

We're All Damaged Study Guide

We're All Damaged by Matthew Norman

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Plot Summary

A year after Andy was left by his wife, he is still trying to cope with the pain. He has moved to New York to be a bartender. While sitting in a bar waiting for a blind date that his friend Byron set up, Andy is called back to Omaha by his mother to spend some time with his dying grandfather before the funeral. Andy is not too sure about heading home, but since his mother has made all of the arrangements for him, he does not have much of a choice. His return to Omaha means that he must confront his past.

From the moment he lands, Andy has an ominous feeling about being home. His brother picks him up from the airport, and it becomes apparent that most of his relationships are awkward and tense. A year after being gone, his brother finds it more important to take a business phone call than to talk to his brother.

Once Andy gets to his parents' house, things do not get better. The awkwardness continues when he meets the neighborhood security guard Don Johnson, then finds his father in the back yard shooting squirrels with a paintball gun. After talking about his flight, the fact that his hair is longer and Andy noticing that his father has a beard, he and his father have nothing else to talk about.

The situation gets even more awkward when Andy discovers three men from the Glitter Mafia have been vandalizing his parents' front yard because of his mother's conservative beliefs on same-sex marriage and the fact that she expresses her opinion on her radio talk show, Dr. Nancy Knows, and has interest from Fox News to be a panelist on one of their shows.

Andy visits his grandfather at the hospice wing of the home, New Beginnings, but with a tube down his throat, Henry cannot talk. He attempts to write, but the task exhausts him.

Before leaving New York, Andy promised his friend and supervisor that he would stay away from his ex, but he does not. One night, he takes his grandfather's Caddie to Dairy Queen and gets a grape Mr. Misty, and then goes and sits in the new patio furniture at the house that used to be his. He imagines being with Karen once again and realizes how much he misses her. When he is confronted by the new boyfriend—the paramedic Karen had an affair with—he throws his drink at the house and kicks the head off a Nebraska lawn gnome.

Andy meets Daisy, who claims to be a friend of Andy, and despite not knowing her very well, finds someone he can talk to and confide in. He is aware that she is keeping secrets from him, but he is intrigued by her. She exclaims that her mission is to bring Andy back to the living. She finds way to restructure his life, from making him buy a t-shirt that is one size too small with a cartoon cowboy riding a corn cob to helping him recreate the last perfect moment with Karen to helping Karen become jealous by pretending to be his girlfriend.



In addition to Daisy helping him come back to life, Andy rekindles his friendship with Neal, Karen's twin brother and his friend from high school. Despite the positive steps Andy makes in his life to get over his pain, there are other issues he must deal with, including his parents' troubled marriage, which has driven his father to have an affair, and a group of paintball-colored squirrels who are out for revenge.

The book concludes with Andy returning to New York to bartend broken and bruised—physically this time instead of emotionally. While he was unable to solve all of his problems or those of his family, he was able to put them in perspective and move forward with his life. The blind date he was supposed to have early on in the book even shows up, and Andy and Katie go to the roof to see the Empire State Building lit up in rainbow colors to celebrate the Supreme Court legalizing same-sex marriage.



Chapters 1-4

Summary

In Chapter 1, Matthew Norman's main character Andy tells the story of when his wife Karen left him. They had been eating dinner in Applebee's. She was staring out the window while he asked her a multitude of questions, such as how the traffic was, if the pollen count was higher than normal, how many people in the restaurant were spies from TGI Fridays. She responded by saying, "Andy, I don't want this anymore" (3).

At first, Andy believed that she was talking about her meal, so he took the opportunity to do something intimate and loving; he cut off a piece of his chicken for her, telling her she should really try it. She then clarified that she meant she did not want "us" any longer. Andy was unsure how to respond. When the waiter asked if he can help them with anything else, he told the waiter that they were fine.

In Chapter 2, Andy sits in a bar called Jerome's a year after what he calls the "Great Applebee's Massacre." It is now 2014, and he is living in New York, working as a bartender at a place called the Underground. He is waiting for his blind date to show up, and the bar is growing more crowded and people keep asking for the seat. He keeps telling them that he is waiting for someone, but it has been more than an hour. The bartender tries to be sympathetic and hands him another drink then comments that she is probably stuck in traffic or on the subway, which Andy tells himself is plausible.

Andy's frustration and drunkenness grows, and he says out loud that he did not even want to go on a stupid blind date, although he meant to say the words internally. This draws the attention of the bartender again, who asks if he is all right. Andy asks the man "If you were a woman...Would you sleep with me?" (7). The bartender responds by laughing, and Andy's alcoholic drink is replaced with a cup of coffee.

Andy eventually gives up the seat, and the woman who takes it startles Andy by looking at him and smiling, then asks if his phone is buzzing on the bar. At first, he thinks it might be his blind date, but she does not have his number. It is his mother. He leaves the bar to take the call.

At close to 11:00 p.m., the street is bustling with activity, something Andy has not gotten used to yet, and he almost gets run over by a group of men on bicycles. He dials his mother's number, and Nancy informs him that it is his grandpa and that it is time. She then proceeds to give him his flight information and tell him his brother will pick him up, but Andy is not convinced he is going to go home. His mother becomes upset, but he hangs up before she can say much.

As Andy steps off the curb, he is run over by a bicyclist who is trying to catch up to his friends.



In Chapter 3, Andy heads back to his apartment after picking up some mint chocolate chip ice cream, gum, a six-pack of Japanese beer, and a box of Nerds. The bicyclists shoulder hit him in the corner of his left eye, and he presses the ice cream to his face. A gray-and-black cat, named Jeter, that wanders his building thumps his tail against Andy's door. As Andy opens the door, the cat darts inside, and Andy pours him a bowl of Cap'n Crunch. Andy opens his underwear drawer and stares at the wrinkled pile. He had attempted to return to Omaha five months previously to finalize his divorce, but left the security line in his socks.

He calls his boss Byron, manager of the Underground and a black man who played linebacker at Rutgers once, who immediately asks him how the date is going. He had set it up for him; the girl is his sister's new roommate. Andy tells him that she did not show up, and Byron feels bad.

Jeter finishes eating his cereal and flips over the bowl before hissing at Andy, who opens the door so he can get out. Andy lets Byron know that he has to return to Omaha for his grandfather's impending death, and Byron tells him to take as much time as he needs, but Andy has to promise him one thing: he has to stay away from his ex. Andy promises that he will, and they talk about how Karen cheated on Andy with an ambulance driver. Byron then asks if Andy and his grandpa are close, and Andy responds that his grandpa had given him his first beer when he was 12.

After Andy hangs up, he finishes packing his duffle bag, trying to ignore Jeter, who is scratching at the door. When it gets so loud Andy cannot take it, he opens the door to find the cat has brought him a decapitated mouse. When Andy comments that that was sweet, Jeter hisses and runs off.

In Chapter 4, Andy has made it to Omaha and is sitting on a bench outside of Eppley Airfield watching a YouTube video called "Worst Best Man...Ever!!!" while a guy in a Range Rover honks his horn in the loading/unloading zone. A traffic cop pulls his attention away from the video, and Andy realizes his brother Jim has been honking at him. The cop welcomes him to Omaha, and Andy believes it is "without question, the most ominous thing anyone's ever said to me" (19).

When Andy climbs into the car, his brother is talking on his Bluetooth headset and tells him to shut up. Andy turns to his niece and nephew in the back seat; Bryce is playing a video game and wearing a karate gi, which Andy refers to as a robe. Bryce corrects him, saying it gives him mobility for his fighting moves, then asks what happened to his face. Andy explains that a ninja got him because he did not have a robe like Bryce and his mobility was compromised.

Emma sits next to her brother in the back seat with a Cheerio stuck to her face. She had been a baby when Andy left, so she has no idea who he is. Bryce explains that she is terrible at talking, and then she offers Andy her chewed up Cheerio.

Jim finally gets off the phone and hits Andy on his thigh. They talk about Jim's new car and how long he has had it (a few months), and Jim asks how the city is treating Andy.



The conversation then turns to Andy's drinking, and Jim makes a passive aggressive comment about how drinking is "awesome until you cash in your 401(k) and move to the most expensive city in America to become the world's least charismatic bartender" (22).

As they drive down the street listening to 80's music, Andy sees a picture of his mother on the side of a bus, with "Dr. Nancy Knows. Always right. Always right. Weekdays" (23), which causes him to yell out in surprise. Jim explains that these posters are all over town as their mother's popularity has surged and that she has gone through a makeover and has interest from Fox network. He switches the station to their mother's show, and they listen to her talk about how she believes the true definition of marriage is one man and one woman and that the Supreme Court will agree with her.

Andy asks if they are too old to be scarred by their parents, but Jim does not answer because his phone is ringing again.

Analysis

Andy's happiness is directly correlated with the relationship he has with Karen. When she leaves him, he becomes unhappy and descends into a spiral of despair and self-pity.

Before that fateful day in Applebee's, there is evidence that Andy and Karen's relationship was broken. Andy comments that Karen had been silent for months. Instead of asking what was wrong, he fills the silence with mundane questions about traffic and pollen counts. After she tells him that she does not want to be married anymore, his biggest regret is not asking the waiter about Bacon Time. It seems that if they had a healthy relationship, he would have been able to talk with Karen about what was wrong and attempt to fix it.

In Chapter 2, it becomes more apparent how self-absorbed Andy is. He has moved to New York to get away. It is undeniable that he has been deeply hurt and tries to drown his sorrow in alcohol, pity, and avoidance. His happiness is gone. When he finally gives up the seat he has been saving for his blind date to another couple, all he can think about is how she is going to leave the man.

During Andy's phone conversation with his mother, we get some insight into their relationship. She has made all the arrangements for Andy to return home—whether he actually wants to or not. There is no discussion about his feelings or what coming home will do to him, just that he needs to be there, and then Andy hangs up on her. He feels slightly guilty about that, but it shows that they do not have the closest of relationships.

Whether Andy wants it to or not, the past and real world come crashing into him—literally—which is symbolized by him being hit by the bicycle rider on the street. He cannot hide from the past any longer, and no matter how painful it is, he has to face it.

In Chapter 3, there is further insight into how low Andy has sunk. After getting hit, he goes to the store and buys a random assortment of junk food and "a six-pack of weird-



looking Japanese beer” (12). It is apparent that he no longer cares what he puts into his body and how it will make him look. At the moment, he apparently looks like hell, and the convenient store clerk comments on it. “The checkout guy at the all-night corner store stared at me as he rang me up. ‘My friend,’ he said. ‘Your face, it is very much fucked” (12).

Jeter waits for Andy outside his door, which is both a comfort and irritation for Andy. Jeter is a reflection of how Andy manages his relationships. On one hand, Andy is desperate for someone to come home to and feed him, much like he does for the cat, but on the other hand, like Jeter, Andy is fickle about how he is taken care of. He wants the relationship on his own terms, which, like the cat, makes him come off self-centered and angry. Jeter appreciates what Andy does for him and shows his gratitude by bringing dead mice, but he also wants his own space. Andy reflects these same behaviors by showing up for the blind date that was set up for him, but then complaining he did not want to be there in the first place or by his attempt to return home to finalize his divorce but then chickening out and having it done at a UPS store.

It becomes further apparent that Andy handles things, especially his past, in a self-destructive and self-absorbed way in Chapter 4. One of the first things he does after landing is watch a video called “Worst Best Man...Ever!!!!” (18) about someone vomiting at a wedding. He is so absorbed in it, he does not realize his brother is honking at him until a cop points it out. Once he climbs in to the Range Rover, it becomes apparent that Andy’s relationship with his brother is broken.

After not seeing his brother for a year, the first thing Jim tells Andy is to shut up because he is on the phone. Andy turns his attention to his niece and nephew for conversation. At first, the conversation focuses on Andy teasing his nephew about his “robe,” which Bryce corrects him as being a “gi.” It does not take long before the conversation changes and it becomes apparent that the relationship between Andy and his nephew is awkward because they do not really know or understand each other. “What about crazy?” Bryce says. ‘Are you still crazy? You know, from your breakdown?’ (21). This conversation shows that his brother is more than willing to talk about Andy’s problems with others than attempt to help his brother.

Andy is more of an observer of his life rather than a participant; he has become disconnected from himself and, apparently, his family. Jim finally gets off the phone, and the conversation turns to his new car and how Andy got his black eye, which Andy refuses to answer. Jim asks how life is in New York, which gives insight into how Andy views his own life. “One of the odd consequences of spending so much time alone in the last year is that I’ve started thinking in movie montages. So, in lieu of answering Jim’s question, I splice a few New York scenes together in my head” (21-22).

Discussion Question 1

Why do you think Andy’s biggest regret is not asking about Bacon Time rather than about why Karen wanted to leave?



Discussion Question 2

Andy is 31 years old. Do his actions reflect this? Support your answer with evidence from the text.

Discussion Question 3

How do you think Andy feels about having a failed marriage when his mom's focus is on the sanctity of marriage?

Vocabulary

maniacal, obsess, intimate, unsuspecting, shimmering, pseudoadults, dander, generalizations, pulsating, overleveraged, gesticulates, entranced



Chapters 5-8

Summary

In Chapter 5, Andy and Jim head to a neighborhood called Prairie West where the houses get bigger the farther in they go. A few months after Andy left town, his dad retired and his mom renewed her contract with the radio station, and then they moved into this new house. She had sent Andy pictures, but they did not show the massive size of the two-story house with three-car garage and extremely large green yard. His grandpa's Caddie is parked in the corner of the driveway.

