herself. She meets up with Trisha for a picnic, and they catch up and bond.

Trisha recalls times when Ranee went to the hospital, once for blacking out because she'd been hit and once for swallowing a bottle of pills. At home, Trisha is confronted by Eric, who discovers that she had an IUD put in so she wouldn't have children. Eric is furious at her for lying to him and asks for a separation.

Marin finally fills in Raj on what's been going on. Raj and Marin have never been confidants but work together to figure out how to best help her. They confront Gia, who continues to claim there's nothing wrong. They contact Amber, a friend of Gia's, and discover the two haven't been close ever since Gia got a boyfriend. Marin is surprised by this but keeps it from Raj.

Ranee remembers a holy experience she had visiting a temple in India and believing her whole life was before her. Now, she meets with some friends from her Indian community--none of whom know about Brent---and prays with them for Brent and for others. Many offer condolences for Brent, but Ranee feels as though she is being given the chance to live for the first time.

Analysis

Religion was referenced at multiple points throughout this section. Marin remembers being taught about a God, but every time that she's really needed to pray for anything and receive an answer, no help came. After that, Marin learned to rely on herself instead of trusting in some religious being to provide answers for her. Ranee also recalls visiting a temple and feeling as though her life is ahead of her. She has a similar religious experience while visiting a temple after Brent has slipped into a coma. Ranee and Marin seem to have different reactions to religion, one negative and one positive. However, in both instances, it seems to leave them with a feeling of self-reliance and independence as they head into the rest of their lives.

For Marin, this realization of being on her own translates into more than just her relationship with God, but with the people around her. Marin had to learn as a child that her mother would not intervene to help her and neither would her sisters; she is the only one who could save herself from the situation with Brent, by getting into school, getting



married, and leaving home. When she finds out about Gia, her initial impulse is to hide the truth from Raj and take care of everything by herself. When that doesn't work, she reluctantly fills Raj in but continues to keep secrets from him, such as learning about Gia's boyfriend. The distance in Raj's and Marin's marriage is further made clear by the fact that each one immediately suspects the other of being responsible for Gia's bruises, suspecting the worst in each other instead of trusting in the best.

The theme of secrets also continues in this section with Trisha, whose secret she has been keeping from her husband is finally revealed. Trisha knows that Eric has always wanted children and pretends that she is doing everything in her power to make that happen, like meeting with a fertility specialist. In truth, she had a procedure done so she couldn't have children. Trisha thinks that keeping this secret will allow her to keep Eric. It actually pushes him to ask for a separation.

Discussion Question 1

Why doesn't Marin tell Ray about Gia's abuse? What does this say about their marriage?

Discussion Question 2

How is Brent's relationship with Gia different than with his daughters? Why?

Discussion Question 3

Why did Sonya never question her father's beatings as a child?

Vocabulary

preempted, deities, tarmac, consulted, supplement, sustenance, broach, pristine, fathom, reminisce, supremacy, tread, savior, dissipate, tallies, mingles, fury, epitomized, encompassing, censor, insight, mundane, novelty, precursor, cultivated, tarnished, relished, demeaning, viable, idol, prod, makeshift, prying, alleviate, autonomy, cedes, disheveled, sheen, abdicate, diligent, yearned, vacillating

Section Four (Pages 138-188)

Summary

Sonya goes to meet with people at the hospital for a potential job of teaching a class on photography for the patients. The class would be part of the patients' therapy. David meets up with them and offers to take Sonya on a tour of the facility. They brainstorm some ideas on how to best work with the patients. Sonya is wary of their attraction for each other. The sisters and Ranee have dinner together. They notice that Ranee is no longer wearing her necklace, but she refuses to explain it. Everyone is tense, preoccupied with their own private worries, and they bicker over the past. Trisha and Sonya go out to drink. Trisha reveals that Eric has left her. A man approaches, and Trisha tries to flirt with him; but, Sonya chases him off.

Marin visits Gia's principal at school. She takes a book to Gia (which she took out of her backpack before going to school) and delivers it to her, meeting her new boyfriend, Adam, in the process. Marin pretends to be fine with it, but she follows her after school to Adam's house. She makes it home before Gia, and Gia lies about where she's been. Gia tells Marin and Raj that her bruises came from a game she played with her friends.

Trisha remembers getting ready the night before Marin's wedding. Brent was angry when it was suggested that people were noticing Trisha's burgeoning beauty. Ranee and the others managed to placate him by reminding him of India and the sacrifices they know he made for their family. Trisha misses Eric and visits her mother. They argue over Brent; Trisha wants him to get better, Ranee does not. Trisha realizes Sonya has told her about Eric leaving. Ranee asks why she doesn't want children. Trisha is afraid she doesn't know how to love.

Sonya works with some of the patients. She and David begin spending more time together. They bond over the children and photography. She works with a grouchy patient who tells her about his dead wife. Sonya thinks it's better not to get too attached to anyone. She doesn't believe that she's worthy of love.

Analysis

Sonya begins teaching photography at the hospital as a way to help the patients cope with their illness. David believes that the artistic endeavor will provide a kind of therapy that will lift their spirits and help them heal. Sonya at first worries about her ability to teach people this way, but in fact she is probably more qualified than most people. Though Sonya doesn't admit as much, she has used photography in much the same way to forget about her own past and deal with her terrible memories. Photography has become her own coping mechanism.

Marin is horrified to discover that not only is her daughter being abused, but she is covering up for her abuser. Marin is so distraught by discovering this that she vomits.



For Marin, this situation is even more horrifying than it might be for a normal mother to discover the same, which would be awful enough. Marin's entire life has been dominated by her need to control, which was her own coping mechanism for escaping her father's abuse. She has long believed that if she manages her life well enough, her daughter will have a better life than she did. Instead, despite all of her careful planning, her daughter has ended up in nearly the same position, crafting her life around covering for her abuser.

Trisha's relationship with Brent is dramatically different from that of her sisters or her mother. Trisha is horrified to learn that her mother wishes Brent would die. Marin, Sonya, and Ranee have lived their lives in fear of Brent, but Trisha was able to see a different side to him, one which was loving and affectionate. This demonstrates the theme of appearances. Because Brent has shown a kind side to Trisha and later to Gia, they are able to view him far more benevolently. They believe that he loves and cares for them. Because Marin, Sonya, and Ranee have viewed the worst parts of Brent, they cannot move beyond that image of him.

One symbol which is used in this section is that of prey running from predators. When one animal is attacked, the others will run off, leaving it behind in order to save themselves. Sonya equates this to herself and her family members. Whenever Brent attacked one of them, the others would only look on, unable--or perhaps unwilling--to intervene. Marin uses her marriage as an opportunity to leave home and get away from Brent. After her graduation, Sonya leaves the family and only returns after Brent is in a coma. Logically, she knows this was done for her own survival. All feel a sense of guilt for not doing more and for running away when they should have joined together to fight.

Discussion Question 1

Why is Sonya so afraid to get close to anyone? How does this keep her apart from David, her sisters, and her mother?

Discussion Question 2

Why did none of the girls intervene when Brent was hitting them? How has this affected their relationships as they've grown older?

Discussion Question 3

Both Trisha and Sonya worry about being like their father in this section. How can people become what they fear and despise? Do people have control over what they become, or are they destined to become their parents?

