

Truly Madly Guilty Study Guide

Truly Madly Guilty by Liane Moriarty

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Plot Summary

Truly Madly Guilty is a contemporary, Australian novel by Liane Moriarty about marriage, parenthood, and lifelong friendships. Clementine and Erika, who have been friends since childhood, are dealing with a near-tragedy that has far-reaching repercussions. The plot weaves back and forth through time, as memories often invade the present. Chapters suddenly launch themselves forward or backward in time. Readers are immediately treated to what appears to be a cooling friendship between Clementine and Erika, stemming from a barbeque.

For the first half of the novel, the barbeque is touted as the singular event which has changed everything. However, the details of what happened at the barbeque are not revealed until well into the novel. Erika and her husband, Oliver, want to have a baby, but Erika is unable to conceive. They are asking Clementine and her husband, Sam, to donate eggs to Erika. However, what they hoped would be a discussion about the subject is made brief and sudden as Erika's next-door neighbors, Vid, his wife Tiffany, and their daughter, Dakota, invite everyone over for a barbeque. As such, Erika, Oliver, Sam, Clementine, and Holly and Ruby (Sam's and Clementine's children), go next door. Harry, an angry, old neighbor, watches the get together from his window.

As the day wears on, the alcohol flows and only Oliver is not tipsy. As the evening approaches, Tiffany's past as a stripper comes out, and most of the adults begin to behave like teenagers. No one is watching the three children. Erika screams when Ruby disappears in Vid's fountain. Erika and Oliver are the first to reach Ruby, saving her life by administering CPR. Everyone comes to regret the barbeque, wishing it had never happened in the first place. Clementine and Sam blame each other for the accident. Erika, whose medication as mixed with alcohol, struggles for most of the entire novel to remember exactly what happened while discussing with Oliver alternative ways of beginning a family. Vid and Tiffany feel horrible over what happened, so much so that Vid destroys the fountain.

As the novel continues on, it is revealed that Erika's mother is a hoarder. The friendship between Erika and Clementine was forced by Clementine's mother, who insisted on giving Erika daughter-status and a better environment. It is also revealed that Clementine and Sam blame each other, because they blame themselves for being irresponsible. They go on to take CPR classes so that they can be ready should such an incident ever again occur. Erika's memory finally returns. Preparing to bring plates out to the backyard, she saw Harry banging on the window of his house to gesture toward Ruby, alerting Erika to Ruby falling in. (It is later revealed the elderly Harry died falling down the stairs seconds later in the attempt to rush out and save Ruby.) Holly later confesses to having pushed Ruby into the fountain in the first place, for taking her rock collection. As the novel ends, Oliver and Erika are set to become foster parents, and Erika writes Clementine a warm note and includes a photograph of them as teenagers on a roller coaster from many years before.

Chapters 1 – 18

Summary

Chapter 1 – Erika is in the audience listening as her friend, Clementine Hart, addresses the room, full of senior citizens of the Community Matters Meeting. Clementine, a mother and well-known cellist, is there to share her story “One Ordinary Day.” Clementine tells everyone present that everything began with an ordinary barbeque on a cold day –though Erika knows this is not true. Clementine goes on to say that she and her family accepted the invitation to the barbeque at the last minute, and that the hosts were friends of friends who Clementine did not really know. Erika is amused and satisfied by Erika giving what seems to be a pointless talk rather than formally performing with the cello. Clementine goes on to explain that six adults, three kids, and a dog were all present, that music by Gabriel Faure was playing, and that the adults were a little tipsy. Suddenly, Erika begins to feel a panic attack coming on. She does her best to remember the encouragement of her psychologist, telling her to float through it, but she rushes outside into the rain instead.

Chapter 2 – Erika, who works as an accountant, catches a cab back into the city. The driver talks about the rain, disputing claims it is due to global warming by ascribing the rain to natural weather events like La Nina. Erika thinks about how it has been a mistake to take part of her workday to go and hear Clementine speak. Erika reflects on how her goal was to be both supportive, and to try to remember more of what happened that day of the barbeque since she cannot quite recall due to taking a prescription pill before attending the barbeque and subsequent drinking. Erika’s mom, Sylvia, calls to invite Erika and her husband, Oliver, over for lunch on Sunday. Erika tells her mom they will come on the fifteenth according to the deal, and not at any other time; or, Sylvia can come to their place or meet them somewhere. On the phone with Oliver, Erika relates the call from her mother and Clementine’s speech to Oliver. Oliver reassures her, telling her to talk to Clementine about the barbeque, and that what happened is not her fault. Erika says it is because it was her idea to go to the barbeque.

Chapter 3: The Day of the Barbeque – The novel steps back in time to the morning of the barbeque. Erika’s neighbor, Vid, is glad to see that a silver BMW, parked outside the Richardsons’ house for the past six months, has finally been moved. Vid asks about Erika’s day. Erika explains her friends Clementine and her husband Sam, and their daughters, are due over for a visit. Because the day is so nice, Vid decides they should all have a barbeque at his place. He says his wife, Tiffany, would be happy to see them, and their daughter, Dakota, would be happy to play with Erika’s daughters. Erika reluctantly agrees, which makes Oliver unhappy.

Chapter 4 – The novel returns to the present. Clementine leaves her talk as quickly as she is able. Clementine deeply regrets the barbeque, and wishes she had never agreed to attend. She knows she must talk to Erika to give her an answer to what happened. Clementine tries to keep herself focused on her forthcoming audition.



Chapter 5: The Day of the Barbeque – The novel steps back in time to the morning of the barbeque. Sam helps focus Clementine’s mind on her upcoming audition with exercise while their two year-old daughter, Ruby, does her best to participate. Their five year-old, Holly, wakes up and asks about what is going on. Sam then brings the girls to the living room, where they have set the room up to resemble an audition for a practice audition. Sam says he will take the girls out for the morning so Clementine can practice and focus.

Chapter 6 – The novel returns to the present. Sam, a marketing manager, takes a passenger ferry. He reflects on being a businessman, and how his mother wanted him to be a businessman. He considers that he is not very passionate about being a businessman. He begins to think about his life in general, his family, his marriage, and then thinks about Tiffany. He wishes to return to the day of the barbeque.

Chapter 7: The Day of the Barbeque - The novel steps back in time to the morning of the barbeque. Sam struggles to get the girls together to head out of the house to allow Clementine the space to practice. Clementine thinks about how Erika is Holly’s godmother, and how Erika is always quick to expect manners from Holly. She thinks about how Erika was once wild and exciting, but has settled down to a large degree because of Oliver. Clementine thinks about her own decision to settle down and have children, and does not regret the decision. Erika then calls to explain the situation with Vid’s barbeque. Clementine agrees to attending. Erika explains that Oliver is unhappy about the decision because of the proposal they wish to discuss.

Chapter 8 – The novel returns to the present. Tiffany wonders why Dakota is being so polite to her. She also considers the fact that the last time she or Oliver saw their elderly neighbor, Harry, was the morning of the barbeque.

Chapter 9: The Day of the Barbeque – The novel steps back in time to the morning of the barbeque –a Sunday. Tiffany, Dakota, and their dog, Barney, are in the kitchen. Dakota is set to attend the elite private school, Saint Anastasias, just as Dakota’s older stepsisters (from Vid’s first marriage) had done. In August, Tiffany will have to attend an informational meeting with Dakota at the school, according to an e-mail she receives. Vid comes inside to explain about the coming barbeque. Harry comes to the door. Harry is upset because the mailman keeps putting Tiffany’s mail in his mailbox. Harry is very old, and seems to have a form of dementia. He goes from being angry about the mail to sad. Tiffany tells him they are always there for him. Harry demands to know why he would need them, then storms off.

Chapter 10 – The novel returns to the present. Oliver and Erika speak by phone. Oliver asks if Erika has seen Harry around lately. Erika suggests searching for a spare key under one of Harry’s flowerpots because he is of that generation. Oliver agrees to try to find one. Erika hopes Harry is okay, despite his grumpiness. She then calls her psychologist to book an appointment for the next day.



Chapter 11 – Oliver and Tiffany go over to Harry's house, find the key, and go in. There, they find Harry has died, his body at the bottom of the staircase. He is wearing mismatching socks, his hair is combed, and his glasses are on.

Chapter 12: The Day of the Barbeque - The novel steps back in time to the morning of the barbeque. Dakota watches as Barney runs out the door while her father, Vid, complains about Harry. Dakota is reading *The Hunger Games*, and believes if she had a little sister, she would die for her like Katniss was willing to do for Prim in the novel.

Chapter 13 – The novel returns to the present. Oliver tells Erika that Harry is dead when she gets home. He explains it appears as if he has been dead for weeks, having fallen down the stairs. It upsets Oliver greatly to think that everyone in the neighborhood continued their lives on as normal, unaware that Harry was helpless and dying. Vid and Tiffany are also deeply upset by the news of Harry's death. Erika later speaks by phone with Pam (Clementine's mother), who is babysitting for Clementine and Sam, and reports they are having marital problems. Pam also encourages Erika to visit her mom sooner than planned.

Chapter 14 – Sam asks how Clementine's talk went at dinner. Clementine says it went well, and that there were about twenty people present, including Erika. Sam and Clementine struggle to make conversation. Clementine is annoyed by Sam, and wants to lash out at him. Sam, meanwhile, urges Clementine to keep focused on her audition. It is then that she believes she hears Vid laughing in the restaurant.

Chapter 15 – Clementine is relieved to find Vid is not at the restaurant. Sam reveals that he, too, is relieved. Instead of eating, they decide to leave. Clementine wonders aloud if Sam ever thinks about what would have happened if they had never gone to the barbeque. Sam says he thinks about it all the time.

Chapter 16: The Day of the Barbeque – The novel returns to the day of the barbeque. Clementine and Sam are late in arriving at Erika's, which is normal for them. Oliver is still angry that Erika has accepted Vid's invite, especially on that day. Oliver suggests going ahead with their previous plans another day, but Erika insists they will continue with the plan as normal despite the barbeque. Clementine, Sam, Holly, and Ruby arrive. Holly and Ruby are dressed like fairies, and Holly brings along her rock collection which Erika worries is obsessive. Oliver gifts Holly with a rock, which Erika frowns upon. While the girls do crafts, Erika and Oliver explain they have been through eleven rounds of IVF in the attempt to conceive. Erika explains she is unable to conceive, and needs an egg donor. Oliver asks if Clementine would be their egg donor.

Chapter 17: The Day of the Barbeque – Oliver explains they do not need an answer right away. He also explains that he has some literature about the process. Oliver also clarifies for Sam that it would be Oliver's sperm being used for fertilization. Clementine admits it is a lot to think about. Dakota then arrives to bring everyone over to the barbeque.



Chapter 18 – The novel returns to the present. Clementine and Sam return home. Pam is surprised to see them back so early. Pam, who herself has a good marriage, is always seeking to help others in their marriages. Pam encourages Clementine to see a marriage counselor. Pam then explains she spoke with Erika by phone about the Sylvia situation, and also explains that Harry was found dead. Clementine finds herself thinking about Erika's infertility. She explains this to her mom. Pam asks Clementine how she feels about this. Clementine explains she was asked the day of the barbeque, and says they have not talked about it since. Clementine does not believe she has a real choice. She says that she is going to donate.

