

What Alice Forgot Study Guide

What Alice Forgot by Liane Moriarty

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Plot Summary

What Alice Forgot, a novel by Liane Moriarty, starts out with the titular character in bed, obsessing over all of the rules that she has to follow because she's pregnant. Her thoughts are routinely interrupted by other memories and she suddenly finds herself in a gym. Alice thinks this has to be a mistake because she would never go into a gym. It's eventually made clear that she hit her head. Alice starts to ask her classmates questions that only get her stranger answers, as though she were asking something ridiculous. The paramedics arrive and start asking Alice questions, including how old she is. She says 29, but one of her friends informs them that Alice is in fact turning 40 later that year. They ask Alice what year it is and she answers 1998, when it is in fact 2008.

The paramedics bring Alice to the hospital. She manages to get in touch with her sister, Elisabeth, whom she's incredibly close to. She's also trying to get in touch with her husband and the love of her life, Nick. Elisabeth eventually arrives and Alice realizes things aren't right. Elisabeth seems distant and their relationship has clearly changed in the last ten years. Alice is even more shocked when she gets in touch with Nick, who is incredibly flippant and outright hostile towards her. Elisabeth tells her not only is she getting divorced, but she's in the middle of a vicious custody battle for her three children.

Elisabeth brings Alice home and catches her up on everything that's happened in the last ten years. Alice has become a very busy person and the two of them grew distant. Elisabeth has been struggling for seven years to have a child with her husband, Ben. Each time she has a miscarriage, and it's driven her into a severe depression. Alice was always too busy to help her through it because she had her own family to raise. Alice is horrified when she hears about that. She wants to do everything she can to fix things with Nick and her sister.

Alice quickly finds herself overwhelmed with being a mother. Nick offers her some support, but he's hesitant to actually spend any time with Alice. Over the last ten years, their relationship had dissolved to the point where they couldn't stand one another. Alice begins to get some of her memories back, but they come in the form of brief flashes and muscle memory. She has a memory about a woman named Gina, but nobody in her family wants to talk about it.

Alice believes that Gina had an affair with Nick and that's what broke their relationship. The truth is soon revealed to her, that Gina was her best friend who had recently passed away. Gina is the reason that Alice and Elisabeth drifted apart, and part of the reason why Nick and Alice started to fight in the first place. Gina's relationship with her husband fell apart and Nick felt like Alice was envious that her best friend was single. Alice was always complaining that Nick didn't care about her, and he was too obsessed with work. They started to fight over every little thing.



Alice doesn't care about any of that, now, and she's determined to fix her family. At the same time, Elisabeth continues to descend into depression because of her miscarriages. She has one last chance to get pregnant, but she can't handle the pressure. Alice is finally there for her, and with her help she's able to get through her depression and finally ends up pregnant.

All at once, Alice's memories start to come back. Things are going better with Nick, but he can tell that everything changes when her memory returns. Alice realizes how foolish she's been and she pulls away from Nick. She learns some things from her past self, though and manages to repair their relationship and strengthen the bonds with her children and her sister. Years later, Alice and Nick manage to reconcile and happily raise their family together.



Chapters 1-2

Summary

Chapter 1

The protagonist, Alice thinks she is lying in bed, fretting about all the rules she has to follow because she's pregnant. Everything feels strange around her however, and she has a terrible headache, which she believes is just a symptom of her pregnancy. She eventually wakes to find herself in the gym by her friend and work colleague, Jane. Alice is surprised because she never goes to the gym. Jane fills her in and explains that she fell when they were working out and hurt her head. Paramedics arrive and question Alice. She says that she's 29 and the year is 1998. Jane tells the paramedics that Alice is turning 40 soon, and it's revealed that Alice, as a result of her injury, has forgotten the last 10 years of her life.

Chapter 2

Alice is still confused about everything going on around her. She feels like she is being mocked by Jane whenever she makes a request, like calling work. The book briefly shifts to the view of Jane's sister, Elisabeth, filling out paperwork for a Dr. Hodges. She talks about how Jane called and said there was an emergency with Alice. Jane was upset because she was working and she and Alice had been feuding over something recently. The book shifts back to Alice who is being taken to the hospital. Alice keeps trying to remember details about what she did earlier in the week and her life with her husband, Nick, but she is having trouble placing dates to anything.

The book shifts point of view back to Elisabeth's work for Dr. Hodges. Elisabeth feels guilty because she hung up on Jane. She was in the middle of an important speech for work. Even when she is giving the speech though, she keeps thinking about Alice and how serious head injuries can be.

Analysis

Chapter 1

Readers are introduced to Alice and the main conflict is set up with Alice's amnesia surrounding the last ten years. Many events are foreshadowed through the memories Alice still has. Although she doesn't realize it until much later in the book, one of the memories she keeps having is about a vacation that she, Nick, and Gina went on. It's made clear to the readers that the past version of Alice is much different from who she became. Without her memories, Alice can't believe that she would spend any time in the gym, and it's clear that her fashion has greatly changed as well. Alice's children are foreshadowed by the dinosaur stickers on her clothing and bag. Jane makes it clear that



things aren't normal between Nick and Alice since she clearly doesn't take Alice's requests seriously to call Nick.

The theme of Memories is introduced in this initial chapter as it is a crucial theme in this novel. Memories are shown to have the ability to immediately thrust the person who is remembering them into that time period. In Alice's case, it is extreme, but for many people, a simple memory can bring up emotions and additional memories that have lain buried for a long while. This is the case as evidenced by Elisabeth, and even Jane.

Chapter 2

The main purpose of this chapter is to highlight the changes in Alice's relationships. Readers need to understand how strongly she used to care about Nick and Elisabeth. Jane has already hinted that things aren't good between Nick and Alice, but Elisabeth's notes at the end of the chapter also make it clear that she and Alice are distant. Not only that, but they were recently fighting about something, foreshadowing the adoption conversation that Alice has with Ben. The fact that Elisabeth initially hangs up the phone shows exactly how damaged their relationship has become and also hints at Elisabeth's depression. The depression is also hinted through the fact that Elisabeth is directly communicating with a therapist.

Discussion Question 1

What can the reader already tell about Alice's character, based on the reactions of those around her?

Discussion Question 2

What indicates Elisabeth's feelings towards her sister Alice?

Discussion Question 3

Discuss the theme of Memories as it is first introduced in Chapter 1.

Vocabulary

dollop, besotted, strident, tersely, derision, enunciated, pantomime, surreal, rueful, sedate, ascertain, tandem, fervent, digress



Chapters 3-4

Summary

Chapter 3

The doctors start to examine Alice, who still insists that it is 1998. One of the doctors finds a scar from a C-Section. Alice has a vague memory of someone telling her that there wasn't a heartbeat, but she can't remember what it was in reference to. The doctors go to prepare tests for Alice. She lies in bed and thinks about how if it really is 2008 her child is now 10 years old and she can't remember anything about them. The book cuts away to Elisabeth's report. She is trying to get in touch with Jane or someone else who knows about Alice, but nobody is picking up. She calls her husband, Ben, who promises to pick up Alice's children from school.

Chapter 4

The doctors tell Alice that her personal doctor has retired, so they aren't able to get any details about her pregnancy. Alice starts to go through the items in her bag. She finds high quality, expensive clothing that normally wouldn't have fit her. She also finds a day planner and various forms of ID which confirm that it is in fact 2008. She finds a cellphone and calls Nick. She finds out that he's been promoted to general manager, but he's away on a trip. She's redirected to Nick's personal assistant, who is very rude to Alice. Alice surprises herself by being equally rude back, as though it were second nature to her. She hangs up and gets a call seconds later. She expects it to be Nick, but instead it is the voice of a child that she doesn't recognize. The unknown child refers to her as Mum.

Analysis

Chapter 3

Alice starts to have a memory from a doctor declaring that there's no heartbeat. Readers are initially given the impression that this is referring to Alice's child. This is reinforced by the fact that the doctors comment on Alice's C-section scar. The memory ends up being about Elisabeth, marking the first of her many miscarriages. This is an important plot point because it serves as the catalyst for Elisabeth's depression. Additionally, it is highly symbolic that there is no heartbeat. Where there is no heartbeat, there is no life. And as the reader will learn, there is no life in Alice's current life style, including her relationship with others.

Elisabeth and Alice's strained relationship is once again reinforced by the way Elisabeth acts when she's trying to learn more about Alice. She shows only a passing knowledge about Alice's current life, and shows how damaged the relationship has become over the years.



The theme of Memories is once again demonstrated in this section as the reader gains more information about what Alice remembers about the last ten years. Though the reader isn't given enough information to make a clear picture come into focus, what is learned is that Alice and Elisabeth have not been close for the last decade, so much so that when the authorities ask Elisabeth questions about her sister, she has no idea at all. The reader can also see Alice's memory continuing to tell her that it is 1998, even though she clearly sees from the items in her purse that it is 2008. She calls Nick, as if it were a habit, showing that memories can often be faulty at best. The mind holds on to what is deeply ingrained, and the rest may be jumbled depending on the circumstances. That her first inclination is to call Nick suggests that they, at one time, were very much a couple.

Chapter 4

Alice continues to learn more about the person she's become. Not only has she gotten in shape, but her clothing is much more expensive than anything she would have worn in 1998. She's also carrying a day planner around, hinting at her busier lifestyle. Alice discovers that she has a nastier side as well when she speaks with Nick's assistant. The assistant also foreshadows that things are clearly tense between Alice and Nick. She also learns that Nick has gotten highly promoted in the last ten years. This ends up being very important later on when Alice discovers that one of the main reasons that she and Nick were fighting was because Alice was unhappy with all the long hours that Nick was working. Nick himself even admits later on that he was having a hard time managing his work life and his home life.

Discussion Question 1

Discuss the significance of Alice's memory of a stopped heartbeat and what it suggests?

Discussion Question 2

How are memories portrayed in these two chapters?

Discussion Question 3

What can the reader determine about Alice's former life, prior to her break up with Nick?

Vocabulary

nonchalance, excruciating, gorge, narcotic, stow, innocuous, flippant, fiscal, reprimanded, taut, palpable, contempt



Chapters 5-6

Summary

Chapter 5

The chapter opens with Alice's grandmother, Frannie, writing a letter to someone named Phil. She's talking about her past as a teacher, but has to cut the letter off because she has just heard about Alice getting hurt at the gym. Back in the hospital, a child, using a cell phone, asks why Alice didn't pick him up for swim practice. Before Alice can answer, the boy spots "Uncle Ben" and hangs up. Alice starts to panic as she realizes she doesn't even know what her child is named. She goes through more of her belongings and finds a picture with three children, Olivia, Tom, and Madison, all with her last name, Love. Alice starts to cry when she realizes she has not one, but three children she can't remember.

Chapter 6

The chapter opens with Elisabeth writing to Dr. Hodges in a journal about the events of that day. It is written in past tense as she remembers the events that took place. She talks about how she was able to leave her conference so she could go to the hospital. Ben had picked up Alice's children, and he seemed very happy to have them in the car with him. Elisabeth notes that this is something Alice wouldn't normally trust them with. When they had spoken on the phone, Alice had sounded so real to her. The past year it always felt like their conversations were spoken with forced politeness. When Elisabeth arrived, the first thing Alice said was how different she looked.

The chapter switches back to Alice's perspective. It is the day of the event that Elisabeth is chronicling in her journal. Elisabeth looks so much larger to Alice and also worn out. She's immediately worried about her sister, but Elisabeth makes it clear that they need to talk about Alice. She explains her confusion and asks about her kids. Elisabeth assures Alice that they are wonderful kids. Elisabeth feels uncomfortable and wants to get a doctor, but Alice stops her and starts talking about Nick. The view switches back to Elisabeth writing to Dr. Hodges. She ominously says how shocked she was that Alice had forgotten about Nick and Gina.

Analysis

Chapter 5

Alice learns that she has a son, although she's too shocked to actually speak with him. She also realizes that not only does she have a son, but Elisabeth must have married since she can't think of any family member that goes by the name of Ben. The gravity of the situation sinks in as Alice tries to remember any details about her children. The only memories that she has though are from the start of her pregnancy at 1998. Alice digs



through her bag looking for more information, where she finds out that not only does she have a son, but she also has two daughters as well.