Vocabulary

appendages, expertise, infractions, archenemies, procession, endorphin, caliber, coup, touting, consist, exploratory, embroiled, fraternal, oncology, diminish, endeavors, topple, muse, contrite, symbiosis, dread, seeping, enhance, frenetic, semblance, pristine, aloof, trepidation, interject, arsenal, thoroughfare, shenanigans, stupor, fare, boisterous, vantage, revels, brink, translucent, gauge

Section Five (Pages 189-225)

Summary

Marin hires a private investigator and learns that Adam was charged with beating a previous girlfriend. His eighteenth birthday is in a week; so, if he is charged again, it will be as an adult. A social worker comes to check on her and asks about the "game" Gia was playing with her friends, and Gia continues to lie. Raj wants to pull her out of school, but Marin refuses because it will set her back. The private investigator tells her it will be best to get pictures of Adam in the act of beating Gia. Marin authorizes this. Marin confronts them at the school with the help from the prisoner and the private investigator.

Sonya recalls learning about hell and hopes there is one so Brent will have to suffer there. At the hospital, David tells her that Gia has been admitted. Sonya learns what has been happening with Gia. Gia worries about a necklace she might have lost, and Sonya offers to look for it. On her way back, she stops by David's office. He tries to comfort her. Sonya asks him to let her father die.

Ranee worries for Gia and goes to visit. Gia insists that Adam loves her and compares it to how Brent used to hit Marin. Ranee is shocked that she knows about this--they have tried to keep this secret from Gia--and leaves. She goes home and cuts Brent out of all the old photos. Sonya finds her and tells her she wishes she'd never been born.

Trisha remembers a girl who used to bully the others in grade school and got away with it because her mother was sick and no one was allowed to be mean to her. She receives a text from Eric asking to meet with their lawyers. Trisha meets up with her friends, who talk about women who have been domestically abused. Trisha reveals the truth about her family. Trisha remembers her father being kind to her, and she goes to visit him. Sonya finds her there and comforts her, telling her how much she helped them cope with Brent by keeping everyone cheerful. Sonya runs into David and asks him to forget about her.

Analysis

For most of the novel, Brent's daughters and wife have feared that he will somehow recover and his influence will continue to harm them even though he's deep in a coma. This fear proves to be founded when it is discovered that one of the reasons Gia allows herself to be hit by her boyfriend is because she knows that Brent used to hit Marin. Though Brent never hit Gia himself, he has set a precedent that this is acceptable behavior.

Ranee and Marin are horrified when they learn that Gia knows about Brent beating them--perhaps just as horrified at learning that Gia is being beaten by her boyfriend. Though it is too late for them to go back and change the past, their hope for the future



has been instilled in Gia, who is meant to be happier, freer, and less afraid than they were allowed to be. Though they care about Gia, this is not only for her own sake, but almost as a way to redeem their own experiences through her. When they believed Gia was ignorant of that past, then it was almost as though it didn't happen. Now that she knows, they must face that past head on.

Ranee's answer to this is to cut Brent out of old family photographs. In essence, she is attempting to erase him from her past. If his image is gone, then it is as though he was never a part of their lives and will never have power over them again. This demonstrates the theme of the past affecting the future and the theme of appearances. With Brent's image removed from the photographs, it alters the appearance their family tried to put up for so long of being happy.

Trisha remembers a girl from her childhood who was cruel to everyone but who got away with it because her mother was dying from cancer. Trisha recalls that this experience taught her that from weakness comes great strength. This may seem a strange lesson to learn when her sisters and mother have been so bullied by her father's strength and their inability to stop him. However, in many ways, Trisha seemingly had the upper hand in her family because Brent saw her as so weak, beautiful, and in need of protection. Perhaps, this is why out of all his daughters, he never hit her. Trisha learned to use her own weakness as a way to leverage her safety, thus turning it into her strength.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Gia try to protect Adam even though he hurts her? Why do the other women in her family continue to protect Brent?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Sonya wish she had never been born?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Trisha decide to tell the truth to her friends? What are other ways in which the perfect world she's built for herself is crumbling?

Vocabulary

professed, redacted, leisurely, assessment, verify, intercede, conniving, pretense, nagging, visceral, transpired, circumstantial, outlet, absolve, snare, inferno, munch, sterile, demeanor, subside, fathom, dictate, threshold, cluster, warped, reprieve, lurked, excruciating, protocol, stance, resignation, blotched, tainted, anguish, dowry, rile, unscathed, perusing, abrasive, obtuse, impasse, vessel

Section Six (Pages 227-273)

Summary

Gia is depressed and staying home from school. Raj is angry at Marin for doing things on her own and not turning to him. The detectives explain how Adam will be prosecuted, and Raj discovers that Marin let Adam beat Gia so the private investigator could get pictures to prosecute him with. Gia blames Marin for ruining her life. Marin wants Gia to return to school, but Raj is horrified by how little she seems to care for Gia's well-being.

Sonya has been avoiding David, but he asks her out for dinner. They kiss. Sonya warns him that things will end badly. David admits that he felt connected to her the first time he saw her. He believes she is a fighter and will emerge triumphant, despite what's happened to her in the past. Sonya thinks he's too good for her and leaves. She goes to a bar and gets hit on by a man. She asks if he has any pornography of women getting beaten up. The man is disgusted, and Sonya leaves, breaking down into tears.

Ranee, Marin, and Sonya help Trisha pack up her house. Marin questions why she's receiving so little, but Trisha explains that she didn't want anything from Eric. She'll work to support herself. They discuss Gia, and Trisha admits that she's afraid to be a mother because of what could happen to her children. Marin insists that everything Gia has is because of her. Trisha includes the bruises in that description. Ranee worries about the secret she has yet to reveal to Trisha.

Raj shows Marin Gia's diary, where she writes about thoughts of suicide. Marin insists on keeping her in school, but Raj refuses. Marin tells him she'll leave him if he gets in her way. Raj is taken aback that their marriage means so little to her. Ranee remembers discussing Sonya with Brent on Sonya's birthday. Brent told Ranee that it was because of her that Sonya left. Ranee claimed it was to save her.

Trisha meets with Eric, who is cold and distant at first, but breaks down and asks Trisha why she lied to him. He triggers a memory in Trisha of wandering down the hall as a girl, weeping. She goes home and asks Ranee about the memory. She begins to realize the reason behind some of Brent's odd behavior in her teenage years, like letting her redecorate her room and allowing her to marry an American. She realizes Brent raped her the night of Marin's wedding. Ranee discovered the truth a few months before and apologized to Trisha.

Analysis

One symbol referenced in this section is that of the pineapple. Marin recalls a group of school children sitting around and saying what kind of fruit they would describe themselves as. Marin says a grape to be generic, but another girl says a pineapple because it is rough and prickly on the outside and difficult to cut through. Yet, it's worth it on the inside. Marin does not directly compare herself to this pineapple, but the parallels

are striking. Marin has created such a barrier around herself that very few people catch a glimpse of the vulnerability on the inside, even the people who are meant to have a close relationship with her.

It may seem odd that Trisha, Sonya, and Marin laugh so hard at Trisha sending a care package to Gia after learning she was being abused by her boyfriend. But, this indicates another coping mechanism that the sisters have used to survive their childhood. Finding ways to laugh about terrible things allows them not only to get past it, but to regain some sense of control over the situation. As Sonya reflects earlier in the novel, they can either choose to laugh or cry, and they choose to find the humor in the situation.

Another symbol is that of the sari. Trisha thinks of playing with her mother's saris as a girl. She remembers how they made her feel beautiful and mysterious, particularly the veil which covered her face. Trisha thinks differently of this clothing now, instead viewing it as a way to keep a woman's beauty and power hidden and to put her in her place. This memory of the sari is triggered by Trisha's memory of her rape. The veil is similar to Trisha blocking out her memory of the rape, keeping her ignorant of Brent's true nature. She is "in her place" in the role as the favored daughter.

