

Wilde Lake Study Guide

Wilde Lake by Laura Lippman

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Plot Summary

NOTE: This guide refers to the Kindle Edition of *Wilde Lake*, a novel by Laura Lippman.

Wilde Lake, a novel by Laura Lippman, begins when Luisa Frida Brant (Lu) takes office as Howard County's first female state's attorney. Shortly thereafter, a crime occurs. A woman is murdered in her apartment. Eager to make a name for herself, Lu decides to take the case herself instead of giving it to another member of her legal team. Years before, Lu's father had become famous when he won a murder case while in the same office that Lu now holds.

Lu goes to the crime scene and consults with the lead detective on the case. While there, she runs into the victim's neighbor, Jonnie Forke. Though Jonnie is not interested in getting involved in the case, she finds comfort in the police's view that the murder is an isolated incident.

It does not take long for the police to find a suspect, a mentally-disturbed vagrant named Rudy Drysdale. Although the suspect had gone to the same school that Lu and her brother (AJ) had attended, Lu does not know him. When she asks AJ, he says that he does not know Rudy either. The police bring Rudy in for questioning. Even though he has a public defender with him during the interrogation, he still implicates himself in the murder.

The police charge Rudy with the crime. Fred, Lu's old boss whom she defeated during the election, comes to see Lu to tell her that he will be defending Rudy. As Rudy does not have enough money to be able to afford Fred's firm, she assumes that Rudy's parents are paying for his defense. However, Fred never confirms her suspicion. He tries to get Lu to cut a deal, but she refuses. AJ also suggests that Lu should cut a deal when she talks to him about the case.

Lu starts getting messages from a woman named Eloise Schumann who says that it is important for her to talk to Lu. The woman claims that Lu knows her. Lu, who has problems remembering names, does not remember the lady. So, she does not return Eloise Schumann's calls.

The court process progresses, and Lu goes to court for the selection of the jury. Right before the break, Rudy attacks her. Then, he looks as if he is trying to escape. In reality, he is trying to commit suicide by having the police kill him. The police do not kill him. Later, he commits suicide in his cell.

The case ends, but Lu's investigation does not because Fred makes a point of telling her that Rudy was dyslexic. Fred's words continue to haunt Lu. She realizes that Rudy may have entered the wrong apartment due to his dyslexia. In that case Jonnie Forke was his intended victim. After doing some research, Lu discovers that Jonnie Forke is Nita Flood, a girl she knew of in school and whose brothers had accosted, Davey, a



good friend of AJ's during AJ's and his friends' high school graduation party. She starts asking Davey and AJ questions and finally discovers that AJ did know Rudy.

Rudy was the school photographer. He was at the cast party for the county musical that AJ, Davey and another friend, Noel, attended. During the party, two boys from another school made fun of Rudy, and Davey and A.J. defended him. From that point on, Rudy started hanging around AJ's group of friends. Even though he was not invited, he was at Davey's house the night of the alleged rape. He was also at the graduation party. He is the one who killed Ben Flood. Rudy felt as if he had to pay AJ and Davey back for what they did for him. AJ claimed that Ben had fallen on his knife to protect Rudy.

Years later, Nita recognizes Lu when she decides to run for office. She decides to blackmail the boys who were at Davey's house on the night of the rape. The court records had been sealed even though Davey was found to be innocent. However, as times have changed, the information would be enough to ruin Davey, who is now a powerful minister, in today's society. He is the only one who pays. AJ says that he told Rudy about it and that Rudy had taken it upon himself to try and kill Nita. He made a mistake, though, and went into the wrong apartment. AJ paid for his defense. AJ commits suicide after telling the story to Lu.

Lu finally talks to Eloise Schumann, who is the girl (now woman) who had come forward as a witness in Lu's father's famous case. Lu's father had won the murder conviction against Ryan Schumann, even though the victim's body was never found. Eloise claims that Lu's father knew that she was the killer, but he had prosecuted Ryan Schumann. She wants a posthumous pardon for Ryan Schumann, who died in prison. However, since she does not want to implicate herself, nothing is done. Lu loses her interest in the law and resigns saying that she has to take care of her family. She writes the story, but she seals the records for 100 years to protect her children.



Section 1: Part 1 (First Full Chapter) - January 9

Summary

In Section 1: Part 1, AJ manages to convince his father to allow him to attend his high school graduation with his friends at Wilde Lake. After the graduation ceremony, AJ and his friends go to the lake, and the party begins. A short time later, Ben and Tom Flood arrive to avenge the alleged rape of their sister, Nita. Ben Flood stabs Davey.. Once they realize what is going on, Bash, one of AJ's friends, catches Tom Flood. AJ chases Ben Flood into the woods. When he comes out, his arm is broken and Ben Flood is dead. AJ says that Ben fell on his own knife while they were fighting. Lu's father, then a state's attorney, insists on a grand jury probe. The grand jury finds that AJ acted in self defense, and he goes to Yale in September. Tom Flood serves four years in jail. No one talks to Lu about it. Most of what she knows comes from newspaper accounts and old court documents.

It is now present day, January 5, 2015. Lu is now the first female state's attorney of Howard County, Maryland. Fred Hollister, her old boss and the man she ran against for the position, has stopped by to talk. Lu wants to make sure everything is okay between Fred and her. After Fred leaves, Lu's deputy, Andi Gleason, comes into Lu's office. The two talk about the staff meeting and how Lu plans to divide the work.

The story returns to the past. Lu is not yet born. Her brother AJ and their parents go to look at the new town, Columbia. The family currently lives with the maternal grandparents, and his father is ready to move into their own home. AJ's mother is pregnant with Lu. Mother does not like the area, but father insists that it is the future. He strikes a deal with his wife. She will agree to live there if they find a house she likes. They find one, and he has the house moved to a lot in Columbia. The grandparents are angry, and they use Lu's future arrival as an excuse for their grown children not to move. They insist that the house is too small. Teensy, who worked for the grandparents, goes with Lu's family to the new home. Lu is born four months later.

The narration returns to the present (January 7) and Andi tells Lu that she has a murder case if she wants it. A middle-aged woman, Mary McNally, has been killed. Andi tells Lu what she knows about the case and Lu goes to the crime scene. The head detective on the case fills her in and the two discuss the evidence. As they leave, they run into Mary's neighbor, Jonnie Forke. She says that she does not know anything about the murder.

The narrative returns to Lu's childhood. Teensy is washing dishes when she sees a boy in the bushes peeping into the kitchen. He is taking pictures of the house because he thinks it is cool. He introduces himself as Noel, and Lu hopes that he will be a new friend for both her brother and herself. It turns out that he had to leave his previous



school because he was caught kissing a boy. He comes in the house, and he and Teensy become friends. While he is there, he sees a picture of Lu's mother and when he asks whether she and AJ have visited her grave, Lu realizes that she has never thought about her mother's resting place. AJ says that she was cremated. When Teensy catches them around their father's desk, AJ and Lu get in trouble, even though they are there because of Noel.

In the present (January 8), the police find the man whose fingerprints were found in Mary's apartment. His name is Rudy Drysdale. They bring him in, but he does not say anything when questioned at first, but after Jonnie remembers seeing him lurking around the apartment, he says he wants a lawyer. Mike wants to keep him in jail overnight to rattle him and says that they will get one for him in the morning. The news disappoints Lu because she was looking forward to listening in on the interrogation. Right before finding out about this, Lu finds out that a woman named Eloise Schumann called her and says that Lu will know who she is. Lu does not recognize her name and does not call her back.