The theme of Youth as a Perception is demonstrated in this chapter. Alice, too, is ten years older, but in her mind, she looks as she did when she was 29. Thus, when she sees Elisabeth she is shocked at how much older and worn down her sister looks. Alice is acting as she did when she was 29 as well and this makes Elisabeth uncomfortable because it reminds her of how far they have drifted apart from one another. The theme indicates that youth, while a biological process, is just as much a psychological process. This is evident in the way that Alice reacts and continues to hold on to her sister in a way that she obviously hasn't in many years.

Chapter 6

Ben foreshadows the trouble that he and Elisabeth are having conceiving children of their own. Elisabeth notes that he's ecstatic about getting to drive the kids home and take care of them, something that they don't normally get to do. This once again hints at the trouble between Elisabeth and Alice and signifies just how far apart they have become. This is also shown by Elisabeth's later comments about Alice sounding real and not using the usual forced polite tone that they now use.

Alice once again makes it clear that she and Elisabeth used to be much closer. She's immediately worried about Elisabeth when she sees how stressed she looks. Elisabeth is uncomfortable with how much Alice is acting like her past self. Alice doesn't want her to leave the room for a second because Elisabeth makes her feel safe, something that Elisabeth had forgotten about. Alice starts to inquire about her children, and Elisabeth once again reinforces how distant they've become since she doesn't have too much to say. At the end of the chapter Gina is brought up. At this point, the reader is under the assumption that she's an ominous figure and likely responsible for the trouble between Alice and Nick.

Discussion Question 1

Discuss the theme of Youth as a Perception. How much does chronological age play into one's behavior?

Discussion Question 2

Why might Alice not have trusted her sister with the care of her children before the accident?

Discussion Question 3

What do you think is obvious about Ben and Elisabeth's relationship?

Vocabulary

riled, modicum, stodgy, stilted, dredge, stolid, monotonously, radiant, mantra, paucity, giddy, extroverted, credentials



Chapters 7-8

Summary

Chapter 7

Alice talks about the few memories she has, including the one about someone saying there was no heartbeat. Elisabeth writes to Dr. Hodges, saying she was surprised and somewhat flattered that Alice remembered that out of everything that happened in the last ten years. She then goes on to write that at the time she wasn't ready to talk about it to Alice, or anyone else for that matter, and that it was the start of things going downhill.

Meanwhile, Alice continues to ask Elisabeth questions. She's very impressed that Elisabeth is teaching seminars and managing her own business. Elisabeth tells Alice how she got married to Ben, and Alice feels terrible that she can't remember the wedding. Elisabeth keeps mentioning how busy Alice is, which frustrates Alice because she dislikes busy people. She gets the impression things are strained between her and Elisabeth, but she can't remember why. She gets a call from Nick, which Elisabeth tries and fails to intercept. Nick is incredibly angry and even rude towards Alice, which leaves her stunned. Elisabeth takes the phone and explains to Nick what has happened to Alice. Elisabeth hangs up and tells Alice that she and Nick are in the process of getting a divorce.

Chapter 8

Alice thinks back to when she and Nick got married. They were both incredibly happy with one another, taking great pleasure in just using the terms husband and wife. She just can't imagine what would cause them to break up and stop loving one another. Alice goes over all her insecurities, trying to figure out what might have changed in ten years and how she can fix it. Elisabeth assures her that Alice was happy with the divorce and had previously said the marriage had fallen apart a long time ago. This news shocks Alice even more. She thinks back to when she and Elisabeth were younger and Elisabeth had taken care of her the day their father died. She thanks Elisabeth for being such a good older sister, but Elisabeth says she isn't as good as Alice thinks. Alice asks if she's happy and Elisabeth tries to dodge the question. The chapter ends with someone arriving to see Alice, and Alice expressing shock when she sees the person's face.

Analysis

Chapter 7

Elisabeth's struggle to have children is explored for the first time. She doesn't go into much detail about it to Alice, but readers can figure out that the heartbeat memory was



attributed to her child and not Alice's. Elisabeth being surprised once again shows how much their relationship has changed in the last few years. It's also telling that Alice has that memory, implying that even with all the changes she did still genuinely care about Elisabeth. Alice's busyness is brought up once more, which she thoroughly dislikes and finds hard to believe. She was never the type of person who kept a busy schedule and always felt like being too busy got in the way of enjoying life.

Alice finally gets the chance to talk to Nick, which ends up going poorly for her. Nick is downright aggressive and agitated towards Alice, very clearly wanting nothing to do with her. Elisabeth knew this would be his reaction, but she didn't have the heart to tell Alice. She did at least try to get the phone away from Alice, still wanting to protect her younger sister. At the end of the chapter Alice finds out about the divorce, which ends up being one of the driving conflicts up until Alice finally gets her memories back.

The theme of Miscommunication is touched upon briefly, here. It is evident that no one in this family directly says what they feel or mean, leaving a lot of the communication up to assumptions. This is shown to have had a devastating effect on not only the sisters, but also between Alice and Nick. The miscommunication continues as Elisabeth refuses to tell Alice much more about their past. In some regards she is protecting herself from painful memories, but in a larger sense, she just doesn't want to talk about it out loud.

Chapter 8

Alice once again thinks back to the way things used to be with Nick. This is important for the reader to see because it really emphasizes how much their relationship has changed in ten years. Alice's shock and pain are made clear, as well as her reasons for wanting to get Nick back, even though he had just been so rude to her on the phone. Elisabeth informs Alice that she and Nick have been struggling for some time, and Alice was actually happy that they were finally separating. Alice can't imagine what would possibly cause Nick to leave her, but she assumes it was something she had done. Alice and Elisabeth's strained relationship is once again shown when Elisabeth says she hasn't been that good of a sister to Alice in recent years.

Discussion Question 1

How has miscommunication already begun to cause problems?

Discussion Question 2

What events have happened in both Alice and Elisabeth's life that now make Alice feel safe when Elisabeth is near?

Discussion Question 3

From what the reader has seen thus far, how would you describe Nick's character?



Vocabulary

preposterous, vigorously, guffaw, inscrutable, lustrous, synthetic, inebriated, conceded, briskly, cognitive, malice



Chapters 9-10

Summary

Chapter 9

The stranger turns out to be Alice's mother, Barb. Alice is shocked to see how fashionable her once shy mother has become. Barb surprises Alice even further by saying that she has married Nick's father, Roger. Alice wasn't a huge fan of Roger, and she remembered that Nick always used to mock him. Barb keeps asking Alice about things that she can't remember, which upsets Alice. Alice declares that she's going to fix her marriage and she won't lose Nick. Barb is elated at this, but Elisabeth tries to calm her down, pointing out that Alice doesn't understand how much everything has changed. She tells Alice that she and Nick are in the middle of a very difficult custody battle, and Jane is now Alice's divorce lawyer.

Chapter 10

Elisabeth writes to Dr. Hodge again. She says she doesn't feel like she's as good a sister as Alice thinks. The two of them had grown apart once Alice had children. Alice turned more to the other school parents than she ever did Elisabeth. The two still spoke, but it wasn't the same because they didn't share everything. Elisabeth was also dealing with anger issues, and she was upset at how busy Alice constantly was. After leaving the hospital, Elisabeth and her mom struggled with whether or not to tell Alice about someone named Gina. Back at the hospital, Alice was having nightmares. She wakes up after remembering Nick yelling about someone named Gina in her dream. She also hears the same phrase again saying that there's no heartbeat.

Analysis

Chapter 9

Alice is not only surprised by how much her mother's style has changed in the last ten years, but also that she ended up with Nick's father, Roger. Alice reveals a little bit about Nick through Roger. One of the reasons that Nick didn't get along with Roger was because Roger left his mother. This is a motivating factor for Nick in the present, since he doesn't want to be the same type of father that Roger was to him. Alice declares her goal of getting back together with Nick. This delights Barb, and will later motivate her and Roger to try and push Alice and Nick together when they attend Frannie's talent show later in the book. Elisabeth once again reiterates how bad the divorce is when she mentions that Alice and Nick are engaged in a vicious custody battle.

Chapter 10



One of the themes demonstrated in this chapter is about Miscommunication and how dangerous miscommunication can be. It has been touched upon briefly in the other chapters, but this is one of the chapters where the theme really shines through. Barb and Elisabeth partially show it by choosing not to tell everything to Alice. It's more clearly shown through the sister's strained relationship. Elisabeth never told Alice how much she was hurting, either brushing the subject off or insisting she was fine. Each time she lost a child, Elisabeth sunk further into depression but she never got help. As seen with Alice's situation, Elisabeth does have a family that cares about her and she could have reached out to them. The reader learns that Elisabeth is seeing a therapist now, but given the tone of the earlier letters Elisabeth makes it sound like even that has been a very recent development. Readers also learn later on that Elisabeth has been telling her therapist only a fraction of what is bothering her, and it isn't until much later in the book she really opens up about how bad her depression has become.

Discussion Question 1

How is miscommunication shown to be dangerous and harmful in Chapter 10?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Elisabeth feel that she and Alice have drifted apart?

Discussion Question 3

What is the significance of Alice continuing to hear the phrase about there being no heartbeat?

Vocabulary

pathological, coyly, tersely, monologue, intricacies, vehemently, innocuous, vigilant, primeval



Chapters 11-12

Summary

Chapter 11

The chapter opens with Frannie writing to Phil. She explains her actual relationship with Alice and her family. Frannie had never married, so she wasn't technically their grandmother. She was a neighbor that always helped to take care of the family and was given the honorary title of grandmother. Alice wakes up and is prompted by the nurse to clean herself up. She goes into the bathroom and finally looks at herself in the mirror. She's surprised at how much weight she's lost and the way her body just looks and feels so differently. She starts to put on some of the makeup and use the beauty products packed away in her bag. It all starts to feel natural and she can feel flashes of memory from the different scents she uses and by applying the makeup. She also has the occasional flash of trying to rouse her children whenever she feels like she's taking a while. Once she finishes, she's surprised at how good she looks.

The focus shifts and Elisabeth writes to her doctor about how she picked up Alice. Alice had said to Elisabeth that her memory was coming back, but then she asks Elisabeth how many children Elisabeth has. Alice reveals her memory hasn't come back. She starts to joke with Elisabeth, which surprises the older sister because she isn't used to Alice being that silly. The two start laughing and having a good time in the car. Elisabeth eventually tells Alice how they were pregnant at the same time several years ago. Elisabeth had been trying for several years to get pregnant, and she finally had. The child didn't survive though, which is the memory that Alice keeps having about there being no heartbeat.

Ever since then, Elisabeth writes in her journal, she has felt like she isn't the same person. She thinks it had a negative effect on her marriage, and that they were no longer a happy shiny couple. On the way home Alice has a few more flashes of memory, but she says that they don't feel like she's remembering events she was actually part of, and she can't remember details. Alice apologizes to Elisabeth about the lost child.

Chapter 12

Alice feels depressed thinking about everything that has happened with Nick. As they are returning home, she feels a sudden feeling of overwhelming fear, but she doesn't know what causes it. They arrive at Alice's home and she's amazed at how good it looks. Alice remembers when they first saw the house together. It was a complete mess, but they spoke with the owner who showed them pictures about how beautiful the house used to be. They decided to buy it and fix it up because she was offering them such a good price. Alice explores the house with Elisabeth. She marvels whenever she sees one of the changes that she and Nick always talked about. They had made a list of 93



things they wanted to change with the house when they first bought it. Alice was amazed that all of the changes had been made. The children were at Nick's until Sunday, when Alice would have to take care of them. She wonders what she will say to them, since she doesn't want them to be afraid of her. A deliveryman arrives with a large shipment of alcohol, and Elisabeth asks if Alice is hosting something that night.

Analysis

Chapter 11

Frannie's relationship with Alice and her family is explained. This comes up again much later on when Alice thinks back to her past with Elisabeth and how they lost their father. Alice shows off some of her muscle memory when she cleans herself up and applies her makeup. This muscle memory frequently occurs throughout the remainder of the book up until Alice actually gets her memory back. Alice experiences a few memories of her children. While she doesn't remember any details about them, this gives readers an idea that she does genuinely care about her children, even though she has no memories of them. It's important to address this since readers have no reason to believe Alice deserves the kids over Nick at this point in the story.

Alice initially lies about her memory because she doesn't want people to worry, something that's apparently an old Alice trait. Elisabeth is able to pick up on the lie almost immediately when Alice asks about Elisabeth's children. Elisabeth goes into more detail about the memory that Alice had with the doctor declaring there was no heartbeat. She also goes into more detail about the extent of her depression. She isn't just sad about not having children, but she feels like because she isn't a mother her life has been meaningless. She used to be a happy person, but after everything she's been through both she and Ben have started to suffer and aren't the same people that they were a few years ago.