This ties into some other gender-specific ideas that occur in this section. Marin remembers her friends telling her as a girl that in a former life she must have been a boy because she is so practical and in-charge. Even then, Marin recognized that women in her culture had to suffer so much more than men, and told herself she would rather be a woman than a man to show fortitude of character in surviving all that hardship. Ranee also remembers realizing at a very young age that her life would be very different from her brothers, simply because she was born a girl. This ties into the overall theme of domestic abuse in the novel. Domestic abuse is not specific to women. However, in the majority of the cases, women are the victims. They are put into positions where they are forced to forfeit control of their lives because of their gender.

Discussion Question 1

Why doesn't Marin confide in Raj about helping Gia? Why does Marin feel the need to do everything on her own?

Discussion Question 2

How does Sonya compare her state of mind to having cancer?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Brent claim it was Ranee's fault that Sonya left? Is there any truth to this?



Vocabulary

stonewalled, benevolent, exile, eluded, reprieve, closure, defaults, adjoining, provoke, conjured, foreword, vehemence, subpoenaed, palpable, initiatives, entanglement, flagellation, saturates, wracking, assessing, diligently, ludicrousness, dominant, selective, vacant, solitary, confinement, conjoined, staple, novelty, whereabouts, cursory, foreboding, soliloquy, abdicated, hubris, charade, venture

Section Seven (Pages 274-328)

Summary

Ranee recalls learning the truth about what Brent did to Trisha. Brent talked about a terrible mistake he made. At first, Ranee thought he was talking about hitting her and the other girls. Ranee left the house and drove around for several hours. When she returned home, Brent was in a coma.

Sonya learns one of the patients she was working with died but was resuscitated. Sonya runs into David, whom she has been avoiding. He tells her he misses her, and she leaves.

Raj confronts Gia about what they found in her diary. Raj tells her she can take time off school to recover, but Marin argues that she'll take them away. Gia says she wants to stay with Raj. Marin goes to visit Brent and recalls a time during a Diwali celebration when she was accused of staining a carpet and Brent believed the worst in her. But, another man who knew her reputation spoke up for her and saved her from his wrath. Marin decided the only way to be safe from him was to be so accomplished that he couldn't get angry. Marin realizes her success means nothing because she and her husband are strangers and her daughter prefers him over her.

Trisha asks Sonya what she remembers from the night Trisha was raped. She says Trisha behaved strangely but then acted like she forgot about it; so, Sonya let it drop. Trisha has a hard time connecting the man who did this with the father who loved her. Trisha is afraid Brent chose her because she was like him. Sonya gets called back to the hospital to work with a patient whose doctor is David. The kid is being forced to play soccer by his father but hopes his injury will get him out of it. Sonya meets up with David and tells him the truth about Brent. David sympathizes, but Sonya knows he can't truly understand.

Marin negotiates with Raj to give their marriage a second chance so she can stay with Gia, agreeing to let Raj decide how to let Gia recover. Ranee tells Trisha she had no idea and would have never stayed with Brent if she had known. Marin throws Gia a sixteenth birthday party that she doesn't want, and the whole family attends except for Trisha. Gia doesn't want to come down, but Marin tells her she owes it to everyone. Adam arrives, and Marin makes him leave. Gia protests because she can't understand why she should not love him when Marin still loves her father after what he did. Ranee and Sonya encourage Marin to tell Gia the truth. Marin apologizes to Gia for the party and tries to talk to her, but Gia goes to bed.

Analysis

Sonya recalls a town she was photographing that was ravaged by a tornado, with homes destroyed and families torn apart, but afterward the sky is filled with a beautiful



rainbow which she describes as "beauty in the face of despair." Sonya's life has been similarly ravaged by her father's abuse. Though Sonya is offered opportunities to allow beauty into her life--such as a close relationship with her mother and sisters, or a relationship with David--she pushes these opportunities away, seeming to believe that her life can never recover from the devastation to allow in the good.

A similar metaphor can be found in the blooming flowers that Trisha tends to in the garden. Trisha marvels at the beauty of the roses and recalls that she used to cut off all the thorns in order to make the flower truly beautiful, though now she understands that the thorns help to keep the rose safe and that the flower needs both the good and the bad to bloom. For most of her life, Trisha believed herself to be one of those flowers without thorns, but she now understands that the thorns were never truly removed from her. She just did not realize they were there because they were hidden in her memory. This analogy offers hope that she will be able to overcome the bad in her life and let in the good.

Marin recalls the Diwali celebrations her family used to have back in India and how spectacular they were. With everything she heard about America, she imagined they would be even better there. However, the celebrations end up paling in comparison. This mirrors Brent's expectations for what could become of his family in America. In India he was a respected engineer; but, in America, he is only hired at menial jobs where he gets no respect and can barely manage to get by. In both cases, the dreams of America do not live up to the reality.

Ranee tells Trisha the Hindu parable of the rope and the snake. The man had no family and was forced to take a dangerous path home every day. The man accidentally kicks a rock into a cobra, waking it. The man ran away from the snake and turned back to look at it. He tripped over a bolder, hit his head on a rock, and bled to death. The "snake" he had been so afraid of turned out to actually be a coiled rope. Ranee compares this to the choice Trisha has ahead of her. She can be so consumed with looking behind her at her past--which, like the rope, poses no actual threat to her--that she destroys her future. Or, she can choose to look forward. Though the metaphor is applied specifically to Trisha, the same could be said for her sisters, as well as Ranee.

Discussion Question 1

Marin tells Gia that she doesn't understand love. How does Marin define her love for her daughter? How does it fall short as well?

Discussion Question 2

How can Trisha still love her father after what he's done to her? How has her life changed now that she knows the truth about Brent?



Discussion Question 3

Why does Sonya believe she is like her father?

Vocabulary

divine, nomad, resuscitate, fallback, karma, vitals, lashing, bile, overrides, impasse, destabilizing, precedence, dictates, susceptible, scrutinize, concession, caste, succulent, seeped, moniker, delectable, beacon, foliage, sanctioned, medley, astounded, serenity, amateur, neurological, prognosis, talcum, perusal, navigate, callousness, accurate, negate, indulgences, bandits, weathered, engulf, accolades

Section Eight (Pages 329-368)

Summary

Trisha goes back to the home she shared with Eric. She wants to give him an explanation for what went wrong in their marriage, but she receives divorce papers in the mail. Trisha visits Brent in the hospital and confronts him, telling him she'll find a way to survive. Ranee gathers her family at Brent's hospital room, along with David. Ranee notices a connection between him and Sonya. The daughters and Ranee all agree that it's time to pull the plug on Brent, but Gia protests. Everyone leaves, except for Ranee and David. He confides that he's in love with Sonya. Ranee asks him to tell her the truth. She was poisoning Brent with his eye drops so that Sonya could come home. The reason Ranee sent her away was so she'd have a fighting chance.

Sonya learns that the patient who was forced to play soccer by his father was discharged and that his father agreed to let him stop playing. Marin and her family drive home after the hospital. Marin realizes she never loved Raj. She wants Gia to realize that Brent's love for her was a fantasy. Marin sits down to talk with her and asks when Brent told her about hitting them. Gia says it was when she told Brent she wanted to be just like Marin; he said he made her into what she was by hitting her so she would learn. Marin explains what it was like with Brent and why it's so important for her to keep the same thing from happening to Gia. Gia knows it's wrong but she still loves Brent and misses Adam. They agree to help each other get through it.

Trisha goes over to Eric's new place to visit with him. Eric is surprised to see her but lets her in. Trisha tells him the truth about Brent--what he did to her sisters and Ranee, and what he did to her. She explains why this has made her afraid to have a child and why she lied to him. Eric asks if he can go with her to therapy--as friends, now, though Trisha hopes it may eventually return to something else as she forges a new future.