Returning to the past, the kids hang out with Noel during the summer and that same summer her father tries a man for killing a young woman. He wins even though her body was never found. Noel is there for all of this. School starts and AJ goes to high school. Lu goes to the first grade. She tries to impress her teacher, who she thinks is beautiful when she first sees her, but the attempt backfires and the teacher takes a disliking to her. Her father goes to a parent-teacher night and the teacher tells him that she is frustrated because Lu is not interested in creative work. She always wants to know the rules. Lu explains that she wants to get the best grades because it is important. Winning is important. She is also in trouble for making fun of kids who are not as smart as she is, but Lu says she is just trying to help. Father tells her that she will not be happy if she makes winning everything. When she says that he is happy when he wins, he says he is happy to see justice done.

In the present, Mike and his partner interrogate Rudy as Lu watches. He admits that he broke in, but then tries to get out of it. Then he tries to get out of saying that he knows the victim. When the police tell him that his fingerprints are all over the place and ask whether he expects them to believe he just stepped over her body he becomes quiet. Lu knows though he will go straight to the judge. She sends Andi to the bail hearing. Afterwards, she discusses him with Mike and finds out that he had attended her old high school.

Later that evening, Lu helps Penelope with her homework. Penelope, unlike her twin brother, has problems with math. When the kids are in bed, she goes to AJ's room and finds his high school yearbook. Flipping through it, she sees that Rudy was one of the staff photographers, but his picture is not there. She wonders whether her father is happy and feels bad for not considering it before.



Analysis

The first point to note about this section is the attention it pays to the role of women in society. When Lu starts her new job, she pays close attention to how she behaves and how others behave towards her because she is a woman. It bothers her when Andi enters her office without knocking. She first wonders whether she is going to have to train people to knock. The people who used to be her co-workers need to remember that she is the boss. Then she wonders whether a man would worry about the knocking issue at all. "Would a man worry about such things? Would he worry about the knock, or would he worry about telling people to knock?" (Loc 191)

When she visits the crime scene, Mike uses the pronoun "he." When Lu asks him whether he is using "he" because he thinks that the killer is man. Mike shrugs, indicating that the pronoun he uses does not make a difference. Lu thinks that men can "afford to be" indifferent to pronouns" (Loc 407). Her tone implies that this is a luxury that women do not have. Women have to be exact and get everything right or else they lose their credibility. She cannot even show that the sight of the victim's body bothers her. She says that, "She's seen some things a woman ain't supposed to see" (Loc 407). Yet, she is careful not to show her emotions because Mike is watching her.

These are the issues she deals with on the job, but she also has to fight for the right to work because she is a woman. When he was alive, her husband, Gabe, had asked her, "Why work?" (Loc 228) Her job was like a hobby to him. When the children arrived her work became more of an hobby in his eyes. He had finally. allowed her to keep her job, but he tells her that it is up to her to make it work. Lu almost finds herself in the same situation her mother had found herself in. Her mother had had to move into a town that she did not like because her husband, Lu's father, had decided that that was where they were going to live. "I was your wife. Good-bye to my life" (Loc 345). For Lu, giving up work was like giving up her life, especially if it was to take care of the children. She finds motherhood boring, but she "dare" not say that because women are supposed to be nurturing and love to be with their children.

Lu must defend her right to work in a way that she does not think a man would have to do due to her wealth. During the campaign, Fred, like Gabe, tries to convince the public that for her, work is a hobby. It is just something she wants to do in order to avoid boredom. She wonders whether a rich man had ever had to defend his wish to work. "Has anyone ever suggested that a rich man wanted to work simply because he had nothing else to do?" (Loc 817)

Another point to note about this section is that it serves to give readers insight into the characters of Lu, AJ and their father. It also helps show why Lu is the way she is.

Lu is the only girl in a household of popular and successful men. After Ben Flood's death, the newspapers portray him as a hero. "The headline in the next day's Light was: STATES ATTORNEY'S SON SAVES FRIEND'S LIFE IN GRUTAL REVENGE PLOT" (124). In September, her brother goes to Yale. Thus, he is an intelligent and brave



hometown hero. Lu listens in as her brother presents arguments in order to get permission to do things that he wants to do like attend the graduation party.

Her father wins a murder case, even with the lack of the victim's body. The victory makes him famous in the county.

Based on these strong male characters, all winners in her eyes, Lu grows up thinking that winning is everything. She tries to impress her teacher with her ability to read. She tries to help other students who are not as smart as she is. She bases her behavior on the premise that, "being the best is important. Winning is important" (Loc 776). As a result even though she may think that she is trying to be helpful, others think that she is arrogant and making fun of the other children. When she finishes her work early, she "inserts" herself on others and the others do not want her help. During the conversation she tells her father that she just wants to win. She thinks that winning makes him happy. He tells her that when he goes to court, it is not about winning, it is about getting justice. He was happy when he won the murder case "Because justice was done. Because a young woman whose body may never be found wasn't forgotten" (Loc 787).

This statement defines Lu's father's character. He is a moral man who tries to teach his children right morals as well. This is what he does with AJ when AJ wants to do something that could lead to trouble. He tries to teach him how to behave and warns him that he will not get special treatment if he breaks the law. He tells Lu that she will not be happy if she makes winning everything.

She, however, does not learn that lesson. She continues to be fiercely competitive in her adult life. "Lu doesn't feel competitive about other women. Lu feels competitive about everyone" (Loc 234). When remembering her father's words, she thinks "But that's what competitive people always say" (Loc 787). She says that A.J. and her father liked to win and so did Gabe. According to her, winning was everything in her household. She does not think that she was wrong in her love of winning. Her mistake is showing how much she wants to win. AJ and her father know how to hide their desire to win.

Readers have the feeling that her father is right though in saying this she will never be happy if she continues to have this attitude. Her teacher does not like her. Her classmates do not like her. She regrets having not paid attention to Gabe when they were in the same high school Spanish class. His height was one of her reasons for shunning him. He was short, like her, and she hated being matched with short boys. "Her own precocity had been burdensome enough, and she had finally hit her stride socially. She didn't need to be tarred with the brush of another geek" (366). Her competitive nature kept her from possibly having ten more years with him as they could have been high school sweethearts.

One point that continues to surface in reference to Lu is her wealth, due to Gabe, and her position of prestige due to her family heritage. This is in contrast to Jonnie's situation. Jonnie lives in an apartment complex that was once for up and coming



people. It now seems to be inhabited by people who are just keeping their heads about financial waters. This shows that social inequality exists.

A final point to note in this section is the fact that the narrative gives hints that foreshadows future events. When Lu runs into Jonnie Forke, Jonnie says, "Yeah, I know who you are" (Loc 440). Lu thinks that she means that she knows that she is the state's attorney. In reality she knows that she is AJ's sister. This realization is what launches her blackmail scheme. In addition, Rudy went to AJ's and Lu's school. This fact sets up a possible connection between him and someone they knew at the time.

Discussion Question 1

Given Lu's relationship with Fred, would you have done as she did and run for his office? Why or why not? What does the fact that she ran for office say about her? Would you judge a man in the same way? Support your answer.