As soon as Andy steps out of the Range Rover, a golf cart with a man who looks to be about his dad's age stops in the middle of the street. He tells Jim that the music is a little loud, and Jim proceeds to turn up "The Safety Dance" by Men Without Hats instead of down. The man tells them this is their warning, then drives off. Andy notices a decal on the back of the cart that reads "Prairie West Security," and Jim explains that the man is Don and a total DB. Jim tells Andy that he has to get Bryce to karate and notices the duffle bag in Andy's hand. He is distressed that Andy would not bring a dress suit because he was there for a funeral. Jim tells Andy to go down to the Gentleman's Closet and put the suit on his account for his birthday.

In Chapter 6, Andy spends a few moments looking into the window of the Caddie. He opens the door to look upon the wrinkled leather seats, the faint crack in the dash, and smells his grandpa's hair gel. He remembers how he had driven it once when he was 13 in the parking lot at the Nebraska Furniture Mart. His grandpa told him he was a certified natural.

Andy eventually heads to the house and is confused as to whether or not he should knock. There is no immediate answer to his question, so he sets down his bag and steps into the yard. He notices a birdbath and an antique bench, along with a "Protect Marriage" political sign. In addition, he notices something out of place in the meticulous lawn and finds two Ken Dolls in tuxedos with their hands glued together.

A screaming sound comes from the back yard. Andy throws the Kens onto the driveway and proceeds around the house on a stone walkway surrounded by flowers. At the back of the house, he notices the three large birdfeeders put together like a skyscraper with a squirrel dangling from the feeder, which is upsetting the birds. A soft pop sounds, followed by a hiss, then the squirrel explodes in a burst of red. Andy hears a voice behind him, then turns to see his father in a second-story window. He notices his dad's full beard and the gun in his hand. When his dad notices Andy, he asks how his flight was, and Andy tells him it was pretty good, then asks if he could not point the gun at him. His father directs it out into the yard, then comments on how Andy's hair is longer and that he likes it. Andy comments that he grew a beard and shot a squirrel.



His dad explains that they have been stealing the bird food and that he read on the Internet that if he hits them enough times, they will not come back. As he is talking, the squirrel on the lawn is getting up and starts running toward the trees. Andy's dad shoots after him, red splatters all over the lawn, and Andy realizes his father is shooting paintballs.

The birds return to the feeder, and Andy's dad says it is just the two of them for dinner. Andy realizes that they have run out of things to talk about. His dad asks if he would like a drink, and Andy says yes.

Chapter 7 opens with Andy asking where the worst possible place to be is, and his answer is 11:36 p.m. central standard time. He and his father had grilled steaks and drank Coors Light from the can, while taking turns shooting at the squirrels. At 10:00, his dad went to bed, so Andy found some M&Ms in a cupboard, looked at pictures of him and his brother, opened the fridge to see all of his mom's Weight Watchers meals, then saw the keys to the Caddie.

He goes to Dairy Queen, and then to his former house. He drinks his grape Mr. Misty float while sitting in a new lawn chair. He stares at the TV flickering in the bedroom and imagines climbing in bed next to Karen. He wonders if Karen and her new boyfriend are reading or catching up on their DVR or perhaps having sex. He reveals that the other man's name is Tyler Sullivan.

He notices that the house has been repainted and has new gutters and shutters. The yard had been resodded and landscaped with flowers. There is a garden gnome with a Nebraska football jersey looking at Andy.

He hears laughter from the show Friends through the cracked bedroom window—Karen's nightly routine is to fall asleep to Friends reruns. He realizes how much he misses her. Then, Tyler yells at him from the window. Andy stands and steps into the moonlight, and the two men stare at each other. He throws the Mr. Misty float at the house and then kicks the head off the lawn gnome.

As Andy drives home in Chapter 8, he thinks about what he just did. He did not imagine that was how the trip would go, but he needed to go to the house to see what her new life looked like.

As he pulls onto his parent's street, he notices that all the lights for the house are on. His mother, a blonde woman wearing a black dress and heels, is at the end of the driveway screaming at a VW Bug, which has three guys in it with the windows rolled down and laughing. As they drive away, glitter flies out of the window.

The three men have vandalized the yard. Hundreds of Ken Dolls are strewn everywhere, the political sign has been torn up and replaced with a new sign on pink glossy paper that reads "Always Wrong! Always Wrong!", and a male sex doll has been placed in a tree. Andy has to step over rainbow flags and a photo cutout of Neil Patrick Harris to get to his mom at the mailbox, who explains that she has been glitter bombed.



Bradley, Andy's father, is on the porch in his pajamas with his hair sticking up and a handful of garbage bags. Don pulls up, also in his pajamas and his Prairie West Security windbreaker. There is a confrontation between Bradley and Don as Don asks for the information to make a report, and Bradley attempts to comment on Don's role as being made-up before he is silenced by a look from his wife. Andy then learns that the man's full name is Don Johnson. His father tells him to get the ladder out of the garage.

As Andy enters the immaculate space, he notices a vintage motorcycle. As he takes the heavy ladder down, he inadvertently knocks over the garbage cans and notices it is full of Ken Dolls and Teletubbies, along with pictures of famous gay people, sex toys, colorful condoms, dirty magazines, and nude photos of men. When he steps out of the garage to get answers from his parents, Andy realizes that there is something wrong.

Analysis

In Chapter 6, Andy's relationship with his family is further defined in his interactions with his father. After Andy has been gone for a year, his father asks him about his flight and comments about how long his hair is, and Andy notices that his dad has a beard and is shooting squirrels with a paintball gun—and that is all they talk about, suggesting a relationship that does not go very deep.

In Chapter 7, Andy's unhappiness increases. Since it is tied to he and Karen's relationship, the fact that they no longer have one upsets him. It dictates his actions of creeping around her yard and destroying the garden gnome. Seeing how Karen has moved on without him pushes him further into despair.

In Chapter 8, the notion of creepy and abnormal behavior is further emphasized when he returns to his parents' house to see how the men in the VW Bug have vandalized the yard. Like Andy, they are not afraid of being caught in a yard in which they do not belong. They want to be heard and seen, and they want their actions to be justified and make an impact.

The scene in the front yard also allows Andy to see that his father does not respect the authority of Security Officer Don. When he shows up to get information to file a report, Bradley does not hide his indignation for Don's position. The scorn for Don's authority is further emphasized in the fact that his full name is Don Johnson, which Andy quickly relates to the actor who plays a fictional vice cop on television and finds humorous. Bradley's dislike of Don is actually a trait he shares with Andy. From the first moment Andy met Don, he dislike him, which shows Andy's contempt for authority figures.

This scene is also the first time Andy realizes that his parents' relationship is damaged. He cannot pinpoint exactly what is wrong, but he knows something is.

Discussion Question 1

Why do you think the author feels the need to describe exactly how the squirrels look?



Discussion Question 2

What do you think the squirrels symbolize?

Discussion Question 3

Why do you think Bradley has an issue with Don and his role as neighborhood security officer? What does it symbolize?

Vocabulary

rebellious, sprawling, hallucinate, mutilated, glaring, squabbling, resodded, observer, psycho, mangled



Chapters 9-12

Summary

In Chapter 9, Andy heads with his father to New Beginnings with his father, the home his grandfather is in. There is a sign out front that reads: "New Beginnings: Where Every Day Is Something Special" (41).

As they sit in the parking lot, Bradley asks if he wants Andy to come in with him, but Andy says he will be okay. They talk briefly about where Andy went last night, and Andy can tell his father is concerned about him. Andy asks if they are going to talk about what had happened, and his father replies that they hate his mother. Andy is confused, as it has never escalated to this level before. They would get TP'd when he was in high school, and his father explained that they did not hate her back then.

A honking horn pulls Andy's focus to the parking lot across the street, and he notices a girl outside of Starbucks. She is wearing jeans and a black T-shirt, has dark hair, is thin, and has a sleeve of tattoos on her right arm. His father asks again if he is going to be okay, and Andy assures him he will be fine. His father comments that his grandpa may or may not know who he is, and Andy tries to remember the last time he spoke to him. Andy looks back at the Starbucks, but the girl is not there anymore. His dad tells him he will pick him up in two hours.

In Chapter 10, Nurse Sandy leads Andy to the hospice center, where every door has a person's name and a suite number. His grandfather's is "Suite #5, Henry Allen" (44). She opens the door to the room, where the raw, sick smell is the first thing Andy notices, along with the machines, wires, tubes, pillows, and blankets on the bed with metal rails. The nurse chats with Henry and takes notes about readouts on the machines, then comments about how Andy looks older. She gestures to a photo on the wall, and asks when it was taken. She seems surprised to learn it was only a year and a half ago.

Eventually, Nurse Sandy leaves, and Andy is left alone with his grandfather. He notices how nice the room is. There is a couch and an easy chair, along with rows of flowers by the window. The biggest bouquet is of sunflowers, and he notices that the card is signed, "Love D" (45). He recognizes most of the names, but not that one.

Andy decides the room is too dark, so he opens the shades. In the process, he almost knocks over the "I Heart NY" coffee mug he sent his grandfather. He turns around and notices his grandfather is awake and takes his offered hands. He sits next to him on the bed. His grandfather has a tube in his throat and cannot talk, but he writes on a legal pad. He tells Andy that he is glad he is there and asks him how he is doing. Andy tells him "Good," but he is convinced his grandfather does not believe him.

Writing has exhausted Henry, so they look at the drawings by Bryce and Emma on the corkboard, and Andy asks if it hurts. His grandfather's response is to touch the tube at



his throat and nod. A baseball game is playing on the TV, his grandfather's favorite sport, especially if the Cubs are playing, and Henry eventually drifts to sleep. Henry eventually wakes again and spends a long time writing something on his pad. Andy reads: "Poor kid can't throw a curve to save his life" (47).

In Chapter 11, Andy is trying to find his way out of the hospice ward and has gotten lost. When he finally finds the front door and steps onto the sidewalk to wait for his dad, he thinks about how the past two hours felt like an eternity but were also not long enough and laments how he should have called his grandfather more often or watched more Cubs games with him and been better at being a grandson.

Someone starts calling Andy's name, and he notices a lady in a robe that he had noticed when they first pulled up. She is waving at him, and when she makes it to him, introduces herself as Mrs. DiGiacomo. She then asks him if he likes *The Young and the Restless*, a soap she enjoys watching, and asks if he would like to watch it with her sometime. Andy tells her yes, then she tells him there was something she was supposed to tell him. After staring off into space for a while, she says that his sister left him a note and hands him a Starbucks receipt and tells him to turn it over. Andy tries to tell her he does not have a sister, but she is not listening. The note says for him to go to the Bookworm at 8 p.m. but not to tell Mom and Dad and is signed by D.

In Chapter 12, Andy is at the Bookworm, an indie bookstore in Midtown. He is in the Self-Help section reading *Light Your Own Fire: Why Feeling Better Is Up to You*. It is 8:42, and there is no sign of D. As Andy is looking at the picture on the back, a voice tells him not to waste his time with that one. He looks up to see the girl from Starbucks. She introduces herself as Daisy. As they talk, a guy in a Member's Only jacket watches them.

Andy finally brings up the note while standing next to a table with paperbacks. Daisy picks up a copy of *The Son of Hollywood* by Curtis Violet and explains how she has been afraid to read it because it is his last one, but she is making her students read it.

Daisy explains that she leads an online creative writing workshop for adults, mainly housewives who write about their sex fantasies, and that she has a list of the different euphemisms for "vagina."

As Daisy and Andy sit on a couch drinking lukewarm coffee, she asks Andy what his motivation is, if he wants to get her back—after they agreed that she will not be named—and Andy is confused about how she knows so much about him and his ex-wife. As they talk, the guy keeps looking at her, which Andy points out, and Daisy tells him that is Kenny, then tells Kenny he has to be 100 yards away.

Right before they both leave, Daisy tells Andy he is her motivation and is going to help him come back to life. She places her hand on Andy's chest and asks him if that is where it hurts. He does not respond, but she is right. As he walks to the Caddie, he notices the car is covered in glitter with a Ken Doll on the hood and the VW Bug speeds away from him.



Analysis

In Chapter 9, the relationship between Andy and his father is explored further. Andy is aware that his father is concerned about him, but neither of them go out of their way to discuss the issue. This conversation gives more insight into Andy's personality and relationship with his parents when he comments that his mother brings the vandalism on herself. He feels slightly bad for saying it, and his father responds that the other side says things that are just as awful. The exchange between father and son is awkward and tense and broken up by a horn honking across the street.

Chapter 10 gives insight into Andy and his grandfather's relationship. Henry is unable to speak because he has a tube in his throat, but he can write on a legal pad. The conversation is pretty superficial and does not extend beyond niceties. Granted, Henry cannot talk, but when given the opportunity to write something of meaning, he does not. Henry spends a long time writing something on his pad of paper that exhausts him. With as long as it takes and considering the man is dying, it seems like his words are going to be profound and possibly life changing. Instead, they are a comment about how the pitcher in the game cannot throw a curve ball—and that does not seem to bother Andy, who also does not go out of his way to have an in-depth conversation. The closest he gets is asking his grandfather if it hurts. The response is Henry touching the tube in his throat and nodding.