David comes to the house and tells Sonya what Ranee admitted to him. He ran some tests to confirm Ranee's story. He gives Sonya the option of what to do with them. She burns them. David tells her he's glad to deal with the hard things first in their relationship so they can move on to the good. David admires her for everything she's managed to survive. They agree to give it a try. Ranee and her daughters and granddaughter return to India with Brent's ashes and cast them into the river.

Analysis

One symbol used in this section is that of a flock of birds. Trisha worries about how she'll ever be able to get her life back on track, and Ranee tells her about watching flocks of birds fly when she was a girl. She would notice one or two of the birds fall behind the rest sometimes, but they would always manage to catch up. Ranee offers hope to Trisha that, although her life seems to have stalled with this revelation about



her, it doesn't mean she won't be able to catch up again. She also assures her that the flock won't leave her behind. Her mother and sisters will be there to make sure she finds her way again.

Later, Trisha worries about what outfit to wear when she goes to visit Eric. Trisha used to love wearing feminine clothes, but she has felt ashamed doing so ever since she found out about Brent. Though logically she knows she wasn't at fault, she worries--as many victims of such assaults do--that she was somehow to blame because of the clothing she wore or because of her behavior. As part of her attempt to put her past and her fears behind her, Trisha puts on one of her feminine outfits again. This may seem like a small feat, but to Trisha, this shows her assertion that she was not at fault and that she can reclaim her life again.

Ranee, Sonya, Trisha, Marin, and Gia return with Brent's ashes to India at the end of the novel. This is, perhaps, more of a kindness than Brent deserves--to return him to the place where he was happiest. However, it is also a necessary journey for them to make for themselves. Brent was such a force in their lives that they believed they would never be free of him. In returning him to India, they are able to finally let him go. This demonstrates the theme of the past intertwining with the future. The return to India itself is an acknowledgement of their past, which is the only way they can move on with their futures.

Another symbol in their return to India is releasing Brent's ashes into a river, where the author writes is as though the sins are washed away. This is in reference to the Christian practice of baptism, where a person's sins can be washed away like water. Brent was like a sin in the lives of his family members. Now, he has been cast into the river and swept out of sight. They can finally be free of him. Baptism is itself a symbolism for death and new life, with the body being baptized "dying" in the water and emerging as a new person. Brent's death was the only way his family could achieve the same kind of rebirth and move on with their lives without him.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Ranee tell David that she let Sonya leave so many years before? How can something hurtful sometimes be something kind?

Discussion Question 2

Marin believes Brent is incapable of loving anyone, though his relationship with Gia was different than with any of his daughters. Did Brent actually change, or is Marin right that he just got better at putting on an illusion? How has her relationship with Brent made Marin have a more difficult time loving people?

Discussion Question 3

What does the return to India at the end of the book symbolize? Why was it important for Raneë and her daughters to return there together?

Vocabulary

recipient, righteous, indignation, condemnation, charred, conspiracy, unanimous, self-effacing, exhibited, unequivocal, benign, element, toll, illusion, marring, emanated, rationalization, femininity, instigator, telltale, scenarios, tactic, fragments, notion, immune, assailant, draconian, envision, complexities,

Characters

Sonya

Sonya is the youngest daughter of Ranee and Brent. She has two older sisters, Marin and Trisha. It is no secret to Sonya that she was an unplanned, unwanted child. Her father likes to tell the story of how she was a mistake and that she should have been aborted. Sonya is born into a house of abuse, unlike her sisters, who can remember a time when Brent didn't hit them. Throughout the course of her childhood, she is referred to as "the stupid one" and is never expected to amount to anything. As a child, she is also overweight and deeply unhappy.

At Brent's command, Sonya attends Stanford University, a very prestigious school, though Brent continues to belittle her accomplishments and her intelligence. When she graduates, Sonya is supposed to go to law school, but instead announces that she wants to pursue photography. Brent says some hurtful things, but it is Ranee's confirmation that Sonya should have never been born that causes her to leave and never return home, until she learns of Brent's coma.

Sonya pursues her own path by taking photography jobs that allow her to travel and never put roots down in any place for too long. She takes lovers but leaves as soon as real feelings seem to be developing. As a result of her abuse as a child, she becomes obsessed with pornography where men hurt women, though she is deeply ashamed of this. Though she still cares for her family, Trisha in particular, she does not return home, even for Trisha's wedding, preferring to be on her own.

After Brent goes into a coma, Sonya is at last persuaded to return home. There she meets his doctor, David, and the two develop a quick attraction to each other that begins to run deeper, though Sonya is afraid to make herself vulnerable. She pushes him away repeatedly, as well as her mother, whom she continues to believe never wanted her. Sonya finally learns that her mother sent her away so she could have a fighting chance away from Brent and that Ranee misses her so much that she poisoned Brent so that Sonya can come home again. Sonya decides to make herself vulnerable by remaining with her family and giving David a chance.

Trisha

Trisha is Brent's favored daughter, known for being the beautiful one. Brent even goes so far as to call her a "goddess." Perhaps because of this, Trisha is the only one of Brent's daughters whom he doesn't beat. Trisha often plays the role of mediator in her house, attempting to assuage Brent's bad moods. Though Trisha herself is not beaten, she feels the brunt of being raised in an abusive house, believing she and her sisters have survived hell together, just on different sides of the road.



Though Brent insisted upon choosing the right husband for Marin--namely, an Indian man--he allows Trisha to choose her husband. She chooses a white man named Eric, who was an orphan without any family. Eric adores Trisha and gives her a lavish home, keeping her like the princess she was always raised to believe she was. Eric wants to start a family, and Trisha pretends to agree, though she secretly has an IUD put in so she can't get pregnant.

Trisha is the only of the daughters to mourn Brent and hope that he gets better. She remembers him as being a loving, doting father. She has never suggested to Eric or anyone else that he was anything otherwise. However, when Eric discovers she has been lying and leaves her, Trisha begins to remember long-buried memories of herself as a young girl, screaming and afraid. Trisha eventually remembers that she was raped by Brent on the night of Marin's wedding. Afterward, Trisha blanked out the memory, and Brent was so wracked with guilt that he let Trisha do whatever she liked. None of her sisters or her mother ever knew.

Once Trisha learns the truth, she re-examines her life and her relationship with her father, continuing to have a difficult time connecting the father who harmed her with the father she loved. Trisha reaches out to Eric and tells him the truth. They agree to attend therapy together to help her overcome her issues and her fear of being a mother.

Marin

Marin is Brent's and Ranee's oldest daughter. She was born in India and has memories of their life there--in particular, the loving and kind father Brent was then. She remembers when Brent first began to change, and how he seemed to turn on them overnight. As a result, Marin became an overachiever, both as a way to maintain control in her life, and because she believed it would make Brent love her again. Throughout her life, Marin has exercised this level of control, which has allowed her to accomplish many things, but has also alienated her from the people around her. At Brent's insistence, she agrees to an arranged marriage with a man named Raj, who is kind, but who is mostly beneficial to her as a way to get out of Brent's house.

Many years later, Marin has a successful career, as well as a life with Raj and her daughter Gia. In many ways, Marin seems to be living through Gia, pushing her to be as successful as possible, even though it has driven a wedge in their relationship. When Marin learns that Gia has been abused by her boyfriend, Adam, Marin tailspins as she realizes that she has lost control of her life. Attempting to regain that control, she goes after Adam with the help of a private investigator, further alienating Gia. By keeping Raj in the dark, Marin also creates further cracks in their marriage, causing him to ask for a separation. Gia chooses Raj's side, and Marin fears she may end up all alone.

Marin's sisters and mother finally persuade her to come clean to Gia and explain why she is the way she is. The two bond over this shared experience, and Marin promises not to be so controlling in the future. Marin is able to salvage her relationship with Raj, as well as with her sisters and mother.