Discussion Question 2

How would you describe Lu's and Andi's relationship? Do you think it is typical of the relationship women have with each other? Explain your answer.

Discussion Question 3

Based on what you know about Lu so far, who do you think was right about winning - Lu or her father? Explain your answer.

Vocabulary

legacy, register, assassination, unvarnished, undermine, insinuated, conscientious, obligation, listless, perpetually, disavow, discreet, unfathomably, notoriously, stint, appalled, courtship, legitimacy, accelerated, generically



Section 2: Things That Go Bump In The Night - January 13

Summary

The narrative returns to Lu's childhood. It is her seventh birthday, and her father says that she can have a party and invite all of the girls in her class. However, she does not want to because she does not have any friends. Instead, she ends up going ice skating with her father, AJ, and their new next door neighbor, Miss Maude.

One day, AJ and Noel are talking while they watch Miss Maude from AJ's window. Lu listens in from the room next door. They say things that Lu really does not understand. A week later, Lu's father goes to see the neighbor and gives her a bottle of wine as a gift. He likes her, and Lu starts going to her house on Friday. Miss Maude starts coming over to Lu's house for dinner. Lu says that Miss Maude and her father are not dating.

One night, Miss Maude's house catches on fire. Everyone leaves Lu's house in case the fire jumps from Miss Maude's house to theirs. It does not, but Miss Maude's house burns down. When they evacuate the house, Lu notices that her father does not have on shoes. Miss Maude leaves, saying that it is a sign. Later, when she is 15 or 16, Lu finds out that he did not have on shoes that night because he had been in the house with Miss Maude. He was having an affair with her. AJ had already figured this out, and he also knew that Miss Maude's husband is still alive. The news shocks Lu.

The narrative returns to the present. Lu and her father are having a glass of wine together. AJ and his new wife are coming over. Lu is 45 years old, and AJ is 53. He looks great. Her children are there. They like AJ, but they have no interest in Lu's work. She talks about the case with AJ and mentions that he may know the defendant, but AJ says he does not. They all go to bed. She sees the light coming from AJ's room, and she thinks it is his wife who is there. Then, she thinks that maybe it was AJ..

The story returns to the past.. AJ makes the case to get his own phone. His father agrees to install an extension if his grades are good. Lu likes to play games with the phone after it is installed. She is doing that one day when it actually rings and she answers it. The woman on the line asks whether she is speaking to Lu. Teensy intervenes and tells the woman not to call again. When the phone rings again, no one answers. Then one day while Lu is home, the woman calls again and says that she is Victoria Closter, her mother's mother. They are still talking when AJ comes in. Lu tells him who she is talking to and he hangs up the phone. He then calls his father's office to say that they will be taking the phone off the hook.

Their father comes home. After talking to AJ, he tells Lu that he kept her from her grandparents because they blamed him for her mother's death. He thought that they would blame Lu as well. He also did not want them to treat Lu and AJ the way they had



treated her mother. He plans to get an unlisted number and place another phone in AJ's room. They go to get pizza. Lu has fun because her father is relaxed and talks to people. On the way back, though, AJ is rude and makes sarcastic comments about his father and the upcoming election. They have take-out pizza the following week. AJ takes his slices to his room while talking on the phone. His father does not say anything, he tells her that he will be defending Rudy Drysdale and he wants to have the trial within 180 days. Someone has offered to pay for Rudy's defense, but he will not say

In the present time, Lu's secretary knocks on the door, which makes Lu happy. Fred wants to meet with her. She tells him that he can come at noon. When he arrives who paid for it. Lu checks and finds out that Rudy's parents live close to her father's house. The idea of what she is up against excites her. Mrs. Schumann has called back. and left her number for Lu to call. Since Lu still does not know who she is, she throws out her number.

The narrative goes back to the past. Columbia is having a birthday party. Lu's father thinks that it is crazy, but knows that he has to participate. AJ, is excited because he will be singing. Lu realizes that her father does not celebrate his birthday and AJ reminds her that it is on the day their mother died. AJ does not get to sing the main solo as he thought he would, though. Instead, a boy named Davey he gets it. AJ admits that Davey is better and he becomes friends to prove that he was not upset. Teensy likes Davey and so does their father. He is happy that AJ has a black friend. Davey wants to go to Wilde Lake so that he can take the subjects he needs for college. He wants to become a doctor. He plays football and is using the game to get a scholarship at Stanford. He finally gets in Wilde Lake. AJ has a tight group of friends. Two members of the group, Bash and Lynne, start having sex together and Lu watches them one day during one of their sexual encounters.

Years later in the present, Lu is the one having sex with Bash, who is now married. Lu did not have a crush on him when they were younger, but they had met by accident six years ago at the grocery store. One this particular occasion, he gives her a scarf to congratulate her on the job. Lu realizes that he is excited because she is a new woman.

Analysis

The primary element to note in this section is its support of the truth motif that appears in the novel and the issues about truth that the novel highlights.

Several instances occur in which a character who Lu places on a moral pedestal is caught in lies. Even so, the character has justified his lies in his own mind so that he can live with himself. This is what Lu's father does in his relationship with Miss Maude and in hiding the existence of Lu's maternal grandparents.

The "truth" that everyone knows about Miss Maude is that she is a widow. "Her husband had been in Vietnam" (929). This explains the sad expression she always wears, Lu



thinks. Everyone believes her story to the point that Noel even says that the death of her husband explains her white hair. The truth though is that her husband is not dead. He is a double amputee at Walter Reed. What is more, her father knew this and continued to have an affair with her. He knew that he was committing adultery, but “he cared about her, in his way” and saw her as “a de facto widow - wouldn’t divorce her husband out of principle, but he was never going to come home, be her husband again” (Loc 1066).

The “truth” that Lu knows about her maternal grandparents is that they are dead. The tale her father has told her is that they died soon after her mother’s. Lu “was quite clear on that” (Loc 1250). Then, though, she discovers that her grandparents are alive. When her father explains why he had kept them from her he builds his case, as he would a court case. First he makes Lu see why he would fear that they would blame her for her mother’s death. He tells her that they did not approve of her mother having a second child. He does not make Lu feel bad about herself when she assumes that they did not want her, but he does make her feel sorry for him and their family unit. He says, “And then when your mother was well, gone, they said ‘See, we told you this would happen”” (Loc 1282). He continues by saying that he was afraid that they would take their feelings out on her. He says that he was also afraid that they would try to control her the way they had controlled her mother.

He wins his case with Lu. She thinks that it is unfair that the phone will be in AJ.’s room, not that he is getting an unlisted number so that her grandparents cannot call her. When AJ. tells her the truth about Miss Maude, she cannot believe that her father knew the truth about her marital situation. She still believes that her father did not have any lady friends during the eight years when she and her father lived alone after AJ left for college. Now she wants to believe that her father “found a way to meet his needs, that he had a rich and thrilling secret life” (Loc 1068).

It is interesting to note the words both AJ and his father use when they are talking about these incidents. When Lu says, “She lied about being married, “ AJ says, “She lied about her husband being dead” (Loc 1055).

Lu’s father refers to Lu’s mother as being “gone,” not dead. It is easy for readers to miss the significance of his choice of words as adults often refer to people as being “gone” instead of dead, especially when they talk to children. His real reason for choosing this word becomes clear, though, when readers discover that Lu’s mother had lived for 15 years after her birth. So, she really was “gone.”