In Chapter 11, Andy meets Mrs. DiGiacomo, and the interaction between the two is like every other interaction—awkward. Andy is not exactly sure how to act around her or if she needs special treatment because of her age, so he comes across as slightly patronizing. When his father picks him up, he tells Andy to never watch *The Young and the Restless* with Mrs. DiGiacomo—although he refers to her as “that woman” (51), indicating they do not have the best relationship. There is no explanation as to why, and Andy does not ask.

Chapter 12 finds Andy waiting for his “sister” at the Bookworm. Daisy is portrayed as the opposite of every woman Andy knows—both in appearance and in action. The relationship between Daisy and Andy is unlike any other he has in the book right from the beginning. She is the only one Andy has told the truth about how he got his black eye. She already knows about Karen—but she will not say her name because “It sucks when people say her name, doesn't it” (60)—and all of the other things Andy has been through like losing his job, his friend's wedding, and moving to New York because Henry told her. Daisy makes it a point to not let Andy be distant. They do not know each other, but she makes it a point to let him know that they are going to skip over the awkward stuff and be friends.

Discussion Question 1

Why do you think the author chose to name the old folks' home “New Beginnings: Where Every Day Is Something Special”?



Discussion Question 2

What type of relationship do Andy and his grandfather have?

Discussion Question 3

Why do you think Andy believes Mrs. DiGiacomo is crazy the first time they meet? Does his opinion change as he gets to know her?

Vocabulary

institutional, picturesque, inadvertently, tangible, stenciled, bouquets, hospice, gist, meandering, lurking, occupational, passive



Chapters 13-16

Summary

In Chapter 13, at home, Andy has limited options of what he can do. He can either watch Fox News with Nancy or read from his self-help book. Andy heads up to his room, which he has termed the “Bizarro Room” (65) because it looks exactly like his room when he was a teenager. The walls are the same light blue, and his Nevermind poster, Swingers movie poster, and a photo of Memorial Stadium in Lincoln adorn the walls. His Star Wars Lego models are even in there: his Millennium Falcon looks like the day he finished putting it together, but part of the Ewok Village has crumbled. In his closet are his running shoes from high school, along with his plaid shirts, boom box, and CDs. Mixed in with all of this is a box of photos from when he and Karen were together.

Chapter 14 begins with Andy waking from a hangover. After discovering the box of photos, he went down to the kitchen and grabbed a bottle of Jack Daniels. During his drunken bender, he remembered his breakdown at a meeting at work, which led to his losing his insurance job. He also decided to attempt to hang an NWA poster that he found in his closet, and he was mostly successful, although it is crooked on the wall. The pictures of he and Karen are scattered all over the floor.

His mother is attempting to wake him up so that he can help his father. She is very concerned about the place he is in. Andy eventually gets out of bed and puts on one of his old flannels. As a form of protest against his mother, he decides to forgo pants, so he is in the driveway in Christmas boxers. As he and his father are talking, Don pulls up and tells Bradley that it is against the neighborhood rules to run his motorcycle, and if it happens again, he will boot it. He then gives Bradley a ticket and gives Andy a ticket for not wearing pants.

Chapter 15 begins with Andy spending the next few days getting up late and then visiting his grandpa at New Beginnings. During this time, he has watches the Best Man video several times and attempts to call Karen once, but no one answers. One night, he goes with Daisy to a record shop where he buys his dad a CD of motorcycle engine sounds, and he and Daisy talk about all the women who have broken Andy’s heart—from grade school to college.

Daisy convinces Andy to buy a t-shirt with a cartoon cowboy riding a corn cob that is one size too small. She buys a t-shirt with “Nebraska: Fuck Yeah!” (81) on the front. After they make their purchases, Andy receives phone call from his dad that he needs to head to New Beginnings.

In Chapter 16, Andy finds his mother and brother at New Beginning speaking with Dr. Desai. The situation is not as bad as he expected to find it, but Henry is definitely getting worse. They watch a Cubs game on TV, and Nancy tells Andy that there are



some things of his grandpas in the basement that Andy can have. Jim mentions that there is a computer down there that he and Gina bought that Andy can have.

Analysis

Andy is always stuck in the past in some form or another, but in Chapter 13, he is thrust back into his high school days because his mother has decorated his room exactly the same as it had been. However, since actually returning to the past is impossible, this is only an illusion. What makes it even worse is the fact that mixed in with nostalgia from his carefree teens are the memories of Karen, which are photographs from when she and Andy were together. Unable to deal with the memories and unhappiness, Andy drowns his pain in alcohol.

In Chapter 14, Andy's relationship with his mother is explored further. Nancy recognizes that Andy is not in a good place. However, instead of talking about what can be done to help him feel better, she claims that he is wallowing and acting like a child. Instantly, Andy becomes a petulant child and questions what his mother is doing with her career and the makeover. She claims that if she takes herself seriously, others will too.

Andy continues to patronize his mother by bringing their father into the conversation and asking whether or not he supports her decisions. The relationship between Nancy and Bradley is further portrayed as strained when Nancy responds to Andy's query with, "He doesn't like change," she says. "You know that. He's an accountant" (73).

Andy and his mother's strained relationship becomes even more apparent when Andy heads out of the house to help his father, without pants—a way to protest his mother's authority. However, the act is in vain because his mother has just pulled out of the driveway as he walks outside, so he looks foolish in his Christmas boxers. As he is speaking with his father about the motorcycle, Don pulls up in his golf cart and gives both of them tickets for not obeying the rules of the neighborhood.

Andy does not do well with authority figures. There is no doubt that his mother only wants what is best for him, but she does not know how to help him. She is fully aware that he ran away to New York to escape his problems, but instead of taking about what those problems are, she believes that coming home and getting a good job will fix them. Perhaps that is why she has gone through a makeover herself: to escape what she had been in the past.

The beginning of Chapter 15 shows Andy in a rut. Things change when he decides to meet Daisy at a record store. Again, he and Daisy's relationship is in contrast to how Andy interacts with his family. Daisy makes Andy talk about all the girls who broke his heart, beginning with the first one in grade school.

This scene shows how well Daisy is at breaking Andy out of his shell. She knows that he is stuck in the past so instead of forcing him out of it, she forces him to talk about it. Andy seems to appreciate this approach because he willingly opens up to her. Daisy



and Andy are able to expose themselves to each other both emotionally and physically, as is symbolized when they share a dressing room together.

In Chapter 16, Andy goes to New Beginnings and his broken relationship with his mother and brother becomes more apparent as they talk. No one expresses their feelings about what happened to Grandpa. Instead, Nancy tells Andy that he can go through Henry's stuff in the basement and take what he wants, then Jim jumps onto the loveseat and calls dibs.

Discussion Question 1

Why do you think Andy's parents decided to decorate his room as an exact replica of the room he had as a teenager?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Andy and his family keep referencing 401(k)s? What is the symbolism behind it?

Discussion Question 3

Andy notices a tattoo on Daisy's lower back that comes from the book *The Great Gatsby*. How is the Daisy in this story like the Daisy from Fitzgerald's story?

Vocabulary

painstakingly, relentless, sabbatical, petulant, acknowledged, plausible, poltergeist, imminent, respirator



Chapters 17-20

Summary

Chapter 17 begins with Andy in Mrs. DiGiacomo's room as she microwaves them Hot Pockets; they are watching *The Young and the Restless*. Andy spent the night on the floor of his grandfather's suite and was wandering the halls looking for coffee when Mrs. DiGiacomo found him. They talk about his grandfather and how he taught her about baseball and also about how Daisy does not look like his sister.

Andy eventually heads back to the suite to find his mother watching Sean Hannity. After he asks a question, she pauses the program and answers as if he had been speaking to her instead of Ann Coulter. When Andy tries to leave, he draws attention to himself. He realizes at that moment that he misses his old mom—who had been rounder and brunette.

In Chapter 18, Andy goes to Lazzari's where his former best friend Neal, Karen's twin brother, is the owner. As he pulls into the parking lot, he notices "Bid Red," Neal's Ford F-150, with the dented left fender. His mom is talking on the radio about people not taking responsibility for their lives.

Inside, Andy finds a Terminator 2 pinball machine with his initials still as the high score. No one is at the counter, so Andy helps himself to a beer. When Neal comes to the front from the back, he is unhappy to see Andy, but Andy needs him to be a buffer for his dad, who is the tailor at the Gentleman's Closet.

As they are talking, Owen, another friend and co-owner of the pizza place, says that he had been thinking about Andy while watching the Best Man video. Andy thanks him for posting it on YouTube, and Owen comments that BuzzFeed had it as the "sixth-biggest wedding fail of all time" (101).

Chapter 19 begins with a flashback to Neal and Kristen's wedding. It had been six weeks since Andy and Karen separated, and it was hard for Andy to see her at the wedding. At the reception, they avoided each other, and Andy was doing his best to keep himself together, but one of the other bridesmaids riled him up by talking about how Karen was a fool and that she should not be with him, referring to Tyler. As Andy was about to make his speech, the alcohol hit him and he started throwing up. Jerry, Neal's dad, grabbed him and took him outside, then blocked Andy from getting back in, so Andy punched him then got into Big Red and smashed into a tree.

In Chapter 20, Andy is heading to the Gentleman's Closet to have Jerry make him a suit. At first, Jerry refuses, so Andy asks if Jerry punching him will make him feel better and change his mind. It does. After getting fitted for the suit, Andy charges \$500 to his brother's account.



Analysis

At the beginning of Chapter 17, Andy's relationship with Mrs. DiGiacomo has become different from his other relationships, but not the same as he and Daisy's. He does not feel the need to get close to Mrs. DiGiacomo by telling her about his life, but he is not against listening to her talk about hers. Perhaps this is another attempt to rebel against his parents since his father told him not to watch *The Young and the Restless* with her, or perhaps it is his attempt at having a connection with another human being.

When Andy heads back to his grandfather's suite, he finds his mom talking to the television, practicing for when she gets her chance to be interviewed on Fox. Andy feels awkward seeing his mother in this position and longs for the past, for what she used to be. He comments about how she looks different, which could indicate she was a different person, but from conversations he has had with his father and brother, his mother was always opinionated and had a radio talk show that allowed her to broadcast that opinion. The only difference now is that her look has changed and it is uncomfortable for Andy.

In Chapter 18, Andy travels even further into his past when he goes to Lazzari's pizza to talk to his friend Neal, who is his former best friend and Karen's twin brother. The past—his past—is also alive and well in the pizza place. The pinball machine still holds his initials for the high score.

The tension is thick between Neal and Andy; their relationship is broken, and the assumption is because of what happened to Big Red, but what exactly that is is still unclear at this point. Andy is determined to keep Neal at a distance, hence his attempt to get Neal angry with him. At first, Neal refuses to take the bait, and that upsets Andy. "This is what I hate most about Neal: he's too goddamn nice to properly hold up his end of a feud" (100).

Eventually, Andy does upset Neal, and he feels much more comfortable. It becomes apparent that Andy can only function in relationships when they are tense and awkward.

Andy briefly talks to Owen, a friend from college, who is also co-owner of the pizza place. It becomes clear that Andy is the best man in the video and Owen had uploaded it to YouTube. There is not much other insight into their relationship, but from this interaction, it is strained. Like all of Andy's other relationships, there is no talk of feelings or how they have been, even though they have not seen each other for a year.

One also has to wonder why Owen would post the video on YouTube in the first place. It was obviously not Andy's most glorious moment. If their relationship had been deep, perhaps Owen would have been more compassionate and not posted the moment on the internet where Andy could relive it over and over or the world could laugh at his pain.

Chapter 19 opens with Andy at Neal and Kristen's wedding. This scene shows Andy's descent into despair because of the fact that he no longer has Karen. He cannot be



happy without her. After being banned from going back into the reception, Andy smashes the truck into a tree. The fact that he and Karen are over hits him—both literally and figuratively. Andy's actions at the reception breaks his relationship with Neal and Jerry, which is further emphasized in Chapter 20.

These chapters further highlight Andy's inability to have normal relationships with the people around him. They all have a history with one another, one filled with vomit and getting punched, so it is not exactly warm and friendly. Andy does not even apologize for the way he acted. In fact, at one point, he tells Neal, "Guess what, Neal,' I say. 'This isn't about you. Not everything is about you and your precious goddamn wedding reception, OK? Other people have shit going on, too. Like me. I'm here to buy a suit—something nice. Apparently not something European—but something respectable, so I won't look like a degenerate at my grandpa's inevitable funeral" (111-112).

Andy's self-centeredness once again shines through. He is going through a rough time and his grandpa is at death's door, but in a way, this moment is about Neal's wedding reception. It is about how Andy ruined their day in a multitude of ways, but instead of dealing with that, he turns the pity back on himself. Obviously, Jerry does not feel sorry for him—he is not going to make him a suit just because Andy is going through a hard time—but Jerry is more than happy to punch him and move forward from there.

Discussion Question 1

How does Henry's impending death impact the other characters and how they interact with one another?