Ranee

Ranee is Brent's wife and mother to Sonya, Trisha, and Marin. Ranee was raised in a traditional Indian home, never believing that she could be anything more than a wife or mother. At first her relationship with Brent is a good one, with some tender moments; however, once they move to America and the stresses of life catch up to him, Brent changes dramatically. Ranee feels she has no choice but to stay with him, and she is too afraid to intervene on behalf of her daughters--a choice which she regrets deeply later on in life. One of Ranee's biggest regrets is that she allowed Sonya to believe that she didn't love her in order to convince Sonya to leave and reclaim her life from Brent.

Wanting Sonya to come home, Ranee eventually resorts to drastic measures. Brent, growing ill with his older age, has mellowed with time and become more and more reliant on her. Ranee slowly begins to poison him with his eye drop medicine, knowing that Sonya will only come home if Brent is out of the way. Brent confesses to Ranee what he did to Trisha, and she is so infuriated that she leaves him to drive around. When she returns home, Brent has slipped into a coma, never to awake.

Ranee does not regret what she did to Brent, but she continues to regret that she didn't protect her daughters. In particular, she's sorry that she drove Sonya away. Ranee eventually admits what she did to David and entrusts him to tell Sonya the news. Sonya decides to destroy the evidence, and the family slowly begins to come back together again, learning to love and trust each other step by step.

Brent

Brent is the patriarch of the family who has long-abused his daughters and his wife. Back in India, Brent came from a prominent family and had a good job as an engineer. Believing that better things existed for his family in America, Brent moved them there, only to lose his sense of status and culture. He was forced to take menial jobs where he was belittled for his differences. Brent takes the stress out on his family, becoming a violent, verbally and physically abusive man. He seems to favor his daughter Trisha, never beating her, though it is eventually revealed that he raped her. Brent seems to feel great guilt for this, if for nothing else in his life. He mellows later in life, having a good relationship with his granddaughter Gia, though he tells her the truth about beating her mother and allows her to believe that this behavior is acceptable. Though he is never conscious throughout the duration of the novel, the memory of Brent continues to play an important role, one which his daughters and his wife have spent most of their lives trying to escape.

Raj

Raj is Marin's husband. He met Marin through a marriage arranged by both of their families. Raj is by all accounts a good man and works hard to provide for his family. He and Marin have never developed a real closeness--most likely because she has kept



her childhood abuse a secret and holds him off at a distance. But, he is very close to their daughter Gia and has a strong, affectionate relationship with her. Raj has deferred most of the parenting decisions to Marin in the past, but he begins to be more assertive once he realizes how deeply unhappy Gia is. Though there is still no deep love between Marin and Raj by the end of the book, they agree to work together as parents to salvage their marriage and to help Gia.

Gia

Gia is Marin's and Raj's teenage daughter who is attending high school. Marin has controlled much of Gia's life, pushing her to work hard and be the best, much like Marin was when she was a young girl. Gia has started dating a boy in secret. Before Adam, Gia claims she was unpopular at school, a nobody. After he comes along, people start to pay attention to her. She believes Adam loves her, though he beats her whenever he gets frustrated. Part of why Gia accepts this is because her grandfather confided in her that he used to beat Marin when she was a girl. Gia resents her parents' interference, particularly Marin, and claims she would rather be dead than face the pressure of school again. Eventually, Marin confides the truth of Brent's abuse, and she and Gia are able to bond with each other.

Eric

Eric is Trisha's husband. He is an orphan and was raised without a family, so having children is very important to him. He loves Trisha deeply and works hard to provide a lavish lifestyle for her, though he does not know that Brent used to abuse her sisters and mother. He believes he and Trisha are on the same page about having children. But, when he discovers she has been lying to him about using birth control, he asks for a separation. Eventually, he files for divorce. Once Eric learns the truth about Brent, however--and in particular, how he raped Trisha--he begins to understand the reason for Trisha's deception and meets her halfway, asking to attend therapy with her.

David

David is one of Brent's doctors at the hospital. He and Sonya feel an immediate attraction to one another when they meet. David befriends her and eventually pursues her, though Sonya holds him at arm's length, believing because of his good, wholesome background that he can never understand what she's been through. David has been divorced previously and has one daughter; but, overall his life seems to have been relatively easy. He comes from money and has a good education. David refuses to give up on Sonya and, eventually, convinces her to trust his feelings for her.

Adam

Adam is Gia's secret boyfriend who has been abusing her for some time. Adam was previously accused of beating another girlfriend. Since he was a juvenile at the time, his punishment was very limited. Now, as an 18-year-old, Adam is able to be tried as an adult, which Marin pursues wholeheartedly. Adam appears only briefly in the novel, but he is said to be charismatic, handsome, and popular. He also convinces Gia that he loves her, despite his mistreatment of her. He attempts to visit her on her birthday even with a restraining order filed against him.

Symbols and Symbolism

Music

One symbol used in the novel is music being played in the house. This music represents a newly found freedom for Ranee, who used to never be allowed music in the house because Brent didn't like it. Now that Brent is in a coma, Ranee can choose the music she likes, allowing her not only the freedom to enjoy her home, but also the ability to discover her own tastes, likes, and interests. For the first time in her life, Ranee is free to do so without the fear of repercussions.

Rocks

When Brent first meets Ranee, he gives her a rock and tells her that this is symbolic for his desire to give her the world. This rock represents a small piece of that world. Every year on their anniversary, Brent continues this by giving her rocks, sometimes ordered from different places throughout the world, as if he is actually giving her the world piece by piece. Brent continues to maintain this tradition long after their marriage has gone downhill and he has started to beat her and their children. This ties into Brent's desire to keep up appearances. He wants to maintain the appearance of a good marriage more than he cares to actually make a good marriage.

Trees

Sonya explains to David how photography can help her see the world through a different perspective, by using the symbol of a small tree that is surrounded by other, stronger trees that protect it from the wind. The small tree acts as a haven for animals and small creatures, showing its true strength, though it sees itself as being weak for needing protection. Her ability to photograph it in its true light makes it clear just how strong it really is. This tree acts as a metaphor for Sonya, who believes herself to be weak, stupid, and useless, not realizing how strong she is for using her gifts to help others.

China Cups

Trisha uses a set of beautiful china cups to serve tea for her and Sonya. She notes that the cups are thin, and that they would be very easy to shatter. The cups are not identical, but they have been made very similarly. When they are sitting side by side, it is difficult to tell them apart. This relates to her and Sonya, who did not look very much alike as children, but who have come to do so as they grew older. Like these china cups, they are beautiful and may seem very easy to break; but, they are actually much stronger than they appear on the surface.

Eight

When Marin and Sonya were beaten by Brent as children, Trisha would keep a vocal count of how long the beating lasted. The beatings were sometimes longer, sometimes shorter, but they never went past the number eight. Marin, in particular, learns to cope knowing that there will never be anything so difficult she cannot handle it for more than eight seconds. Later in life, when things get particularly hard to bear, she will use this same method to keep track of the time and reassure herself that she can make it through.

Indian Culture

When Sonya leaves her family, she is literally leaving her home behind. She is also symbolically leaving her past behind. Part of doing so involves shunning her Indian heritage. She refuses to take photography jobs in India, though she travels nearly everywhere else in the world. She also avoids Bollywood movies and Indian food. Sonya believes that turning her back on this culture is essentially turning her back on her father. She doesn't realize that she is also turning her back on her sisters, her mother, and herself.