Lu herself is keeping a secret. She is not lying as no one knows about her affair, but she is still committing adultery. She tells herself tales about her relationship with Bash to make it okay. She never would have started the relationship with Bash if he and his wife, Lucinda, had had children. She also says that every time she is with Bash, it will be her last time with him. Also because they are so discrete, no one gets hurt. The truth that she tells herself even congratulates her on her time management skills. “Bash requires so much less attention than a husband or a boyfriend would” (Loc 1611).



It is interesting to note that AJ seems to realize that their father is not as moral as he tries to educate his children to be. After the children's grandparents call, he openly criticizes his father. He does the same thing when he tells Lu about Miss Maude. He uses the word "saintly" in an ironic way to talk about their father. Still, their father is comfortable with his choices in life. "I have no regrets, AJ. I don't expect you to understand that, but it's true" (Loc 1317).

This section also touches on race and social inequality, or at least the perception of it, with the introduction of the character of Davey. He is the only black kid in AJ's group. He has a great voice and Teensy "falls all over him" (Loc 1435). Davey shocks Lu's father when he tells him that his father is an oncology surgeon at Hopkins. He had assumed something quite different since Davey is black, which is why he coughs, gulps his wine, and seems embarrassed when Davey tells him what his father does. Lu thinks that he is happy that AJ has a black friend. This was his whole reason for moving to Columbia, a place where everyone is supposed to live together as equals. Lu, however, wonders whether AJ took him on as his friend because he was better at music and sports than AJ. She comments that one of the few mean things that she heard him say when they were children was about Davey.

When Davey gets a football scholarship to Stanford, Noel implies that being black helped him get the scholarship. AJ says that "There's not a prejudiced bone in my body" (Loc 1490). Noel does not believe it. This exchange involves the son of the man who turned his back on his parents because they were prejudiced. It seems to say that even people who claim to be open minded and moral will feel a twinge of jealousy when they perceive someone of another race getting benefits that they do not have. It is easy to attribute the advantage to race even if it was hard earned.

The murder case gets more interesting in this section as Fred reappears as Lu's adversary. The case also gets closer to home as she realizes that Rudy's parents live near her.

Discussion Question 1

Do you feel sorry for Lu because she does not have any friends? Do you think that this fact bothers her? Explain your answer.

Discussion Question 2

What would you have done in Miss Maude's situation, given the fact that her husband is a double amputee? How comfortable do you think she was with her relationship with Lu's father? Support your opinion.



Discussion Question 3

Do you think AJ's attitude toward his father changes in this section? What about Lu's? If so, what do you think causes the change? Is it justified? Why or why not?

Vocabulary

tragic, hysterically, nonchalant, meticulous, principle, innately, pilgrimage, reconfigured, dwell, institutionalized, infuriating, compulsively, autonomy, amnesia, reprimand, shoddy, eternity, erodes, scenarios, adrenaline



Section 3: Kodachrome - February 1

Summary

Section 3 continues Lu's childhood story. Life magazine comes to the school and takes photos of AJ's class. He and his friends are front and center. Instead of them being on the cover, though, they are in a section talking about sex, alcohol, and drugs. AJ writes his own article about the life of his friends in rebuttal for the local paper. A New York publishing house editor wants him to expand into it into a memoir. His father does not think it is a good idea, but he starts it. He never finishes it, though.

In the present, Lu goes to Rudy's parents' house. They agree to talk to her and tell her that he was 19 years old when he was diagnosed, but they do not say what with. He was a photographer and could not deal with the fact that it got dark so soon in New England when he went to college. Walking is his form of self-medicating. Later she finds out that his father had gone to the emergency room with a stab wound in his leg. He blamed it on an intruder. The police knew he was lying, though. Lu assumes that it was Rudy who stabbed him. There is no record of it, but the incident shows that he is violent and this is good for her case. She knows that Rudy's mother would let him sleep at the house without his father's knowledge. So she wonders why he was in Mary McNally's apartment.

Returning to the past, Lu's father comes home early one day, pours himself a drink and sends Lu out of the living room so that he can use the phone. AJ comes and tries to cheer his father up with some stories. Lu finds out later that the man her father had put in jail was filing for an appeal saying that the state had withheld evidence. Her father had lost his temper while talking to a reporter. The reaction to his statement marks the first time he is not beloved. The new witness's story falls apart, though and the convicted man stays in jail.

In the present, Lu and AJ meet for lunch on a Saturday. He wants to discuss a confidential matter with her. First, they discuss the case. He thinks that she should plead out the case, but Lu rejects the idea. The confidential subject is about surrogacy and he thinks she is a good person to talk to because her children were born by gestational surrogacy. She gives him the cons of parenthood.

The narrative goes back to a county musical in which AJ, Ariel, Davey, and Noel have roles. The performance goes well. The cast party is on Sunday afternoon at Davey's parents' house and the parents of the cast can also come to the party. The parents and the kids take over different parts of the house. Suddenly everyone sees Davey and AJ chasing two boys. When they catch them, Lu's father finds out what happened. The boys had humiliated the school photographer because they had caught him taking pictures of them at the party. They call him a faggot and Davey a nigger when he says that he is not cool for them to be smoking in his parents house. Afterwards, guests begin



to leave, but Lu's father stays until the end. Later that night she listens to the song and wonders what it would be like to have a man love her and what a faggot is.

In the present, Lu goes in front of the grand jury to get an indictment and feels uncharacteristically nervous. She goes back to the office after getting the indictment and says she is not taking any media calls. but no one calls because it is not a high profile case. When she leaves the office, a woman comes rushing towards her. She is Eloise Schumann, Ryan' Schumann's second wife who married him while he was in jail. He has since died, but Eloise wants a posthumous pardon for him. When Lu says that she cannot do it, she tells her that her father knows that he is innocent but concealed information. She tells her to ask her father why he railroaded an innocent man.

The narrative goes back to the past. In order to do her back to school clothes shopping, Lu tags along to the mall with AJ and his friends. This is when she notices Nita Flood for the first time. AJ and his friends make fun of her. Then Lynne and Bash complain that about Lu's presence. AJ asks her whether she has any friends to hang out with,, knowing that she does not. She chooses an outfit, but it is a disaster and the kids at school make fun of it.

One kid, Randy is especially cruel. She does not cry when they make fun of her, but she plans her revenge. She waits for him as she plans to beat him up, but AJ and Noel come from the other direction just as he arrives. AJ asks her what she is doing. Randy sees her and laughs. She jumps him. AJ tries to pull her off then she fights AJ for using her full name. Then she calls AJ by his full name which is not the same as his father's. Noel picks up on this fact, but does not tell anyone.

The narrative returns to the present. On Sunday night Lu finds a chance to ask her father about Eloise Schumann. It turns out that this is not the first time she has come forward. She was the witness that had come forward during the appeal in the past that had claimed that she had done committed the crime.

Analysis

This section gives more clues as to the connection between Rudy and AJ. Readers already know that Rudy was the school photographer. Some of the the most popular students from the school were in the musical. At this point, readers should be wondering whether Rudy was the photographer at the cast party whom AJ and Davey defended. If this is the case, why does AJ claim not to know him? They might also wonder why AJ is interested in the case and is trying to convince Lu not to go to trial.