Discussion Question 2

How does the dialogue from Nancy's radio shows apply to what is happening in Andy's life?

Discussion Question 3

When Andy flashes back to the past, he portrays himself as a complete mess. Do you think this makes him a sympathetic character or one who is berating himself and deserves condemnation?

Vocabulary

smoldering, hyperalert, prosperity, infuriating, schlepping, buffer, preposterous, perennially, quirk, timbre, accessories, concussion



Chapters 21-24

Summary

As Andy and Neal are heading back to Lazzari's in Chapter 21, they are pulled over by Tyler in his ambulance. He tells Andy to stop creeping around the house and to quit calling. Tyler pulls Andy out of the car and punches in the stomach. When Neal tries to be comforting, Andy kicks him out of the car.

In Chapter 22, Andy is having ice cream with Daisy. She asks him what his Feel Sorry Flick is, and he tries to tell her about Applebee's, but she vetoes it and makes him try again. He tells her a story about when he and Karen were trapped in the house during a snow storm. They had been laying on the couch watching Ace Ventura, with Karen's feet propped up on his legs, and he was massaging her feet. He was massaging up her legs, and she lifted her hoodie so he could kiss her hip bone and stomach. He claims it was the last perfect day of their marriage.

After Andy finishes his story, Daisy kisses him. He then heads back to the Caddie and notices the VW Bug parked next to it.

In Chapter 23, Andy heads to a coffee shop with Stephen, Ronnie, and Chili (Charles). They are the three men who have been vandalizing his parents' yard. They talk briefly about Daisy, then Stephen tells Andy that he knows all about him and his family. He passes Andy an envelope with pictures of his dad having an affair. Stephen tells Andy that if his mom does not stop her rhetoric, those pictures will go to the press.

In Chapter 24, Andy is having an uncomfortable dinner with his parents. No one is talking, and they are reading magazines at the table. His mom gets the call to be on Fox, and that night while Andy is cleaning the kitchen, he calls his brother to talk about the pictures of their dad.

Analysis

In Chapter 21, the tension between Andy and Neal is still high, the situation still awkward. In addition, as with the vast majority of Andy's interactions with others, the conversation between him and Tyler is also tense.

Since Karen is gone, Andy is unable to be happy, and he blames everyone around him for what happened: Tyler for being the one who took her and Neal for not telling him that she was having an affair. These relationships are broken because of Andy's desire to be with a girl he cannot have.

In Chapter 22, Andy goes to get ice cream with Daisy. As Daisy is good at doing, when Andy tries to put some distance between her and him, she does not allow it. She tells him that he is eating ice cream on a sunny day, and then she asks him what his Feel



Sorry Flick is. He tries to tell her that he does not have one, but she knows better than to believe him.

After he finishes telling about his Feel Sorry Flick, Daisy does not say a word and looks sad. She kisses Andy, which makes him lightheaded. This reinforces how the relationship with Daisy is unlike all of Andy's other relationships. She is willing to talk about what is upsetting him when no one else will and is sympathetic to his pain, and Andy is willing to share, which begins to make him feel better.

The relationship Andy has with the Glitter Mafia, Stephen, Ronnie, and Chili, is initially set up to be tense and awkward. After all, these three men have been vandalizing his parents' yard and supposedly hate his mother. Perhaps that is the reason why he is willing to go to coffee with them without knowing their intention. It is apparent that he does not have the greatest relationship with Nancy, but this would definitely upset her in many ways.

In Chapter 24, Andy is having an awkward and uncomfortable dinner with his parents. The scene becomes even more telling about how his parents' relationship is broken. They are not speaking to one another, they are reading magazines at the table, which he remembers as being against the rules when he was growing up. Andy tries to engage them in conversation by asking his father about serving on a board, which sort of works. It ends when Nancy tells them she received the call from Fox. The relationship between Nancy and Bradley and Nancy and Andy further becomes defined when it becomes apparent that neither of the men are overly excited about this new development. In fact, after the news, Andy cannot even say the word "Fox" (141).

His concern for his parents deepens, and Andy decides he needs to talk to his brother about what is going on. As with every other conversation Andy has with his brother, this one is awkward. Once again, it becomes apparent that Andy cannot have conversations of emotional depth with his family.

Discussion Question 1

How does the confrontation with Tyler give insight into the type of person Andy is?

Discussion Question 2

Why do you think Daisy takes Andy to the various places (the bookstore, the record shop, the ice cream parlor) around Omaha that she does?

Discussion Question 3

What is Andy's first impression of the Glitter Mafia and how do they fulfill or reject his expectations?

Vocabulary

sacred, montage, rubberneckers, genre, articulate, perpetually, hyperarticulate, affected, hackneyed, dialogue, ominous, impediment



Chapters 25-28

Summary

In Chapter 25, Daisy calls Andy from the mall, telling him that she feels bad she ran out before she could tell him her Feel Sorry Flick. She is at the mall and wants to know what size pants he wears because she is buying him some. Her flick is a day when her boyfriend was trying to teach her how to play the guitar. She could not figure out how to place her fingers correctly, so he moves behind her to help.

In Chapter 26, Andy meets his brother at Lazzario's. He tells his brother about the pictures, and Jim tells him not to worry about them. He had been approached in the past with the same threat, but nothing came of it. As they are talking, Emma pulls down a neon sign that had been hanging in the window.

Chapter 27 begins with Andy sitting in his room fixing the Ewok Village and listening to rap. His dad enters and tells him that Mitch Cameron's show is about to start. As they watch, they are mortified by Nancy's words. She comments about how the gay community is more promiscuous than the straight community and how allowing gay marriage will fundamentally change society.

In Chapter 28, Andy is looking for his dad. After the segment, Bradley left the room. Andy finds him 30 minutes later in the living room waiting for the Glitter Mafia, and Andy offers him a beer. Andy asks if his father agrees with his mom, and he responds by saying that it does not matter that marriage is not about agreeing but about staying, and that is what he is doing.

Analysis

In Chapter 25, it is further emphasized how different Andy and Daisy's relationship is from the others. Her actions in buying him pants could be construed as motherly and caring—especially considering that around his own mother Andy undermines her authority by not wearing pants. Daisy also feels bad for not telling Andy her Feel Sorry Flick. The fact that she cares about sharing something with him like he shared with her means that there is give and take in the relationship and recognition of the other's feelings.

Despite the fact that Andy is able to open up to Daisy about his life and emotions, he still uses sarcasm and jokes as a self-defense, which is evident in this chapter. The mystery of who Daisy is also deepens. Andy finds the fact that she has been banned from New Beginnings by his mother concerning - but not enough to demand she answer his question or ask his mother about her.

The conversation between Andy and Jim is another example of the dynamics of their relationship. Andy is genuinely concerned about what is going to happen with his



parents, and his brother dismisses it. In addition, he lets Andy know how stupid he is for going to his former house. It is apparent that Andy is hurting emotionally, but instead of trying to help him, Jim pushes him away, and Andy allows him to do it.

In Chapter 27, the distance between father and son is evident. As Andy sits on the floor of his bedroom listening to his high school rap CDs and putting together his Ewok Village, his father makes an off-hand comment about how childish he is acting, to which Andy has to agree that he is. This is evident when Bradley tells him that it is almost time for the show to start and Andy looks at his watch (even though he is not wearing one) and asks if they know exactly when she is supposed to be on and in the comment Bradley makes about the Legos, remembering when Andy received the kit—when he was 11.

After they watch the news program with Nancy as a guest, Andy and his father are shocked by what they have just seen, but they do not find comfort in talking to one another. Instead, Bradley disappears from the room, leaving Andy alone.

Discussion Question 1

Why do you think Jim berates Andy for his behavior instead of asking how he can help his brother?

Discussion Question 2

What does the reaction Bradley and Andy have to Nancy being on Mitch Cameron say about how they feel about her and what she does?

Discussion Question 3

After the interview, Andy and Bradley talk briefly about marriage; what insight does this conversation give about Bradley or his politics?

Vocabulary

exclusively, blacklist, streamlining, devastated, bribery, manhandling, horrifically, homoeroticism, promiscuity, semantics, flustered



Chapters 29-32

Summary

In Chapter 29, Andy heads down to the basement to go through his grandfather's things. While down there, his mother finds him. She asks what he thought about the segment, and he tells her she thought she was mean. She tells him that it does not really matter because her contact at Fox liked it.

In Chapter 30, Andy goes to the Gentleman's Closet to get his suit. While there, Jerry pulls out a bottle of scotch and offers Andy a glass. Jerry tells Andy that he never disliked him as much as Andy thought he did. Jerry talks about Karen and what it was like to raise a daughter. He comments about how from kindergarten on different young boys were enamored with Karen and how she would break their hearts by rejecting them. In high school, Jerry had to talk an exchange student off a roof after Karen rejected him. He comments that even with guys Karen liked, she would get tired of them. He then tells Andy that despite what happened, he does not get to take it out on Neal.

Daisy then enters the store and pretends to be Andy's girlfriend. She kisses him in front of Jerry and tells Andy to try on the suit, claiming she has veto power if it does not look good. As they leave, she holds Andy's hand.

In Chapter 31, Andy is in the Bizarro Room with his grandpa's laptop telling himself that he is not going to go onto Facebook. As he is typing in the "f," a web address, "freegirlcamslive," (177) pops up. Curious, he clicks on the link and finds Daisy's picture. He clicks on it, and watches her as she sits on her bed in short shorts, interacting with the other men in the room who are tipping her. He texts her and tells her he is watching her, and she texts him back with her address.

In Chapter 32, Andy is at Daisy's apartment. They talk about their Feel Sorry Flicks, and Daisy comments about maybe they are not supposed to turn them off. When Andy says that is unhealthy, Daisy points out that they have not been healthy for a long time. She then helps Andy recreate the scene with Karen during the blizzard.

Andy wakes up in Daisy's bed. Her wall is covered with the various terms her students use to describe vagina in their stories. She explains her job as a cam girl, then tells Andy that his grandfather found her after Googling "How to find a girlfriend when you're alone" (189). Daisy then pulls a photograph out of her book, which is of a woman in a 1950-style swim suit that looks like Daisy; it is Andy's grandmother Dot. Daisy then has Andy help her recreate a moment with her ex.



Analysis

While Andy is in the basement going through his grandfather's belongings in Chapter 29, his mother finds him. Instead of talking about how they are feeling about the impending death of a family member, Nancy wants to know what he is doing. Andy and Nancy do not share the same outlook on life, and that puts a strain on their relationship. They are able to speak to one another because they are family, but the dynamics between them is defensive. They always seem to be justifying—or attempting to justify—their actions to one another, which makes their interactions tense and awkward.

In Chapter 30, Andy has gone to the Gentleman's Closet to pick up his suit. While there, he and Jerry's relationship becomes a little less tense and awkward. While drinking scotch, Jerry takes the moment to tell Andy that he never disliked him as much as Andy thought he did. The reason Jerry tells Andy this is because he wants him to realize how painful his actions have been, especially for Neal, and for Andy to realize that he should not put so much of his happiness in a relationship and girl who could not give it back.

In Chapter 31, the relationship between Andy and Daisy takes a turn and grows deeper. He sees her on the webcam and witnesses how the men interact with her. When he brings it to her attention, she invites him to her apartment. In Chapter 32, when he makes it to her apartment, she recreates the blizzard scene with Andy.

Daisy and Andy have a connection that he does not share with any of the other characters in the book. It is based on a shared pain and the desire to feel better, even if for only a moment. However, that connection is an illusion because both of them are pretending to be someone they are not. This scene also gives insight into how Daisy is willing to be whatever she needs to be for men—from those who watch her on the webcam to pretending to be Henry's deceased wife. However, in that world, she has power and control and the ability to make people feel better about themselves.

Discussion Question 1

While Andy is going through his grandfather's things in the basement, why do you think he decides to only take the laptop and nothing else?

Discussion Question 2

Why do you think Jerry decides to share the story about Karen's line of broken hearts with Andy?

Discussion Question 3

How does Daisy's job as a cam girl give her power and control?

Vocabulary

musty, commemorative, defiant, marketability, exhilarating, kneading, deactivated, relentlessly, phenomenon, diatribe, scantily



Chapters 33-36

Summary

In Chapter 33, Mrs. DiGiacomo helps Andy and Daisy sneak into New Beginnings at night so Daisy can say goodbye to Henry.

In Chapter 34, Andy heads to his parents' house and finds his dad asleep on the front porch. He moves a deck chair next to him and checks email from his previous account that he could not figure out how to delete after Neal's wedding. There are several from Neal, and the subject lines reflect how upset he is with Andy. They taper in irritation, and Andy scans a few lines of one of the last emails. It asks if they could just forget the whole "Karen Era" and go back to being the friends they were before. Andy opens the last email Neal sent. In it, Neal comments that the worse part about the entire situation is that he will never get to hear Andy's best man speech, and he was sure it was good.

As Andy is sitting on the porch, he notices a Ken Doll with a note tucked under his arm that reads, "Andrew: I wish you had taken us more seriously. Just remember, it didn't have to be like this. Sincerely, The Glitter Mafia" (198).