Predators

Sonya recalls being fascinated by nature, when strong predators close in on the weakest member of their prey and attack it, while all the other animals run off to save themselves. Sonya doesn't make a direct correlation, but this symbolizes her own family life, in which Brent would attack them one-by-one and the others would leave just to save themselves. She wonders if it is the destiny of the weak one to die, or if there is a way that it could have survived. This reflects the guilt that she, her sisters, and her mother feel at not doing more to protect each other.

Pineapple

Marin recalls a day when she was a little girl and she and her friends took turns saying what kind of fruit described each of them. Not wanting to draw attention to herself, Marin says a grape and makes up a generic answer; but, she is struck when another girl says "pineapple." When asked why, she claims it's because it is rough and prickly on the outside and difficult to cut through; but, it's worth it on the inside. Marin is much like this pineapple, in that she has put up a rough barrier around herself with her rigid, controlled life. On the inside, she is actually quite weak and vulnerable. She rarely allows people to see this, even those she loves.

Saris

When Trisha was a young girl, she loved trying on her mother's saris. She would feel so beautiful wearing these traditional gowns of her culture, and in particular liked wearing the veil to cover her face, as it made her feel mysterious. As she grows older, learns the truth about Brent, and comes to distrust the beauty she has always taken for granted, Trisha begins to view saris differently. They have now become a way to hide a woman's beauty and power. Wearing a sari keeps a woman in her place.

Tornado

Sonya recalls visiting a town that has been destroyed by a tornado. As she photographs the devastation, the people cry out and point toward the sky. At first, Sonya thinks another storm has come. Then, she realizes that they are pointing at a beautiful rainbow. Seeing it, Sonya describes it as "beauty in the face of despair." Much like this town, Sonya's life has been torn apart by her father's abuse, but there is still beauty to be found. Many times, Sonya pushes away this beauty, not believing she deserves it. Eventually, she allows herself to rebuild her life and make room for the good.

Settings

Ranee's Home

The childhood home that Sonya, Marin, and Trisha grew up in is filled with many bleak memories, as well as some good. Though the girls were abused throughout their time there, they were also very close to each other. It was there where they learned to laugh together even through very difficult times. After the girls grow up and move out, Ranee continues to live there with Brent. When he goes into the hospital, Sonya stays there with Ranee, and Trisha eventually returns after Eric leaves her and she remembers the truth about being raped by Brent. The family gathers there for various major occasions, such as Sonya returning home, and other family dinners.

Trisha's Home

Trisha's home is described as being stylish and luxurious, with no expense spared for Trisha's comfort. She has no career and is essentially provided for by her husband. Trisha spends a great deal of time selecting things like furniture, dishes and silverware, and pillow cushions for the sofas. After Eric leaves her, Trisha refuses to take anything in the house that she did not purchase with her own money. The house stays empty for most of the remaining novel, as Trisha returns home to live with Sonya and her mother.

The Hospital

The hospital is where the majority of the action of the novel takes place, particularly in Brent's hospital room, where the family gathers at various points to visit him, both as a group and on their own. Brent is in a private room, which allows for various family members to reveal deep secrets through conversation with him throughout the novel. Sonya also begins to work in the hospital, teaching patients photography as a form of therapy. The hospital is also where she begins to form her relationship with David. The majority of her time is spent in patients' rooms, the cafeteria, and David's office.

India

Most of the time in India is remembered in reflections by Ranee and Marin, who remember the times that their family spent there before coming to America. Their family lived a very different life in India, feeling a strong sense of family, community, and experiencing security and happiness with Brent's career and his kindness as a husband and father. Marin recalls a Diwali celebration that lasted for several days and involved the entire community. Ranee recalls growing up with her family, where gender roles were more readily defined and where Ranee knew exactly what was expected for her as a daughter, wife, and mother.

India is returned to at the end of the novel, when Ranee, Sonya, Marin, Trisha, and Gia take Brent's ashes to scatter into the river. This action is symbolic of returning Brent to the place where he was still a good husband and father and their family to a place where they were happy together. Only by facing this past together can they truly move on to their future.

Palo Alto, California

Brent and Ranee relocate their family to California after leaving their home in India. Palo Alto is a particularly affluent, expensive part of the United States, known for its educated, forward-thinking citizens. It is the home to high tech computer companies and Stanford University, which Sonya attends as an undergraduate. Brent and Ranee believe America will be a land of promise and opportunity; but, it actually proves to be a great source of stress and frustration, as they are detached from their culture and status. This is where their family begins to disintegrate, as Brent starts beating his wife and daughters, though eventually it does provide good opportunities for their daughters, who are all financially successful, if not emotionally well.

Themes and Motifs

Control

One of the major themes that emerges in the novel is control. Marin, Sonya, Ranee, and Trisha have lived most of their lives controlled by Brent, forfeiting control over their own lives. Because of this, the main characters all seek to reclaim a sense of control over their situations, in different ways. For instance, Ranee poisons Brent to get him out of their lives; Sonya avoids being vulnerable with anyone so she can control her emotions; and Trisha lies about using birth control so she can maintain control over her body.

Of all the characters, Marin is perhaps most dominated by the need to control her life. Marin believed that becoming accomplished and being "perfect" would be a way to reclaim her father's affections. She also had to learn at a young age that not even her mother would intervene to help her, and that she was the only one who could save herself from the situation with Brent. She pushes herself in everything, holding herself to a high standard, and expects the people she loves to live by the same standard.

This especially extends to Gia, whom Marin tries to model after herself. Marin wants Gia to have opportunities that she did not have. However, in pushing Gia to be her best, she ends up driving her away, and into the arms of an abuser. When Marin learns about this, she feels control spiraling out of her hands and resorts to drastic measures to take it back, but ends up alienating her husband and daughter even further. It is only when Marin relinquishes control and makes herself vulnerable that she is able to reconnect with them again.

Brent's need for control is similarly motivated by his loss of control in his life. In India he was a respected man with a good job; in America, he is hired for menial jobs and mocked for his religious and cultural differences. Because Brent has lost control in this aspect of his life, he insists on exercising a tyrannical control in his home with his family.

Secrets

As victims of domestic abuse, Ranee, Marin, Sonya, and Trisha feel a sense of shame and decide to keep the truth about Brent to themselves, even keeping their significant others in the dark. In all cases, this secretiveness puts up walls between the characters and their loved ones; Ranee loses contact with Sonya for a long period of her life; Eric leaves Trisha; Raj and Gia threaten to leave Marin; and Sonya has never known what it is like to be in love. The cost of keeping this secret proves to be very high.

In addition, all of narrative characters in the novel possess their own individual secret at some point. Sonya is addicted to abusive pornography; Ranee has poisoned her husband in order to bring Sonya home; Marin keeps Gia's abuse to herself for a large portion of the novel. As with the secret about Brent, these secrets ultimately prove to be toxic and must be revealed in order for the character to move forward.



Perhaps the character most closely tied to the theme of secrets is Trisha. In addition to not telling anyone about Brent, Trisha also hides the fact that she had an IUI surgery to prevent having children from her husband, Eric, who desperately wants to start a family. Like the above secrets, once this is revealed, it drives a wedge between Trisha and Eric, and nearly results in their divorce.

This, in turn, causes Trisha to remember another secret that she has long-buried: on the night of Marin's wedding, an intoxicated Brent came into her bedroom and raped her. Trisha was so scarred by the experience that she suppressed the memory of it. She has, in essence, been keeping this a secret from herself. Remembering this causes Trisha a great amount of pain since it completely rewrites her relationship with her father. But, it also provides clarity for her behavior with Eric and allows her the opportunity to provide him an explanation, as well as potentially fix their relationship.

Appearances

One important theme in the novel is that of keeping up appearances. Part of keeping Brent's abuse secret involves coordinating clothing to hide bruises and putting up a good front to the community. In essence, the family must keep up the appearance of being happy in order to keep anyone from finding out the truth.