Analysis

If readers are looking for a quick answer to the question of the incident at the barbeque that serves as a catalyst for the plot, they will be waiting until Chapter 47. This is because Liane Moriarty structures her novel in such a way as to string readers along, providing vague clues and references to the day of the barbeque right from the very beginning of the novel. She also leaps back and forth through time, from the present to the day of the barbeque, and back again, filling in pieces of a puzzle one at a time. In some respect, this is symbolically reflective of the fact that Erika cannot recall the precise details of that day, but it is also designed to hook readers to keep them interested in what otherwise seems a relative simple plot: six friends, three kids, and a dog end up at a barbeque. The barbeque itself becomes symbolic of change, the fixed point at which everything is altered.

Each of the people at the barbeque is married –Erika to Oliver, Clementine to Sam, and Tiffany to Vid. They are a diverse group of people who have Erika and Oliver as friends in common. From the outset, it appears as if the marriages themselves are strong – even after the barbeque. But, in reality, Clementine and Sam have been having difficulties in their marriage since the barbeque. Clementine's mother encourages her to see a marriage counselor, believing that marriage is important and must be a priority in life –especially to a married person. Here, Moriarty begins to lay the groundwork for the thematic argument that marriage must be a priority in a married couple's life.

At the same time that Clementine struggles to handle her marriage, she also struggles in her lifelong friendship with Erika. It is revealed that Erika's request for egg donations is understandably jarring to Clementine – but she ultimately determines she will donate. Why this is the case is not revealed beyond the fact that she believes she does not have a choice. At first glance, this appears to be the dutiful, loyal obligation of one friend to another –a friend who is a parent toward a friend who wants to become a parent. But as with the barbeque, there is much more to the story than first meets the eye. This is understood through Clementine's confirmation that she and Erika have not discussed egg donation since the day of the barbeque, meaning that whatever happened at the barbeque takes precedence. Because of this, Moriarty contends, friendship has its ups and downs. This is natural.



Moriarty also looks at parenthood as a natural, beautiful thing, though she contends simultaneously that no parent is perfect. Readers can see this in how Clementine, the mother of Holly, sometimes lets Holly get away with things, while Erika –who wants to be a mother –is always firm with Holly about things like manners. This serves to be a source of contention between Clementine the parent, and Erika the would-be-parent. Clementine constantly compares herself to others, especially Erika, as a parent. Clementine feels as if she does not measure up to anyone’s standards as a parent, but Clementine does not realize this is normal. No one, Moriarty continues to argue, is a perfect parent –but Clementine does not understand this, yet, especially in lieu of the barbeque. This only serves to create more friction between the two. But key to understanding the barbeque is Holly’s rock collection and Harry’s death. The rock collection symbolizes truth –and will not reappear again until much later in the novel. Still, readers should keep their minds apprised of the rock collection and Harry’s death.

Discussion Question 1

What event do each of the characters in the novel wish had never occurred? Why? How do each of the characters in the novel so far approach their regret over the barbeque? Why?

Discussion Question 2

What is the friendship between Erika and Clementine like, especially regarding parenthood? Do you believe Erika is right to correct Holly? Why or why not? Do you believe Clementine is justified in being annoyed when Erika corrects Holly? Explain your reasoning.

Discussion Question 3

Why does Clementine appear at first to constantly compare herself to Erika and other parents? What do you believe accounts for Clementine’s insecurities? Why?

Vocabulary

amplified, expectant, discreetly, exquisite, faux, infuriating, melodramatic, abase, altruism, sophisticated, applicant, rueful, contemptuously, precocious, compulsory, surreptitiously, tremulously, mechanically, incredulous, enunciated, niceties, diabolically

Chapters 19 – 36

Summary

Chapter 19 – Vid and Tiffany are in bed. Tiffany is still upset over Harry, but Vid reminds her Harry did not want to be their friend despite their efforts. Had Harry been different, Vid knows, they would have noticed his absence. Vid tells Tiffany that Harry had probably died instantly. Still, Tiffany feels badly. There are many things running around in her mind, including the informational meeting for Dakota's new school the next morning. Tiffany struggles to sleep, then feels a need to go check on Dakota. Dakota is awake in the dark which startles Tiffany. Tiffany lays down next to her and falls asleep. Dakota sneaks out of bed. As she does so, she thinks she must be a disappointment to her parents because she is growing up with money while her parents did not. She reminds herself that her parents probably love her, and do not think she is a disappointment despite the day of the barbeque.

Chapter 20: The Day of the Barbeque – The novel now steps back in time to the day of the barbeque. Tiffany and Vid watch as Dakota brings Erika, Oliver, Sam, Clementine, Holly, and Ruby over to the house. The sight of the children causes Tiffany to reconsider her deal with the much older Vid, who promised her one child and one child only, for he already has three angry teenage daughters. When Tiffany sees the space between the adults, it seems strange to her because the four of them are supposed to be friends but they do not appear to be so. Vid and Tiffany nevertheless welcome everyone warmly.

Chapter 21 – The novel returns to the present. Clementine stays up late reading while Sam goes to bed early, choosing to sleep in the study on the pullout instead of their bedroom. It has been this way since the barbeque. Since the barbeque, Clementine has dreamed of having sex with someone other than Sam, and is caught by Sam and their family members. Since the barbeque, Sam has begun grinding his teeth and Clementine has taken to talking in her sleep. Clementine suddenly thinks about the only time she saw inside Erika's childhood home after they had been friends for six months to discover Sylvia was a hoarder, and the house was full of everything imaginable.

Chapter 22: The Day of the Barbeque – The novel returns back in time to the day of the barbeque. Clementine has brought expensive champagne. Erika and Oliver are not surprised by this, as Clementine and Sam always live beyond their means, such as taking the children to Tuscany for vacation when the Central Coast an hour away would have been just as good. (This is why, it is explained, Clementine needs a successful audition for the full-time orchestra job so desperately.) Tiffany breaks out beer for everyone. Erika can only imagine what the beautiful Tiffany is doing to the minds of the men present. She wonders if Tiffany is not trying to be sexy on purpose. Tiffany compliments her husband's ability to cook, which prompts Clementine and Erika to talk about wanting husbands who can cook. Sam's concern that the kids have grown suspiciously quiet upstairs prompts a conversation about parenting styles and losing kids –such as the day Dakota was temporarily lost on the beach, making Tiffany angry

at Vid. When Vid asks if Erika and Oliver are planning to have children, an awkward moment follows. Erika tells him one day. A scream is heard upstairs.

Chapter 23 – The novel returns to the present. Clementine calls Erika. Clementine asks to meet for a drink after work, but Erika tells Clementine she is taking the day off to see her mother and to help her clean as much as possible. Oliver is taking off work too, but because he is sick. Clementine offers to go along with Erika, but Clementine tells her she should be practicing for her audition. Clementine then tells Erika she will donate the eggs to her, and that what happened at the barbeque has nothing to do with her decision. Erika knows otherwise.

Chapter 24: The Day of the Barbeque – The novel returns in time to the day of the barbeque. Clementine, Sam, and Tiffany go check on the girls while Vid, Oliver, and Erika remain behind in the kitchen. Vid refers to Tiffany's collection of sea glass as hoarding, prompting Erika to reveal her mother as a real hoarder. Tiffany returns to the kitchen with Dakota, saying Dakota bumped her nose on Ruby while playing Wii tennis. Sam and Clementine are now playing Wii tennis with each other upstairs at Ruby's insistence, and Tiffany reveals that Ruby needs a diaper change. Erika takes it upon herself to bring the diaper bag upstairs. As she approaches, she hears Sam and Clementine in conversation, talking about not wanting to do "it," and "it" being repulsive. As Sam goes to head downstairs, he is stunned to see Erika.

Chapter 25 – The novel returns to the present. Tiffany and Dakota get ready for their informational orientation. While looking for Dakota's cardigan, Tiffany finds The Hunger Games, and realizes she will have to speak to Dakota about it later.

Chapter 26: The Day of the Barbeque – Erika tries to play it cool by telling Sam and Clementine that Tiffany wants everyone out back in the cabana. Clementine proceeds to change Ruby, and Clementine considers that she can't do what Erika is asking of her.

Chapter 27 – The novel returns to the present. Oliver suggests Erika wait to head to her mom's until the rain lets up, but Erika knows this will not happen anytime soon. Not only does Erika have plans to go to her mom's, but she has her emergency psychology session to make as well. Erika dwells on the conversation she overheard the day of the barbeque, in which Sam and Clementine referred to "it" as "repulsive." Erika takes this to mean egg donation.

Chapter 28: The Day of the Barbeque – The novel goes back in time to the day of the barbeque. Clementine and Sam are impressed by the size and landscaping of Vid and Tiffany's backyard. It is the opposite of Erika's minimalist home. Vid explains his inspiration was the Gardens of Versailles. Clementine even spots a maze in the corner of the yard. The group begins to warm up to one another, and eventually the conversation turns to yoga and flexibility –leading Tiffany to show off her flexibility and be complimented by Sam and Oliver. The conversation turns to music, wherein Clementine puts on beautiful classic music –and only she and Vid get it. Vid winks at her to let her know this.



Chapter 29 – The novel returns to the present. Vid polishes Dakota’s shoes for Informational Morning at Saint Anastasias. Vid sees Erika leave her house, which causes him to wonder if Erika has seen Clementine lately. He thinks about going to see her perform –something which he has told no one that he did. He considers how Clementine was the best cellist and the best performer of everyone on stage. Vid considers that he longs for something, and believes Clementine is the only person who can give it to him. Vid, Tiffany, and Dakota get on the road. Vid feels sad that Harry has died alone, but does not feel bad about his dying because Harry was so mean. When Vid drives them to the school, he is thrilled because he can afford the school. Tiffany meets another mom named Lisa, who has two girls enrolled at Anastasias. Lisa introduces Tiffany to her husband, Andrew, whom Tiffany finds stunningly handsome and recognizes.

Chapter 30: The Day of the Barbeque – The novel returns back in time to the day of the barbeque. After food, everyone begins talking about sports. While Oliver is not really a fan, Tiffany genuinely is. The conversation turns toward careers, and Tiffany explains she is a house-flipper. Vid says that, despite his owning an electrician company with thirty electricians, the real money comes from Tiffany. Vid and Tiffany reveal they got together after bidding on the same house –but they had known each other previously.

Chapter 31 – The novel returns to the present. Erika arrives at her mom’s house with cleaning supplies. The house and the hoarding horrify Erika, who believes her mother loves material things more than her. Immediately there is tension between Erika and Sylvia, with Sylvia defensive about her hoarding illness, raising Erika while a single parent, and not being rich. Sylvia also accuses Erika of deliberately not having children so that Sylvia does not get to be a grandmother.

Chapter 32: The Day of the Barbeque – The novel returns to the day of the barbeque. Dakota is annoyed by the adults whispering to each other and lowering their voices like teenagers. Dakota thinks about her parents, and how they denied that Vid had a love affair with Tiffany before Vid had divorced Angelina. Dakota considers herself old enough to know the truth, for she knows about everything that goes on in the news, from ISIS to murder.