In Chapter 35, Andy makes an attempt to find Stephen and talk him down from his plans, but he was not at the coffee shop. He and Daisy sit in the Caddie in front of the pizza place, and he tells her everything that has happened—including about the affair, which she is not surprised about. Eventually, Andy heads into the restaurant, which is extremely busy, and gives his best man speech over the microphone to Neal and everyone waiting for pizza. When he finishes, Daisy is standing near the pinball machine, and as the crowd thins, Neal and Owen take the time to sit at the table and chat with Andy and Daisy. Both men are awkward and goofy around Daisy.

In Chapter 36, Andy heads to New Beginnings and talks to Mrs. DiGiacomo, who is upset that Andy never told her that Daisy is not his sister. He tells her that he tried to but she was not listening. He then asks if maybe Daisy said the same thing, but Mrs. DiGiacomo says no. From the beginning, Daisy always claimed to be Henry's granddaughter. His mother is in his grandfather's room, and she tells Andy to invite Daisy over for dinner.

Analysis

In Chapter 33, Andy is slowly emerging from his self-absorption and pain. He goes with Daisy to New Beginnings to see his grandfather. Andy takes the time to apologize to his grandfather for not being there more often and tells him what a wonderful grandfather he has been. There is a connection between the two, and even though it has taken a while, Andy finally realizes that he should have done more.



Andy returns late to the house in Chapter 34. His father has fallen asleep on the porch, and Andy tries to wake him, but he knows it is in vain. Instead of heading inside and leaving his father alone, he grabs a blanket to stay out on the porch with him. At the moment, there is no awkwardness between the two of them. Andy is attempting to make a connection between the two; however, it is a small step considering his father is sleeping.

In Chapter 35, Andy makes even more strides into pulling himself out of despair. After taking the time to realize that others have been hurt, he decides to make amends. He goes to the pizza place to give Neal his best man speech. He is successful in mending he and Neal's relationship, and when he finishes, he notices that Daisy heard the entire thing. Her presence further reinforces how her support has helped Andy come back to life.

In Chapter 36, Andy is back at New Beginnings speaking with Mrs. DiGiacomo. His feelings of awkwardness with her have vanished, and they share the fact that Daisy lied to them, giving them something they can connect to each other with. Once again, Daisy was the catalyst for allowing Andy to connect with someone else.

Discussion Question 1

After spending time with Daisy, how does Andy change? If there is a change, is it noticeable in his actions?

Discussion Question 2

How does Andy and Daisy's relationship compare or contrast with the relationships Andy has with others?

Discussion Question 3

Is it possible Andy can be compassionate, or is he too self-absorbed?

Vocabulary

efficient, elaborate, ranting, resentment, liberating, henchmen, shotgunned, slinging, babbling, yammering, flustered, oppressive, tentative, impromptu



Chapters 37-40

Summary

In Chapter 37, the entire family is at Nancy and Bradley's house for dinner. Daisy has graciously accepted the invitation, and when she arrives, Andy takes her on a tour of the house. While in the Bizarro Room, Daisy comments about how she is not surprised that Nancy has left his room the same because "That's what her kind of politics is all about, right? The past is this sacred, glorified thing? Even though it never really existed in the first place" (213).

At dinner, Gina tries to engage Daisy in conversation, even when the atmosphere becomes tense. Nancy eventually reveals that Daisy's real name is Stephanie Fitzgerald and that her father gave Stephanie \$185,000 and wrote her into the will. Stephanie/Daisy tries to defend herself by explaining that she was nothing more than a friend to Henry when everyone else abandoned him. She looks to Andy for his understanding. He does not give it to her, and she leaves the house.

In Chapter 38, the photographs from Bradley's affair have made it to the internet and have been picked up by several new outlets, including the Omaha World-Herald, Salon, the Huffington Post, and Morning Joe. Andy learns that his mom had known about Stephanie for quite a while. In addition to the tips, she will inherit \$100,000 upon Henry's death, which Nancy is attempting to fight. Andy knows how bad all of this sounds, but he cannot stop thinking about Daisy/Stephanie.

In Chapter 39, Andy meets Stephen in the coffee shop. Stephen tells him he feels bad for having to send out those photos, but since he made the threat, he had to follow through. Stephen says that in the long run, Nancy will not be any worse off because now she is a symbol for the conservatives' cause. Andy does not see her that way; she is just his mom.

In Chapter 40, Andy comes home to see his dad's bike tipped over on its side in the garage. Don has made good on his threat and booted it. Bradley tried to remove it, but to no avail. Andy decides he will not let this injustice stand, so he comes up with an idea. After getting Big Red from Neal, he and his father place the bike in the back of the truck. With the boom box strapped to the roof, they play the motorcycle engine CD and blare rap music from the cab of the truck while driving through the neighborhood. Don tries to catch them in his golf cart, but it is not hard for them to get away.

As they are making their getaway, the squirrels finally get their revenge, and Andy crashes the truck.



Analysis

In Chapter 37, the relationship the Carter family has with one another is put on display. At dinner, the relationships between everyone once again become tense and strained. Nancy reveals that Daisy's real name is Stephanie and that her father has given her \$180,000 in tips online and wrote her into the will. During this conversation, Daisy pleads with Andy to help and believe her, but he does not. Eventually, she walks out of the house. It appears at this point their relationship has been broken.

In Chapter 38, Andy finds out more about Daisy/Stephanie and how his mom has known about her for a while. It should change the relationship Daisy and Andy have, but instead, he finds that he cannot stop thinking about her, which shows how deep their relationship goes.

By Chapter 40, Andy's relationship with his father has changed. Andy knows the pain Bradley has gone through, and it all seems to accumulate in the fact that his motorcycle has been booted. His father finally opens up to Andy about his affair, and they are able to relate to one another, knowing that their happiness was tied to women they were unable to attain. Neither of them can do anything about the fact that these women have left their lives, but Andy uses the opportunity to get back at the authority figures.

The chapter ends with the squirrels finally getting their revenge and wrecking Big Red, injuring both Andy and his father. It appears that things are not getting better, but it actually symbolizes that Andy has been broken down completely, physically and emotionally, and now has the chance to heal.

Discussion Question 1

How does Daisy's retelling of how she and Andy met make him look good? Why do you think she would do that for him?

Discussion Question 2

How does the release of the affair photos change the family's relationship?

Discussion Question 3

Why would the author decide to have the squirrels cause the accident in Big Red? What does it symbolize?

Vocabulary

ignorant, somber, inexplicable, astronomical, snide, sully, desegregation, intel, bigot, booted, pining, omen



Chapters 41-44

Summary

In Chapter 41, Andy wakes up in the hospital, aware that time has passed but unsure how much. Tyler sits in a chair next to him. He had come to the call after Andy totaled the truck. Andy broke his wrist, while his father had some bumps and bruises and needed stitches on his forehead.

Tyler asks about Karen and how she acted right before she left Andy—if she got sullen and silent—and Andy lies and tells him that she is just moody and that everything is going to be fine. Andy says he needs to get out of the hospital to see his grandfather, then learns that Henry has died.

Chapter 42 is Henry's funeral. The entire family is there, but the relationships are strained. His mother and father sit at opposite ends of the pew. Emma plays with a hymnal, then inadvertently drops it on her foot, and the only one who can comfort her is Andy. He takes her out of the service, and Karen follows them out.

They sit in Karen's car while the rain pours down. Karen comments that she tried to stay in love with Andy, but she was incapable. Andy then finds out that she and Tyler are engaged. Karen comments that she heard Andy was with someone and that it hurt her. Before getting out of the car, Andy kisses her knuckles, and Emma demands that her knuckles be kissed too.

In Chapter 43, Andy prepares to head back to New York. He meets Daisy in the gazebo in their yard. They talk about various things, including the fact that she is not going to keep the money Henry left for her. Andy says she should go to New York. She says she cannot because she is still in love with her ex and if he decides to come back, he needs to be able to find her.

Between Chapter 43 and 44, there is a section that shows what happened between Daisy and Henry in his room. She pretended to be Dot so that Henry could feel better about letting go and rejoining his wife.

In Chapter 44, Andy is back in New York getting crap from Byron about having a broken arm and being useless as a bartender. He sends Andy home, telling him to come back the next night prepared to serve beer. At his apartment, Jeter has left him a pile of dead mice. He follows Andy into the house, and they go through their routine—Jeter walks around the house and Andy pours him cereal.

Andy's phone rings, and Byron tells him that someone is looking for him at the bar. Andy imagines it is Daisy, but then discovers it is Katie, the girl he was supposed to go on a blind date with. He meets her outside his apartment, and they head up to the roof to see if they can see the Empire State Building lit up in rainbow colors to celebrate the Supreme Court's passing of same-sex marriage.



Analysis

In Chapter 41, Andy wakes up in the hospital with a broken wrist and a concussion. Tyler is sitting by the side of his bed, asking if he is all right. Their relationship has not changed much, mainly because Andy does not want it to change, which is understandable since Tyler is the man his wife had an affair with. Tyler attempts to extend friendship, however, by asking Andy about Karen and how she acted before she left Andy. There are so many responses Andy could give Tyler at this particular moment, but he decides to lie to Tyler, which inadvertently gives Tyler comfort.

Chapter 42 is Henry's funeral, and the relationships between the family have altered further. His mother finally recognizes the tough year Andy has had and the pain he has been going through. "You were my sensitive one," she says. She leans forward, glancing at my brother. "Jim was always, well...Jim. You cared about things, though. You always felt things more than he did. I always liked that about you" (245). In their pain, Andy and his mother are able to connect.

Andy even gets the chance to speak with Karen. Andy finally gets some closure and an explanation of why Karen left him, even if it is only because she was unable to stay in love with him. However, it gives him the opportunity to see that he might not be as damaged as he assumed he was, which is what he needed to realize to move on.

In Chapter 43, Daisy finally comes back and tells Andy to meet her in the gazebo in their backyard. Their relationship has not changed, despite everything that Andy has learned about her. He still feels connected to her, and he is still able to talk to her about things he cannot talk to anyone else about. There is even the chance that he would be willing to have a deeper relationship with her, which becomes apparent when he asks her to come to New York. She refuses, but this also frees Andy to be able to start over with his life.

Andy and Daisy's relationship was never meant to form into something more than a friendship forged in pain. Andy's happiness was always tied to a woman he could never attain (Karen), but Daisy showed him that it is possible to find happiness outside that relationship. It is ironic that she is able to show Andy this fact considering she is pining for a guy she cannot have, but it is enough to propel Andy forward.

In Chapter 44, Andy is back in New York at work. His relationship with Byron is fun, with his supervisor giving him a hard time for having a broken wrist and being unable to make drinks. However, it is apparent that Byron cares for Andy. At the beginning of the book, he had set Andy up with a blind date, from the phone conversation the pair had before Andy went home to Omaha, it was apparent that Andy had told him about Karen.

The book ends with Andy finally meeting up with his blind date, Katie. Immediately, their relationship begins with openness and honesty. She tells Andy that she was going to meet him at the bar, but then became concerned that he was going to be a jerk, so she decided not to go.



By the end, the relationship between Andy and Jeter has also changed. He decides he could become a cat person. “I could buy some cat toys, maybe some actual cat food. I could get some cardigans. Drink Less. Post pictures on Twitter of him doing mysterious cat things. That sounds like starting over to me—like a clean Etch A Sketch” (263). Shortly after making this decision, as he heads to the front of his apartment to meet Katie, Jeter follows him, then follows them up to the roof. Jeter even allows Katie to pet him, symbolizing both of their changes in being open to new relationships.

Discussion Question 1

Life has both literally and figuratively beat Andy up. What does he learn from this?

Discussion Question 2

At Henry’s funeral, Andy finally gets the chance to speak to his ex-wife Karen. By this point in the story, Andy has had contact with a variety of different women. How are they alike? How are they different?

Discussion Question 3

What is Daisy’s role in the story? How does she release both Henry and Andy from the torments they have placed on themselves?

Vocabulary

hallucinating, stabilized, chafing, sophisticated, glum, platitudes, precision, inflection, obnoxious, customary



Characters

Andy Carter

Andy is the novel's protagonist. This book is Andy's story, which begins from the moment his wife left him at an Applebee's. He is attempting to get his life back on track, but in reality, he has run away to New York so he does not have to deal with the pain and rejection. He has become a bartender at a place called the Underground, and his supervisor, Byron, attempts to set him up on a blind date that does not work out because the girl never shows.

Andy heads back home to Omaha for his grandfather's last moments. There, he is confronted by the past, including his family, former friends, and his ex-wife's new boyfriend. He also meets Daisy, who has decided it is her mission to bring Andy back to the land of the living. In addition, Andy is introduced to the Glitter Mafia, a group of homosexual men who are trying to persuade Nancy, Andy's mother, to stop spewing her conservative rhetoric on the radio and Fox News.

Throughout the novel, Andy finds himself in confrontations with the people from his past. Throughout the ordeal, not only is he hurting emotionally, but he gets damaged physically, too. From a black eye from a bicycle rider right before leaving New York to crashing Neal's truck and breaking his wrist and getting a concussion, Andy learns that no matter what life throws at him or how bad he gets hurt, he can pick himself up and move forward. With the help of Daisy, he also learns how to overcome his heartache and find someone new to love.