Brent also has to keep up various facades in his life. He expresses his desire to be thought of well by the community, and always makes sure to put on a good face when interacting with other Indian families and friends. At work, he must pretend to drink coffee to avoid the derision of his coworkers, who mocked him for drinking milk instead, as was the custom in India.

When Brent is in his coma, David believes he must have been a very good husband and father because of how many people visit him. Though in nearly every instance his family members are visiting him to berate him for his treatment, these visits maintain the appearance of loving, doting daughters who miss their father.

In addition to the community, Brent's facade manages to fool even some who are very close to him. Because he shows his kinder side to Trisha and Gia, both girls are far more lenient toward him, even knowing about his abusive behaviors. Trisha is so convinced by the appearance of the loving father that Brent maintains that she has a difficult time reconciling her memory of this man with the father who raped her. In contrast, because Marin, Sonya, and Ranee have seen the worst parts of Brent firsthand, they cannot move beyond this image of him and distrust the memories of times that he was kind.

Freedom

Freedom emerges as one of the main themes of the novel. Freedom is usually used in reference to a people or a nation who have been oppressed but who gain back the right to think and act for themselves. Ranee, Sonya, Trisha, and Marin experience a form of



tyranny within their own home. It is only through Brent's coma and eventual death that they are able to regain the ability to live their own lives as they please. This takes the shape of seemingly simple pleasures, such as choosing to play music, wearing a certain kind of clothing, and pursuing one's profession of choice.

The author references birds at various points in the novel, describing birds who have fallen behind the flock or who have had their wings broken. The birds serve as metaphors for the main characters of the novel and what they have survived. Birds are often used as symbols of freedom, since their wings give them the ability to travel freely from place to place and to escape from bad situations. A bird whose wings are broken has had that freedom forcefully taken away, which is what Brent has done to his wife and daughters.

Brent is in a coma for most of the novel and no longer physically has the power to control his wife and daughters. However, though they revel in some small freedoms that come from living without him, almost all experience difficulty in truly embracing this new freedom in their lives. Though Brent may no longer have physical control, his memories remain a strong presence which they must overcome in order to be truly free of him.

The Past and the Future

Overcoming the past to move toward the future is an oft-recurring theme throughout the novel. One prime example of this can be found in the character of Gia. The family believes she is ignorant of Brent's abuse, but Ranee and Marin soon learn that Brent revealed it to her before his coma, and they are horrified at this knowledge. All their hope for the future rests on Gia, and part of that hope is that she will never have to experience what they have gone through. Not only does Gia know about Brent, but she also falls into an abusive relationship, partially as a result of learning Brent's secret.

While they are initially devastated that Gia has learned the truth, this knowledge also opens the doors for them to truly put the past behind them. When they believed Gia was ignorant of the past, they could ignore it and pretend as though it never happened. With it out in the open, they must rally together, face the terrible truth, and work together to ensure that the future will be better for Gia and for all of them.

One metaphorical example of how this can be accomplished is in the Hindu parable of the rope and the snake which Ranee tells to Trisha. In it, a man walking home at night believes he has accidentally walked into the path of a dangerous cobra. Trying to run away from the cobra, the man turns back to look at it, trips, hits his head on a rock, and dies. It turns out the snake was actually a rope, which had no real power to hurt him. Ranee summarizes that like the rope, the past no longer has any real power to harm anyone, unless they keep looking back at it.

Ultimately, Ranee, Sonya, Trisha, Marin, and Gia attempt to put their past behind them by taking Brent's ashes to India and setting them loose in a river. In doing so, they are

finally free of him; part of the symbolism of this journey is that they must first return to where they came from so that they can finally move on to where they need to go.

Domestic Abuse/Violence

Domestic Abuse/Violence is a theme in *Trail of Broken Wings*. Brent, the husband of Raneé and the father of Marin and her sisters, was guilty of beating all of his daughters, except Trisha, whom he raped. Feeling helpless under his control, his wife stayed with him. This could have been, in part, because she remembered how nice he had been in the earlier days of their marriage. Perhaps, she hoped that he would revert back to those days. However, he never did.

Brent also abused his daughters emotionally by leading them to believe that his behavior was acceptable because they provoked him. This belief of being responsible for the abuser's actions was even passed on to Gia, Brent's granddaughter, when she found out that her mother Marin had been beaten as a child by a father who loved her. Gia equated the abuse with love. Therefore, when her boyfriend Adam abused her, Gia was willing to put up with it. She, too, felt that she was probably responsible for his outbursts. Also, she accepted Adam's shabby behavior because having a boyfriend helped her to fit in at school. She would settle for abuse over being alone. Marin, however, is now savvy about what had occurred when she was a child. She is able to break free from her past brainwashing to save her daughter Gia from Adam.

Styles

Point of View

The book is divided into four different points of view that rotate throughout: Sonya, Ranee, Trisha, and Marin. The novel is written in present tense, although the perspectives differ between the four narrators. Marin's and Ranee's sections are third-person, while Sonya's and Trisha's are first-person. There is no indication of why this distinction is made, though perhaps it has something to do with the nature of secrets. Ranee and Marin both keep the most secrets from the people around them; so, their narrations are one step removed. Trisha also keeps secrets, but her main secret is the one she keeps from herself. Sonya is shaped by the secrets that are kept from her, namely by her mother, which is why the reader is allowed directly inside her head.

Language and Meaning

The language of the novel is fairly sophisticated, including some words that may be difficult for young readers. The four narrators are all well-educated, cultured woman, and the vocabulary reflects this. In addition, some words and expressions from Hindi are also used in the novel. Most of these are italicized and explained within the text. Occasionally some of the more familiar words--such as sari--are left unexplained.

Though most of the novel takes place in present time and, as such, is written in present tense, many of the characters reflect back on events that have happened in the past. Occasionally these reflections are written in past-tense and use a vocabulary that reflects the age of the narrator as they were at the time (a young child, a teenager, etc.) instead of the more advanced word choice used throughout the rest of the text.

Structure

The sections of the book are not broken into numbered chapters, but are rather named for whichever narrator is telling that part of the story from her perspective (Marin, Sonya, Trisha, or Ranee). Sonya has 12 chapters; Marin has 13; Trisha has 11; and Ranee has 8. These are interspersed randomly, with no set pattern on whose chapter will follow next. The book contains an epilogue, which is told from Ranee's point of view, though it is not titled with her name.

Quotes

The unknown is the hardest. Which might explain why we try so hard to rule our worlds. It is the only hope we have to make sense of our lives.

-- Sonya (Sonya)

Importance: Control is one of the major themes of the novels. For characters whose whole lives have been controlled by a single man and who have felt so little control over their own lives, the majority of their adulthood is shaped by seeking out anything that will give them the semblance of control in their own lives. In this instance, Sonya has created a system of rules that she believes will help her make sense of the world, and fears anything--such as relationships--that will take the control out of her hands and put her in unfamiliar territory. Sonya can't make sense of why her father treated her the way he did, so she struggles to only include things in her life that she can control and make sense of.

Ranee ignores the sound of laughter that reverberates in her head. It mocks her for believing she has escaped. A fugitive is never free. Though he lies unconscious in a coma, miles away, his memory still smothers the air she breathes. Part of her knows it always will.

-- Ranee (Ranee)

Importance: Freedom is a major theme of the novel. Ranee revels in the simple pleasures of the new freedoms she has found since Brent has gone into a coma, such as getting to dress how she likes and play the kind of music she wants to listen to, but because she has lived so much of her life in fear, it is difficult to put that behind her. Brent no longer has any physical control over her life, but the memories of him remain a strong presence in Ranee's life. It is a presence which she fears she may never be able to escape.