Chapter 33 – The novel returns to the present. As the information morning begins, Tiffany wonders if Lisa will wonder about her past with Andrew. Tiffany also thinks about the barbeque, and wonders if she should take the blame for everything. Dakota says she feels sick, so they leave the meeting. Outside, Dakota says Clementine hates her. Vid asks why, but Tiffany already knows why.

Chapter 34 – The novel remains in the present. Clementine goes to a wedding for a music gig for their orchestral group Passing Notes. Kim, first violinist, also acts as manager and tells the group the wedding will still be held outside despite the threat of rain. Clementine thinks of marriage, and wonders if she is at the beginning of a nasty divorce. Vid calls her, but Clementine does not pick up. As the rain intensifies, it becomes apparent the awning meant to protect the musicians will not hold, so Kim tells everyone to pack up. Clementine soon after gets a call from the school secretary,

Helen, who reports that Holly says her stomach is bothering her again. Clementine tells Helen she is ten minutes away.

Chapter 35: The Day of the Barbeque – The novel returns to the past to the day of the barbeque. Tiffany reveals she and Vid met while she was working as a stripper at the age of nineteen. Tiffany's career becomes a subject of fascination. She reveals most of the guys who watched her were not sleazy, but ordinary guys. The conversation is interrupted by another scream.

Chapter 36 – The novel returns to the present. Clementine, now at home with Holly, is surprised to see Sam home early. Sam explains it is the second time Holly has had a stomach issue, so he decided to come home. Clementine reveals Holly is playing them, and that Holly was perfectly fine on the way home. The whole way home, Clementine explains, Holly could only talk about her upcoming party and wanting to invite Dakota. Clementine says she gave in and agreed. Sam opposes this, and says Dakota will not be coming. Clementine insists she will be invited. She asks Sam's opinion on her donating eggs. Sam says it is her choice. Clementine asks Sam about the two of them having a third baby, to which Sam responds with sarcasm and disbelief. Clementine is stung by this, and asks if Sam has seen Holly's strawberry shirt, and wants to know why things keep disappearing.

Analysis

Moriarty continues to weave back and forth through time with her chapters, jumping to the day of the barbeque and then leaping to weeks later. The back-and-forth style of structure continues to fill in pieces of the puzzle step by step, but the pieces remain vague and confused. Her intention is, still, to keep readers hooked in the plot (though some readers may argue that it has gone on for too long) while symbolically reflecting Erika's own inability to recall all of the details of that day. Moriarty's narrator easily crosses the gulf between past and present and ensures that readers also have a fuller understanding of each of the characters involved in the novel. For example, Vid and Tiffany, who were largely peripheral, become central to the plot as it unfolds—especially Tiffany's history as a stripper.

Tiffany's history as a stripper seems both to bother her, and not bother her. As long as she has no real confrontation with the past, Tiffany does not care. Yet when the past appears in the form of Andrew, she suddenly begins to worry if her past will somehow undermine Dakota's schooling (this is a fear she later clearly outlines for Vid). Vid is not very troubled by Tiffany's past as a stripper: their marriage is strong because it is clearly a priority to them, as Moriarty contends. Ironically, despite Tiffany's beauty and stunning body, sex is not all there is to their marriage. But whatever Tiffany's past has to do with being a stripper, it helps prompt her to consider taking all of the blame for whatever happened at the barbeque.

Marriage must be a priority—but clearly the marriage between Sam and Clementine has hit a rough patch, especially after the barbeque. Readers learn that Sam is sleeping in



the study, alone, and not with Clementine in the bedroom. Both appear to have other priorities in life than each other – and this is to their own detriment. It seems the catalyst for their distance can be traced to the barbeque, but as is common so far in the novel, Moriarty is not forthcoming with what occurred at the barbeque to jeopardize a marriage. It is possible that this may have something to do with the egg donation –which Clementine and Sam wrote off as “repulsive.”

Themes of friendship and parenthood become central in this section of the novel. The repulsiveness of what Clementine and Sam consider to be essential for Erika’s life also seems a suitable reason for the downs, rather than the ups, that Clementine and Erika are dealing with in their friendship. Friendship has its ups and downs, Moriarty contends, but this is normal. However, the strength of the language employed used to describe Erika’s request is disheartening in nature, and staggering to Erika personally. Erika’s inability to conceive children –and her seeming desire to be a parent –is brashly countered by Sylvia’s accusations that Erika is deliberately avoiding parenthood so that Sylvia cannot be a grandmother. No parent is perfect, but Sylvia’s accusations are beyond cruel given Erika’s situation. Readers must remind themselves that Sylvia has the mental illness of hoarding, and that her outburst is attributable to that. Erika herself recognizes that no parent is perfect, which is why she struggles to even have a relationship with her mother at all.

Discussion Question 1

How does Tiffany’s time as a stripper affect her marriage to Vid? Why? How does it affect her daily life? Why?

Discussion Question 2

Despite the difficult parent-child relationship that Erika and her mother have, Erika strives to be a part of her mother’s life. Why?

Discussion Question 3

What appears to be a major source of the current coldness between Erika and Clementine (relating to egg donations)? Do you believe Erika is right to be taken aback by this? Why or why not?

Vocabulary

profoundly, nebulous, volatile, exquisite, feckless, incongruously, preposterous, opulence, hedonistic, abate, furtive, torrential, veritable, ubiquitous, inexorable, contributory, negligence, inimitable

Chapters 37 – 58

Summary

Chapter 37: The Day of the Barbeque – The novel returns back in time to the day of the barbeque. It is Holly who is calling for Clementine. As Clementine goes to find her, she thinks about how much about the day has gone crazy –from Erika, never wanting kids, to now wanting them with Clementine’s help to Tiffany having once been a stripper. Holly, as Clementine soon learns, only wanted to show her an exciting game on Dakota’s iPad. Sam appears a moment later, and Clementine thinks about how sex with him has become boring and almost seemingly inappropriate because they are parents.

Chapter 38: The Day of the Barbeque – The novel remains in the past on the day of the barbeque. Oliver asks Erika if she is okay because she is drinking more than usual. Erika is angered by this but then remembers Oliver’s parents are both alcoholics. Harry calls Vid, but Vid ignores the call because Harry has kicked Barney. Tiffany urges Vid to answer, but Vid refuses. Tiffany answers instead, and learns Harry is bothered by the loud music. Sam explains he and Clementine met when Clementine’s quartet, Passing Notes, played at his friend’s wedding. Ruby appears to tell her mother she is tired and cold. Clementine puts on Ruby’s coat, selected by Clementine’s mother and Erika sometime before. It is decided they will leave after dessert. Oliver then directs everyone’s attention to a tree, where he asks if he sees a possum.

Chapter 39 – The novel returns to the present. Vid and Tiffany have returned home. Tiffany is still saddened by Dakota’s confession on the ride home. Tiffany asks for Vid’s help in opening a jar of chocolate almonds brought over by Erika for the barbeque. Thoughts of Erika disturb Vid, which causes Tiffany to ask if Vid has gotten through to Clementine. Vid explains she has not called back. Tiffany tells Vid that Clementine liked him a lot, which is part of the problem. Vid struggles with the lid, drops the jar, and the glass shatters everywhere.

Chapter 40: The Day of the Barbeque – The novel steps back in time to the day of the barbeque. Oliver holds Holly up to see the possum, which makes Clementine realize that Oliver will be a good father. It makes her wonder if she really could donate eggs, and force herself to forget that their child would biologically be hers. Clementine also considers that Erika has been drinking more than usual. Dakota, meanwhile, has disappeared. Tiffany explains it is because she is probably reading, as Dakota has been on a reading kick lately. The conversation turns to Clementine’s work, which causes Clementine to reflect on how she first heard the cello at school, and how it was Erika who encouraged her to play. When the conversation turns to parents, Erika says Clementine did not have a choice but to be friends with her because Clementine’s mother more or less adopted her because of her poor home environment.

Chapter 41 – The novel returns to the present. Erika sees her psychologist, Marilyn. Erika thinks she looks more like a Pat than a Marilyn, so Erika refers to Marilyn as “Not-



Pat” in her mind. Erika begins by saying that whenever she is invited over to someone’s place, she brings a jar of chocolate almonds. It is an act learned from Clementine’s mother. Erika reveals she has gone through IVF –unknown to Marilyn. Erika mentions Harry’s death, then talks about the egg request made of Clementine. Erika also reveals her medication and the alcohol at the barbeque mixed badly, causing her to be unable to remember things. Marilyn says it is possible something might trigger the memories. Erika recalls how she was essentially adopted into Clementine’s family, but that Clementine was not happy about it.

Chapter 42: The Day of the Barbeque – The novel returns to the day of the barbeque. Clementine realizes Erika is drunk and on the dangerous verge of revealing secrets. She suddenly goes to the bathroom. Tiffany takes the blame for filling Erika’s glass one too many times. Vid brings out the dessert – cremeschnitte, a Chantilly-and-custard crème cake. Oliver excuses himself to use the restroom. Clementine realizes she and Sam are getting along well with Tiffany and Vid, and that they make their friendship with Oliver and Erika easier. Clementine asks Tiffany if she did lap dances at the club. Tiffany explains she did, and asks if Clementine wants one.

Chapter 43 – The novel returns to the present. Sam thinks he and Clementine keep too many things and need to de-clutter the house so that they will be able to find things they lose more easily. One of Holly’s drawers is stuck shut, so Sam wrenches it out. He becomes angry, urging Clementine to remember what he was doing just before “it” happened at the barbeque. Clementine acknowledges he was trying to open a jar of nuts. Sam explains he was desperate to open the jar because he knew Vid could have done it easily, and because he saw the way Clementine looked at Vid. Clementine counters that Sam was doing it just to impress Tiffany. Clementine says they were all doing it.

Chapter 44: The Day of the Barbeque – The novel returns to the past, to the day of the barbeque. Tiffany’s offer of a lap dance causes her excitement. Clementine tries to decline humorously by insisting the music isn’t right, but Vid insists, saying Tiffany is adaptable. Sam even encourages it. Tiffany moves around sexually but knows in her mind she would never do a lap dance with kids around. Suddenly there is a crashing sound, and Clementine’s name is screamed.

Chapter 45 – The novel returns to the present. The police visit with Oliver and Erika to follow up on Harry’s death. Oliver confirms the last day he saw Harry was the day before the barbeque.

Chapter 46: The Day of the Barbeque – The novel steps back in time to the day of the barbeque. Oliver uses the bathroom, then washes his hands. He has the overwhelming urge to bring Erika home and let her sleep her drunkenness off so his normal wife will come back. It brings up bad memories of his alcoholic parents. He then hears Erika scream Clementine’s name.



Chapter 47: The Day of the Barbeque – The novel remains in the past on the day of the barbeque. Clementine rushes toward the fountain that Erika is also rushing toward. Erika and Oliver jump into the fountain, and lift up Ruby.