In addition to that, the section looks at the concept of truth and people's perception of it. It is ironic that AJ gets upset when the picture of his friends appears with the sex and drugs article because in reality, this is the truth. Lynne and Bash are having sex. Readers do not know it yet, but Davey and Nita are having sex. Noel and AJ smoke pot. AJ's view of his group overlooks all of this. They are good kids building a future for themselves and "as every generation had, and were entitled to their mistakes and



missteps” (Loc 1699). Lu notes that, “He conveniently left out the information that they did, in fact, smoke pot all the time” (Loc 1699).

While Lu’s father encourages AJ to write the article, he comes up with several reasons as to why he should not write the memoir. One of them is that he will have to tell the truth. Lu says that her father sounded serious when he said this. “Yet there was something about his tone that sounded grave to me as if he were suggesting that AJ did not always tell the truth” (Loc 1701). AJ’s choice of words is even more interesting. He says that he “would be honest” (loc 1701).

Being honest and being truthful are two different things. Being honest means that you do not tell lies. So, AJ was being honest in his article as long as he did not say, “We do not smoke pox and we do not have sex.” Honesty deals more with what you think is true. AJ told what he thought was true in the article as well. Telling the truth, however, means telling people the full truth of the subject in question. AJ does not plan to do this. Lu realizes this as she narrates the story. “I wish he had saved his nascent memoir. I would have loved to read his version of his life, then and now” (Loc 1712). His memoir would have been honest, telling his version of the truth. This revelation about his character may also serve to make readers question what he has said about knowing Rudy.

More information about his character comes from Lu at the end of the first chapter in this section. She says that AJ was sincere. His actions came from genuine feelings, much like her father’s, even though she does not make the later point.

Her father’s truthfulness comes into question in this section as well. It reveals that the case against Ryan Schumann was reopened. Now, Eloise Schumann is coming forward still claiming that Ryan was innocent and that Lu’s father knows the truth.

Another revelation about the family’s ability to tell the whole truth comes about when Lu calls AJ by his full name. Noel is there when she does it and is shocked that even though there is a “jr.” at the end of his name, he does not have the same name as his father. He even questions him as to why he never changed it if it really was a mistake as AJ claims.

When Lu talks about AJ’s sincerity, she uses the past tense at the end of the section, foreshadowing AJ’s death. When describing the two warriors named Ajax she says that her brother had said that maybe he was Ajax the Lesser the last time they spoke. Ajax the Lesser is the Ajax who “survived so many attempts on his life that he ended up boasting that not even the gods could kill him. The gods promptly did just that” (Loc 2298). This is ironic because before then, he probably thought that he was Ajax the Great.

Another point to note about this section is that Lu’s vow to get revenge against Randy shows how competitive she is and that, as she has said previously, she does not know how to disguise the fact that she wants to win. She is willing to do bodily harm to someone in order to get her revenge and win. The memory mirrors her current situation.



She has to show everyone that she really is better than Fred and the murder case gives her the perfect chance to do so.

Finally, elements of racism and close-mindedness appear in this section in how the boys from the other school treat Rudy and Davey when they call Rudy a “faggot” and Davey a “nigger.”

Discussion Question 1

Do you think that Lu and her father have the same view of AJ? Explain your answer. If you think their views are different, whose view do you think is more accurate? Support your answer.

Discussion Question 2

What do you think motivates Eloise Schumann to continue to say that Lu's father knows that Ryan Schumann is innocent? Do you believe her or Lu's father? Why?

Discussion Question 3

Why do you think Lu and AJ are ashamed of their full names?

Vocabulary

anticipate, invalidated, legacy, sanctimony, anecdote, mystified, inexplicable, innocuous, extravagance, mediocre, intemperate, gracious, vocation, embarked, phobic, initiated, inevitable, muster, laden, frisson



Section 4: K-I-S-S-I-N-G - April 7

Summary

Back in the past, Randy becomes Lu's best friend in the fourth grade after her father makes her apologize to him (K-I-S-S-I-N-G). The day after she apologizes she finds her favorite flavored candy in her desk. She knows that he thinks AJ is great, but he is willing to settle for her. Teensy does not like him, though. One day they see Davey and Randy says that he sees him in his neighborhood all the time. He thinks he is high. Lu invites Randy to her house for Thanksgiving. They talk about kissing, but Lu is not in to it and thinks that she will have to watch him for now on.

In the present, Lu is attending a professional women's group where she is a keynote speaker. She is not happy though because she is a fill-in. She gives her speech about work - life balance and afterwards, a young woman challenges her due to her wealth. She goes back to the office and then home. Mike calls and tells her that they found Rudy's DNA on Mary's bed spread. She thinks this is good news and she might be able to get a confession. Bash contacts her and wonders if they can meet next week. She says maybe knowing that the answer is yes.

In the past, Randy comes over for Thanksgiving dinner. He brings a bottle of creme de menthe as a gift. Lu's father accepts it and places it with his expensive alcohol. They go to Lu's room, and she fears that he will be interested in kissing, but he is interested in her games. Later, after dinner, she tries to get him to eat his dessert "correctly" and calls him white trash loudly enough to him to hear her. She gets sent to her room and Randy leaves. AJ tries to convince his father to let him go out with Bash, but since they have no specific plans, his father says no. The next evening he convinces him that they have a plan and he allows AJ to take the car. AJ returns five minutes before he is supposed to be home. The chief of police calls eleven hours later to say that AJ may be a witness to a felony.

In the present, Fred has the DNA report and he comes to Lu's office to discuss the case. He wants murder two for Rudy, but Lu says no. She asks what Rudy wants and Fred says that he wants to go to trial. Fred warns her that she is not as good as she thinks she is and says that her father was the only great state's attorney in the country. She tells him she may go even higher and he says that he is sure she is aiming for the job of attorney general or governor.

Back in the past, it is a long holiday weekend. Lu's father goes to work as normal. What is not normal is that he comes home early and he is mad because AJ is still in bed. He gets him up and interrogates him about what he had done the night he went out with the boys. He says that he had gone to Davey's house with Bash and Noel. Then Nita Flood has shown up. She was mad at Davey because they have been having sex, but he had taken another girl to the homecoming dance. They made up by having sex, but it turns out that she claims that Davey raped her. Lu's father has the case go to the grand jury



and Davey gets off. The school is full of rumors and Nita ends up going to another one. She becomes the first Flood to actually finish high school, but takes an overdose of the night of her graduation and this is what had instigated the attack by the Flood brothers on Davey.

In the present, Lu is in court to pick the jury. After the selection, before they are ready to break for the day, Rudy attacks her and looks as if he is trying to escape. The police catch him. The next morning she gets a call saying that Rudy has committed suicide in his cell.

In the past, AJ and his friends go to college. Lu is sad and her father tries to make her feel better. She and Randy are still friends, but he gets a girlfriend so that shuts her out. Finally, AJ comes home. Davey ended up going to the University of Maryland is a paraplegic.

Lu's father makes AJ visit Davey. Noel becomes an actor and is in town, but he does not go to the house. He dies at the age of 26 of AIDS. They all go to his funeral and Davey sings. It turns out that Noel had planned his funeral and had told everything to Ariel. She is mad at the others for not coming to see him. AJ claims that it was Noel who cut him off. Davey surprises everyone by saying that he thinks homosexuality is a sin. He also feels as if he was punished for having sex before marriage. After everyone leaves Lou talks to Davey. He says that if he wants to know why Noel wanted him to sing, he should ask AJ.