Daisy/Stephanie Fitzgerald

Daisy is a friend of Henry's who decides she is going to make it her mission to bring Andy back to life. Daisy teaches a writing class online that she has termed "Vagina Fiction" and is also a cam girl. Henry found her because he was lonely and wanted to find a girlfriend, so he Googled how. She looks strikingly like Henry's deceased wife, Dot.

Daisy has been hurt by an ex just like Andy, so she has the ability to sympathize with him. Her approach is unconventional and Andy finds her odd but intriguing, so he goes along with her plan. Daisy is also the only person Andy confides in, even though he knows she is keeping secrets from him.

Daisy does have secrets that she keeps from Andy, but Nancy makes it a point to reveal them. Daisy's real name is Stephanie Fitzgerald and she is from Kansas City. Henry had given her more than \$180,000 through the website she works for and wrote her into his will. Daisy accuses the family of abandoning Henry and explains that she was his only friend.



Daisy sneaks into New Beginnings at night with the help of Mrs. DiGiacomo because Nancy has banned her from the building. On one particular night, she pretends to be Dot to give Henry comfort and to let him know that it is all right for him to let go.

Bradley Carter

Bradley Carter is Andy's father. Bradley is a retired accountant. He spends most of his days shooting squirrels with a paintball gun or working on a vintage motorcycle he bought. When Andy returns, it is apparent that he is concerned about his son, but he does not go out of his way to talk to Andy about his pain.

Bradley also has a problem with Don Johnson. He feels that the security officer's job is made up and goes out of his way to undermine Don's authority. Bradley does not believe in everything his wife says on her show, but as her husband, he stays. He is not happy in the marriage so he has an affair. When that information comes to light after being sent to the news media, he breaks off the relationship.

Andy realizes that his father has been defeated and broken down. Don has booted his motorcycle, so to help them both feel better, they load the bike into the back of Neal's truck, Big Red, and drive it through the neighborhood blasting rap music and a CD of motorcycle sounds. The stunt makes Bradley happy, right until the moment the squirrels cause Andy to crash the truck.

Nancy Carter

Nancy Carter is Andy's mother. Nancy is a conservative Catholic who is against same-sex marriage. She has her own radio show and expresses her opinion loudly and often. She is also being looked at as a potential panelist for Fox News. To be more appealing, she has gone through a makeover, losing weight and dressing in power suits and heels.

Her relationship with Andy is awkward and strained. She is fully aware of how much Andy is hurting, but she never goes out of her way to talk to him about it. She takes on her motherly role and tries to force Andy to behave appropriately. It is apparent that Andy loves her, but he comments on how he misses the old her and that he does not believe in the things she says while on air.

Jeter

Jeter is the cat that hangs around Andy's apartment building. When the mood suits him, Jeter enters Andy's apartment and eats Cap'n Crunch. When he is finished, he usually hisses and demands to be let out. Jeter also leaves decapitated mice on Andy's door mat.



Karen

Karen is Andy's ex-wife. She left him at an Applebee's. Andy finds out later that she had been having an affair with the ambulance driver who lived down the street. Most of what the reader knows about Karen comes from Andy's memories of her or from what her father says about her. According to Jerry, Karen always had a line of admirers, but she rarely reciprocated the feelings, which left behind a string of broken hearts. At the funeral, while Andy and Karen are talking in her car, she reveals that she and Tyler are engaged but that she is unsure if he is really the one.

Don Johnson

Don Johnson is the Prairie West Security Guard. Don's job is to ensure that all the rules and regulations in Andy's parents' neighborhood are upheld. He drives a golf cart around and gives tickets. He is not particularly liked by Jim, Andy, or Bradley, and they do what they can to undermine his authority, including turning up their music when he tells them to turn it down and driving around the neighborhood with a booted motorcycle in the back of a truck while blaring rap music and a CD of motorcycle engine sounds.

Jim Carter

Jim Carter is Andy's older brother, married to Gina. From the moment Jim picks Andy up from the airport, it is apparent that he and his brother are not very close. Jim's phone conversation for his job is more important than talking to his brother, who he has not seen for a year. Jim knows everything that is going on in Andy's life, but not because he spoke to Andy about it but because he spoke to others about it.

When Andy tells Jim that he is worried about their parents and about their father's affair, Jim dismisses it and says that nothing is going to happen. He talks down to Andy and tells him that he is behaving like a fool.

Emma Carter

Emma Carter is Andy's niece and Jim's daughter. Like Bryce, Andy has no idea how old Emma is, but she was a baby when he left for New York. She does not talk much, and when she does, it is hard to understand. When Jim and the kids pick Andy up from the airport and take him to his parents' house, she offers Andy Cheerios and her Dora the Explorer doll.

While at the pizza place where Andy and Jim meet to talk about their father's affair, she pulls a neon sign down from the window. At Henry's funeral, she inadvertently drops a hymnal on her foot, and Andy is the only one who can console her. When Andy takes her out into the church's lobby, it gives Karen the opportunity to follow him so they can



talk in the car. Emma is with them and acts as a buffer, lightning the mood with her childish antics.

Bryce Carter

Bryce Carter is Andy's nephew and Jim's son. Andy cannot remember exactly how old Bryce is, but believes he is around seven. Bryce plays video games and is more often than not wearing his karate gi—even to church. The one time he does not have it on is at Henry's funeral, and Andy finds it sad that he is not wearing it.

Henry

Henry is Andy's grandfather who is dying of cancer in the hospice ward of New Beginnings. He has a tube down his throat, so he is not able to talk much, although he attempts to communicate through writing. However, he does not do that much because it exhausts him. Henry is a huge Cubs fan. Andy has fond memories of his grandpa including being able to drive his Caddie when Andy was only 13, going to baseball games with him, and one time at Christmas when he picked up a raw turkey and made it dance for Jim and Andy.

According to Daisy, when Henry first got sick, he was scared and alone; his family was not around to support him, so he found Daisy online and instantly formed a friendship with her because she looked exactly like his wife Dot when she was younger. He then proceeded to give her \$180,000 and write her into the will.

Neal

Neal is Karen's twin brother and Andy's former best friend. He also co-owns Lazzari's pizza. Andy and Neal had met in college and became instant friends. Andy was the best man at Neal's wedding, which occurred six weeks after he and Karen separated, and Andy proceeded to destroy the reception. He drank too much, and after finding out about Karen having an affair, proceeded to vomit right before his best man speech, punched Neal's father in the face, and then crashed Big Red into a tree.

After the debacle and when Andy moved to New York, Neal tried to stay in contact by sending emails, but Andy did not read them until he was back in Omaha. Neal wanted to remain friends and the thing he was most upset about with the whole ordeal was that he never got to hear Andy's best man speech. Andy mends their friendship by giving his best man speech during the lunch rush at the pizza place.

Tyler Sullivan

Tyler Sullivan is the ambulance driver who had an affair with Andy's ex-wife Karen and is currently her new fiancé. Tyler does not appreciate Andy lurking around their house



and calling in the middle of the night, so on one occasion he pulls Andy over with his ambulance, tells him to stay away from Karen, and then punches Andy in the stomach. Tyler is also the one who treats Andy after he wrecks Neal's truck and breaks his wrist. While in the hospital, he asks Andy if there were any signs that Karen was going to leave him, such as being silent, and Andy lies to him and says that she is just moody.

Byron

Byron is Andy's supervisor at the Underground bar and a black man who played linebacker at Rutgers once. He is Andy's only friend in New York, and he sets Andy up with a blind date (his roommate's sister) and tells Andy to stay away from Karen when he returns to Omaha. When Andy returns to work after his grandfather's funeral, Byron makes it a point to give him a good-natured hard time for having a broken wrist and being worthless in the bar.

Owen

Owen is a friend of Andy's from college and co-owner of Lazzari's pizza with Neal. According to Andy, Owen is still also a stoner. Owen is the one who uploaded the "Worst Best Man....Ever!!!!" video to YouTube and constantly points out to Andy how many views it has received.

Jerry

Jerry is Karen and Neal's father and owner of the Gentleman's Closet. When Andy started throwing up at Neal's wedding, Jerry ushered him out and then blocked him from getting back in. Andy punched him before running off and crashing Neal's truck. When Andy returns to Omaha, he needs a suit for his grandfather's funeral and goes to Jerry to have it made. At first, Jerry refuses. When Andy offers to have Jerry punch him so they will be even, Jerry does and then agrees to make his suit.

When Andy goes to pick his suit up, Jerry shares scotch with him and tells him that he never hated Andy as much as he thought he did. He then explains that Karen has always left behind a trail of broken hearts and that her leaving may have always been fated from the beginning. He then tells Andy not to take his anger out on Neal because he had nothing to do with what happened.

Mrs. DiGiacomo

Mrs. DiGiacomo is another resident of New Beginnings. Mrs. DiGiacomo's outfit of choice is a robe, and she is constantly roaming the grounds of New Beginnings. When Andy first meets her, he believes that she is crazy and is not quite sure how to interact with her, so he comes off as patronizing.



She helps Daisy sneak in at night to see Henry. She invites Andy to watch *The Young and the Restless* with her and makes him Hot Pockets and tea. At Henry's funeral, she reveals that she had a crush on Henry and invited him to dinner. He rejected her in the nicest way by telling her that the only person he wanted to have dinner with was his wife, and she was no longer around.

Stephen

Stephen is the head of the Glitter Mafia, who are trying to silence Nancy. He and his friends Ronnie and Chili are responsible for defacing Andy's parents' yard with Ken Dolls and blowup sex dolls. At one point, they even cover Nancy with a handful of glitter, as well as the Caddie.

Stephen approaches Andy to ask him to convince his mother to stop saying her rhetoric on the radio. He tells Andy that if he does not, he will take photos of Bradley having an affair to the police. When Andy is unable to silence his mother, Stephen follows through on his threat. In a conversation at the coffee house after the news has hit the media, Stephen tells Andy that he feels bad about having to do that because the real person who was hurt was Bradley.

Gina Carter

Gina Carter is Jim's wife. Gina makes it a point to send Andy birthday cards and engage Daisy in polite conversation at an awkward family dinner.

Nurse Sandy

When Andy first visits his grandfather in the hospice ward, Nurse Sandy is the one who shows him to the room and explains that Henry cannot talk and spends most of his time sleeping.

Gayle

Gayle is the sales associate at the Bookworm who asks Andy three times if he is all right.

Kenny

Kenny is Daisy's stalker who shows up in random places and points out to Andy that the Glitter Mafia is the one who covered his car in glitter.



Dr. Desai

Dr. Desai is Henry's doctor.

Gloria

Gloria is Neal's mom. She is mentioned at the flashback to Neal's wedding as releasing doves.

Ronnie

Ronnie is a member of the Glitter Mafia. He accompanies Stephen and Chili to Andy's parents' house to deface the yard. He is also a bodyguard when Stephen takes Andy to coffee to show him the pictures he has showing Bradley's affair.

Chili (Charles)

Chili/Charles is a member of the Glitter Mafia. His role is much the same as Ronnie's. According to Stephen, it was Chili's idea to put the sex doll in Andy's parents' tree.

Multi-colored Squirrels

Andy first meets these squirrels after his father has shot one off the bird feeder with a paintball gun. There is a group of them, and they randomly show up throughout the book. According to Andy, he can tell that they are plotting against him. By the end, they get their revenge when they cause Andy to crash Big Red.

Nadine

Nadine is the night-shift nurse who lets Daisy in to see Henry.

Kristen

Kristen is Neal's wife.

Helen

Helen is the bridesmaid who inadvertently tells Andy Karen was cheating on him.



Adam

Adam is the barista at Koba Café.

Gus

Gus is a friend of Henry's from New Beginnings who speaks at his funeral. He shares how Henry would take over movie night and replace the intended film with an R-rated movie.

Dot

Dot is Henry's deceased wife.

Katie

Katie is Byron's sister's roommate and blind date that was supposed to meet Andy in Chapter 2 but does not show up until the end of the book.



Symbols and Symbolism

Jeter the cat

Jeter symbolizes how Andy manages relationships. There is a sense of desperation in Andy to be able to come home to someone and have them feed him. However, like Jeter, Andy is particular about how he is taken care of. There is a sense that Andy wants to develop relationships on his own terms, making both he and Jeter appear self-centered and angry. Jeter, like Andy, wants his own space, but he also appreciates what Andy does for him, which is symbolized in the dead mice Jeter brings to Andy's front door. Andy has friends that want to help him move on from the divorce, and Andy appreciates their intentions, which is symbolized in the way Andy shows up for the blind date that was set up for him even though he did not really want to go. However, like Jeter, Andy is unable to hide his discontent and verbally expresses that he never wanted to be on the blind in the first place.

By the end of the book, when Andy returns home from Omaha, he decides he is going to adopt Jeter as his own. This changes the relationship between them, and Jeter makes it a point to follow Andy to the street where he meets Katie, the girl he was supposed to have a blind date with at the beginning of the book. Both Andy and Jeter become more open to having relationships and moving on with their lives. It even goes so far as Jeter allowing Katie to pet him while they sit on the roof of Andy's apartment building.

Relics from the past

Throughout the entire novel, Matthew Norman refers to things from the past, from the song playing in Applebee's when Karen left Andy, to the places Andy visits when he returns to Omaha to the way his bedroom looks and the clothes from high school hanging in his closet, symbolizing how Andy is stuck in the past.