Chapter 48: The Day of the Barbeque – The novel remains in the past on the day of the barbeque. Oliver lays Ruby on the ground, ignoring Clementine's gestures to give her Ruby. An ambulance is called while Oliver and Erika administer CPR. Clementine is terrified.

Chapter 49: The Day of the Barbeque – The novel remains in the past on the day of the barbeque. Oliver continues to administer CPR. Ruby coughs up water. Erika and Oliver turn Ruby onto her side, and she begins throwing up water.

Chapter 50 – The novel returns to the present. Erika tells her psychologist she does not wish to talk about Clementine anymore. Instead, she relates the story of Ruby's almost-drowning. Marilyn asks Erika why she is so obsessed with the day of the barbeque. Erika says it is because she feels she has forgotten something important. The feeling that there is a feeling that she has forgotten something annoys and disturbs her. Marilyn suggests that this is perhaps because a part of Erika doesn't actually want to remember it. She suggests returning to the scene of the accident to try to trigger the memories. The session ends, and Erika considers returning to Vid's backyard.

Chapter 51: The Day of the Barbeque – The novel steps back into the past to the day of the barbeque. The ambulance arrives and the paramedics rush to see Ruby. Ruby is examined and questions are asked. A police officer also arrives to ask questions, which is explained as routine for an incident of this kind. A rescue helicopter is also on the way, which is also explained as routine for such an event.

Chapter 52 – The novel returns to the present. Sam and Clementine acknowledge they were all doing it the day of the barbeque. Sam says all their behavior was disgusting. Clementine says what happened was bad luck. Sam explodes in anger, saying it was their negligence that almost got Ruby killed. Sam says he should have known he could not depend on Clementine. Clementine mocks Sam. Sam then unveils the subject of potentially martially separating.

Chapter 53: The Day of the Barbeque – The novel steps back to the day of the barbeque. Tiffany speaks with a police officer about what happened. The officer explains that children drown in plain sight, most often because of lack of parental supervision. The helicopter's arrival brings Dakota out of the house. Dakota asks what is going on, so Tiffany explains. She sees Vid talking to a police officer as well. Vid has a police phobia, so Tiffany sends Dakota into the house, saying she is needed by Daddy.

Chapter 54 – The novel returns to the present. Tiffany calls out to Dakota that everything is okay, that Daddy has merely dropped a jar. Dakota doesn't care. Tiffany realizes now why Dakota has been acting so strangely, blaming herself for what happened. Tiffany explains Dakota thinks Clementine is mad at her because Dakota

was “in charge” of the kids and was not watching Ruby when Ruby went into the fountain.

Tiffany reveals to Vid that she saw one of her ex-customers at the school that morning (Andrew). Tiffany explains she never slept with any of her customers, but worries that Andrew may tell his wife or someone else about seeing her with Dakota at the school. She worries it will negatively affect Dakota, perhaps even leading to bullying from the other kids. Vid does his best to reassure Tiffany. He turns to the day of the barbeque, saying he wishes none of it had ever happened. Tiffany thinks about the speeding ticket she got rushing Clementine to the hospital. She then tells her husband they are going out.

Chapter 55: The Day of the Barbeque – The novel returns to the day of the barbeque. Oliver and Erika are to take care of Holly while Clementine is driven to the hospital by Tiffany. Clementine wonders how she could have let Sam go with Ruby in the helicopter. Erika tells her to snap out of it, saying it doesn't matter.

Chapter 56 – The novel returns to the present. Erika tells Oliver she is going next door for just a moment to attempt to jog her memory. She begins to recall memories of the barbeque, but then realizes the fountain has been torn out, with a concrete slab now in its place.

Chapter 57 – Clementine follows Sam into their bedroom, asking him if he is serious about separation. Sam says he is probably not. Sam apologizes for having said it. Sam says he is upset about the idea of Dakota coming to the party, because her parents are not their kind of people. Clementine says they are good people, but Sam does not believe so. He says he will have to live with the barbeque for the rest of his life. Clementine tries to defend Tiffany, but Sam does not want to hear it. Clementine realizes just how tangled and messed up their marriage has become.

Chapter 58: The Day of the Barbeque – The novel steps back to the past to the day of the barbeque. Tiffany drives Clementine toward Westmead Children's Hospital. Tiffany begins to apologize, but Clementine says what happened was her fault. Clementine begins to panic, but Tiffany calms her, urging her to breathe slowly. They get stuck in traffic, which enrages Clementine, who only wants to get to the hospital to be with Ruby. She continues to resent Sam taking the helicopter ride with Ruby. Clementine tries to distract herself by asking Tiffany to talk about anything other than what is going on. Clementine does not wait for Tiffany to ask, but begins talking about her upcoming audition. Tiffany says she had to audition for her job at the strip club as well. Clementine begs Tiffany to talk about her stripper days, so she does. Finally, the traffic breaks up, and Tiffany and Clementine arrive at the hospital.

Analysis

Moriarty continues to jump back and forth through time with her novel –but it is finally in this section of the novel –specifically Page 232 of Chapter 47 –that Moriarty finally



reveals the barbeque incident that compelled the event to become a catalyst of change: Ruby's near-drowning. While the details surrounding the actual near-drowning –such as how Ruby went into the fountain at all –remain unclear but consistent with Moriarty's structural formula, immediate events are very clear. It was Erika and Oliver who rescued Ruby while Sam and Clementine, arriving on the scene second, felt as if they should have done more. This would in turn explain why they have come to blame each other for the near tragedy, because they could not do enough themselves (this will later be made apparent by Moriarty in her fleshing out of the guilt of Sam and Clementine with respect to what happened).

Parenthood is a beautiful thing, but no parent is perfect. This is clearly the case as Ruby went into the fountain, obviously unsupervised. While Oliver is in the bathroom and Erika is leaving the kitchen, the other four –all parents –are sexually distracted, with Tiffany leading the way. Readers will recall Tiffany considering taking the blame for the entire affair of the barbeque –and this is why. Readers should note that there is great irony in the two non-parents being the ones to save the life of a child of other parents. This only adds to the misery that Sam and Clementine feel. Clementine realizes her marriage, rather than being a priority, has become a jumbled mess. Sam has even threatened separation, but quickly reneges on this.

For them, parenthood is no longer a question of being perfect, but of even being competent. To have their daughter almost drown when they should have been watching her is something they cannot console themselves about, and so they lash out at each other. As one of the attending police officers note, most kids drown in plain sight. Sam himself goes to say that their behavior the day of the barbeque was disgusting, that they should have been watching the kids. Erika and Oliver seemed to be more like parents than they did, as they were behaving like irresponsible teenagers regarding the fountain incident. (Readers should note that the fountain represents the recalling of the past and of truth. Vid destroys the fountain not only to avoid remembering that day, but to ensure no such accident can happen again.)

Oddly enough, readers will note, although Clementine is grateful for the action of Sam and Erika in saving Holly, that there is any kind of distance at all between Clementine and Erika is strange. Erika has not blamed anything on Clementine; and if Clementine has withdrawn from Erika in humiliation, it should have easily been overcome by their friendship and Clementine's knowledge that people –including parents –make mistakes. However, there is a growing distance between them. Clementine is less humiliated by Erika's quick response to the Ruby situation than Clementine is actually resentful of Erika for a number of things (some already discussed, some yet to be discussed by the novel).

Discussion Question 1

What was the barbeque incident which allowed the barbeque to become a catalyst for change? What immediate effect does it have on all those present?



Discussion Question 2

At this point in the novel, what is a reasonable explanation for Clementine's reaction toward Erika saving Ruby? Why does their friendship cool rather than warm over Erika saving Ruby's life?

Discussion Question 3

Do you believe Sam's blaming of Clementine is justified at all? Why or why not? Do you believe his assertion that their behavior, as a whole, acting like teenagers, was disgusting? Why or why not?

Vocabulary

conspiratorially, morosely, refutations, truculent, frisson, magnificently, formidable

Chapters 59 – 76

Summary

Chapter 59 – The novel returns to the present. Oliver asks if Erika remembers anything upon her return home. Erika explains she has not, and that the fountain has been removed. Erika explains she has typed up everything she does and does not remember. Erika explains she remembers coming out of the house holding plates, and then the next thing she knew, she was in the fountain with Oliver. Oliver fills in the gaps for her: she dropped the plates and ran to help save Ruby. Erika cannot understand why she cannot remember. Oliver ascribes it to alcohol and medication. He tells her to let it go. Erika tells him he is right. Erika then reveals her mother's hoarding is the worst it has been in a while and that the neighbor wants to sell but her property value is in jeopardy because of Erika's mother's hoarding. Erika reflects on how Oliver's careful planning has led to the once-a-month visits, otherwise Erika would be beside herself.

Erika also reflects on how it was Oliver who insisted she get therapy to help deal with her reactions to her mother. Erika also reflects on how she wanted to be a mother to give her own child a normal kind of life. She then reveals to Oliver that Clementine has agreed to donate eggs. Oliver only wants Clementine to donate the eggs if she actually wants to do it. Oliver explains they'll be parents one way or another. Erika reassures Oliver that she, like he, wants to have children. Clementine then notices that Holly has left her rock bag at their house. Oliver explains it is because Holly does not want it anymore.

Chapter 60: The Day of the Barbeque – The novel steps back in time to the day of the barbeque. Holly and Erika sit on the couch while Holly considers her bag of rocks. Oliver makes hot chocolate while Holly asks if Ruby is dead. Erika says Ruby might die, which prompts a quick response from Oliver, telling her to stop. Erika falls asleep soon after. Oliver asks Holly if she wants him to keep her rocks somewhere safe. She begins whispering in his ear.

Chapter 61: The Day of the Barbeque – Clementine meets her parents and parents-in-law at the hospital as they arrive. Clementine reports that Ruby is alive. All scans and X-Rays reveal everything to be good. Pam slams Clementine for not paying better attention, but Clementine's father intervenes. Clementine realizes her mother considers Erika the perfect daughter, and believes Erika would never have made such a mistake. Clementine's father and Sam's parents reassure Clementine, telling her Pam is only reacting from the shock of the situation.

Chapter 62: The Morning after the Barbeque – The novel remains in the past, but advances to the morning after the barbeque. Sam and Clementine have spent the night in Ruby's room. Upon awakening, Ruby demands to see Whisk. Sam and Clementine are relieved, but their looks at each other are full of coldness and blame.

Chapter 63 – The novel returns to the present. Sam finishes preparing dinner, the discussion of the separation already gone. Holly is not happy that Sam has prepared shepherd's pie. Holly says she does not like the taste and has an upset tummy. Clementine knows better. Ruby laughs as she listens to the entire discussion. Clementine thinks about how the only person behaving normally anymore is Ruby, who wants to be done with the past. She has experienced no trauma or anything negative relating to the experience. Sam gets fed up, and takes away the girls' dishes. He then offers them ice cream for dinner. Clementine is unhappy about this and protests, but Sam gets the ice cream anyways. He says they must live for the day. He asks where the polar bear ice cream scoop is, but Clementine says it is lost like everything else.

Chapter 64: The Morning after the Barbeque – The novel steps back in time to the morning after the barbeque. Dakota blames herself for Ruby almost drowning because Dakota got bored with Ruby and went to do something else. She hears banging outside. Looking through her window, she sees her dad breaking apart the fountain.