The theme of Letting Go is discussed in this chapter. What the author suggests is that the inability to let go of hurtful things from the past can affect someone profoundly in the future. This is evidenced by both Alice and Elisabeth. Though Alice touches upon some of it, because she's being forced to relive her past ten years in series of disjointed flashbacks, it is Elisabeth whose character really embraces this theme. She has taken the miscarriages of her children very personally and has not been able to let go of her self loathing. The fact that she's decided to see a therapist does seem to suggest that she's attempting to make her peace with that.

Chapter 12

More of Alice's happy past is explored with Nick, once again emphasizing how strong their relationship used to be. Showing the state of the house is important to readers because it lets them realize that Alice had at least several good years with Nick where they were able to turn their home into the place they always dreamed about. As Alice explores, she realizes that they managed to accomplish each of the 93 items they had



on their list of impossible dreams. At the end of the chapter, Alice finds out she's hosting a party, something that had been alluded to a few times before.

At the start of the chapter, Alice experiences a profound sense of fear and dread when she passes by a street near her home. Readers eventually discover that this is the spot where she and Madison witnessed Gina's car getting crushed by a tree. This event is part of what contributed to Alice and Nick falling apart as a couple.

Discussion Question 1

How could the house be seen as symbolic of Alice's past relationship with Nick?

Discussion Question 2

Discuss the author's use of foreshadowing in Chapter 12. What events, symbols, and conversations seem to suggest something that might happen later in the novel?

Discussion Question 3

Describe Elisabeth's state of mind as she's writing in her journal about the events.

Vocabulary

reconciliation, repellent, pedantic, truculently, bemused, acerbic, pessimistically, ramshackle, disparaging, cynically, smarmy



Chapters 13-14

Summary

Chapter 13

Elisabeth and Alice start looking around the house for clues. They discover an invitation for a cocktail party for the kindergarten parents. Alice asks if Elisabeth usually goes to these events, but she doesn't since they are for mothers. Alice is surprised that Elisabeth still isn't a mother, assuming that she must have had a child after the miscarriage. The chapter switches to Elisabeth writing to her doctor. She writes about how she kept trying to have a child with Ben. They wouldn't announce when they were pregnant because they thought it would jinx the child. Elisabeth kept having miscarriages though, while Alice was successfully having children.

Alice was very supportive of Elisabeth, even while she was having her own children. Elisabeth is surprised to remember how she and Alice cried together after her second miscarriage. Back at the house, Elisabeth asks if Alice is trying to make a point. This hurts Alice, as Nick had said something similar before, and she didn't want to be the type of person that made points. She worries that she's done something to hurt not only Nick, but also Elisabeth.

Chapter 14

Alice explores her room and finds flowers from another man. She's horrified at the thought of dating someone else. She goes to sleep and wakes up to Frannie visiting her. Alice is happy that Frannie still looks and sounds the same. She asks about the divorce, but Frannie says Alice hadn't confided in her much in recent years. They go downstairs where Barb and Roger are preparing lunch.

Elisabeth leaves once Alice wakes up. As she's leaving, Alice asks who Gina is. The chapter shifts to Elisabeth writing to her doctor about how much she's changed in the last ten years. Her inability to have a baby has hurt her in so many ways. She and Ben struggle at dinner parties because they can't make small talk. She used to be so good at it, but now all she can talk about is her one boring medical topic. She's afraid that Ben resents her because she's failed as a wife. She feels like she's lost that tough edge that Alice always used to admire because she's so defeated from her miscarriages.

Analysis

Chapter 13

Alice shows how much things have changed between her and Elisabeth. In the past, they would have always gone to events together, but now Elisabeth clearly doesn't. Readers know that part of the reason why Elisabeth doesn't want to go to the family



events is because she's so bitter about not being a mother herself. Elisabeth clearly bears at least some resentment towards Alice. She felt like every time she tried to bear a child it failed, while Alice kept having more children. She had to see how happy all of her family members were whenever Alice was successful, but never got to experience that herself. Elisabeth snaps at Alice, foreshadowing the earlier conflict that Elisabeth mentioned having with Alice. Readers eventually find out this has to do with the subject of adopting children, which is why Elisabeth is so defensive when Alice asks about her being a mother.

Chapter 14

Alice gets her first introduction to Dominick, her current boyfriend and the principle of the school. Dominick becomes a reoccurring character throughout the book. His relationship with Alice is explored more in depth when they actually meet. Frannie gets the chance to talk to Alice in person. She tells Alice that they don't talk as much anymore, again showing how much Alice has changed in recent years. Alice keeps trying to find out details about the divorce, showing how determined she is to identify and correct the problem. Elisabeth goes into more detail about how the miscarriages have affected her and Ben. They've both retreated away from social situations. Elisabeth believes that she's lost the tough edge that Alice was constantly talking about as well. The only thing Elisabeth feels like she can focus on is her medical issue, which Alice later discovers is one of the reasons that they drifted apart.

Discussion Question 1

What would cause the two sisters to bear resentment toward one another?

Discussion Question 2

What past events indicate that at one time Alice and Elisabeth used to be quite close?

Discussion Question 3

What do the flowers from the other man seem to suggest about Alice at 40, as opposed to Alice at 29?

Vocabulary

synchronize, grimace, poignant, pristine, stilted, euphoria, evocative, reconciliation, innate, anecdotes



Chapters 15-16

Summary

Chapter 15

Everyone but Frannie makes an excuse to leave the room after Alice asks about Gina. Frannie has to awkwardly explain that Gina used to live across the street. This triggers a feeling of rage within Alice, but she doesn't know why. Frannie helps her remember that Nick cheated on Alice with Gina, but Alice can't remember why that would have happened. She wonders if it was something that she did to push him away. She's furious with both Nick and Gina. Alice gets a call from Kate Harper, the other mom running the party. Kate insists that Alice still run the party at her house, and Alice agrees because she thinks her life is already a nightmare. Alice is surprised that her future self would be friends with someone like Kate.

The chapter shifts to Elisabeth. She's attending a meeting with "the Infertile." They all organized a monthly support group several years ago because they were tired of the optimism of their previous therapist. They ask Elisabeth about a recent conflict she had with Alice, but Elisabeth doesn't feel right complaining about it since she just had such a good moment with Alice.

Back at Alice's house, everyone is explaining what happened in the last ten years. Some of these events trigger faint memories, but nothing substantial for Alice. She's busy thinking about Nick and wondering if she can forgive him for what happened.

Chapter 16

Alice finds herself home alone. She starts to explore the rest of the house, but soon feels overwhelmed. A neighbor she used to be friendly with snubs her when she tries to greet her. This upsets Alice even more. She decides to go for a walk. She instinctively finds herself running, even though past Alice would have never run. She finds it oddly comforting until she has a panic attack at the same street corner as before. She has a very brief memory of Gina's license plate. One of the parents going to her party spots her and brings her back home. She asks who he is, and he says his name is Dominick. Alice had earlier found roses in her home from someone with that same name.

The chapter shifts to Frannie writing to Phil. She talks briefly about Gina, commenting how Alice used to idolize her, which always upset Nick. The chapter then shifts to Elisabeth writing to her doctor. She is writing about how she had given up on the idea of having children. Despite that, she and Ben would eventually decide to try again because they didn't know what else to do. When she arrives back home, Ben is sitting at the table with red puffy eyes. He says that Alice was right about something they spoke about last week.



Back at her house, Alice is talking to Dominick. He tells her that he's the school principal and they had been dating for about a month. He also tells her that next week for mother's day she was going to get the school in the Guinness book of World Records for baking the largest lemon meringue pie along with the other mothers. Dominick comments that Alice seems much happier, and he kisses her. Alice is shocked at first, but remembers that she isn't with Nick. Alice once again wishes that Elisabeth was there with her.

The chapter shifts back to Elisabeth's letter. She writes that she always disliked Gina because Gina stole Alice away from her. Alice and Gina just had so much in common and many inside jokes. Elisabeth remembers a time where she had a miscarriage and called Alice. Gina was there and they were laughing in the background. Alice stopped when she heard the news, and she promised to talk to Elisabeth about it later, but she never called back. Elisabeth believes that was when things started to change for the worst with Alice.

Analysis

Chapter 15

Alice mistakenly believes that Gina was responsible for her and Nick breaking up. She thinks that Nick had an affair because of the feeling of rage Frannie's words invoke. Alice later finds out that Nick never cheated on her. She was feeling rage because of Gina's death and the fact that Nick didn't want to attend her funeral. Alice finds some comfort in getting to talk with Frannie, since she's exactly as she remembers. Alice gets another shock when she speaks with Kate Harper, unable to fathom how the two of them could have ever possibly become friends.

Elisabeth's problems are explored in more detail when she has a meeting with the Infertile. Like her, the members were fed up with the seemingly unending optimism of their previous therapist. The conflict that Elisabeth had with Alice is brought up again, along with the fact that Elisabeth had previously been badmouthing her to the group. Back at her house, Alice once again reinforces her desire to get back together with Nick.

Chapter 16

Alice once again has a panic attack when she passes by the road. She has another vague flashback about Gina. She once again mistakes the grief as coming from some affair that Nick didn't actually have. Alice is rescued by Dominick, the man that had previously sent Alice flowers. Dominick is very understanding about what Alice is going through. At first Alice can't believe why she would be with him, but this is likely just because she's still so focused on getting back together with Nick. As the chapter goes on, she admits that he seems like a nice person, but he just isn't Nick. Dominick is completely unaware that Alice is even thinking about Nick.

These two once again touch on the theme of Miscommunication. At this point in the story Alice has no intention of being with Dominick. She's already told her family



members that she intends to get back together with Nick, and she even later tells some of the mothers at the school. She never once thinks to tell Dominick. This continues several more times throughout the book.

Elisabeth writes about the hopelessness that she's feeling. She isn't trying to have a child with Ben because she thinks they can't do it, but simply because she doesn't think they have anything else to do with their lives. Elisabeth has hinted at this in previous chapters, but she spells out exactly how bad it is in this one. The conflict with Alice is brought up once again, which readers later find out ties into Elisabeth's struggles to start a family. Both Elisabeth and Frannie talk about Gina's strong friendship with Alice. Elisabeth even mentions how this friendship is part of what drove her and Alice apart. The lemon meringue pie record is briefly mentioned as well, setting up a future plot event.

Discussion Question 1

Discuss Elisabeth's past anger towards Alice. What part of that was miscommunication and assumptions and what part of it was truly happening?

Discussion Question 2

Discuss the situation that Alice finds herself in with Nick and Dominick.

Discussion Question 3

How might the group called "The Infertile" be a damaging group for Elisabeth to be a part of?

Vocabulary

peal, infidelity, maliciously, inertia, grotesquely, flippantly, unobtrusively, chortled



Chapters 17-18

Summary

Chapter 17

The letter opens with Frannie's letter to Phil. She talks about how she and Phil were engaged, but the marriage never happened. The chapter then returns to Alice thinking about how the party had just gone. Alice had fared well at the party. She had called Elisabeth and Ben to come over and help, but she was comfortable around all of the parents. She was surprised that she wasn't afraid of crowds anymore, but Elisabeth seemed to have picked that up. Dominick had helped her throughout the party, explaining her condition to the other parents. She liked him, but couldn't imagine dating him. Alice goes downstairs after thinking about the party. She and Elisabeth were still awake because of their insomnia. Alice talks about Gina's affair. Elisabeth is surprised and says that Nick never had an affair with Gina. The chapter ends with Elisabeth telling Alice that Gina is dead.

Chapter 18

Elisabeth explains how earlier in the year there had been a car accident and Gina died. Alice had witnessed it as she was driving right behind Gina. The accident occurred at the same road where Alice kept having panic attacks. Alice and Gina were still friends after Alice and Nick had decided to get a divorce, so there was no chance of an affair. Alice is shocked by this news, but she still can't remember anything specific about Gina. She asks Elisabeth about her kids. Elisabeth tells her some details, but she admits that it's hard for her to describe, again hinting that she and Alice aren't that close anymore. Alice asks about the conversation she had with Ben before the accident. Elisabeth is hesitant, but eventually explains that Alice had tricked Ben into coming over.