Physical and emotional damage

The physical damage Andy goes through is symbolic of his emotional pain. It first begins when he knows he has to return home to face his past, and then gets worse as he faces that past. However, it also symbolizes that even though Andy gets beat up and looks terrible, even getting to the point of having to go to the hospital, he can heal from his injuries. In the hospital, Tyler points out that the break on his wrist is pretty bad and that Andy will probably feel an ache whenever it gets cold, symbolizing that Andy will always carry the memories of the pain with him, but he will heal and move on.

Right after Andy finds out from his mother that he has to return home to spend time with his dying grandfather, he is hit by a rider on a bicycle and receives a black eye. This is the first instance of his emotional pain manifesting itself as physical pain. When he



returns home, Andy is subjected to more physical pain, including being punched by his former father-in-law, being punched in the stomach by Tyler, and eventually crashing Neal's truck and receiving a broken wrist and a concussion.

Daisy's tattoos

Daisy's tattoos symbolize how different she is from the other women in Andy's life. Daisy has a total of 15 tattoos that vary from colorful symbols to words etched in her flesh. The tattoos Andy focuses on are the words, and they refer back to classics in literature. From the "So It Goes" tattoo that references Faulkner to the "Beautiful Little Fool" that references Fitzgerald to the blatant "Read." on the inside of her wrist. Daisy is educated, attractive, and well-read, but she is also the opposite of the conservative-type that Andy's mother would approve of.

Trying on shirts in the record store

In Chapter 15, Daisy and Andy share a changing room in the record store, and they expose themselves to each other both physically and emotionally. Daisy knows how to break Andy out of his shell. He is stuck in the past, but Daisy does not try to force him out of it; instead, she makes him talk about it. Andy is receptive to this approach and opens up willingly to Daisy.

Daisy is able to get Andy to open up further in Chapter 32 when they become physical with each other. This scene shows how vulnerable both Daisy and Andy are. They are so caught up in the past and their exes that they cannot move forward, yet they trust each other and open themselves up to each other to recreate scenarios that they enjoyed with their exes. Again, they expose themselves to each other both emotionally and physically, and it eventually helps Andy take the first steps to getting over Karen.

The "I Heart NY" coffee mug

The "I Heart New York" mug that Andy sent his grandfather shortly after moving to New York symbolizes Andy's attempt to show that he is not hurting from being rejected by his ex-wife, but like the mug, Andy is empty. He is not dealing with the rejection well and has run away from his family and friends to avoid his problems. His guilt about leaving his grandfather is realized later in the novel when he once again sees the mug sitting on the window sill of his grandfather's room.

Bouquet of sunflowers

The bouquet symbolizes Daisy's relationship with Henry and how she became the sunshine in his life after his family abandoned him. When Andy first visits his grandfather in New Beginnings, he notices a variety of different flowers, but the largest bouquet is sunflowers that were sent by Daisy. Not only did Daisy remind Henry of his



deceased wife Dot but she kept him company when he felt lonely and scared. Later in the book, Nancy throws the sunflowers away, signifying her dislike of Daisy and how she has been banned from seeing Henry.

N.W.A. poster and CD

The N.W.A poster and CD symbolizes Andy's contempt for authority figures. Andy finds an N.W.A. poster rolled up in his closet in the Bizarro Room and has several of their CDs. During a drunken bender, he decides to hang it on the wall. N.W.A. were notorious for their hatred of the police and authority figures. It is not a secret that Andy does not like Don Johnson, the neighborhood security guard in his parents' neighborhood, but he also fights against his mother and her ideals. This can be seen when he protests Nancy's desire for him to act grown up and goes into the driveway wearing no pants.

Later in the book, before Nancy is supposed to be on Fox, Andy is sitting in his room listening to gangster rap while repairing his Ewok Village, and when he and his father load the motorcycle into the back of Big Red, Andy blares the N.W.A. CD. The hope, of course, is to upset Don and to show that neither Andy nor Bradley will bow down to authority, and it accomplishes the task.

Emma pulling down the neon sign

While Andy and Jim are talking about their parents in Lazzari's pizza, Emma decides to hang from a neon sign in the window, ultimately tearing it down and cracking the window, symbolizing how destructive the Carter family is, not only to themselves but also to those around them. Andy's destruction of his relationships stemmed from Karen leaving him. He pushed everyone else away, including friends and family, and ran away to New York. Nancy is destructive with her conservative rhetoric against same-sex marriage, and Bradley is destructive to his marriage and his mistress' marriage by having an affair. Jim is destructive in his inability to be supportive of his brother in a time of need.

The Caddie

Andy and Jim call their grandfather's Cadillac "the Caddie," and for Andy, it represents freedom. After returning to Omaha for his grandfather's impending death, this is one of the first things he sees sitting in his parents' driveway. It brings back a sense of nostalgia and memories of his grandfather; it is also his transportation to take him around town. Andy uses the Caddie to meet up with Daisy and to get away from his parents' house when he needs to. Near the end of the story, he trades the Caddie for Neal's truck so that he can enact his plan to get back at the authority figures.



Settings

Jerome's Bar

This is the bar Andy has picked to have his blind date in. However, she never shows up.

Andy's Apartment

This apartment is located in New York, and it is where Jeter, the building's resident cat, visits to eat Cap'n Crunch and brings Andy decapitated mice. At the end of the book, Andy finally meets his blind date, and they head to the roof of his apartment building to see the Empire State building lit up in rainbow colors to celebrate the Supreme Court's passing of same-sex marriage.

Eppley Airfield

This is the airport in Omaha where Andy watches "The Worst Best Man...Ever!!!!" video while waiting for his brother to pick him up.

Andy's Parents' House in Prairie West Village

After his father retired, Andy's parents moved into this house. His trip back to Omaha is the first time he has been in the house. It is a massive two-story house with three-car garage and large green yard. The Glitter Mafia often vandalizes the front yard with Ken Dolls, signs, and blow-up sex dolls. In the back yard, Bradley shoots squirrels off the bird feeder with a paintball gun.

Bizarro Room

This is what Andy has termed the room he is staying in at his parents' house. It is an exact replica of the room he stayed in as a teenager—the walls are the same color and adorned with the same posters, and his clothes from high school hang in the closet. There is also a box of photos from Andy and Karen's wedding.

Henry's Caddie

Andy has fond memories of being able to drive his grandfather's car at 13. While visiting Omaha, he often takes the car to get him around. Andy and Neal get pulled over in the Caddie by Tyler in his ambulance, and while sitting in front of Lazzari's pizza place, Andy tells Daisy about his father having an affair.



The Backyard of Andy's Old House

Andy visits the backyard of his former house one night while he is bored. He wants to see how Karen has moved on and what her new life looks like and notices that the house has been repainted and has new gutters and shutters. The yard had been resodded and landscaped with flowers and has a garden gnome with a Nebraska football jersey.

New Beginnings

This is the home where his grandfather lives. Andy visits often to spend time with Henry before he dies and meets Mrs. DiGiacomo, whom he eats Hot Pockets with and talks about his grandfather.

The Bookworm

This is the indie bookstore located in Midtown where Andy meets Daisy. He also picks up a self-help book that talks about how he needs to turn off his Feel Sorry Flicks so he can heal.

Drastic Plastic

This is a record store where Andy spends more time with Daisy. While here, she tells him that he needs to change his shaving routine and that he might be the album Yankee Hotel Foxtrot by Wilco and that Karen might be the record label that dropped him. She then convinces him to buy a t-shirt with a cartoon cowboy riding a corn cob that is a size too small.

Lazzari's Pizza Place

Neal, Andy's former best friend, and Owen own this pizza shop. Andy first visits it to convince Neal to be a buffer so he can get a suit from Jerry (Neal's father) at the Gentlemen's Closet. Andy then has dinner here with his brother to talk about what they should do about their dad's affair. This is also the site where Andy repairs his relationship with Neal by reading his best man speech over the intercom during the lunch rush.

Neal's Wedding Reception

During the wedding reception, Andy learns for the first time that Karen had been having an affair. It is also the site where the Best Man video was filmed, and Andy is the guy vomiting in the video. Andy also punched Jerry in the face and ran Neal's truck into a tree.



Gentleman's Closet

This is the tailor where Andy goes to get his suit for his grandfather's funeral. It has been in Neal's family for several generations. When Andy goes back to the shop to get his suit, he shares a scotch with Jerry, who lets Andy know that what happened between he and Karen may have been fated from the beginning, and nothing Andy could have done would have changed it.

Ted & Wally's

Andy meets Daisy here for ice cream and tells her his Feel Sorry Flick.

Koba Café

Andy meets the Glitter Mafia, Stephen, Ronnie, and Chili, here and Stephen delivers his threat that if Andy does not find a way to silence his mother, he will send the photographs of Bradly having an affair to the press. Andy meets Stephen here after the photographs have been sent to say that he feels bad about having to do that but he had to follow through on his threat.

Daisy's Apartment

Andy is invited to Daisy's apartment after he sees her on the internet and texts her to tell her. While here, Daisy helps Andy recreate his Feel Sorry Flick and she has Andy help her recreate a memory of her ex.

Sacred Heart Church

This was Henry's church when he was alive, and it is the site of his funeral. During the service, Emma drops a hymnal on her foot, and Andy is the only one who can comfort her. When he takes her out of the service, it gives Karen a chance to follow him and they have a conversation in her car in the parking lot.

Underground Bar

By the end of the book Andy has returned to New York and work. Byron is giving him a hard time for having a broken wrist and being unable to serve drinks.



Themes and Motifs

Unattainable Women

The men in *We're All Damaged* are unhappy because their happiness is tied to the actions of the women in their lives, and most of the men are pining for women that they cannot have. The main character, Andy, is struggling to deal with the loss of his wife, while his father struggles to maintain an affair, and his grandfather is looking to be reunited with his deceased wife.

Karen is unattainable because of her rejection of Andy and because she replaced him with someone new, but also because Andy was never able to hold on to her—and part of that was not his fault. In a conversation Andy has with Jerry, Karen's father, it becomes apparent that Karen has always been independent. Since the time she was in kindergarten, she has had a line of admirers pining after her, but she did not always feel the same about them, which upset the boys. Karen wants to do relationships her way, and that means leaving behind a line of broken hearts.

At Henry's funeral, Andy finally gets the chance to talk to Karen, and she claims that she tried to stay in love with Andy. She wanted their marriage to work, for it to be enough, but it was not. She was incapable of being there for Andy, and nothing Andy could have done would have changed that.

The same relationship dynamic can be seen with Andy's father Bradley and Nancy and the woman Bradley has an affair with. Bradley and Nancy rarely talk to one another anymore, and he makes obscure comments about how he does not agree with her point of view, but he tells Andy that those things do not matter in a marriage, the only thing that matters is that he stays.

Bradley has been unhappy with Nancy for a while, so he finds comforts in someone else's arms. Andy finds out about his affair from the Glitter Mafia, and even he admits that his father looks happy in the pictures of him leaving the hotel after being with his mistress. By the end of the book, however, Bradley has cut off contact with the mystery woman, saying that it is better for everyone, and Andy wants to know exactly who it is better for. He wants his father to be happy, but since the affair is unmoral and goes against Bradley's beliefs, he finds himself in a situation where he cannot have any woman—neither his wife nor his mistress. Both of them are unattainable.

The final relationship in the book with an unattainable woman is Henry and his deceased wife Dot. Unlike the relationships between Andy and Karen and Bradley and Nancy, this one is portrayed as incredibly loving. Dot has been gone for a while, and Henry is on his death bed, pining to be with her once again. Henry has been living in the hospice wing with cancer, feeling incredibly lonely and abandoned. He finds comfort in a girl he found online, Daisy, because she looks like his former wife. However, Daisy is also unattainable for Henry. She is not Dot, no matter how much she looks like her, but



Daisy does what she can to make Henry feel loved and needed, even going so far on one night to play the role of his wife and tell him that it is time for him to let go so they can be together once again.

Daisy is also an unattainable woman for Andy. As a friend of Henry's, she does not like to see Andy suffering because of his loss, so she does what she can to help him come back to the living. She knows he has been deeply hurt, she has too, so she does what she can to help Andy do what he has to do to find a woman he can attain. Andy finds himself thinking about Daisy often, and they even have a physical moment together, but it does not last. Andy cannot have a relationship with Daisy because she is still pining for her ex.

Broken Relationships

Feeling connected to others is an important part of relationships, but the characters in *We're All Damaged* have a hard time connecting with one another; their relationships are awkward, strained, and broken.

As the main character, the reader gets to see how Andy's relationships are the most damaged. From the moment Karen left him to his grandfather's funeral, it is clear how broken his relationships are.

The only relationship that is almost not broken is the one Andy has with Daisy. She is the only one who he feels he can talk to and tell the truth to, but she keeps things from him—and he knows she is keeping things from him. Daisy is a mystery, but he enjoys her company and she has a positive influence on his life. Even after Andy finds out the truth about who Daisy really is, he cannot stop thinking about her.

Andy relationship with his own family is strained. His brother is more than willing to talk about Andy rather than talk to him, and his father and mother show no emotional support after what he went through with Karen. In fact, his mother's entire platform is centered around the sanctity of marriage and how it is more of a piece of paper, it is a sacred bond. How must Andy feel knowing he failed at keeping that sacred bond? Not only that, but Bradley is unable to uphold that commitment because he is having an affair.