Chapter 65 – The novel returns to the present. Vid and Dakota are passengers in the car Tiffany is driving, waiting to see where she is taking them. Tiffany says they will only be making a quick visit. Vid realizes where they are headed, and decides to call a restaurant to make a reservation. They arrive at Sam and Clementine's place. Tiffany confirms to Vid that Sam and Clementine do not know they are coming. Holly answers the door when Tiffany knocks, and immediately says she wants Dakota to come to her birthday party. Tiffany explains to Sam when he appears at the door that she and the family were in the area for dinner and she thought she'd drop by. Clementine appears at the door, apologetic for not answering any calls. Tiffany cuts to the chase, saying she knows Clementine has not returned any calls because she does not want to remember the day. Tiffany says she understands. Tiffany reveals that Dakota has been blaming herself for what happened, and Clementine is saddened by this. Tiffany says Dakota needs to see Ruby is okay. Ruby runs up, and Tiffany gets down to see her. Tiffany says Ruby looks great. Clementine tells Tiffany to bring Vid and Dakota inside.

Chapter 66 – The novel remains in the present. After the visit of Tiffany and her family, Clementine feels cheerful but Sam is angered. The next morning, Clementine heads out to do her talk at the Hills District Retirees Association, but there has been a mix-up. The association was expecting Clementine the cellist to perform the cello, not give the talk "One Ordinary Day." Still, Clementine goes on ahead, having converted the events of the barbeque into a story to relate facts and figures and the need to take good care of children. It was Pam who first suggested Clementine use the events of the day to do good by way of a story. After the talk, a man approaches Clementine to tell her his grandson would have been thirty-two that weekend if he had survived past childhood. The man tells Clementine she is doing a good thing. He explains his grandson's name was Tom, and his death destroyed his daughter's marriage. Clementine worries her own marriage will not survive.

Chapter 67 – The novel remains in the present. After the visit to Ruby, Dakota begins to read again. This makes Vid and Tiffany both very happy. Vid and Tiffany talk about the visit. Vid finds Sam and Clementine to be strange and too quiet. Tiffany says she

believes they blame themselves for what happened. Tiffany reflects graciously on how Clementine made sure to tell Dakota that what happened was not Dakota's fault. A young man in his twenties comes to the door. The man introduces himself as Steven Lunt, the great-nephew of Harry. Steven explains he and his mother were Harry's only relatives, and did what they could to keep in touch. He tells Tiffany that Harry went so far as to call her "nice enough" which makes Tiffany very happy.

Chapter 68 – The novel remains in the present. Erika and Oliver prepare to head out to pick up Sylvia for a large dinner. Things are progressing toward egg donation, which makes Erika happy. At Sylvia's house, Oliver considers that they perhaps need to have professionals handle Sylvia's hoarding while they get Sylvia out of the house for dinner. Erika says they will work on it. Sylvia congratulates Oliver and Erika on saving Ruby's life. But Sylvia becomes enraged when she learns about the egg donation process underway. She insists her grandchild will actually be Pam's grandchild. Sylvia calls it all unnatural, and says Pam has horrible ears.

Chapter 69 – The novel remains in the present. At dinner, Pam gives a speech to everyone present (consisting of family members and friends), thanking Oliver and Erika for saving Ruby. A toast is made, during which time Holly smashes her glass against Sam's, causing the glass to shatter. Sam becomes angry and shouts at Holly, telling her she has done a stupid thing. Sam realizes his hand is cut, and storms out while Oliver begins collecting the pieces of glass. Awkwardness follows. Clementine's dad, Martin, asks about Sam. Clementine chalks his stress up to his new job. She admits they also blame each other for Ruby's accident. Martin says this is called being married. Martin contends that Sam is not right in the head. Pam says she has been saying this for weeks.

Chapter 70 – The novel remains in the present. Tiffany heads to the Saint Anastasias store to buy a school uniform for Dakota when she runs into Andrew's wife, Lisa. Lisa reveals that her family will be in Dubai on business for five years, so her daughter will not be attending Anastasias. Lisa gives Tiffany the uniforms she has purchased for her daughter, for Dakota instead. Tiffany reflects on how she dated Andrew and ultimately slept with him for a hundred-thousand dollars and used the money to lay the foundation for her house flipping business. Watching Lisa drive away, Tiffany realizes she now has a second chance in life. She also feels shame, wondering if Andrew's decision to go to Dubai had to do with encountering her at the school.

Chapter 71 – The novel remains in the present. Oliver and Erika get a roof leak in the storeroom where they keep their outdoor gear, such as skis. Oliver confronts Erika about a suitcase he has found in the storeroom, full of items belonging to Clementine, Holly, and Ruby. Oliver asks why. Erika writes it off as a habit or compulsion. Oliver insists it must all be given back. Erika begins to cry, believing Oliver will leave her. Erika goes on to say Clementine is not so great, and she reveals what she overheard Sam and Clementine say upstairs the day of the barbeque. She says she was embarrassed because her best friend thought of her in such a way. Oliver tells Erika he is her best friend.



Chapter 72 – The novel remains in the present. Clementine and Erika finally get together. Clementine apologizes for the chaos at dinner the other night. Erika admits she and Oliver no longer want to receive the egg donation. Clementine cannot understand why, and asks why. Erika says Oliver wants to look at other options for personal reasons. Erika explains she does not really want a baby, but that Oliver does – and she will remain by his side and loyal to see his dream come true for their marriage. Erika's marriage is a priority for Erika. Erika reminds Clementine she will now be able to focus on her music. Clementine realizes this is true.

Chapter 73 – The novel remains in the present. Holly, Sam, and Ruby go see a Pixar movie. Sam thinks about how he is becoming more and more of a shouter, like his father. He also senses a new impatience and brittleness in Clementine. Sam thinks about how, when he was younger, he believed his sexual compatibility with Clementine would gloss over all other differences. He worries about his sex life now with Clementine. He also thinks about how he cannot get the image of Erika and Oliver saving Ruby out of his mind. His thoughts are interrupted by Holly who complains Sam has eaten all the popcorn. He tries to quiet her down, but she throws the empty popcorn tub into the aisle. Sam then gets up and brings his children from the theater. Holly and Ruby must realize, he thinks, that life has consequences.

Chapter 74 – The novel remains in the present. Oliver goes for a run in the rain. He notices many new cars in the neighborhood, meaning Vid and Tiffany must be entertaining. He uses the run to think, trying to wrap his mind around Erika's thieving, and how he and Erika may move forward with becoming parents. As he runs, Erika drives by and urges him into the car. She puts her face against the palm of his hand.

Chapter 75 – The novel remains in the present. Vid has thrown a party just for the heck of it. His four older daughters are present and being kind toward him, even though it is because the three older ones all want something from him (Adrianna wants to do a choreographed dance with him at her wedding; Eva and Elena want money). Dakota wants nothing. Even Tiffany is warmer and more sexual toward him. He correctly assumes that Tiffany slept with the client she saw at the school. He is happy to know the client will be in Dubai for years. When Dakota wanders into the kitchen, Vid happily picks her up and spins her around.

Chapter 76 – The novel remains in the present. Clementine wakes up to sunshine. The rain has finally stopped. Clementine wants to spend the day in the sun, but knows she and Sam are booked to do a first aid class at the local high school. Sam wants to skip, but Clementine will not let him.

Analysis

Moriarty, though having revealed Ruby's near-drowning at the barbeque to be a catalyst for change, continues to withhold two other important points from the reader. First, Erika continues to struggle to recall her memory regarding the say of the barbeque, and the time surrounding Ruby's going into the fountain, and her rescue. Second is how Ruby



ended up in the fountain at all in the first place. These questions continue to dominate Erika in particular, as the incident itself –in and of itself –is settled for everyone else, and what they do from now on becomes key. At the same time, readers once again learn of the fate of Holly's bag of rocks: she does not want it anymore, despite a near-obsession with wanting to collect rocks early in the novel. The reason why ties into Ruby's accident, but will not become known until the end of the novel when Clementine's parents discover the truth.

No parent is perfect, Moriarty continues to argue –but Clementine and her own mother think otherwise. Ruby nearly drowned –this much is certain and this much is settled. But why and what must happen next is not. Pam, like Sam, slams Clementine, putting her on the line for Ruby's near-demise. This troubles Clementine greatly, who is still beside herself blaming herself for what almost happened to Ruby. Importantly, however, Vid and Tiffany make peace with Sam and Clementine, especially for the sake of Dakota, who has tragically been blaming herself for what happened. Making peace with the past brings Vid and Tiffany closer together, and their marriage becomes even stronger as a result of acknowledging the past and moving beyond it. Vid and Tiffany recognize that the other is human, and that marriage does not mask that humanity. Instead, marriage strengthens humanity and causes a deeper respect for human individuality. Vid can accept that Tiffany was a stripper, for example, because that is not all she was or ever will be. This is strengthened through their marriage.

Sam and Clementine remain at odds, however, continuing to jeopardize their marriage based on their individual pride and sense of failed responsibility for what happened the day of the barbeque. This is only compounded by the praise Pam gives to Erika –and it is revealed that Erika was forced into friendship with Clementine because Pam wanted to take care of Erika in ways she believed Sylvia could not. Additionally, whereas marriage has been a priority for Vid and Tiffany, and is a priority for Erika and Oliver (he refuses to give her up regarding her hoarding of things from Clementine and the children –he values loyalty and love above all else) –it has not been a priority for Sam and Clementine. This much will become clear to them in time. Readers should note that life has consequences, just like Sam seeks to instruct his children to accept –and Sam himself is responsible for the consequences of his own life choices. This includes seeking to be a better man than he was the day of the barbeque.

Discussion Question 1

How do Vid, Tiffany, Oliver, and Erika begin to make peace with the events of the barbeque? Why? Why are Sam and Clementine unable to do so?

Discussion Question 2

Explain how the events at the barbeque bring healing to the marriage of Vid and Tiffany, as well as to the marriage of Oliver and Erika.



Discussion Question 3

How does Erika seek to make her marriage a priority in her life? Is she right to do so, even at the expense of her own position on children (or on any issue, for that matter)? Explain your reasoning.

Vocabulary

agitation, insouciance, travesties, ominous, contorted, paroxysm, robustly, reticent, compulsion, pilfering, infinitesimal, traipsing, solemnly

Chapters 77 – 89

Summary

Chapter 77 – The novel remains in the present. Oliver and Erika stand in her mother's front yard. Sylvia meets them outside, and blames the hoarding mess on the rain. Oliver and Erika reveal to Sylvia they will no longer be using Clementine as an egg donor. Sylvia claims to be crushed by the news. A garbage dumpster is delivered, and Oliver and Erika get to work cleaning up the yard. Almost everything they throw out is an argument with Sylvia, but they make slow progress. As the sunlight warms Erika's face, she suddenly remembers everything.