Back in the present, Lu decides to pay her respects by visiting the funeral home. She now realizes that Rudy was trying to commit suicide by cop. When she gets there, Fred is there with Rudy's parents. His father admits that they know that he was guilty, but they have to protect a child. His wife gets mad at him for saying so. She and Fred leave together. He explains that Rudy was dyslexic which is why he had stopped at the door of the courthouse trying to figure out which way to go. He continues to talk about it and Lu wants to know why he is telling her this, but he won't say anything more.

Later that evening she understands. Rudy had gone into the wrong apartment because he was dyslexic. It was the Jonnie Forke's apartment that he had planned to go into. After doing some research Lu realizes that the woman is really Nita Flood.

Analysis

A noteworthy element in this section is the reason why Lu finally makes a friend. She makes one because she apologizes for her actions. This is something that she has never done, even after she learns why her teachers and the other students do not like her. Randy is ready to be her friend as soon as the next day after the apology. He is the one who leaves the eraser and the Now and Laters in her desk. In order to build upon what he has done, Lu has to reign in her normal personality. When he responds to her comment that one can read anywhere, even in the bathtub by saying that you cannot read in the shower she gets angry. "My temper almost flared. I hated being contradicted,



topped. But then I realized that Randy was only trying to build on what I said. He was trying to have a conversation” (2423).

Another element concerning Randy is that his living situation and the manner in which some people receive him supports the theme that social inequality exists. Teensy does not accept him as she had accepted Noel and Davey. Lu describes her as being, “...the biggest snob in our household...” (Loc 2423). Randy lives on the wrong side of town. When Lu asks whether he can stay for dinner, her response is that he lives in “those town houses by the high school” (Loc 2423). Lu thinks she is just talking about the fact that he will have to get home somehow, but she is really saying that they do not have those type of people over for dinner. She cannot openly say this, though, so she never explains what she means to the young Lu. Just as one was not to say that the people who live in the town houses are poor, one is not to say that you do not invite those type of people to dinner. Social inequality does not exist if you do not talk about it.

The narration continues to highlight this theme on Thanksgiving day using several techniques. First of all, the use of the words “white trash” in title of the chapter describing the events of the day shows the existence of social inequality. As one is not supposed to call someone white trash the word “trash” is in parenthesis. When Randy comes over with the opened bottle of creme de menthe in a paper bag and offers it as a gift, Lu’s father makes a special effort to show him that it is just as valuable as his expensive alcohol by placing it amongst them. In essence, he goes overboard to try to make Randy feel comfortable in their household. Doing this, though, shows that he does not see Randy as an equal because if he did, there would be no need to make such a show of accepting his present. It is interesting that when Lu says the words that are not to be said and calls Randy white trash, Randy leaves, according to her, not because of what she called him, but because he had come over to get away from the fighting. Even though the two households, his and Lu’s, are on a different level socially, they were in essence, the same.

The narration uses the theme to give readers another clue to help solve the present-day mystery. When Randy and Lu see Davey, Randy comments that he sees him at least once a week near his house. In support of the theme, Lu asks why would he be in Randy’s neighborhood. She ends her question with “...over there” because she does not want to say “You live in those town houses where poor people live. Davey lives in Hobbit’s Glen, miles away, near the golf course, in a really nice house” (Loc 2456). Davey, who is not poor, would normally have no reason to be on that side of town. Nita Flood, whose family is also poor, lives in the same area. Thus readers may realize that Davey is going there to see Nita.

Note the issues in this section that women have to face in society, even among themselves. The professional luncheon Lu attends combines this point with the theme of social inequality. The group is supposed to exist to give women support. Yet, these very same women resent each other. Lu is not happy because she was not the group’s first choice of speakers and she resents the woman who was the first choice because she got more press than Lu when she became the state’s attorney of Baltimore City. “They wanted the state’s attorney of Baltimore City. She is younger, an African



American woman whose election last fall was considered big news, overshadowing Lu's election as the first female state's attorney in the history of Howard County" (Loc 2504) Lu does not even see what was so special about the woman's victory as Baltimore city has already had an African American woman state's attorney. She can only attribute the attention to the fact that the woman beat "a well-financed incumbent" (Loc 2504). Lu notes, however, that that is not even a good reason because she did the same thing. Lu never thinks anything to show support for the woman or even thinks that the woman's abilities may have warranted the attention of the press.

The woman who later verbally attacks Lu resents Lu because they are not equal socially. She is jealous of Lu's wealth. She gets mad at Lu for calling herself a single mother (which she is) because Lu's wealth gives her advantages that she, as a single mother, does not have. Lu can send her children to a private school, she can get hired help, she does not have college debt. Lu tells her the point of the gathering, "...I think the point is that women, whatever their challenges, benefit from networking and support" (Loc 2541). The woman does not pay attention to Lu's words any more than Lu had paid attention to her father's words when he spoke about winning. She continues to focus on her resentment towards Lu by asking about on-site child care.

In addition to the themes just mentioned, the concept of judgment and justice outside the courtroom arises in this section. Just as Miss Maude had seen the fire as a sign that she was doing something wrong by committing adultery and pretending that her husband was dead, Davey sees the stabbing and the resulting consequences on his life as a sign that he was wrong to have had sex before marriage and to have been so proud of himself. He also sees Noel's death as a form of judgment because homosexuality is a sin. An interesting point is that many of the people in the novel who have done something "wrong" have fallen. Even Lu's father lost his beloved status when he lost his temper talking to the reporter. The question still remains as to whether he knew that Schumann really was not the killer. Readers see Lu's arrogance reaching a new height in her conversation with Fred about her future professional plans. Does Fred provide her with the information about Randy's dyslexia with the hope of brining her down? What about AJ? He is supposed to be good, but finds himself involved in incidents of rape and murder. Readers have a sense that he will fall due to the foreshadowing elements in the previous sections.

On a final note, the narration's connection of the past with the present becomes more evident in this section. Readers now know that Jonnie Forke is Nita Flood. They learn about the "alleged rape, and realize that Rudy had really meant to kill Nita. However, he entered the wrong apartment due to his dyslexia.

Discussion Question 1

Do you think that Lu learns anything from that fact that Randy becomes her friend? Explain your answer.



Discussion Question 2

What makes every household the same in Columbia?

Discussion Question 3

Do you think that Fred is Lu's friend or enemy? Explain your answer. How would you feel about Lu if you were Fred?

Vocabulary

supervised, dismissively, empowerment, disingenuous, strident, immensely, despot, circumstances, summoned, respite, loathing, amiable, humiliation, claustrophobia, perverse, acquiescence, spurned, misnomer, crotchety, restraining



Section 5: April 8 - Miguel De Cervantes Is Called To The Inquisition, Or The Final Shoe Drops

Summary

In the present, Lu goes to see Nita and starts to connect the dots. Nita is not surprised to see her, but is surprised that it took her so long to figure it out. Nita says that she only realized the the defendant was the Rudy she knew in school when she saw his name in the paper. She realizes that he meant to kill her, but does not know why. She brings up the fact that the guys did favors for her and the subject of Davey comes up. She admits that her father beat her that night, but still claims that Davey raped her. She thought they were both in love. Lu almost believes that Nita really believes her story. She says that she has not seen Davey. Lu starts to wonder whether Davey he could have hired Rudy to kill Nita to keep her from talking about the past. She decides to ask him.