By the end of the book, there seems to be some recognition that the relationships have to change. After getting over the preconceived notions of how things should appear as opposed to the way they are, there is a chance for almost everyone to mend their relationships.

Stuck in the Past

The inability of Andy to let go of the past - especially when it comes to him and Karen - has a profound effect on how he feels in the present, which is depressed and unhappy. His inability to let go of the past also makes it hard for Andy to relate to others around



him and have relationships. The author shows how stuck Andy is by constantly referring to pop culture references from the past, including the song playing in Chapter 1 when Karen left Andy to the Bizarro Room at Andy's parent's house with all of the things Andy had when he was in high school to the Terminator 2 pinball machine in Lazzari's pizza that still has his initials as the high score.

Andy is not the only one who is stuck in the past, his mother is too with her ideals and rhetoric. Despite the fact that Nancy has gone through a makeover to look different and get a spot on Fox News, she is still stuck in the past by believing that marriage is defined as one man and one woman and that the gay community is damaged. Like Andy, being stuck has made her unhappy and unable to relate to her family or others on a sympathetic level.

Andy had run off to New York in an attempt to escape his past, but he was unable able to do so—it still found him there. This is evident when his mother calls him to let him know about his grandfather's impending death. However, by the end of the book, there is a sense that when Andy returns to New York, the past does not have the same hold over him as it did before. It is always there, but there is the sense that Andy has the ability to move forward. He has made peace with the fact that he and Karen are not going to get back together, which allows him to pull himself out of depression and be happy again and perhaps even start a new relationship with Katie.

Dealing with Rejection and Hurt

Andy's inability to deal with the rejection and hurt from when Karen left him at Applebee's has led him to act like a child. This is evident in the fact that Andy has moved to New York to run away from his problems instead of confronting them. While Andy is waiting for his blind date to show up in Chapter 2, he comments that he did not even want to go on a blind date in the first place, making him seem sullen and moody—like a child.

Andy reverting to a child-like state is evident in how he interacts with his family upon returning to Omaha, beginning when his brother picks him up from the airport. Instead of having an adult conversation, he acts coy, refusing to answer his brother's questions about how he got his black eye and commenting to his nephew that drinking is cool—a very un-adult thing to say to a seven year old.

When he gets to his parents house, his child-like behavior increases. This is evident when his mother comes to his room to wake him in the morning in Chapter 14. Nancy comments that he is wallowing and that he needs to move back home to get his life together. He responds by telling her that she is using her radio voice on him, and he resents that. He also hates feeling like he is a caller on her show that is muted so he cannot defend himself. To protest his mother, he decides not to wear pants when he goes into the driveway to help his father. This action is more fit for a child than the 30-year-old man that Andy is.



Andy's childlike behavior can also be seen when he helps his father load the booted motorcycle into the back of Big Red so they can drive through the neighborhood blasting rap music and the CD of motorcycle sounds. Neither Bradley nor Andy respect Don's authority, and when he followed through on his threat to boot the motorcycle because running it was against neighborhood rules, instead of taking the consequences like adults, they decide to undermine the authority figure and behave like unruly children.

By acting like a child, Andy does not actually have to deal with what is going on in his life—or at least that is the illusion. Acting like a child gives him the ability to push people away and to be self-centered. By acting childish, he can pretend that he is not at fault for anything that has happened. Perhaps Andy believes that others will take care of his problems for him if he acts like a child. However, it becomes apparent that this process does not bring Andy happiness or make his problems go away.

Family is Forever

Andy's family is the epitome of dysfunctional. Andy does not agree with his mother's political views or approve of her makeover. He discovers his father is having an affair. He and his brother can barely have a conversation with each other that does not involve calling each other names.

When he returns to Omaha to be with his ailing grandfather, it becomes apparent how broken his relationships with his family truly are. He is unable to really speak to his brother, father, or mother about the emotional turmoil he is going through. His father appears to be the only one who has some sympathy, but not enough to go out of his way to speak to his son and help him through troubling times. His mother chastises him for behaving like a child instead of moving on, and his brother calls him an idiot for skulking around his former yard and calling his ex-wife in the middle of the night.

Tension and awkwardness abound when Andy is around his family. However, as the book progresses, it becomes apparent that when things get really bad, the Carters have the ability to pull together and be there for one another. At the funeral, Nancy finally recognizes that Andy has had a rough year and is able to sympathize with him. Nancy has been embarrassed because of Bradley's affair, but Andy is happy to have his mother back. Bradley and Andy are able to relate to one another because they both realize that they have been pining for women they cannot have. This allows them to open up to one another and connect.

Despite the problems and issues Andy and his family have, in the end, when things are at the worst, Andy and his family are able to pull together and be there for one another. There is still tension and not every problem has been resolved, but the family has the ability to show one another that they love each other and are willing to work things out.



Styles

Point of View

The story is told in first person from the perspective of Andy Carter. First person perspective gives the reader the opportunity to experience the story from the eyes of the main character. It allows them to be in the character's head and to know their thoughts and feelings.

First person perspective can be limiting when it comes to what the other characters are thinking or feeling because the reader can only see through the eyes of Andy. Therefore, it is unknown what Bradley thinks about any of the situations unless he tells Andy; the same goes for all the other characters. The reader assumes that what is presented on the page is true to what really happened, but it is impossible to be sure.

This limited viewpoint can also be misleading, and the narrator can become an "unreliable narrator." Since the reader can only experience what Andy experiences from his perspective, it is hard to know if he is being completely honest. However, it might be safe to assume that Andy is being truthful with the reader because he does not always portray himself as perfect or unaffected. He lets the reader know that he has been hurt and that he has been drinking way too much since Karen left him. He also shows the reader when he acts crazy (such as when he skulks around his former yard) or that he gets beat up by Tyler. Andy does not feel the need to portray himself as anything different than what he is, but it also allows the reader to see how he heals and grows.

Language and Meaning

The language used in the book is contemporary, including curse words throughout. The reason for doing this is to place the story in a specific time and place. It allows the reader to see that Andy exists in 2015 and not some other time and place. The reader can relate to Andy through his language and through the landmarks shown throughout the book. Even if they have never been there, they know that these places exist because of the way the author has portrayed them.

The same can be said for the use of language to describe the past. Once again, this puts the book in context and allows the reader to relate to what has occurred in the past through the descriptions and language used by the author.

Structure

Most of the story is told in present tense, but there are a few instances when Andy talks about events from the past in past tense. This is done to help the reader relate to Andy and be firmly in his point of view. It gives a sense that as Andy goes through his life, the reader is going through it with him. There is a sense that we are watching and

participating in the action with Andy. When he relates to the scenes from the past, the reader feels like they are remembering the past with Andy. This helps the reader relate to him and feel for him in the various situations.



Quotes

That's the thing I hate most about my brain, the way it stores and catalogs things, all this dumb shit on a giant hard drive in my head, so I'm forced to obsess over it all like a crazy person.

-- Andy (chapter 1)

Importance: This quote gives insight into Andy and how he approaches life and relationships. This quote reveals how Andy acts throughout the novel.

He's just being friendly, of course. But as my brother inexplicably honks at me three more times, it is, without question, the most ominous thing anyone's ever said to me."

-- Andy (chapter 4)

Importance: This quote occurs after Andy has landed in Omaha and is waiting for his brother to pick him up. He has been sitting on a bench, watching "The Worst Best Man...Ever!!!" video, and a cop has to tell him that the person honking was honking at him. He then welcomes Andy to Omaha. This foreshadows how the rest of his trip will go.

I've said this before. Let me reiterate. I'm not saying gay people are bad people. This isn't about that. What this is about is a tiny minority of people getting to turn things completely upside down for the rest of us. That's just not right—plain and simple. This is how civilized society has been operate for thousands of years. One man, one woman, the true definition of marriage.

-- Nancy on her radio show (chapter 4)

Importance: This quote gives us insight into Nancy's character and her politics. It shows why the Glitter Mafia is attempting to silence her.

At the front of the house, though, the sight of my parents stops me. They're just standing there next to each other, their arms at their sides, my mom barefoot in an aggressively tight dress and my dad in pajamas that are too small for him. I can see his thin, hairless ankles, exposed and vulnerable. Something is wrong here. And not just the obvious stuff, like the dildos, the trashed yard, and the fact that my mother is covered in glitter. It's something worse."

-- Andy (chapter 8)

Importance: This is the first time Andy realizes that something is happening with his parents, although he is not quite sure what it is. It sets up how the relationship between Nancy and Bradley will play out throughout the novel and how they grow further apart.

Imagine watching the saddest scene of the saddest movies you can think of. A real tearjerker. Old Yeller. Terms of Endearment. Steel Magnolias. Schindler's List. Now, imagine watching that scene over and over again—day and night. How do you think that would make you feel? Probably pretty darn sad, right? Well, when you're struggling to



move on from something painful, like a divorce or a death in the family, that's exactly what you do. We all have a movie screen in our head, and we run depressing memories, flashbacks, and anecdotes on that screen repeatedly. Double features. Triple features. I call them Feel Sorry Flicks. And until you make an ACTIVE decision to turn those flicks off, they're going to keep playing and playing on a loop. And you're going to keep...feeling...sad."

-- Passage from the self-help book Andy is reading (chapter 12)

Importance: This passage symbolizes how Andy has been living his life since Karen left. He replays scenes through his mind and is constantly unhappy. It also gives him the answer to how to fix the problem—Andy only has to take the steps to achieve that goal.

I don't know what to say, because I don't know this girl, and, frankly, I'm a little afraid of her. Generally speaking, it's difficult not to be at least mildly terrified of a girl who might, at any moment, take her shirt off. But I have to admit, it's nice to be out of the house. And I like the fact that five full minutes have passed and I haven't thought of Karen once.

-- Andy (chapter 15)

Importance: This quote comes after Andy is in the dressing room with Daisy in the record store. It gives insight into how he feels about their relationship, but also shows that Daisy has the ability to make him feel again and that Karen does not always have to dominate his thoughts.

Sometimes in life, it doesn't matter that you've just woken up on a floor. Or that you haven't brushed your teeth. Or that your hair is a mess and you're wearing the clothes you slept in. Sometimes you just have to be polite."

-- Andy (chapter 17)

Importance: This quote comes after Andy spent the night on the floor of his grandfather's suite and has been wandering the halls of New Beginnings looking for coffee. Mrs. Giacomo has offered to make him Hot Pockets. This passage gives insight into Andy's character and shows that while he can decline the invitation, he chooses not to. It shows that Andy has the capability to forgo his own despair and break out of his self-absorbed shell to have a relationship with others.

No matter how much they change, they're still yours. Do I agree with her? That's what you asked, right?' 'Yeah.' 'It doesn't matter. Marriage isn't about agreeing. It's about staying. That's what I'm doing.'"

-- Andy and Bradley (chapter 28)

Importance: This conversation between Bradley and Andy occurs after they have watched Nancy on Fox News. Andy is attempting to connect with his father, to find out what he is feeling, and to tell him that he knows about the other woman. Bradley's response shows that he values his duty to his marriage more than his happiness or connecting with his son. It reinforces how their relationship is broken.



That's what her kind of politics is all about, right? The past is this sacred, glorified thing? Even though it never really existed in the first place."

-- Daisy (chapter 37)

Importance: Daisy makes this comment to Andy after he has taken her on a tour of the house and explained how his room looks exactly the same as it did when he was in high school. She is speaking about Nancy, but this quote also encompasses how Andy looks at his life and how he has glorified the past and made it sacred even though it was full of hurt.

I want you to promise me something, OK?' Daisy says. 'From here on out, not matter what happens, even if I'm not around to keep drumming it into your head, you're Batman. Always. Never Robin. Never again. Deal?'"

-- Daisy (chapter 37)

Importance: This quote comes after Daisy has noticed pictures of Andy and Jim and that Andy was always dressed up as Jim's sidekick. She tells Andy this in the hopes that the will stop living in someone else's shadow and learn how to be the hero. After she says this, Andy has a realization and promises Daisy to be Batman.

This is what we've become. My dad is pining for someone he barely had—a brunette lady with a nice smile in photographs. I'm pining for a girl who got bored of me and told me she didn't love me and then fucked the exact physical opposite of me. My grandpa is pining for a woman who is dead. We're three hopelessly sorry people. If we were characters in Vagina Fiction, Daisy would circle us in red and demand that we...do something, for fuck's sake.

-- Andy (chapter 40)

Importance: This realization helps Andy realize how stuck and self-absorbed he has been and that he must act if he is to heal and move forward.

It's taken me along time to realize this, but I'm lucky that all this happened. I'm lucky that she failed at trying to love me and left me at Applebee's a year ago. If we'd stayed together, Karen and I, we'd have ended up two unhappy people in some big house somewhere, avoiding one another. And by then, it'd have been too late."

-- Andy (chapter 42)

Importance: Andy has finally realized that his happiness was tied to his relationship with Karen, but has discovered that happiness was fleeting. He compares his relationship to her with his parents' relationship and notices that he could be just as unhappy as they are if they had stayed together. It is the final piece he needed to be able to get over his past and move forward.