Chapter 78: The Day of the Barbeque – Erika holds plates Vid has given her to bring outside. The plates are beautiful, and Erika has an urge to keep them. Erika watches Holly and Ruby playing in the yard. She realizes no adults are watching the kids. She becomes lost in thought thinking about her mother and hoarding. She hears a loud knocking, and looks up at Harry's house to see him pointing through his window toward the fountain. When Erika looks over, she sees Ruby has gone into the fountain. She drops the plates, screams, and runs for the fountain.

Chapter 79 – The novel returns to the present. Sam and Clementine go to the high school to take the first aid class. A number of different experts and instructors walk Sam, Clementine, and others through the first aid course. When it comes to practicing CPR, Sam freezes, obviously overcome by memories of the barbeque. Sam commences practicing, begins crying, and leaves the room. Clementine wonders if she has ever truly seen or loved her husband as a real person, which he clearly is.

Chapter 80 – The novel remains in the present. Clementine goes to check on Sam. She finds him in a glass hallway, sitting on the floor and crying. Sam explains what has happened, but Clementine says she already knows what he was reminded of. Sam admits he feels horrible that it was another man, and not him, who saved Ruby. Clementine reassures him it is only because someone else got there first. Sam explains he will have to find a way to let the past go. Clementine thinks Sam has post-traumatic stress from the event, and encourages him to seek therapy. She and Sam then apologize to one another.

Chapter 81 – Oliver is amazed to learn that Harry, essentially, saved Ruby's life. Erika worries that no one ever thanked him for what he did before he died. She feels like she should tell Clementine, but Oliver tells her she cannot tell Clementine.

Chapter 82 – Dakota is thrilled it has stopped raining. Tiffany decides the family will walk Barney to the bushwalk through a national park. Steve runs out of Harry's house to say hello and to give Dakota an antique globe for her bedroom. Steve explains to Tiffany and Vid that it appears the globe belonged to Harry's son before he died, for the globe was found in his bedroom, which appeared not to have been touched since the kid died.



Steve says he and his mom took pictures before disassembling everything. He notes there was even a book on the bed, open and face-down. Tiffany is deeply touched by this all.

Chapter 83: The Day of the Barbeque – The novel now shifts back in time to the day of the barbeque. It is now an effort for Harry to climb his stairs, which makes him angry because he used to be so strong and so healthy. Despite this, he knows his mind is still sharp. He hears music coming from the neighbor's, and thinks about how Dakota reminds him of his son, Jamie. It angers him. In Jamie's room, Harry looks down at the backyard next door and sees two little girls (Holly and Ruby) running around without supervision. He reflects sadly and angrily on the death of his wife, Elizabeth, and Jamie, both killed in a freak amusement park ride accident. When he sees the littler of the two girls go into the fountain, he bangs frantically on the glass to get Erika to move to save her, but Erika is not moving. Harry rushes from the bedroom to save the girl himself, but he trips and falls down the stairs instead.

Chapter 84 – The novel returns to the present. Sam walks home from the ferry he takes to go to work. It is a beautiful day. He feels better as he has been going to therapy. As he comes to a street crossing, a woman's stroller with a baby inside begins to roll toward traffic as she tries to deal with her other child, a toddler. Sam grabs it just in time. The woman is stunned and beyond grateful, but Sam merely tells her to have a good night and continues on.

Chapter 85 – The novel remains in the present. Oliver and Erika go swimming during their lunch break. Oliver has seemed more optimistic and feisty lately. Their sex life has been reinvigorated, but Erika does not know why. She enjoys it, however. Oliver suggests they foster kids rather than try to have a baby or adopt a baby. It will be tough, Oliver admits, but Erika says it might be great. Oliver agrees.

Chapter 86 – The novel remains in the present. Sam drives Clementine to her audition. Holly has returned to normal, just like Ruby, which makes both Sam and Clementine very happy. As they drive to the audition, Clementine talks about how Erika has made her marriage a priority. Clementine tells Sam she wants to do the same, so if Sam wants a third child, she should be at least willing to discuss it. Sam says he is not thinking about babies at the moment, but all behind Clementine and getting the audition. Sam says he no longer will be sleeping in the study. He also goes on to say he chooses his marriage.

Chapter 87 – The novel remains in the present. As Clementine sits down to audition, she touches the little stickers Holly placed on her shirt for good luck. Clementine now places her mind fully on the music, and lets herself go.

Chapter 88: The Night of the Barbeque – The novel returns to the past, to the night of the barbeque. Martin and Pam arrive in front of Erika and Oliver's house to pick up Holly. Martin tells Pam she was too hard on Clementine at the hospital. Oliver lets them inside. He volunteers to grab Holly's rock collection, but Holly reminds him she does not want it. Holly asks her grandparents if Ruby is dead. They tell her she is not. Holly asks



if her parents are angry with her. Her grandparents ask why. Holly explains it is because she pushed Ruby because she took her rocks. Holly explains she told Oliver, who promised never to tell anyone. Pam tells Holly that it was doubtful Ruby fell into the fountain because Holly pushed her. Pam says Ruby must have slipped. Her anger towards Clementine, however, fades.

Chapter 89: Four Months After the Barbeque – The novel now steps ahead in time. Erika and Oliver have taken leaves-of-absence from work to travel the world before coming home to be foster parents. Clementine receives a letter from Erika in the mail. In the past four months, their friendship has cooled. The letter includes a photo of them on a roller coaster ride. The letter also congratulates Clementine on landing the job with the orchestra.

Analysis

At long last, the final pieces of Moriarty's puzzle are put in place. The two outstanding mysteries –Erika's memories and how Ruby ended up in the fountain –are finally answered, along with revealing why Harry died and why the rock collection was so important. As it turns out, Harry saw Ruby go into the fountain. It was Harry who alerted the drunken Erika to this –and Harry died in the attempt to rush out to save Ruby. It is a tragedy of the highest order that Harry should give his life trying to save the child of another, especially given that his own wife and child died many years before in a tragic accident. As readers learn, the truth of how Ruby ended up in the fountain is symbolized in the rock collection: Ruby took it from Holly, which made Holly angry, and which made Holly respond by pushing Ruby into the fountain. The truth is critical to Erika's being able to move on.

The truth is also critical for the purposes of marriage. Clementine realizes that she has been blaming Sam too much for things, and has been failing to see him as a person who is just as in need of love and respect as she is. She realizes this when Sam breaks down in tears at the CPR class, and resolves, like Sam, to put her marriage first. Sam will no longer sleep in the study, and the two will work together with their marriage and children having the priority spots in their life. Sam himself finds redemption in saving the life of the baby in the stroller –something he feels wonderful about, but humbly dismisses in real life to the mother. This is the growth and strength needed –the goodness that comes from near tragedy.

Meanwhile, Erika, ready to do whatever she must to have kids to make Oliver happy, has her love and loyalty reciprocated by Oliver who recognizes her as her own person in the marriage. The two decide to foster kids as a kind of compromise. They will have family, but it will not require the same process as before. Friendship and marriage improve in light of the truth. The final note to the novel comes by way of a brief letter and photograph sent to Clementine by Erika. The photo, featuring Erika and Clementine on a roller coaster as teens, symbolically demonstrates that life and friendship will have their ups and downs. However, things are beginning to look up again. Indeed, the symbolic clearing of the weather from stormy rain to sunlight reinforces this idea as well.



Discussion Question 1

What is the truth behind Ruby's going into the fountain? How does Erika first become aware of this? Why does this trouble her? Should it trouble her? Explain your reasoning.

Discussion Question 2

Despite Oliver's desire to have children, he chooses to change how he wants to proceed. Why does he do this?

Discussion Question 3

How do Sam and Clementine begin to repair their marriage? Why is this so important for their marriage? Why does it matter so much to Sam and Clementine as individuals?

Vocabulary

insufferable, powerhouse, diligently, post-traumatic stress, rapturously, exorbitant, fluidly

Characters

Clementine

Clementine is the wife of Sam, mother of Holly and Ruby, and the best friend of Erika. Clementine is also a professional cellist. For much of the novel, Clementine is distracted, angry, and sad. Clementine is horrified by the near-death of Ruby, blaming herself internally while outwardly casting blame on Sam for what happened.

While Clementine is struggling to fix her chilled marriage to Sam, she is dealing with Erika's request that Clementine donate eggs. By the close of the novel, Clementine acknowledges that she has been unfairly blaming Sam and not recognizing him as a person. The two begin to repair their marriage and move beyond the Ruby.

Erika

Erika is the wife of Oliver. Haunted by her own upbringing to a hoarder mother, Sylvia, Erika has vowed to give her own future child a better life. Erika is not keen on having children. However, since she is so in love with her husband who wants children, she is willing to have a child.

Erika spends much of the novel confused and forgetful, as she cannot recall all of the details of the night she and Oliver saved Ruby's life. Unintentionally, Ruby had mixed alcohol with her medicine.

It was Erika who had accepted Vid's invitation to a barbeque, which set the stage for the plot of the novel. It was also Erika who, through Oliver, sought egg donations from Clementine. Erika's desire to be a parent is the reason for her friendship with Clementine. The saving of Ruby causes a temporary chill in the friendship with Clementine, which begins to heal by the end of the novel.

Sam

Sam, a marketing manager, is the husband of Clementine and the father of Holly and Ruby. Quite the traditional husband and father, Sam is dismayed that most of the time his wife forgets he is a human being with feelings. Though Sam unjustly blames Clementine for the Ruby incident, he blames himself more. Thus, Sam spends much of the novel struggling to keep on top of his feelings. Eventually, he breaks down. At this point, his wife accepts that he is a human being, too.

Sam and Clementine begin to repair their ruptured marriage. Sam also achieves a kind of redemption at the end of the novel when he stops a baby in a stroller from rolling into traffic.



Oliver

Oliver is the husband of Erika. In his professional life, he is an accountant. Kind, quiet, and moral, Oliver is considered by Erika to be the best possible husband anyone could have. Oliver loves Erika deeply, and he protects and guides her as they share life's burdens.

Oliver is not thrilled about Erika accepting the invitation to the barbeque given their desire to ask Clementine about egg donation. However, he never criticizes his wife. The decision to go turns out to be a life-changing one because Oliver and Erika save Ruby from the near-drowning incident.

Oliver's and Erika's marriage grows stronger through the novel, ultimately leading them to foster rather than have their own children. Fostering is a good compromise because Oliver sees Erika as her own person, and his marriage to her means so much to him.

Vid

Vid is the husband of Tiffany and the father of Dakota. Vid is also the father of three teenage girls from his previous marriage. Though, Vid is much older than Tiffany, he is deeply in love with her and devoted to Dakota. It was Vid's idea to have a barbeque which led to Ruby's near-drowning. After the incident, he destroys the backyard fountain to erase the memory of that day. He wants to make sure that the horror will never be repeated.

Tiffany

Tiffany is wife of Vid and the mother of Dakota. Much younger than Vid, Tiffany worked as a stripper from the age of nineteen through her early twenties. Still very much gorgeous and very much in shape, Tiffany has put her past behind her to be a wife and mother. She takes great pride in her roles.

Tiffany also works as a real estate flipper, which proves to be the larger source of income for the family between herself and her husband. Tiffany feels at fault for bringing sexuality to the evening, as it distracted many of the adults from watching the kids. In the end, she accepts she is not at fault. Tiffany becomes the peacemaker between her family and Clementine's family.