Opening my eyes, I stare into hers. They are the exact same color as mine. We are sisters, but a bond far greater binds us. On different sides of the road, we walked through the same hell.

-- Trisha (Trisha)

Importance: Trisha remarks more than once how similarly she and Sonya look. Here she notes how much their eyes are alike, which shows their sisterly, familial bond. However, Trisha believes a deeper bond exists between them, in that they have both survived their horrific childhood together. As the only child who was never beat, Trisha believes for most of the novel that her role was easier and feels a sense of guilt for simply having watched on and comforted her sisters after being beaten. This is what she refers to as having traveled through the same hell, just on different sides of the road. However, this also foreshadows the secret that Trisha has kept, even from herself, that is revealed in the course of the novel: that she was raped by her father. For most of the novel, Trisha believes she was merely a voyeur to the hell her sisters experienced. However, she comes to learn she has suffered just as much at her father's hand.



Watching them, I envy their hopes and dreams. Their belief that anything is possible. That the future is theirs to determine, to create. They are invincible; they are sure. I don't remember feeling like that ever. Even when I had hopes for the future, I knew my past would always walk alongside. My companion for a lifetime.

-- Sonya (Sonya)

Importance: Here, Sonya sees students sitting outside Stanford and envies them their hopes for the future. Sonya, herself, attended Stanford University, a very prestigious school, though she was still made to feel stupid and inferior by her father, particularly when she announced at graduation her desire to pursue photography instead of law school. Watching these students, Sonya sees the difference between their carefree, untainted hopes for the future, and her own caution and fear at every step forward. This ties into the theme of the past and the future, with Sonya constantly aware that any choices she made for her future will be shadowed by her past.

I want to ask him to stop trying to save the man who created this. The one who left a trail of broken wings in his wake. To just let my father die so we can continue living.

-- Sonya (Sonya)

Importance: This line references the title of the novel, Trail of Broken Wings. This quote implies that Marin, Sonya, Ranee, and Trisha are the birds whose wings have been broken by Brent. When a bird's wings are broken, it can no longer fly, and remains grounded to the earth. Brent's daughters and wife all feel as though they have been damaged in some way by Brent and have been "grounded" from something important in their lives. Sonya is afraid to love; Marin holds on too much to control and begins to lose her family in the process; Ranee lives with the guilt of not helping her daughters; and Trisha is afraid to have a child and ends up lying to the man she loves and driving him away. Here, Sonya expresses that she believes the only way she'll be able to fly again is for Brent to die and set her free.

He is sure as only someone so naive could be. I imagine telling him that it is impossible for us to get through this. That abuse is cyclical, in our genes. No matter how hard we fight, we can't escape it. I know; I've tried.

-- Sonya (Sonya)

Importance: One of the reasons that Sonya is so afraid to begin a relationship with David is because he has never had to experience anything like her before. Because of this, he views the world optimistically, full of hope, whereas Sonya is deeply cynical and believes that only bad things will happen to her. Sonya believes that she would only bring pain to someone else because she will never truly escape her past, which is bound to repeat itself.

The facade was harder to maintain than I realized. I had convinced myself that if I mastered the part, if I was queen of the stage, then I would become the person I was playing. But the mask has started to slip and no matter how hard I try, I can't seem to keep it in place.

-- Trisha (Trisha)

Importance: All of the women in the novel have been forced to play a part to a certain extent, but Trisha perhaps more so than anyone else. She is not only playing a part to the rest of the world, but to herself. Trisha has convinced herself that out of Brent's daughters, she is the lucky one, when in fact she has blocked out the memory of his assault against her which was even worse than what happened to her sisters. Trisha puts on the facade of having a perfect life, but it is only as that unravels that she begins to understand the truth about herself and what really happened.

I am doing this for your own good. Brent standing above Marin. He was so large and she felt so small. She would nod; she had no choice. It was her fault; he made sure she knew that. If only she were smarter, prettier, a better student. Straight As weren't good enough. Where were the A-pluses? Why did another student get two awards when she only got one? It's your fault. It's your fault. A mantra in her head, beating her harder than his fists.

-- Marin (Marin)

Importance: In many ways, Marin may come across as one of the least sympathetic characters in the novel, since she is so closed off and rigid in her interactions with others. However, this behavior becomes clearer once it is understood that Brent's abuse extends far beyond just the physical. Long after he stops hitting Marin, he continues to be the voice in her head, telling her that she isn't good enough, pushing her to do better and try harder, and keeping her family at a distance as a result. Marin has to put up such an effort because she believes she will crumble otherwise. Being the best is the only way to keep herself safe.

My father labeled us when we were born. Marin was dohd-dai, overachiever in Indian. Trisha was mathajee, a goddess on Earth, and I was bewakoof, the stupid one. After enough years of hearing the label, you assume it is true. Believe that when someone says something with enough confidence, they know what they are talking about. Especially when it's the person God entrusted you to.

-- Sonya (Sonya)

Importance: Sonya outlines the way that they were labeled by Brent as children, and the reverberations of this can be seen into their adult life. Marin continues to be an overachiever, pushing her own daughter to follow in her footsteps, even at the cost of her health and happiness. Trisha relies on her beauty and believes she has little else of value. Sonya doesn't believe she's capable of anything important and does everything she can to keep others at bay. Though they all strive to move past this, Brent's voice continues to tell them otherwise, making it difficult to move on.

Everyone must reach a point in their life when they stop running. When it is easier to stand still than to keep being chased, even if the person chasing you is only in your head.

-- Sonya (Sonya)

Importance: Sonya has spent most of her life running ever since she left home after



graduation. She has purposefully chosen jobs that will allow her to travel and not stay in one place for too long. Though she has had lovers, she leaves the moment things seem to be getting serious. She has done everything she can to avoid coming home, even missing Trisha's wedding. It is only after returning home, reconnecting with her family, and forming true feelings for David that Sonya begins to realize how futile it is to run from her past. Brent lost the power to hurt her a long time ago. The person Sonya has truly been running from is herself. It is only by facing herself that she can be happy again.

She is breaking a sacrilegious rule, one created in childhood that demands no matter what hardship any of them are enduring, they still have to put on a happy face. If for no other reason than to convince the world to continue believing that they are fine.

-- Marin (Marin paragraph 317)

Importance: This quote ties into the theme of appearances which occurs often throughout the novel. Marin and her sisters and mother have lived in perpetual fear of someone discovering the truth about Brent. Though it might seem like this would be a desirable outcome, since Brent could be punished for what he has done and removed from their home, like many victims of domestic abuse they are so afraid of him that they have become unwilling accomplices to covering up the abuse. To Brent, it is very important to keep up the appearance of being a good man and father, especially among his Indian colleagues and friends, so Marin and the others must do the same by pretending to be happy and well when they are actually miserable and afraid.

Energy doesn't stand still; it moves, shifts with time. I think maybe we are meant to do the same, to see the world not as we fear it is but as we hope for it to be--kinder, gentler, each lesson not meant to destroy but to enable. To learn that we are not stagnant, but rather move with those around us, each one of us melting into the other, becoming one though our bodies separate us. Our hurts and our joys are meant to be shared, the burden easier when another holds your hand."

-- Sonya (Sonya)

Importance: Sonya, in particular, has detached from her family and from the people around her, attempting to survive on her own. To a lesser extent, her sisters and mother have done the same. However, by returning home, reuniting with her sisters, and opening up her heart to the possibility of love, Sonya has come to realize that while overcoming her past on her own may seem impossible, having others to help her and support her along the way can help her from being stuck in the past. Relying on others cannot remove the past hurt, but it can make the burden easier to bear.