Still in the present, Lu is with Bash. She is falling asleep for the first time and he wakes her up. She says that she has insomnia and they start talking about menopause. She doesn't enjoy the conversation. She thinks of Davey while she is with him. When she leaves she wonders if it is time to stop seeing Bash before he wants to stop seeing her. Even though she tries to think that it was a coincidence that Rudy went into the wrong apartment, she still wants to see Davey.

Lu goes to see Davey. She tells him about her theory that he hired Rudy to kill Nita. He denies doing so, but he mentions that he has heard from an online church forum that Nita has a sick grandchild.

Lu invites Andi out for a drink and uses it as an excuse to see Nita Flood. She talks about her grandchild. She calls AJ and he is away for a month. She senses that he has lied to protect Davey and wonders whether he will continue to do so.

AJ is at his fathers house at a barbecue. He seems strange to Lu, but she attributes it to jet lag. She gets him to go for a walk with her. She fills him in on the case. He says that it must all be a coincidence and Fred may have just been playing with her. She tells him about her theory that Nita may be blackmailing Davey. They get to the place were Ben Flood was killed, but do not talk about the evens. The topic turns to their mother. He tells her that their mother was mentally ill. He thought that her father had told her everything and says she needs to talk to him. Later that night she does not want to wake her father up, so she goes to look at the file she used to look at when she was a child. This time she finds a death certificate dated 1985.



Lu confronts her father. He tells her why he kept her mother's presence a secret and that he had told AJ because he had been depressed in college and he felt that he needed to know about his family's history.

The news about Lu's mother blindsides her, but she feels she takes another case. AJ is being extra affectionate and calls her even when he is out of town. He also apologizes for telling her about their mother. He tells her what he went through when their mother was alive. Later in June, Lu think she is happy. She calls AJ who is in Italy. He is happy too and they talk about why he and Noel had stopped talking to each other. He says that it was due to Noel being a drama queen and then he found out about him being sick. She decides she can relax as her brother is doing and calls Bash whom she has been ignoring.

Lu is with Bash. He wants her to stay. He even suggests they go out. She agrees that he can get them a pizza. He apologizes for not mentioning Rudy's attack. He says that he knew him and that he hung out with them a lot. She discovers that he was the one who had been humiliated at the cast party. They talk about the night that Nita showed up at Davey's place. Rudy was there, too, although he had not been invited.

Lu leaves and calls the funeral home and learns that AJ had paid for the funeral. She goes to see him and confronts him about lying about knowing Rudy. They go out to the pool to talk and AJ tells her that Nita was blackmailing them and Davey had paid her. Bush had said that Rudy was not invited but now she knows that he was there. He had given Nita a ride. He was watching while everything was going on. He wanted to testify in front of the grand jury, but AJ had not let him. Lu knows he is leaving something out though. It turns out that when Nita passed out, Davey had said that they could take turns with her to prove that she was not his girl friend. AJ says that he and Noel did not, even though they had said they did. That is why they stopped talking to each other, because they both thought the other was lying. He was sure Bush had, though. Then Lu realizes that Rudy was there on graduation night. He was the one who killed Ben Flood. AJ told Rudy about what was happening with the blackmail, but says that he did not ask Rudy to kill Nita. Later that night, they find out that AJ has committed suicide.

At the end of the narrative, Lu resigns from office and stops seeing Bash. She still feels that AJ did not tell her everything.. As she is now an ordinary citizen, she decides to talk to Eloise Schumann. It turns out that she was Ryan Schumann's mistress. They had picked up the victim who was hitchhiking. They were partying in the woods when the girl got flirty. Eloise claims that she killed her and that it was an accident. Lu figures out that she hit her from behind with her own shoe, and Ryan covered it up.

Lu writes a check for her father's renovation project. Now she stays at home. She has written this narrative. She has it sealed for 100 years so it will not touch her children. She says she does not want them to know that a woman claims to have been with Gabe the night he died. At the end of the novel, she meets her old friend Randy in the grocery store. He seems happy and says that he had always seen her house as a castle. He thought that her family was royalty. She says that they had thought they were also.



Analysis

As the novel deals with a mystery, the main function of this section is to solve it. From a structural note, this section is different from the others in that all of it takes place in the present. This is normal at this point because Lu has already told readers all of the relevant information about the past they need to make sense of what is happening in the present.

One of the most ironic elements about the tale is that Rudy was the one who was always left out of the stories, but he was the most important element. This is relevant in that it is typical for AJ to leave important elements out of his reconstruction of events. Thus readers may be correct to wonder, as Lu does, what he left out of the account he gave her.

It also shows how hard it is for the legal system to make sure justice is done and implement the correct judgment. Witnesses can do as AJ and Lu's father do and hide information or leave out important elements either knowingly or just because they make the judgment that it is not important. Others might be coached to say or even into believing the same thing as groups often are influenced by others.

A talented attorney may be able to weave a story that implicates someone who did not actually commit the crime or make a jury believe a story that does not match the facts. It turns out that this happened with AJ's version of what happened in the woods the night of the graduation party. His tale did not quite match the evidence, but it was convincing and AJ was his father's son even though his father always said he would not get special treatment. "As long as everyone thought it was Andrew Jackson Brant's boy who was the hero, no questions would be asked, no difficult questions about how the story didn't exactly match the evidence." (Loc. 3888). Lu herself even admits that the legal profession is flawed. This point supports the theme that social inequalities exist. AJ might have to go in front of the grand jury like everyone else, but his heritage still works in his favor.

Another important thing to note about this section is many of the main happenings that Lu thought were true in her life turned out to be lies. Her mother had not died right after her birth, AJ was not the hero that night at the graduation party, and Ryan Schumann probably covered up a crime, but was not a murderer. These revelations support the notion that people tell themselves, and others the truths that they can deal with.

Lu has also not been honest with readers. With the exception of the difference of opinion about whether or not she should work, she makes it sound as if she and Gabe had been happy. It is only at the end of the novel that readers learn that he may have been having an affair. She tells herself different truths about the woman who says that she was with Gabe the night he died. "On good days, I think she was a liar, a troublemaker, someone who thought she would be offered money to go away. On bad days- well, at any rate she didn't get any money from me" (Loc 4039).



By the end of the novel, Lu has lost any sense of innocence she may have had as she now realizes how people have lied to her throughout her life. She does not seem to believe in love. Her reaction to the woman proclaiming that she and Gabe were in love may explain why she only had a sexual relationship with Bash. Nita had had problems because she had been in love with Davey. Eloise had committed murder because she had been in love with Ryan. Lu had been in love with Gabe, and he may have been having an affair. Love, for Lu, is just another deception.

Discussion Question 1

Does AJ's confession surprise you? Explain your reasoning. Do you think he told the whole truth? If not, what do you think he left out? What clues did you pick up along the way that helped you put the pieces of the puzzle together?

Discussion Question 2

Do you think that Lu is happy? Why or why not? Has she learned anything through his experience that will cause her to live her life differently? Support your answer.

Discussion Question 3

Will Lu's children be like AJ, her father, and Lu? Explain your reasoning.