Holly

Holly is the older daughter of Clementine and Sam and the older sister of Ruby. Holly is a generally sweet and obedient kid who obsesses over rocks and her rock collection. At the barbeque, when Ruby takes Holly's rock collection, Holly angrily responds by

pushing Ruby into the pool. As a result, Holly feels very guilty and spends most of the novel lashing out because she feels so guilty.

Harry

Harry is the elderly neighbor of Erika and Oliver, as well as Vid and Tiffany. Harry seems to be the stereotypical neighborhood grouch, for he seems old and unkind. In reality, Harry is simply haunted by the tragic deaths of his wife and young son some fifty or sixty years before. Harry proves to be the unsung hero of the novel, as it is he who witnesses Ruby falling into the fountain, alerting Erika to the incident. Harry dies when he falls down the stairs attempting to get to Ruby to save her life.

Pam

Pam is the mother of Clementine and the mother-in-law of Sam. Pam considers herself something of an adoptive mother toward Erika, whom she forced to be friends with Clementine when they were younger due to Erika's home life situation. Pam is very harsh with Clementine while very lenient on Erika. This creates some resentment on the part of Clementine.

Pam is quick to blame Clementine for Ruby's near-death, and she praises Erika for saving Ruby. Pam learns later that Clementine is not to blame. However, even after hearing the truth, Pam does not make peace with Clementine.

Sylvia

Sylvia is the mother of Erika and the mother-in-law of Oliver. Sylvia, a successful nurse, has a terrible hoarding problem. This makes her defensive and causes her to lash out at Erika throughout the novel. Sylvia is constantly antagonistic toward Erika for keeping her distance. She has an accusatory attitude toward Erika. Sylvia thinks that Erika is refusing to have children so Sylvia cannot become a grandmother. Erika and Sylvia struggle in their mother-daughter relationship, but they still manage to make something of it.

Symbols and Symbolism

The barbeque

The barbeque serves as the watershed event for the novel. It is the symbolic point around which the novel revolves. It becomes the fixed point between past and present. The barbeque becomes the point which threatens the marriage of Sam and Clementine, strengthens the marriage of Oliver and Erika, and reinforces the marriage of Vid and Tiffany.

Vid's invitation to a barbeque

Vid's invitation to a barbeque is an omen of bad things to come. Vid, because of the gorgeous weather, extends an invitation to Erika, Oliver, Sam, Clementine, and Ruby and Holly. All of the characters in the novel wish the barbeque had never happened because the barbeque lead to the almost-drowning of Ruby.

Human eggs

Human eggs symbolize friendship and family. Erika wants to begin a family with Oliver because Oliver wants children. They decide they will ask Clementine to donate eggs so that Oliver and Erika may conceive. This is a test of friendship as Clementine at first refuses, then agrees to the donation so that Erika and Oliver can have a family. Ultimately, Erika and Oliver choose to decline the egg donations. They foster children.

Vid's wink to Clementine

Vid's wink to Clementine is symbolic of sexual irresponsibility. As the barbeque gets underway and the alcohol flows, everyone becomes tipsy (except Oliver). Vid and Clementine discover a shared love of classical music which no one else has. Vid winks at Clementine to this degree, but also to demonstrate he finds her sexually attractive. The sexual behavior of Sam, Clementine, Tiffany, and Vid irresponsibly distracts them from watching the girls, leading to Ruby almost drowning.

An audition

An audition symbolizes financial security rather than love of the music itself. Clementine has an upcoming audition for a permanent seat in a local orchestra. The job will provide money desperately needed by Clementine and Sam, who live beyond their means. Early in the novel, Clementine wants the job for the sake of money. Later in the novel, she seeks the job as a means to loving and sharing music.



The dropped glass jar

The dropped glass jar of chocolate almonds symbolizes the shattering of the friendships and relationships between all those present at the barbeque. Things can never go back to the way they were before, just as the jar can never be reassembled. For example, the almost-drowning of Ruby causes the friendship between Erika and Clementine to cool as Pam praises Erika as a hero while condemning Clementine as irresponsible.

The fountain

The fountain, as an object, is symbolic of memories forgotten. Vid and Tiffany wish to forget the memory of Ruby almost drowning in the fountain (and to protect their own child from such a thing happening). Erika wishes to use the fountain to jog her memory of the event –but the removed fountain does not allow for this.

Jamie's window

Jamie's window symbolizes life and death. Jamie's window is located on the second floor of Harry's house. It is in the bedroom that belonged to Harry's dead son, Jamie. The window looks out over Vid's backyard. It enables Harry to see Ruby drowning and to alert Erika to the tragedy unfolding. It also leads to Harry's death as he falls down the stairs and dies while trying to get to Ruby. Life is exchanged for death through the window.

Holly's rock collection

Holly's rock collection symbolizes truth. The rock collection rests at the heart of the near-drowning of Ruby the day of the barbeque. Holly admits she no longer wants the rock collection because she angrily pushed Ruby into the fountain for taking the rock collection –and Holly thought she had killed Ruby. This turns out not to be the case, but Holly insists she still does not want the rock collection because it is a reminder of a horrifying truth to her.

A photograph

A photograph of Clementine, Erika, and Sylvia on a roller coaster symbolizes the ups and downs of life. Just as roller coasters go up and down, life –and friendships –have high points and low points, rises and falls. In the four months since the barbeque, Erika's and Clementine's friendship has cooled. However, the photograph and its warm accompanying letter, sent to Clementine from Erika, signals the beginning of an up.

Settings

Sydney, Australia

Sydney, Australia, serves as the main setting for the novel. Clementine, Erika, Sam, Oliver, Vid, Tiffany, and their families are all residents of Sydney. They work in and around the city. Most of the novel takes place during the rainy season, with rain falling on an almost-constant, daily basis. Only at the end of the novel does the weather let up, which symbolically reflects improvement in the lives of the characters involved.

Vid's house and backyard

Vid's house and backyard serve to be a primary setting in the novel. It is at Vid's place that the characters of the novel assemble for what will become the infamous barbeque. Vid's house is a reflection of his and Tiffany's wealth. The backyard is elaborately decorated and landscaped, and it includes a beautiful fountain. Erika will later visit Vid's backyard in the attempt to recall memories of the past.

The fountain

The fountain, located in Vid's backyard, is where Ruby almost drowns after Holly pushes her. Thus, the fountain becomes the epicenter for the drama and tragedy that subsequently unfolds –from Harry's death to the near-dissolution of Sam and Clementine's marriage. Erika, alerted to Ruby's situation by Harry, and Oliver make it to the fountain first. They save Ruby's life. To move beyond the past and to prevent a repeat of history, Vid removes the fountain. Without the fountain in place, Erika's memory cannot relive the event.

Harry's house

Harry's house is located next door to Vid's, and it overlooks Vid's backyard. Harry's house is, in places, frozen in time back five decades to when his wife and son (Jamie) tragically died. This, in turn, reflects Harry's emotions and state of being – understandably stuck in the past. It is from Jamie's bedroom in Harry's house that Harry sees Ruby drowning and alerts Erika. Also, it is in his house that Harry dies when he falls from the window.

The street corner

The street corner symbolizes redemption. The street corner is crossed each day as Sam heads to and from the ferry to get to work. As the novel comes to an end, Sam is able to save a baby in a stroller from rolling into traffic. It makes him feel wonderful to

have redeemed himself by saving a baby. It also allows him to practice humility by not making a big deal out of it to the mother who graciously thanks him. Sam knows firsthand what such an experience is like.

Themes and Motifs

A couple's marriage must be their priority.

Liane Moriarty argues in her novel *Truly Madly Guilty* that marriage must be a priority. The idea that being married (as well as other aspects of life) somehow makes the marriage itself less a priority is wrong. As Erika effectively states and argues on Moriarty's behalf, her marriage is a priority.

Erika explains this much to Clementine later in the novel. Erika is not keen on having children, but she is willing to have children to make Oliver happy. She loves Oliver this much and wants to see her marriage with him thrive. He is kind and does not ask for much. Oliver, in turn, makes his marriage a priority in his life as well: he always, always protects Erika, and never speaks poorly about her to anyone (he tells no one about her hoarding of Clementine's things). Because of this, Erika and Oliver are close and reaffirming of the other. This leads to a compromise in that they will foster, rather than have, children.

Vid and Tiffany also have a strong marriage because they place such emphasis on it. Even Tiffany's past cannot hold a candle to the strength of the marriage between her and Vic. Their world really revolves around each other, as for example, Vid does all he can to support Tiffany's house flipping business and reassures her when a client from the past turns up as the parent of another kid at the new school for Dakota. Despite the fact that they are married, being married does not mean they can forget about the marriage

Clementine realizes late in the novel that her marriage has not been a priority. Her kids, her music, and even her friendship with Erika have been priorities over her marriage. This has prevented her from seeing her husband as a human being. By focusing on her husband and accepting him as a human being, as well as focusing on her marriage for the first time in years, Clementine is able to bring Sam closer to her, and get him to return to the bedroom from the study. Clementine recognizes her marriage is every bit as important as the other parts of her life, and her choosing to prioritize it leads to its healing.

Marriage does not dehumanize or de-individualize people.

Marriage does not dehumanize or de-individualize people. Often, people in marriage forget to see their husband or wife as anything other than a husband or wife in the utilitarian sense. This causes tremendous problems for those who fail to realize that human beings involved in marriage are still human beings, worthy of love and respect.



Erika and Oliver have this idea figured out perfectly. Erika and Oliver prioritize their marriage because they recognize one another as independent human beings worthy of respect to whom one gives the other their all. Erika is willing to have children for Oliver's sake, while Oliver is willing to foster for Erika's sake. They recognize in one another a different human being worthy of respect and love, and this helps their marriage thrive.

Vid and Tiffany deeply love one another, but it is Vid who is especially instrumental in the marriage. He is fully away of Tiffany's past as a stripper, and that she even slept with one of her clients—but he looks beyond this to who Tiffany is now in the present. She is a wife, a mother, and a successful businesswoman. Tiffany, despite her past, is still a woman worthy of respect and love, and Vid provides this in great stride.

Only at the end of the novel does Clementine realize she has been seeing Sam as a person as well as a husband and a father—and this has led to her de-prioritizing her marriage to him. When he breaks down in tears at the CPR class, she realizes he, too, is suffering greatly from the near-tragedy of Ruby's almost-death; and she realizes she has not seen him as a human being because she has been so focused elsewhere, taking him for granted. Only by recognizing Sam as a human being does Clementine begin the journey toward repairing the marriage.

Friendship has its ups and downs.

Friendship has its ups and downs. This is demonstrated by the primary friendship presented in the novel.

The friendship between Clementine and Erika is best symbolized by the photo Erika mails to Clementine. The photo features herself and Clementine as teenagers on a roller coaster. The up and down movements of a roller coaster symbolize the ups and downs of life and friendship. In other words, it symbolizes their friendship and paves the way for a new up in their friendship after the down period surrounding Ruby's accident.