She convinced Ben that it would make sense to adopt children. Ben was against it because he was adopted and it caused issues between him and the family. Alice had told him to get over it, and Ben eventually agreed. Elisabeth knew it would take a long time and they couldn't even afford it, which is why she was upset. Alice feels bad because she knew how insensitive it was. She asks if she and Elisabeth were still close and Elisabeth is again hesitant to answer. She pushes the subject aside and says that she and Alice should go to bed.

Analysis

Chapter 17

Frannie briefly talks about the relationship that she had with Phil. The two were supposed to be engaged, but the reader doesn't find out until much later why the marriage never worked. The chapter then jumps to Alice reflecting on everything that



happened at the party. Her muscle memory managed to get her through most of the party. She still didn't remember specific people, but she at least knew what she should say and how to handle herself. Dominick and Alice continued to get closer, but Alice once again thought to herself that she would never want to date Dominick.

Alice tries to find out more about the affair from Elisabeth. Elisabeth has no idea what she's talking about though, which once again touches on the theme of Miscommunication. Everyone had been avoiding telling Alice the truth, so she jumped to her own conclusion. The chapter ends with Elisabeth revealing to Alice that Gina recently died.

Chapter 18

Elisabeth finally tells Alice about Gina. Alice learns that the reason she was always feeling overwhelming grief when she passed by the road was because that's where she witnessed Gina die. Elisabeth doesn't think there's any chance that Gina cheated on Nick because Alice and Gina were still best friends after Alice announced she was getting a divorce. The strained relationship between Alice and Elisabeth is shown again when Elisabeth has to talk about Alice's children. This not only shows that they've grown distance, but it also highlights how uncomfortable Elisabeth is whenever she has to talk about children. Elisabeth does eventually admit that they aren't too close anymore.

Elisabeth goes into detail about the conflict that had been mentioned in the previous chapters. Alice tricked Ben into coming over so she could convince him to consider adoption. Alice is horrified because she can't ever imagine having such an invasive conversation, especially if it meant going behind Elisabeth's back. Readers will later learn that it isn't just the invasion of privacy that upset Elisabeth, since both she and Ben have strong feelings about adoption.

Discussion Question 1

Compare the 29 year old Alice to the current Alice. What does she learn about herself as a result of the party?

Discussion Question 2

What does it say about their relationship that Elisabeth can't tell Alice more about Alice's children?

Discussion Question 3

What sort of person must Kate be if Alice is shocked that they would be friends?

Vocabulary

excursion, contemptuous, conspicuous, tersely, superficial, bereaved, intermittent, ballistic, narcissistic, reverently, elation, presumptuous



Chapters 19-20

Summary

Chapter 19

Alice starts to worry about how she's going to take care of her children. She calls up her mother and finds out about their favorite foods. She's surprised how easily she takes to cooking, knowing just what to do and where to go in the kitchen. She goes and checks her emails, again surprised at how her body seems to go through the motions. To her horror, she finds an email chain between her and Nick. In the emails, she is angrily arguing with him about who gets the children for Christmas, even though it's still many months away. Alice can't believe that she would act that way towards Nick. Alice finds out from Dominick that one of the reasons she and Nick apparently broke up was because of how busy he was with work, but she's convinced there has to have been more than that.

Nick eventually arrives with the children. Alice is overwhelmed, but overall happy with who the children are, even if she can't remember being pregnant with them. Nick is very cold towards her and wants to get away, but Alice asks him to stay for dinner. He declines, but the children overhear this and immediately get excited so he decides to accept the offer, though he warns Alice that it's a mistake. Alice is convinced that she'll be able to win Nick back.

Chapter 20

Alice is at a loss on how to handle the children, but Nick helps out. She tries to talk to Nick about the way things used to be, and all the wonderful things they said to one another when they first started dating. She begs Nick to stay so they can work out whatever was causing them problems. Nick is initially stunned and Alice feels like he's starting to act like how she remembers. He insists that their relationship had been in trouble for years though. Alice notes that he seems exhausted, and he makes a comment about how easy it was for her staying at home. The younger children start to fight and Alice doesn't know what to do. Nick breaks it up for her. Madison notices that Alice keeps repeating all their names and accuses Alice of not being able to remember any of them.

Analysis

Chapter 19

Alice's muscle memory kicks in when she's cooking and walking around the house. She logs into her computer and finds a nasty email chain between her and Nick. This is the first real experience she gets with the woman that she became. Up until then, people have offered a few vague descriptions, but Alice always had a hard time believing them.



With the emails she can see exactly what she was saying to Nick and the horrible ways that they fought. Alice discovers that part of what they fought about was the long hours that Nick worked and the fact that he constantly traveled. She doesn't believe that's the only issue, which ends up being true.

Despite everything she saw, Alice is still convinced she can make things work with Nick. Yet Nick is very hesitant to spend any amount of time with her. He only accepts her invitation to dinner because the children overhear it and he doesn't want to disappoint them. Nick continues to act cold towards Alice, even knowing that she has no memory of why they hate one another.

Chapter 20

Alice tries to appeal to Nick by bringing up how strong their relationship used to be. This initially starts to break through to Nick, but it doesn't last for long. Nick takes one of Alice's comments the wrong way and starts to fight with her when she brings up how tired he looks. He argues that it isn't easy for him because he has to work and he can't just stay at home doing whatever he wants like Alice. His tone and words suggest that it's a fight that they've had many times before, going back to what Dominick said in the previous chapter about why Nick and Alice were fighting. Alice is overwhelmed with the children, and very clearly treating them far differently from what they were used to.

Discussion Question 1

What can the reader deduce about Nick's mindset and perception of Alice from Nick's comment about Alice's easy job staying at home?

Discussion Question 2

Why would Alice find many tasks, such as working in her kitchen, surprisingly easy?

Discussion Question 3

How do the emails offer Alice a very clear and frank view of how bitter and nasty the divorce had become?

Vocabulary

dexterous, idiosyncrasies, exhilaration, sanctimonious, juttred, serene, malnourished, plight, flabbergasted, guffaw, pirouetted



Chapters 21-22

Summary

Chapter 21

Madison questions Alice about basic facts she should know about the children. Nick tries to get her to stop, but the kids discover Alice has amnesia. The chapter shifts to Elisabeth writing to her doctor. She and Ben got in a horrible fight on the way home. They each thought the other was opposed to adoption. Elisabeth was tired, which drove her to be firmly against it now. Ben accused her of just wanting to sit around with the television on, and Elisabeth admitted that was fine with her. Since then, Ben hasn't spoken to her.

Chapter 22

Alice has dinner with the kids and Nick and tries to explain the situation. Her children bicker back and forth, but Nick does his best to keep them under control. Alice tells Madison about all the little things they did when she was pregnant with her. Madison seems touched by this, and Alice is amazed that she never told Madison before. She has a memory of her and Nick driving a young Madison around at night because she wasn't able to fall asleep, but the motion of the car helped. This makes Alice happy, but she sees that Nick doesn't care. She realizes that not only did Nick fall out of love, but he doesn't even seem to like her anymore. The chapter shifts over to Elisabeth writing to her doctor. She wonders if she ever wanted to be a mother in the first place. Whenever she takes care of Alice's children she finds herself exhausted. Despite that, she's still crying just thinking about it.

The chapter shifts once again to Frannie writing to Phil. She talks about how she feels bad for Elisabeth and can only imagine how much it hurts to lose a child. She always has to resist the urge to point out that even though Elisabeth doesn't get to be a mother, she at least gets to be a wife, something that Frannie was never able to do.

Analysis

Chapter 21

Madison makes it clear that she and Alice aren't on the best terms. She's the first to question Alice and acts angry that Alice wasn't upfront about her amnesia. This touches upon the theme of Miscommunication once again. The theme is much more clearly shown when Elisabeth is writing to her doctor. She and Ben got in a fight on the way home because they each believed the other was against adoption. If they had simply discussed their views on adoption with one another they could have tried to adopt years ago, as Ben admitted he was willing to do it after the early miscarriages. He argues that Elisabeth doesn't care about starting a family anymore and just wants to sit in front of



the television. Elisabeth admits that she's too tired, and in her later stages of depression ends up doing exactly what Ben was afraid of, giving in to exhaustion and limiting her activity.

Chapter 22

Alice starts to repair her relationship with Madison by telling her about all of the little things that both she and Nick did for her when Alice first got pregnant. Things start to fall apart when Alice tells Madison something that she already knew about. This is a big moment for Alice though because she has one of her first memories from the last ten years about driving around with Madison and Nick. Alice reacts happily to this memory, but Nick doesn't seem to care at all. Alice realizes that things have gotten so bad between the two of them that Nick can't even stand to be around Alice.

Although he isn't happy about it now, this touches upon another theme of the book: Memories. The author seems to be stating that bad memories should not replace or overshadow good ones. Although Nick is in denial about it now, being around Alice with her amnesia starts to break down his bitter demeanor and he once again enjoys the good memories that they had together. It doesn't make all their fighting and arguments disappear, but it's eventually responsible for repairing their relationship. Elisabeth's relationship with Ben touches on a similar theme, as seen through Frannie's letter at the end. She knows that Elisabeth has gone through a horrible ordeal, but she shouldn't let those bad memories get in the way of all the good times that she's had with Ben. Both of them are so consumed by the grief that they can't just be happy as husband and wife like they were before they tried to have children.

Discussion Question 1

How are both couples (Alice/Nick and Elisabeth/Ben) guilty of Miscommunication?

Discussion Question 2

Why should good memories not be overshadowed or be allowed to be replaced by bad ones?

Discussion Question 3

Why did Elisabeth and Ben fight on the way home? Do you feel as if they made any progress in repairing their relationship?

Vocabulary

wailing, figuratively, tell-tale, traumatic, infanticide, generically, hirsute, pedagogical



Chapters 23-24

Summary

Chapter 23

Alice has to take the children to school. She has a hard time getting them all up and figuring out what time she's supposed to leave. Her old memories kick in and she at least remembers most of the route to school. On the way there, she asks her children what kind of a mother she is. The children say that she can be strict and she gets angry a lot, especially about Nick. Alice apologizes to the children for making them grow up in such a hostile environment. Alice speaks with Kate at the school. She tries to find out more about why she and Nick broke up, but the topic keeps changing before she can learn much. Kate does mention that Nick didn't want to attend Gina's funeral. Alice returns home and finds out she has a meeting with a personal trainer. She again tries to learn more about herself, but she doesn't get much information. However, she does start to feel sorrow towards Gina, even though she can't remember anything specific about her.

Chapter 24

Elisabeth writes to her doctor about an incident that happened a few weeks ago at the coffee shop. She had spotted a child wandering away from her distracted mother. She went outside to stop the child from wandering into traffic. Instead of bringing her back, she just kept walking though until the mother ran over and took the child back. Elisabeth broke down, but Alice came to get her. The two went to visit Frannie. They asked her about her mysterious ex-fiancé, but all Frannie said is that he doesn't write her back.

Alice goes to the coffee shop and finds she is now an avid coffee drinker. She talks to the manager, who mentions that Nick was there a few weeks ago. He encouraged Nick to get back together with Alice, who is his favorite customer. Nick said if he could, he would. This delights Alice. She returns home and calls her best friend, Sophie, who it turns out is no longer her friend. They don't dislike each other, but it's clear that they're incredibly distant. She didn't even know Gina was dead. Alice has a memory when she's going to do the laundry about Nick kissing a different woman. She's upset because Nick assured her there was no affair. Barb calls and tells Alice that Elisabeth is having a blood test today for something that has to do with her infertility. The chapter briefly cuts to Elisabeth who is getting repeated phone calls. She ignores all of them though because she doesn't want to talk to anyone.

Nick calls Alice to check on how she's doing. She tells him she managed to get all the children to school. She tells him about the memory she got back. Nick laughs and once again assures her that he never cheated and she's remembering the incident wrong. He says it's interesting that she chose to remember it like that, but he wouldn't go into more



detail. Alice is frustrated and hangs up the phone, suddenly feeling glad they got a divorce.

Analysis

Chapter 23

Alice's muscle memory helps her get the kids to school, although she struggles in the morning to get everyone ready. Alice uses the drive to try and learn more about how she acts as a mother. Her children fill her in that she can be very angry, reflecting what characters like Dominick have commented on throughout the book. Alice apologizes for all of the fighting because she's afraid of what kind of impact it has had on her children. This foreshadows the bullying problems that Madison has later on in the book. Alice continues to try and learn more about what happened with Nick, but she only learns that Nick didn't want to attend Gina's funeral. This is the first indication that things might not have been very good between Nick and Alice, foreshadowing some of the other reasons why they started to fight so much.