Much of the down period—a cooling off, so to speak, between Erika and Clementine—comes by way of three things. First, the situation between Erika and Clementine is awkward given the request of egg donations. Second, Clementine is bitter that it was Erika, and not she, who reached Ruby in the fountain, first. Third, Clementine and Erika were essentially forced to be friends beyond only acquaintances when Clementine's mother discovered what Erika's home life was like. It is the third point that dramatically affects the first two—especially in light of Pam's accusations of irresponsibility toward Clementine, and Pam's praise of Erika.

The drama of the situation surrounding Ruby unfortunately cause a rift between Clementine and Erika. Clementine constantly finds herself comparing herself to Erika, while Erika takes a disdainful attitude toward Clementine—especially when it comes to parenting. Clementine becomes annoyed and angry with Erika for interfering in her parenting, while Erika feels slighted by the utter disgust with which Clementine treats her request for an egg donation. Time and distance helps heal wounds between Erika



and Clementine, however. Four months after the barbeque, their friendship is slowly patching itself up as both women reach out to one another, and especially as a result of Erika's letter and photograph.

Sex is important, but it cannot be the defining point in love and marriage.

Sex is important, but it cannot be the defining point in love and marriage. In the novel, sex is discussed in conjunction with love, relationships, and marriage. Some characters place too much emphasis on it, while others do not take it seriously enough. Some mistake it for being all-important.

Tiffany's bubbly sexuality is appealing to Vid, Sam, and Oliver –but neither Sam nor Oliver would cheat on their wives. Vid understands that his wife once worked as a stripper and even slept with one of her clients. However, this does not detract from his love for Tiffany. Tiffany's youth, gorgeous looks, and stunning body add to the luster of their sex life, helping Vid and Tiffany to prioritize their marriage in their lives.

Oliver is perfectly happy with Erika, and he enjoys sex when they have it. Tiffany worries sex with Oliver may be pointless because she is unable to conceive a child. Oliver reassures her that there are other ways to have a child. Sex has a healthy place in their relationship. However, respecting the love they share takes top priority in their marriage.

Sam, however happy with Clementine, wishes they could have more sex. He realizes late in the novel he has placed too much emphasis on sex and not enough emphasis on Clementine as an individual. When they were younger, their sex was great and enabled Sam to believe everything else would fall into place and differences become irrelevant thanks to the sex. This turned out not to be the case. Clementine, on the other hand, thinks about how little she has had sex with Sam in recent years, because she has not been prioritizing him and their marriage in her life. In her mind, Clementine has been overemphasizing sex while under-delivering.

Parenthood is a beautiful thing, but no parent is perfect,

Parenthood is a beautiful thing, but no parent is perfect. Becoming a parent is one of the most noble and important things a person can do, but being a perfect parent is neither required nor expected. Indeed, assumptions about perfect parenting often come from parents themselves. In this novel, Clementine has high expectations for herself as a parent.

The barbeque becomes a major litmus test for parenting. Sam slams both his own irresponsible behavior, and Clementine's, for what almost happened to Ruby at the barbeque. Sam knows they are not perfect, but are capable parents –and they dropped the ball at the barbeque because they behaved like teenagers. Sam and Clementine

blame one another for what happened, when secretly, they blame themselves. Both feel they have behaved horribly as parents, but this does not mean they cannot improve or are somehow lesser parents in the end because of it.

Clementine is especially hard on herself. She (like Sam) is upset that Erika and Oliver, and not she and Sam, were the first to arrive at the fountain to save Ruby. There is irony in the non-parent of a child saving the child of other parents, and Clementine recognizes this. Pam blames Clementine for what happened, and Clementine constantly compares herself to Erika, feeling as if she does not measure up. Pam's sound praising of Erika does not help any.

Only by looking to Sam does Clementine begin to feel better about what happened. She and Sam both recognize that they may not have been first to the fountain, but that they were on the way to get there. Erika and Oliver merely got there first. They recognize that, apart from the fountain incident, their daughters are happy, healthy, kind, intelligent, and well-loved. Parents are human. As such they make mistakes. The mistake Sam and Clementine made was nearly-deadly. However, it leads them to reorient themselves to their role as parents. They become better parents because of their mistake.

Styles

Point of View

Liana Moriarty tells her novel *Truly Madly Guilty* from the third-person, limited-omniscient perspective. The novel is character driven. There are six primary characters in Moriarty's novel (Clementine, Erika, Oliver, Sam, Vid, and Tiffany) and there are a number of secondary characters (Holly, Dakota, Pam, etc.). Each character has a backstory which serves as a motive for who they are and why they speak and act the way they do. All of the characters are important to the overall plot.

Moriarty takes great pains to fully develop each character. Each is multi-dimensional. The third-person narrator allows the author to see inside the hearts and minds of each of her diverse characters. The reader has privileged access to each character's composition, thoughts, and feelings. The limited-omniscient aspect of the narration lets Moriarty hook readers with a sense of suspense and unknowing. Readers are approximately 230 pages into the book before the "incident" at the barbeque is revealed. The author provides details about the barbeque to the reader by reflecting on Erica's inability to remember everything about the event.

Language and Meaning

Liana Moriarty tells her novel *Truly Madly Guilty* in language that is casual and straightforward. This is done for several reasons. First, Moriarty's target audience are working and middle-class Australian adults, many of whom share nearly-identical or relatable existences to her characters. The familiar language creates an intimacy with the characters and the plot, helping to put the characters and plot within reach of readers.

Second, Moriarty's use of casual, straightforward language is reflective of the identity of the characters themselves as primarily middle-class people whose lives revolve around family, home, and work. The casual and straightforward language lends an air of believability to the characters and their lives.

Finally, Moriarty's novel is relatively long. The story moves along at an arguably slow but steady pace. It is not until Chapter 47 that readers learn about the incident that occurred at the barbeque. The simple, straightforward and causal language is meant to help make the sometimes-plodding progress of the novel more bearable.

Structure

Liana Moriarty divides her novel *Truly Madly Guilty* into eighty-nine numbered, untitled, chronological chapters. Moriarty leapfrogs back and forth through time, from the present

back several weeks to the day of the barbeque, and back and forth again. Moriarty is, in effect, putting together a puzzle but providing only vague clues as pieces along the way.

It is not until Chapter 47 that the incident from the barbeque is finally revealed –and even then, only in part. This is done not only to hook the interest of readers, but to demonstrate the difficulty Erika has in recalling the details of the incident at the barbeque. Nothing makes total sense to the reader until the end of the novel, just like nothing makes total sense to Erika until the end of the novel. The final chapter of the novel actually advances the plot several months into the future, wherein the final pieces of the novel are put in place by Clementine and Erika attempting to restore their friendship.

Quotes

This is a story that begins with a barbeque.

-- Clementine (Chapter 1)

Importance: At the beginning of the novel, Erika attends a talk given by Clementine. Clementine's opening lines set the stage not only for her talk, but for the novel itself. The novel itself revolves around a barbeque –a barbeque that apparently proved to be a life-changing event.

What if we hadn't gone?... Do you ever think about that?

-- Clementine (Chapter 15)

Importance: While out for dinner with Sam, Clementine echoes sentiments expressed by many other characters in the novel so far. All of these particular characters wonder what would have happened if they had never gone to the barbeque. Here, the author continues to build suspense about the barbeque itself by continuing to withhold from the readers the events of that night.

We're asking... the reason we wanted to talk to you today, well, we're wondering if you would consider being our egg donor.

-- Oliver (Chapter 15)

Importance: Here, one of the larger mysteries about the day of the barbeque is settled –why Clementine and Sam were originally supposed to come over to see Erika and Oliver. They want Clementine to be their egg donor because Erika is unable to conceive. This explains why Oliver is so upset over the barbeque. The discussion about egg donation is cut short because other guests have been invited to the barbeque.

Why did she remember that part of the night so clearly?

-- Narrator (Chapter 27)

Importance: As the novel slowly continues to unfold, readers learn that Erika dwells on a particular part of the barbeque. Sometime after asking Clementine to donate eggs, Erika overheard Clementine and Sam talking about "it" being "repulsive." Erika reflects on this for a long time after the barbeque, haunted by the cruelty of the conversation. She wonders if this is why Clementine has decided to donate the eggs after all.

It happened so fast.

-- Clementine (Chapter 47)

Importance: Here, the incident at the barbeque is finally revealed. Clementine's perception of the incident is that, afterwards, everyone will say that it happened so quickly. Clementine watches as Erika and Oliver rush to Vid's fountain, jump in, and lift up Ruby from the water.

They lifted Ruby's tiny lifeless body high up between them.
-- Narrator (Chapter 47)

Importance: When Clementine hears Erika scream for her, she rushes over to the fountain. There, she sees Erika and Oliver jump in the fountain and lift up Ruby's body. This is the reveal of the incident at the barbeque that has been alluded to, but never mentioned, before Chapter 47.

I have this feeling there's something important I've forgotten.
-- Erika (Chapter 50)

Importance: Erika's psychologist asks her why she is so obsessed with the day of the barbeque. Erika explains she feels as if there is something important she needs to remember, but she has forgotten it. The feeling that she has forgotten something haunts her. The psychologist suggests that, perhaps, Erika does not recall the event because psychologically she does not want to remember it.

It was negligence! Our negligence. I should have been watching the girls. I should have known that I couldn't depend on you.
-- Sam (Chapter 52)

Importance: Sam and Clementine argue about the day Ruby almost drowned. Clementine writes it off as bad luck, which causes Sam to respond in anger that they were negligent parents and that what almost happened to Ruby was Clementine's fault. Clementine mocks Sam as a result, prompting Sam to consider separation. Fortunately, this proves to be a false alarm.

I guess they didn't want the memory.
-- Oliver (Chapter 59)

Importance: Erika heads over to Vid's backyard to attempt to jog her memory from the barbeque. However, this proves to be unsuccessful as the fountain has been removed. Oliver states, with some irony, that it seems Vid and Tiffany do not wish to recall the memory of what almost happened to Ruby –while Erika is desperate to do so.

No one behaved normally except for Ruby, who clearly wanted the fuss over.
-- Narrator (Chapter 63)

Importance: As Clementine, Sam, Holly, and Ruby settle down for dinner, Holly refuses to eat Sam's cooking. Ruby laughs at the discussion Holly engages in to get out of eating shepherd's pie. It becomes clear that Ruby –who personally experienced the incident of almost drowning –is the only one who feels normal and who wants things to get back to normal. Everyone else is still affected by the mishap.

Life was all about consequences.
-- Narrator (Chapter 73)



Importance: While in the theater, Holly misbehaves. This prompts Sam to bring Holly and Ruby home rather than finishing the movie. Sam wants his daughters to learn that there are consequences in life and that these consequences cannot be avoided. The same is true for adults. The barbeque was a chapter in life that has had major consequences for all those involved.

...but at some point you just have to let go.

-- Ainsley (Chapter 87)

Importance: One of Clementine's musical friends counsels Clementine on music. Music, Ainsley says, is not only about skill and technique: it is about losing oneself in the music. The same thought is to be applied to life and the past: life is not just about what someone has or what someone's reputation is or even how "good" someone is at life. It is about embracing and losing oneself in life. It is about letting go of the past and looking to the future.