Chapter 24

Elisabeth talks about the event at the coffee shop where she tried to walk away with a child. She tried to play it off as not being a big deal, but it's very clear that she was having a severe breakdown over her inability to have children. Alice was there to help her though. This is a very important moment because up until then it seemed like Alice and Elisabeth had stopped supporting one another. They might have grown distant, but they still loved one another and Alice was perfectly willing to support her sister and smooth over the situation.

The theme of Memories is explored in more detail through the manager. He reveals that Nick is clearly thinking about all of the good memories that they had. He isn't opposed to the idea of getting back together with Alice; he just doesn't believe that it's possible. Alice takes that as a positive sign. Things do turn south when Alice has a memory of Nick kissing another woman in their house. She confronts Nick about this, but he once again reassures her that he never had an affair with her. He also comments that he finds it very interesting that Alice chose to remember the event as her catching Nick.

The truth ends up being that it was Gina who walked in on her husband kissing another woman. As Nick later notes, one of the big reasons they fought is because Alice and Gina were so close. It felt like Alice was living Gina's life. This is shown by the fact that Alice was vividly able to remember something that happened to Gina, even though so many other memories were still lost to her. She also remembers it as though she were the one witnessing the kiss and not just hearing about it later from Gina. Alice gets frustrated with Nick and hangs up on him, feeling a sudden surge of hatred.

The theme of Living One's Life is demonstrated in this chapter as it is becoming clear that Alice latched on to Gina and her life, and in many ways began acting like her. This is suggested as one of the largest problems in Alice's marriage, and what caused her to



change so drastically from the woman she had been. The author seems to be suggesting that when one is not true to one's own life, there are dire consequences.

Although it isn't focused on too much, Elisabeth's blood test is brought up and ends up being a very important plot point over the next few chapters.

Discussion Question 1

Why is Alice continually appalled at how her 40 year old self behaves? What are some of the behaviors that she is shocked by?

Discussion Question 2

Discuss the theme of Living One's Life and why it is an important thing to do.

Discussion Question 3

Discuss Nick's perspective on Alice's decision to try and get back together.

Vocabulary

laconically, truant, agog, protruding, emulation, exacerbated



Chapters 25-26

Summary

Chapter 25

Alice has a meeting with the other mothers about the upcoming Guinness World Record event. A few of the mothers talk to her about the memory loss. When she asks about Nick and the other woman they explain what actually happened. It was Gina's husband, Michael, who had been kissing one of the moms, Mrs. Holloway. Gina made them promise not to talk about it, but that's when she started to have problems with her marriage. The chapter briefly shifts back to Elisabeth. She had called about the results of her blood test and was now considering if she should drive into a traffic pole or go to work. The chapter shifts momentarily back to Alice, who is overwhelmed with playground duty. Later that night, Alice wakes up because she hears Madison having a nightmare. Madison keeps saying she has to get something off of Gina. Alice never finds out what though and Madison says it was just a dream.

Chapter 26

Alice and the children are attending a talent show at Frannie's retirement home. Nick is there with one of his sisters. Olivia is performing, but she's afraid to go up. Nick convinces her that it will be okay, and both he and Alice cheer for her when she puts on an amazing performance. Roger and Barb perform a dance at the end. They advertise that they are offering lessons, and to prove that anyone can do it they bring Nick and Alice up on stage. At first they are awkward together, but Alice can feel that there's still chemistry between the two of them. The chapter briefly cuts away to Elisabeth. She and Ben were driving to the performance, but Elisabeth insisted they turn around. She spent the night watching television instead. She knew that Ben was devastated over her failed blood test. He was hopeful about adoption, but Elisabeth had given up all hope.

Alice talks with Nick and one of his sisters, Ella, after the performance. Ella tells her that none of Nick's other sisters came because they can't stand to be around Alice. Alice gives back the family ring that they had been asking for. She and Nick talk for a little and she gets Nick to tell her about some of the good memories, like the birth of their children. Nick tells Alice that they were too close to Gina and Michael. When they got divorced, it was like Alice and Nick were getting divorced too, which they eventually did. That wasn't the only problem though. One of Frannie's friends mentions seeing pictures of their family online. This upsets Nick, who starts to argue with Alice. Alice is mortified that their conversations can instantly shift from friendly to aggressive.

Analysis

Chapter 25



Alice finally gets to the bottom of what happened between her and Nick. She finds out that it was Michael who was kissing the other woman, not Nick. It was a secret that Alice and the other moms kept amongst themselves. After that kiss, Nick and Alice started to have relationships problems which mirrored the ones that Gina and Michael were having. Alice later has to wake up Madison from a nightmare. Madison was screaming about getting something off of Gina. This is later Madison remembering the day that Gina got in her accident.

The theme of Living One's Life is demonstrated once again in this chapter and the next, in that it is clear that not only did Alice worship Gina and try to emulate her, but Nick felt the same way about Michael. When Gina and Michael divorce, it isn't that big of a stretch to see how Alice and Nick would feel compelled to do the same thing. Thus, the author seems to be suggesting, once again, that when someone invests and gives away their own identity to embrace someone else's it seldom ends well.

Elisabeth's depression has reached a new level as she considers whether or not she should drive into a telephone pole. She assures her doctor that she was just joking, but it's clear that the joke had at least some truth to it. This leads readers to believe that the blood test has gone poorly. It's eventually revealed that Elisabeth actually got good news, but she's too depressed and exhausted to enjoy the news. She thinks that even though the test was positive, she'll still end up failing at having a child, just like all of the other times.

Chapter 26

Nick and Alice once again show the theme of Memories. In this chapter, memories are shown to have restorative and healing properties. For the first time in many years, Nick and Alice enjoy one another's company. Things are still tense between them, but Alice is able to relax around Nick, which makes him relax as well. They cheer happily for Olivia when she performs. Alice is able to sense some chemistry between them when Roger and Barb bring them up to dance together. Alice tries to make peace with Nick's family, returning the engagement ring Nick had given to her which belonged to their family. In one of her emails, she saw that the sisters were upset because Alice refused to give up the ring, even though she hated it and never wanted to wear it. Now, it just seemed petty not to give it back.

Alice and Nick get to talking about their good memories together. Nick also explains more in depth about how close they were to Gina and Michael. When Gina and Michael started to fight, it was like Nick and Alice were fighting, too. Nick felt like Alice was envious of Gina because she got to be single and could start going on dates and looking for new men to be with. Their conversation shifts from friendly to aggressive which upsets Alice because it just reminds her how tense things are between them.

Elisabeth can't make it out to the retirement community because she's fallen too deep into her depression. She can't muster up the energy to care about Ben's condition. All she can do is sit in front of the television.



Discussion Question 1

What role does the television set play for Elisabeth?

Discussion Question 2

Why does the author suggest that there might be hope for Nick and Alice?

Discussion Question 3

What is the message that the author is trying to make about memories?

Vocabulary

suffused, remonstrated, brittle, compromised, permeated, wistful, commandeering, flamboyant



Chapters 27-28

Summary

Chapter 27

Alice finds out why her neighbor was mad at her. Alice was pushing for the area to be rezoned to have a large apartment building, while her neighbor was in opposition. Alice realizes she only took on the project because Gina was invested in it. She goes over to apologize to her neighbor, offering her homemade brownies. The chapter cuts over to Elisabeth. She's still dealing with the test results. She is at work giving one of her speeches when she sees Alice in the crowd. Elisabeth nearly breaks down, but keeps pushing through. Alice asks why she didn't go to Frannie's talent show, but Elisabeth can't tell her.

Alice is adjusting to her life as a mother. She's exhausted by all the things that she has to do, but her memories are starting to slowly come back. She finds they're more like reflexive echoes. She'll start doing a task without even realizing it. She knows she's doing things differently than she would before the accident, but she doesn't care. Alice is later called into school. Dominick says there was trouble with Madison, and he also called for Nick.

Elisabeth writes about her latest experience trying to utilize invitro fertilization. From the moment the procedure started she knew it wasn't going to work. Elisabeth left work early because she couldn't deal with the disappointment. While she was at home, Ben called, upset that Elisabeth hadn't told him the procedure failed. She writes that she had just hung up on him.

Chapter 28

Dominick tells Alice that Madison has a bullying problem. Nick arrives and Dominick explains that Madison cut off another girl's hair and threw a cake at her. Madison has been suspended as a result. Alice suggests that Nick come with them so they can talk about it. Nick is surprised but goes along. Alice finds out Madison was only bullying the girl because she was saying things about Alice. Nick and Alice try to give her tips to deal with her anger, but she points out that neither parent follows the advice they give. The family is momentarily distracted by a whale and her calf, which improves the mood.

Nick and Alice get to talking about their relationship. Nick explains that after Gina broke up with her husband it felt like Alice wanted to be single too. Nick felt like he was getting in the way. She and Nick frequently fought over minor trivial issues. The only reason he didn't go to the funeral was because Alice made him feel like he wasn't wanted there. He admits that he also focused a lot on his work at the time. He tells Alice that maybe they can work things out. The chapter very briefly cuts to Elisabeth, who is still fighting



with Ben. All she does is sit around and watch television, but she feels too defeated to do anything else.

Analysis

Chapter 27

Alice's memories are starting to gradually return. She's still only having echoes, but she's able to fall into her motherly routines and take care of her children. Alice makes peace with her neighbor. She realizes that she was only in opposition of the building renovations because it was a project that Gina was interested in. Alice later learns that another reason she wanted to see apartments put up is because she couldn't deal with all of the negative memories in the house. Alice tries to repair things between Elisabeth, attending one of her work speeches. Elisabeth is shocked and nearly breaks down. She doesn't tell Alice why she was unable to attend.

Elisabeth explores more of her depression. She didn't even have the energy to try and call Ben because she was too unhappy about the results. Again, readers are led to believe that the test was negative and that's why Elisabeth is upset. Elisabeth had gone in with the mindset that the procedure wasn't going to work. She keeps this mindset up until she actually gives birth towards the very end of the book.

Alice realizes that she's doing things differently. Alice is learning how to blend her old styles with her new ones, creating a much happier medium within her life. This is explored much more in depth later on when all of Alice's memories return. This furthers the theme of Living One's Life. Now that she has no recollection of Gina, Alice has started to return to her original personality. She is happier, which indicates that living one's real life, being true to one's individual desires and dreams, brings more happiness than emulating someone else's life.

Chapter 28

Alice and Nick discover that one of the reasons Madison was bullying was because of the way that she's seen them fighting. Alice continues to try and fix things between Nick. They all share a strong family moment when they go to watch the whales together. Nick seems genuinely happy to be with Alice, which the readers know is a big deal since he's been angry and miserable with Alice for the past year, even if she can't remember it. The two get to talking about some of their relationship issues.

Nick goes into greater detail about how close Gina and Alice were. Once Gina became single, Nick felt like he was nothing more than a third wheel. It always seemed like Alice would rather be with Gina. This hurt Nick because he used to be friends with Gina too. He didn't go to her funeral because he genuinely thought Alice didn't want him there. He does admit that his work schedule was part of the problem too, as Dominick had mentioned earlier. This underscores and demonstrates the theme of Miscommunication as well. If they had this discussion years earlier, their marriage wouldn't have suffered.



The chapter very briefly focuses on Elisabeth, who is still suffering from depression. All she has the energy to do is sit in front of the television, completely ignoring the world around her.

Discussion Question 1

What are some of the symptoms that indicate that Elisabeth is suffering from depression?

Discussion Question 2

Why is Alice happier now than she was prior to her accident?

Discussion Question 3

Discuss the influence that Gina and Michael had over Alice and Nick.

Vocabulary

astute, banter, heralded, amiably, throttle, riled, absolving, inscrutable



Chapters 29-30

Summary

Chapter 29

Alice gets a call from Ben explaining that Elisabeth isn't well. Alice thinks it's because of her recent failed pregnancy. Ben clarifies that despite what everyone thought, Elisabeth didn't lose the child. She's pregnant. She's also been up for the last two days just watching television. Alice drives over and crawls into bed with Elisabeth to watch television. It takes a little while, but Elisabeth eventually opens up. She tells Alice she wanted the pregnancy to fail because she was convinced the child would just die inside of her like all of the others. They've been trying for seven years, putting their lives on hold for something that seemed doomed. She says she's too exhausted and can't handle the idea of telling everyone she's pregnant, only to tell them a few months later that the child died. Alice insists that this time it will work and that Elisabeth can't give up. Elisabeth apologizes for not being there when Gina died, but Alice insists that doesn't matter now. Elisabeth says they had drifted apart once Gina was in Alice's life, but Alice continues to say it doesn't matter and they'll become close again.

Alice arrives home and Dominick is waiting for her. She feels uncomfortable with him because she wants to get back with Nick. Nick arrives shortly after and Dominick quickly excuses himself. She and Nick share a bottle of wine and continue to talk about their relationship. Nick admits that he has a hard time managing his home and work life, which is part of why they fought. Alice ends up sitting in his lap and the two kiss. The chapter cuts away to Frannie writing to Phil. She's finally been pursuing a relationship with a man named Xavier. She also reveals to the reader that the reason why she and Phil never got married was because he got into an accident on a camping trip shortly before their wedding.

Chapter 30

Alice has to deal with Mega Meringue Day. She's immediately overwhelmed since she has no memory of preparing the event. Fortunately, the friends she made at the meeting are understanding and help her get everything organized. They say it really isn't any trouble since Alice had previously prepared everything so well. Dominick mentions a date that they had later in the evening, but Alice had already made plans with Nick. She feels bad for Dominick, but she knows that she has to try and fix things with Nick. The other mothers are surprised that Nick showed up at all, but Alice is happy that he did. He even mentions to her that he really thinks they'll be able to fix everything. Barb tells Alice that Elisabeth is there as well. She's feeling sick, but Alice takes that as a good sign, believing it to be morning sickness. Barb also explains who Frannie was always writing to. The event begins with a speech from one of the other mothers about how much Alice has done for the community and how the event is being held in memory of Gina.



Analysis

Chapter 29

Readers finally discover that Elisabeth isn't depressed because the pregnancy test was negative. She's upset because the test was positive and she's pregnant. Elisabeth is so depressed because she's convinced herself that the child is going to die just like all of the other ones. It would have been easier if it was just impossible for her to get pregnant. She didn't want to tell anyone because she couldn't bear the weight of disappointing her family again. Alice is supportive of Elisabeth, and she immediately dismisses Elisabeth when she tries to apologize for not being there when Gina died. Alice makes it clear that all that matters is taking care of Elisabeth. Just like with Nick, she's determined to fix her relationship.

Alice runs into Dominick when she gets home, again touching on the theme of Miscommunication. She doesn't tell him about everything going on with Nick. Dominick finds out when Nick shows up and he excuses himself. Alice and Nick have a good time together and they once again discuss some of the issues that were plaguing their marriage.

Frannie reveals to the reader that Phil died, which is why she never got together with him and why she never actually sends the letters she writes. Like Elisabeth, Frannie had given up on relationships. After the retirement talent show Frannie ends up starting a relationship with Xavier, someone she had recently become friends with. This touches on another one of the themes of the book, Letting Go. Frannie has finally realized that after all these years she's allowed to find someone new in her life. It doesn't tarnish the memory of Phil, and she deserves to be happy.

Chapter 30

The theme of Miscommunication comes up yet again with Alice and Dominick. She doesn't tell him that she has a date with Nick, even though she previously had plans with him. Alice feels bad, but she's too determined to make things right with Nick to worry about how Dominick feels. Alice gets another look at how her relationship with Nick has changed. All of the other mothers badmouth Nick when he shows up, clearly repeating things that Alice herself must have complained about at various points. Alice doesn't care about what they're saying because she's happy to have Nick there. Barb and Alice talk about Elisabeth, who is feeling sick. Alice is happy because she thinks that means Elisabeth is just going through morning sickness. Alice finds out about Phil, amazed that her mother was able to keep Frannie's secret for so long.

Discussion Question 1

Why is Elisabeth upset about her current pregnancy?



Discussion Question 2

How has Frannie indicated that she is ready to let go of her past life?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Frannie write to Phil?

Vocabulary

sullen, neutral, retorted, fraudulently, vitriol, recombinant, ardent, countenance, cursory



Chapters 31-32

Summary

Chapter 31

The mothers start to bake the giant pie. Everything is going well, but throughout the process Alice feels like there's a memory building up, but she can't recall any of the details. It eventually gets so intense that she feels like she's going to pass out. Both Nick and Dominick go up to support her. The chapter cuts to Elisabeth writing about how she missed Alice collapsing because she was in the bathroom and started to bleed. She thought it was fitting she lost her baby in such a trashy place because it was fitting with the rest of her life.

Chapter 32

Alice starts to get all of her memories back. She remembers how she first met Gina and the two instantly became friends. She was desperate for friends because Elisabeth had grown so bitter and snapped at Alice any time they tried to talk. Nick was constantly traveling, so Alice didn't have anyone else to speak to. Nick was barely around to help with the children. Once Alice lost Gina she started to pick fights with Nick just because it would distract her from the grief. Alice was horrified at everything she had done in the past week. When she comes to, Nick can instantly see that she wants nothing to do with him, and Alice instinctively goes to Dominick instead of him.

Analysis

Chapter 31

Nick and Dominick both rush up to help Alice. This is important because earlier in the book it seemed as if Nick wouldn't have cared if Alice was going to pass out. With everything that's happened he's starting to care about her, just like Dominick. Both the men coming up is telling because Alice is soon going to have to choose between them. Alice collapses because all of her memories are starting to come back, which has a huge impact on the rest of the book. Elisabeth collapses in the bathroom as well, giving readers the impression that she has lost her child. This is later revealed not to be the case, and although she did get sick, the child is still healthy. Elisabeth is still clearly depressed, commenting that it's fitting for her to lose her child in such a trashy location because it matches the rest of her life.

Chapter 32

Alice's memories come rushing back and she remembers how she first met Gina. The two hit it off instantly and became close. Alice was desperate for a new best friend at that point because Elisabeth had become so bitter. All Elisabeth could talk about was



her miscarriages. Alice tried to help, but Elisabeth always snapped at her that she didn't understand what she was talking about, and she was constantly getting the phrases wrong. Alice was also upset because Nick was never around to help her with the children. When Gina died, Alice began to pick fights with Nick simply because she wanted to use the fights as a distraction from her grief. As her memories returned, Alice was horrified at the way she had been behaving since losing her memory. Nick is able to tell right away that her memories returned because she gives him a hateful look. Alice makes a point of going right to Dominick, further indicating that she has returned to her current self.

Discussion Question 1

Why had Alice become friends with Gina initially?

Discussion Question 2

What impact did Gina's friendship with Alice have on Elisabeth?

Discussion Question 3

How had Elisabeth pushed Alice away?

Vocabulary

etiquette, impromptu, euphoric, delinquent, diligent, demagogue



Chapters 33-34

Summary

Chapter 33

Months have passed since Alice received her memories back. Alice realizes that she was just being young and naïve thinking that things could change between her and Nick. Their relationship was over, and Alice was much happier with Dominick, who was actively there for her and always paid attention to her. Alice and Nick had at least become less bitter towards each other, and she agrees to let him see more of the kids. She believes that the two of them can have a friendly divorce instead of fighting over every little detail. She has retained some of the traits from her younger self, which has helped her to get along more with Madison. The chapter ends with her getting a call from Ben, announcing that Elisabeth just gave birth to a baby girl.

Chapter 34

Elisabeth is writing her doctor to tell him all about the birth of her daughter, Francesca. She feels bad because all the other Infertile members had to congratulate her, and she knows how painful that can be. She also feels bad because she knows the doctor and his wife were struggling to have a child as well. She tells him how even after all the years of suffering it ends up being worth it. She also says she has changed her views on adoption. She knows once you get a child of your own, no matter how you do it, you'll be happy parents.

Analysis

Chapter 33

Several themes are demonstrated during this chapter. The first theme is that of Memories. Alice has learned to make peace with the good and bad memories from her past. She remembers that she had good times with Nick, and their relationship is better. Alice has chosen to be with Dominick, but she and Nick can be in the same room together without fighting, and Nick has gotten to spend more time with the kids. Alice has also strengthened her relationship with her family. She and Madison are getting along much better, and Alice and Elisabeth are close once again. Elisabeth gives birth at the end of the chapter, indicating to readers that she was just sick and didn't in fact lose her child.

Alice once again demonstrates the theme of Youth being a Perception, in that she manages to still retain something of her younger self. Alice hasn't completely regressed back to the way she used to be, but she certainly isn't as uptight as she was since becoming a mother.



Chapter 34

Elisabeth is finally happy because she has been able to have a child. She has mixed feelings about the whole experience. The theme of Letting Go is demonstrated in this scene when she recognizes that she should have learned to move on a long time ago. At the same time, she's happy that she never learned that lesson because all of the pain and suffering she went through was worth it to have her own child. Her views of adoption have changed as well. When Ben originally brought it up she thought they were too old to be parents. Readers learn in the following chapters that Elisabeth and Ben have become reenergized by having a daughter, and they go on to adopt several more children.

Discussion Question 1

How has Alice changed as a result of her accident and recovery of her memories?

Discussion Question 2

How has the new Alice made things better for herself and others?

Discussion Question 3

What did Elisabeth and Ben learn about themselves as a result of the birth of their daughter?

Vocabulary

scouring, condescending, placate, daunting, credulous



Chapter 35 and Epilogue

Summary

Chapter 35

Frannie is writing one last short letter to Phil. She tells him how the family is ecstatic because Madison just won an oratory competition. Elisabeth is adapting well to being a mother, and Alice seems so much more at peace. Frannie herself is happier now that she has Xavier in her life. She ends the letter with a final farewell to Phil.

Epilogue

Many years have passed and Alice's children are now teenagers or just finishing college. Alice and Nick ended up getting back together. Their relationship isn't perfect, but they've managed to strike a perfect balance between their working lives and their personal lives. Elisabeth ended up adopting three children. Frannie was happy with Xavier, who had incorporated himself into the family, and Barb and Roger are still happily together as well.

Analysis

Chapter 35

Frannie once again demonstrates the theme of Memories, as well as Letting Go. She clearly misses Phil, but she's able to forge new happier memories with Xavier. Frannie knows that after all these years she can pursue another relationship, something that she hinted much earlier in the book was something that she missed.

Epilogue

The theme of Letting Go is brought up again through Alice and Dominick. She knew that they weren't going to work as a couple, and this time she was able to communicate that to Dominick. She and Nick were able to get back together. Their relationship still has issues, but they're able to look past the bad memories. The theme of Youth as a Perception is brought up again. Both Alice and Nick changed when they got older, but those changes weren't permanent and they were able to get over their issues and become a family once again.

Discussion Question 1

How did Frannie come to the realization that she needed to let Phil go?



Discussion Question 2

Why did Dominick and Alice not end up together?

Discussion Question 3

Discuss Alice's transformation from the beginning of the novel to her current state.

Vocabulary

perspiring, gaunt, prudent, innocuous, lax, precipitate



Characters

Alice

Alice is one of the main protagonists of the book. At the start of the book she mistakenly believes that it's the year 1998 and she's 29. It's quickly revealed to Alice that she's actually 39 years old and due to a head injury has forgotten the last ten years of her life. Alice is now the mother of three, and she's in the middle of a vicious divorce and custody battle with the former love of her life, Nick. As a 29 year old, Alice was very kind and a little aloof. She didn't like sticking to schedules or being busy because she felt like that got in the way of living her life. She was very enthusiastic and had a great sense of humor. She inherited her mother's shyness and tended to avoid large crowds. She was very close to the rest of her family, who acted as her support system.

Over the course of ten years Alice has changed quite a bit. She's no longer afraid of crowds and is constantly hosting school events. Her life is very busy and she strictly follows the schedules set in her day planners. As her children note, she always gets upset whenever they veer off from one of her schedules. Alice has pulled away from her family as well. She still cares about them, but they don't quite talk as much. Alice feels like she became very judgmental in the last ten years and always has something to say. By the end of the book Alice has struck a happy medium from the person she used to be and the person that she became. She views her younger self as being helplessly naive, but realizes that sometimes a lighter and less structured approach is needed in life.

Elisabeth

Elisabeth is Alice's sister and the second protagonist of the story. When she was younger, Elisabeth used to be very formal and tough. She was very protective of her younger sister. Elisabeth married Ben and got pregnant right around the same time as Alice. Her first child was a miscarriage. Since then, all of her attempts at having a child have failed. This caused her to grow bitter towards Alice, who was able to successfully have two more children. Elisabeth became obsessed with the idea of having children. It consumed her entire life. It was all she ever talked about, and her continued inability to have a child led to her suffering from major depression. By the end of the book she's able to get pregnant, but this makes her even more depressed because she's convinced the child will die and she doesn't have the energy to keep trying. With the help of Alice, she's able to get through her depression and finally have a child of her own. In the epilogue, she and Ben go on to adopt three more children.

Nick

Nick is Alice's husband. In 1998 he was very similar to Alice in personality. He didn't like becoming too busy and frequently made jokes about how much he dislikes his bosses



and never wanted to become like them. Nick grew up mostly with his mother because his parents split up fairly early in his life. As a result he only ever saw his father on the weekends. Their visits always felt forced to Nick. While he doesn't outright hate his father, he frequently mocked him and never wanted to be like him. During the ten year gap Nick became obsessed with his job, but he still wants to be a good father. Nick also has a temper that was never previously explored ten years ago. Nick is very proud and doesn't appreciate when someone points out he was wrong because it makes him feel humiliated. By the end of the book he's also toned down just like Alice. The two were able to get together and fix their relationship, but they still occasionally fight.

Madison

Madison is Alice's oldest daughter. Madison is very cynical at the start of the book, and frequently fights with Alice. She cares about her mother though, and even bullies another student when she says something negative about Alice. When Alice loses her memory she becomes a much softer person, which helps to mend her damaged relationship between Madison.

Tom

Tom is Alice's second child. He only appears a few times throughout the story. He has a know it all personality and constantly looks up different facts online, which he loves to share with everyone else.

Olivia

Olivia is Alice's youngest child. Much like Tom she only appears in a few parts throughout the story. Elisabeth notes that Olivia is very smart and manipulative. Olivia has some of Alice's earlier shyness, but with the help of Alice and Nick she's able to get over it.

Ben

Ben is Elisabeth's husband. He comes from an adopted family, which was something that he was bitter about growing up. Because of that, Elisabeth believes he doesn't want to adopt. However, this ends up being untrue after they have the first miscarriage. Ben is very supportive of Elisabeth and her family throughout the course of the book.

Gina

Alice initially thinks Gina is someone that slept with Nick, which is why their relationship is in trouble. Alice later learns that Gina was actually her best friend. She and Alice were very alike and instantly became best friends. Nick believes that their relationship fell



apart when Gina and her husband got a divorce. Alice and Nick were just too close to Gina, so it felt like the divorce was happening for them. They got into fights imagining what Gina and her husband were talking about. Alice stopped hanging around with Elisabeth because she had Gina in her life. Earlier in the year, Alice witnessed Gina's death. This caused her to fight even more with Nick because she used the fighting as a way to avoid her grief over losing Gina.

Frannie

Although she isn't technically part of the family, Frannie acts as the grandmother to Alice and Elisabeth. She was a neighbor that acted as a mother for them when their own mother was too depressed to raise them after their father passed away. Frannie only appears sporadically throughout the book where she usually comments on something going on with Alice or Elisabeth. She writes letters to her ex-fiancé, Phil, who died two weeks before their wedding. By the end of the book she's moved on from this relationship and started to date someone from her retirement community.

Dominick

Dominick is the school principal and Alice's boyfriend. Alice has no memory of dating him. She's initially a little cold towards him, but over time she warms up and realizes that he's a good person. When her memories come back, she instinctively goes to Dominick over Nick. As time goes on though, she drifts further from Dominick and realizes she has too much of a past with Nick to ever give up on him.

Barb

Barb is Alice and Elisabeth's mother. In the past, she was shy like Alice. Since marrying Roger she's gotten over that shyness. Barb is optimistic about Alice and Nick getting back together. She and Roger arrange for them to dance together at the retirement show to help push them together.

Roger

Roger is Nick's father and Barb's husband. Alice initially dislikes Roger because he's boring to be around and has a habit of droning on and on about uninteresting topics. She realizes that her mother loves him though and supports their relationship. Roger was never around when Nick was younger, which is part of why he's determined to get as much time with his children as possible.



Symbols and Symbolism

Alice's Gold Bracelet

Nick originally got the gold bracelet when he first found out that she was pregnant. Alice always wears it because it makes her feel safe and acts as a reminder of Nick's love for her. What's very telling is she still has the bracelet even after fighting and divorcing Nick. This represents that she still has lingering feelings for him, even with everything they're going through.

Insomnia

Both Alice and Elisabeth suffer from insomnia, a trait that they inherited from their mother. Alice and Elisabeth always used to talk about it and to them it represents a sisterly connection, something that they share that nobody else outside of their family would understand. Alice asks Elisabeth about her insomnia after losing her memories, but Elisabeth says they hadn't spoken about it in some time, representing how fractured their relationship had become.

Lion Statues (George and Mildred)

When Alice and Nick first moved into their house there was a pair of lion statues that they named George and Mildred. When Alice returns to her home after losing her memory she can't find the statues. Not being able to find them represents the separation that Alice and Nick are going through. When she does finally find them much later the statues are dirty and busted up. Alice tries to fix them, but she isn't sure she'll be able to return them to their old state. This also represents their marriage as Alice is actively trying to get back together with Nick, but she has no idea if it would even be possible. She does finally get them patched up, but they aren't the same. This represents the final state of their marriage. They've mostly worked out their problems, but their relationship is still tarnished.

Glass Bottles

When Alice is exploring her house she finds a collection of glass bottles. She always wanted to collect them, but Nick hated them. Collecting them now is her way of spiting Nick.

Elisabeth's Poster

Elisabeth used to have a poster of Leonardo da Vinci which read, "Obstacles cannot crush me; every obstacle yields to stern resolve." Elisabeth got rid of the poster after



having her miscarriages. This represents that she's lost the strong resolve that Alice used to talk about and has fallen into her depression.

Rawson and King Streets

Gina's car accident took place at an intersection between these streets. Every time Alice passes by them she feels an overwhelming sense of dread and nearly has a panic attack because the streets remind her of the pain of losing Gina. Even when she loses her memory, she still has a strong reaction just going by these streets.

Television

Elisabeth constantly has the television on at her house. She comments multiple times to her doctor that she's taking time out of watching television to write to him. The television represents her defeat and her desire to escape away from all of her problems into stories about other people and places.

Family Ring

When Nick and Alice got engaged he gave her a ring that belonged to the family. In the present, Nick's sisters are upset because they want the ring back. To them taking the ring back is their way of saying that Alice is no longer welcome amongst any of their family members, which is why most of the sisters refuse to even show up to an event if she's there.

Sugary Foods

At the end of the book, Alice is still stocking sugary foods in her house. This is something that she normally would never do, but after losing her memories and regressing to her younger self she's trying to change her ways. To her, allowing sugary foods is her way of accepting her past back into her life. She uses everything she learned from her past to fix her relationship with Nick and the rest of her family.

Roses

At the very end of the book, Elisabeth and Ben go down to the beach and release one rose for each of the children they lost. This is their way of signifying that they're letting go of their grief and moving on with their lives.



Settings

Gym

The book opens up with Alice taking a spin class at the gym. This is where she gets into her injury which sets up the main plot of the book. Alice is surprised to find herself there because she never used to like the gym. Since the gym is at the beginning of the novel, it foreshadows how Alice discovers ways in which she has changed over the years and how she is a much different person than who she was at 29.

Hospital

Several of the first chapters take place in the hospital. This is where Alice gets diagnosed and learns about some of the major changes that happened in the last ten years, such as her divorce and custody battle with Nick.

Alice's Home

Alice's home is where the majority of the book takes place. In flashback scenes, the house is in dire need of repair. In the present, Alice learns that she and Nick accomplished all of the things they set out to do to make the house into their dream home. Alice has many interactions with her family at the house, as well as hosting some school events where she learns more about her relationship with Gina.

Dino's Coffee Shop

Dino's is one of the favorite places that Alice likes to go. It's also where Elisabeth had a breakdown and tried to walk away with a child that didn't belong to her. Alice was there to smooth things over with the parent though, and she keeps her sister from getting in trouble.

Elisabeth's Home

Elisabeth's home is only brought up a few times throughout the course of the book. When Elisabeth gets depressed she locks herself in her home and spends two whole days just watching television before Alice comes in and helps her.



Retirement Community

The retirement community is where Frannie lives. Alice and Nick bring their children to compete in the talent show. This is where Alice makes a breakthrough in restoring her relationship with Nick.

Beach

Alice and Nick bring Madison to the beach when she gets suspended from school. It's another location where Alice and Nick are able to talk about their relationship and help repair the damage from all their fighting.

Pie Event

The pie event is where Alice plans to get the community in the book of world records by building the largest lemon meringue pie. It's also where Alice finally gets all of her memories back and initially chooses to be with Dominick over Nick.



Themes and Motifs

Youth is a Perception

This theme is clearly demonstrated with several characters throughout the book. One of the most prominent characters to embody this trait is Alice. When Alice loses her memories, she reverts to her younger self. She's constantly surprised to find how much she's changed in the last few years. In her eyes, she's become the kind of person that she used to hate. She seems very unhappy and bitter, and she now lives such a busy life. Alice thinks that her life is too busy and she doesn't have any time to sit back and appreciate life.

When Alice gets her memory back, she thinks that it was her younger self that was wrong. She believes that she was being too youthful and naïve and didn't understand the way the world worked. Alice doesn't revert fully back to her old self though because she recognizes that her way of living life isn't perfect. Not only is she having trouble with Nick, but she's drifted apart from her family as well. Alice is willing to change and incorporate parts of her older life into her new one.

This theme is also shown through Elisabeth. Like Alice, Elisabeth grew up to become very bitter because she was constantly losing her children. She lost her strong edge and became defeated. By the end of the book though, Elisabeth is able to overcome her depression and change back into the person that she used to be. Not only does she have a child with Ben, but she adopts several more children. This also shows the theme because she had previously given up on adoption because she thought it was a hopeless prospect.

Though age can be a biological indicator, the way it affects behavior is explored in this novel. The old adage that one only feels as old as one acts becomes very true and evident for these characters. Even when both Elisabeth and Alice begin acting as their former selves, once Alice in particular recalls who she was, she doesn't entirely abandon the new perspectives that she's gained from 'acting' younger than she was.

Miscommunication

This theme is clearly demonstrated with Alice and Dominick's relationship. From the very start of the book Alice has every intention of getting back together with Nick. She makes the announcement back when she's in the hospital. Once she gets home, she finds out that she's dating Dominick when she sees flowers from him. When she eventually meets Dominick she explains about her amnesia, but she doesn't bring up her plans to get back together with Nick.

Alice runs into Dominick several more times throughout the story, each time letting him believe that they're still in a relationship. There's one evening where she has a date



scheduled with Dominick, but she still sets up plans with Nick. Dominick only finds out about them when he shows up and runs into Nick.

The theme is also shown with the way that Alice and Elisabeth interact. Alice and Elisabeth used to be close, but after all the miscarriages Elisabeth has become distant. She doesn't tell Alice about all the pain that she's going through. As a result, Elisabeth has nobody around to support her. As time goes on, her depression gets worse and worse until she's unable to leave her home. She's only able to start getting better once Alice comes over and helps her. If the two had been communicating like they used to be, there's a strong possibility her depression would have never gotten so bad. Elisabeth also shows this theme with Ben. Both believe that the other doesn't want to adopt. The truth is after the first miscarriage they both want to adopt, but they never bring it up, and feel it's far too late once Alice makes them talk about it.

Memories

This theme is strongly demonstrated through Alice as she starts to get her memories back. When she initially loses her memories Alice is determined to change everything about her life. She doesn't like the person she's become because she's only been hearing all the negative things going on. She knows that she's become too busy to spend time with her sister, and she's gotten very bitter towards Nick. As Alice gets her memories back, she realizes that her younger self was being very naïve and didn't understand why she had to change and become so busy.

Several months go by and Alice realizes that neither side was necessarily right. She takes the positive parts of her youth and starts to apply them to her current life. This makes her a better mother and it also allows her to forgive Nick for everything that happened. Her relationship with Elisabeth is strengthened as well.

The theme is shown through Nick as well. At the start of the book, Nick wants nothing to do with Alice. He's rude to her when she calls and he's instantly defensive every time that they talk, believing that Alice is trying to trick him into admitting he was a bad husband or father. As time goes on, Alice keeps bringing up all the good times that they had. She makes him talk about what it was like when they had their children, and some of their good family members. This all contributes to Alice and Nick being able to get together again at the end of the book. They still remember the difficult history that they had and occasionally still fight, but they're able to focus on all of the good parts of their relationship and stay together.

Cutting One's Losses

The theme of "Cutting One's Losses" is shown through a few different characters. The first character that shows it is Frannie. Throughout the book Frannie is writing to her ex-fiancé who passed away in an accident several weeks before they got married. She mentions how she doesn't understand why Elisabeth is unhappy. She feels bad for her, but she thinks Elisabeth should focus on all the good things in her life, like the fact that



she gets to be a wife. This shows that Frannie is clearly unhappy about her relationship status, but she's still too attached to the memory of Phil to move on. By the end of the book though, she's said her final farewells to Phil and starts to date Xavier, who makes her very happy.

The theme is shown through Alice's relationships as well. Throughout the majority of the book, Alice believes that she belongs with Nick. When she gets her memories back she has her doubts about Nick and chooses to stay with Dominick. In the epilogue, she ends up leaving Dominick because she learned that she still has too much of a history with Nick, and she's the one that she wants to be with. She's able to move on from Dominick and rekindle her relationship with Nick.

The theme is clearly shown through Elisabeth's character arc as well. Elisabeth writes at the end of the book that she made a mistake several years ago by refusing to adopt. She admits she should have given up on trying to have a child of her own. She's grateful that she made the mistake and didn't move on because she did eventually get a child of her own, but she advises her doctor not to make the same mistake that she did.

Live Your Own Life

This theme is demonstrated with the struggles that Alice and Nick go through in their relationship. Alice and Elisabeth had grown distant because Elisabeth was so focused on all of her miscarriages. Alice needed someone new in her life, and Gina had just moved in. The two became fast friends. Gina was married to Michael, who got along well with Nick. Things turned sour when Michael ended up cheating on Gina at one of Alice's parties.

Alice started to emulate everything that Gina was doing. The two began to work out together, and Alice would accompany Gina whenever she went out to look for dates. Nick felt like Alice wanted to be single, just like Gina. The two would also fight because Alice would bring up Gina's points and Nick would try to argue on behalf of Michael. Nick commented that it felt like Gina and Michael's marriage had invaded theirs.

Alice demonstrates this theme with her two different sides as well. When her memories return Alice realizes that she has to make changes to her life. She doesn't just become the person that she used to be though. Instead, she takes select traits from her past and combines them with some of the positive traits she's gotten over the last ten years. She knows neither side was right and instead creates a new life using the experiences from both parts of her life, which allows her to fix her marriage and family problems.

Styles

Point of View

What *Alice Forgot* is told from a third person omniscient point of view. The chapters tend to focus on either Alice or Elisabeth, the two protagonists. Elisabeth's sections all occur through letters that she writes to her doctor, usually summarizing recent events that have happened in the book. Alice's sections are mostly focused on the present, but in the earlier chapters she frequently flashbacks to the way her life was in 1998, so readers are able to understand how much things have changed for her in the last ten years. There are also a few sections that are told through Frannie's perspective in the form of written letters to her deceased fiancé.

Language and Meaning

The language used in each chapters tends to differ depending on the character. Elisabeth's earlier sections are written in a more formalized fashion at first. This is because she has only started to talk with the doctor. As the chapters progress, she takes on a more personal touch with the doctor, choosing to use his name. Her sections also start to get gradually shorter to reflect the fact that she's descending further into depression and doesn't have the energy to try and help herself.

Alice's sections are written with her younger persona in mind. When her memories return she starts to talk with a more formal tone, reflecting how much she's changed. Younger Alice is also written to be more scatterbrained, which surprises many of the characters who are used to speaking with her older version. This helps to show how they are two very different people.

Structure

For the most part, the book is told in a very straight forward fashion. In the earlier chapters, Alice experiences a few flashbacks to what her life was like in 1998. This establishes how different her relationships are, which is a driving factor for the rest of the book. The chapters generally begin with Alice and then feature one of Elisabeth's or Frannie's letter towards the end. Every so often the chapter is interrupted by these letters to go into more detail about an event that just happened. This occurs when Gina is brought up, and when Alice first asks Elisabeth about her children. The last few chapters take place over the span of several months, and then in the epilogue many years later to explain where all of the characters ended up.



Quotes

How old are you, Alice?" "I'm twenty-nine, Jane." Alice was irritated by Jane's dramatic tone. What was she getting at? "Same age as you." Jane sat back up and looked at George Clooney triumphantly. She said, "I just got an invitation to her fortieth birthday." That was the day Alice Mary Love went to the gym and carelessly misplaced a decade of her life.

-- Narrator (Chapter 1 paragraph 172)

Importance: This quote sets up Alice losing her memory, which is the driving conflict throughout the book. When the author states that she "carelessly misplaced a decade of her life," it implies a judgment that it is Alice's fault and not the result of a medical injury. This foreshadows the many reactions Alice gets to her memory loss and how some people frame her memory loss as something she is responsible for and not just an injury.

It reinforces this feeling I have that the years are rolling by but nothing is changing. I am the perfect example of the phrase: Going nowhere fast.

-- Elisabeth (Chapter 3 paragraph 72)

Importance: Elisabeth's main conflict throughout the book is her feeling of depression because she can't have a child. This quote highlights the despair that she's starting to feel with her life. This quote also highlights Elisabeth's skewed perception of her life. She thinks nothing has changed, but much has indeed changed as can be seen from the way Alice and Elisabeth's relationship has changed as each sister has transformed into people they never would have recognized a decade ago.

Children (left to right): Olivia Love (Kindergarten), Tom Love (Yr4B), Madison Love (Yr5M) Parent: Alice Love Number of copies ordered: 4.

-- Alice (Chapter 5 paragraph 36)

Importance: This is the first time that Alice discovers that not only is she a mother, but she's a mother to three children.

It was only when she started talking about Nick being in Portugal that the obvious hit me, and it seemed even more shocking than when she asked me whether her children were "nice." She really has forgotten everything. Even Gina.

-- Elisabeth (Chapter 6 paragraph 65)

Importance: This is the first time that Gina is brought up. The weight of the situation fully hits Elisabeth as well, which helps to highlight just how much Alice's life has changed in the last ten years and also how severe Alice's memory loss has become. If Alice has forgotten someone as significant as Gina, Elisabeth believes, she truly must have seriously damaged her memory.



Alice said, “He didn’t want to talk to me? He actually didn’t want to talk to me?” She could feel stabbing pains all over her body, a long witchy finger poking her cruelly. Elisabeth clicked the phone shut and put her hand on Alice’s arm. She said gently, “You’ll remember soon. It’s okay. It’s just that you and Nick aren’t together anymore.”
-- Alice (Chapter 7 paragraph 126)

Importance: The reader finally gets an idea of just how bad things are between Nick and Alice. Up until this conversation, the reader was under the impression that things were good between the two, since Alice kept going on about how perfect their relationship was.

Alice could never remember what happened next, or even how she felt on hearing the words. All she remembered was how Elisabeth had tried so hard to protect her from the “bad, surprised feeling.” She was twenty-four before it occurred to her with a jolt of surprise that Elisabeth had been only a little girl herself that day. She’d phoned her to talk about it, to thank her, and the funny thing was that Elisabeth had an entirely different set of memories about when their dad died and didn’t even remember putting Alice to bed.

-- Alice (Chapter 8 paragraph 92)

Importance: This section shows how strong the relationship used to be between Alice and Elisabeth. It also emphasizes that Elisabeth always used to be the stronger and more protective sister, a role that she is no longer able to fulfill because of her depression.

The problem is the rage. It’s permanently simmering, even when I’m not aware of it. If I hurt myself unexpectedly, or drop a punnet of blueberries all over the kitchen floor, it bubbles over like boiling milk. You should have heard the primeval scream of rage when I banged my forehead against an open cupboard door the other day when I was unpacking the dishwasher. I sat on the kitchen floor with my back against the fridge and sobbed for twenty minutes. It’s pretty embarrassing. Before Alice and Nick split up, I sometimes felt there were unforgivable words hovering on the tip of my tongue whenever I spoke to Alice, words like: “You think the world begins and ends with you and your perfect little family and your perfect little life and you think stress is finding the perfectly color-coordinated cushions for your new \$10,000 sofa.”

-- Elisabeth (Chapter 10 paragraph 19)

Importance: Elisabeth’s problems are once again brought up to the reader. It also shows that things between Elisabeth and Alice have become strained, despite Alice’s earlier memories of them being incredibly close. Elisabeth has felt a powerful resentment towards Alice, and this bitterness and spite drove a wedge between them, as did her depression.

(Does Ben love me like that? Yes. No. I don’t know. Maybe in the beginning. All that shiny love stuff doesn’t seem relevant anymore. That’s for other younger, thinner, happier people, and besides which, it’s not actually possible for a dried apricot to shine.)

-- Elisabeth (Chapter 10 paragraph 35)



Importance: Elisabeth's severe depression is demonstrated in her words here. She used to be happy with Ben, but after all of the miscarriages they both have become depressed and have a hard time focusing on anything else in their lives. She also characterizes herself as a "dried apricot," putting herself down for her aging body. Once again the reader sees that Youth is a Perception.

Next thing we were giggling like schoolkids. We laughed and laughed and I kept driving her toward her house because I didn't know what else to do. It was so strange, laughing like that with Alice. It was like tasting something delicious I hadn't eaten for years. I'd forgotten that drunken, euphoric feeling of being rocked with laughter. We both cry proper tears when we laugh hard enough. It's a family trait we inherited from our dad. How funny. I'd forgotten that too.

-- Elisabeth (Chapter 11 paragraph 126)

Importance: Elisabeth isn't used to having such a good relationship with Alice for some time. This shows how much things have changed between the two sisters. It also shows how healthy Alice's younger self is for her family relationships. Additionally it shows how Elisabeth is capable of shedding tears for joy, not just for depression. She was once a fun-loving person. Alice's memory loss and the time after her injury spark memories not just in Alice but in Elisabeth as well.

I was embarrassed that it had happened twice in almost exactly the same way. I felt as if I was wasting people's time, constantly turning up for ultrasounds of dead babies. What? You thought you had a real live baby in there? Don't be ridiculous. Not you. You're not a proper woman with these half-hearted, faintly ridiculous attempts to have a baby. There are women out there with proper swollen pregnant stomachs and live kicking babies.

-- Elisabeth (Chapter 13 paragraph 40)

Importance: Elisabeth's depression had already been established earlier in the book, but this is the first time that it's clearly established that her depression comes from her inability to have children. Elisabeth sounds bitter and hardened after her personal tragedies, and she feels truly hopeless.

He didn't try to change my mind. He is being very gentle and careful at the moment. The adoption application forms have disappeared from the kitchen counter. He's put them away. Temporarily. I can see the idea still shining in his eyes. He still has hope. Which is exactly the problem. I cannot afford any more hope.

-- Elisabeth (Chapter 26 paragraph 146)

Importance: After everything that she's been through, Elisabeth has lost all hope at having a family. This eventually leads to her and Ben fighting and Elisabeth giving up on everything around her as she retreats into a world of television. This also shows how Ben and Elisabeth have different opinions on adopting children but due to their Miscommunication they do not know the truth about each other's thoughts.



She thought about that strange period of time straight after she'd got her memory back. At first, images, words, emotions crashed over her in violent waves. She could hardly breathe for the chaos. Then, after a few days, her mind had calmed, the memories had fallen into their correct places, and she felt a kind of beautiful relief. Without her memory, she'd been swimming through cloudy water, half blind: now she had clarity of vision again. And what she saw was this: her marriage was over and she was in love with Dominick. That was that. With Dominick she felt the sweet, soothing comfort of being with a man who was besotted by her, fascinated by her, and wanted to find out who she was. With Nick, all she felt was bitterness, fury, and hurt. He was a man who had already decided who she was, who could list all her flaws, annoying tendencies, and mistakes. She could hardly stand to be in the same room with him. The idea that she'd planned to get back together with him was terrifying and shocking.

-- Alice (Chapter 33 paragraph 26)

Importance: Alice getting her memories back is a huge turning point in the book and sets everything up for the final chapters. She shows self-awareness at how Nick and Dominick made her feel differently. By the end of the novel Alice is no longer in love with Dominick and has taken steps to repair her marriage to Nick.