Vocabulary

contemplate, formalities, intention, credible, confrontational, imprinted, pathetically, skeptical, withering, demeanor, berate, delusional, deflates, melancholy, profoundly, sequel, demarcation, taunted, cheekily, presumably



Characters

Luisa Frida Brant / Lu

Lu's father is Andrew Jackson Brant, and her brother is AJ. Her children are Penelope and Justin. Lu does not relish motherhood, but she does spend time with her children, and she helps them with their homework. Her husband, Gabe, died before the narration's beginning.

As a child, Lu hated being paired with short boys and geeks. So, she ignored Gabe when they were in school together. When AJ called her by her full name, she attacked him and then worried that Randy was going to tell the other students. One of her worst memories of school was the day that she chose to wear a disastrous outfit on the first day back after summer break.

Now, as an adult, Lu wears very high heels and pays attention to the way she dresses. She inherited a lot of money following her husband's death, but she continues to work because she loves the legal profession. Ambitious, intelligent, competitive, and discreet, Lu is motivated by her desire to win. She fights harder than most, however, because there are several things that make her feel inferior, such as her height, gender, and full name.

Lu's competitiveness has sometimes caused her problems. As a child, she was always eager to prove that she was better than anyone else. One of her teachers took an immediate disliking to her when she tried to show off. Lu's father always warned Lu about the competitive spirit, but she never listened.

As might be expected given her nature, Lu had problems making friends during her youth. As an adult, her only friend seems to be Andi. Lu keeps Bash at a distance. When Lu becomes a stay at home mom, she still competes with Teensy.

As a child, Lu looked up to her father and her brother. Even when the evidence showed that her father had acted in ways that were not so ethical, like his relationship with Miss Maude, Lu did not believe what she learned. She had her own version of the truth so that she could handle what she had learned. She did the same in her view of how her father handled cases. He did what he did with conviction. Still, the revelations about AJ and her father caused Lu to lose her innocent view of the virtues of her father and brother, and she retreated.

Readers find out that Lu has been telling them her version of the truth as well. Her relationship with Gabe was not perfect. It is possible that he might have been having an affair. Then, it is also possible that he was faithful in the marriage.



Andrew Jackson Brant

Andrew Jackson Brant is the father of Lu and AJ. He is also a former states attorney for Howard County. He is famous for obtaining a conviction in a much publicized murder case, even though the victim's body was never found. People often associate the word "beloved" with his name. He is a highly moral man. He cuts his ties with his own parents because of their racist views.

Andrew Brant gives his children a moral education, telling Lu that it is not good to always want to win. He teaches AJ how to make arguments to get what he wants and to make wise choices. Lu's father is always there to set the example by doing things like calling Randy's father to invite him over for Thanksgiving dinner and teaching Lu how to behave when she calls Randy white trash. It is Andrew Brant who stays at the end of the cast party at Davey's parents' house after the incident that causes everyone else to leave.. When AJ becomes friends with Davey, Lu says that she thinks her father was happy that AJ has a black friend. Initially, the community of Columbia had attracted Andrew Brant because the town was built on the premise that everyone is equal. He intends to do his part to keep this vision in Columbia's future.

Even though Lu's father is a moral man, he does things at times that are not saintly. When he does, he creates his own version of the truth to help him live with his behavior. He has an affair with a married woman. He leads Lu to believe that her mother died soon after Lu's birth. Actually, she died 15 years later. He also lets Lu believe that her maternal grandparents are dead.

Lu calls him "the great protector" because he has good intentions and wants to do what is just. However, his good intentions sometimes lead to injustice. For example, he tries to save Lu's mother. Later, she is committed. He also tries to save Nita because in his mind a girl cannot be raped by her boyfriend. His rejection of her story later leads to her blackmail scheme, her near death, the death of an innocent woman, and the death of his son. Eloise keeps saying that he had information that proved Ryan Schumann's innocence because she kept giving him stories about her involvement in the crime, but he could not believe that she could be involved in such a crime. Justice is not served in any of these situations.

The same pattern occurs with his children. Somehow his lessons get twisted. Lu continues to think that winning is everything. AJ learns how to emerge the hero and how to manipulate the truth.

The author uses Andrew Brant's character to explore the concepts of truth, the existence of social inequality, and justice and judgement. His character also helps explain Lu's competitive nature.



Ajax Homer Brant / AJ

AJ is Lu's older brother and Andrew Jackson Brant's son. AJ serves to help build the plot as his stories of the past spur the events in the present. Davey and Bush were his friends in school, and AJ knows Rudy.

Although people think that AJ is a hero. He presents the image of being honest, but he is not truthful. Thanks to his father's training, he knows what words to use and what to include in his stories and what to leave out. Even after telling Lu the "whole" story at the end of the narrative, Lu is not sure that he told her everything.

AJ gives Lu a standard, when growing up, that helps explain her competitive nature. The motif of truth also flows through his story line due to the way he handles the truth. He is successful because of the version of the truth of his life that he has created for himself in order to survive. The fact that he ends his life at the end of the novel, though, shows that one can build a life of untruths, but it only takes one event to unravel it all. This supports the themes of justice and judgement, as he finally pays for the truths he has twisted.

Noel Baumgarten

Noel becomes a friend of the Brant family when they catch him peeping in their kitchen window. While he knows who he is and leads his life according to his own rules, he has good manners and fits in with AJ and his friends. Teensy even likes him. Though Noel likes to be the center of attention, he is willing to play a supporting role when necessary. He even plays a supporting role in saving Davey's life. Lu says that, in reality, he probably did as much as AJ did to save Davey's life. However, AJ gladly receives all of the credit.

Readers know that Noel and AJ were close, but they only have AJ's word that nothing sexual ever happened between the two of them. According to AJ, his friendship with Noel ended because each one of them thought the other was a liar after each claimed to have had sex with Nita and then retracted their stories. The incident with Nina Flood is the second lie Noel has caught AJ telling. The other was pretending that he has the same name as his father and then making up excuses as to why he has it and why he has never changed it.

The fact that AIDS kills Noel at the age of 26 supports the theme of justice and judgment. Did he die, as Davey says, because homosexuality is a sin? Thus, is it just that he dies so young because he has sinned? The author uses Noel's character to pose this question.



Davey Robinson

Davey becomes AJ's friend when he beats AJ for a singing role in a musical. Davey is the only black member of AJ's group, and he fits in well. He is serious, planning to go to medical school. He is only using football to get a scholarship to Stanford. Even though he has an exceptional voice, Davey has no plans to become a singer.

Davey seems to be a down-to-earth teenager, but his treatment of women gets him into trouble. Even though he is not supposed to have a girlfriend, Davey has sex with Nita to the point that she thinks that they are in love. Yet, he breaks the "rules" by going to another girl's homecoming dance. He shows even less respect for Nita when he does not defend his relationship with her and tells the other boys that they can have her if they want.

The author uses Davey to support the themes of justice and judgment. Was he literally bought down because of his treatment of Nita? This could be why he pays her, because he thinks he owes her and can pay off his sins of the past.

It is interesting to note, that even though he is a minister, he has power and is a hypocrite. He may be motivated to do good, but power attracts him. He lies to Lu about Nita while he is in his own church.

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Nita Flood / Jonnie Forke

Nita Flood is the youngest of the Flood siblings. Her brothers are Ben and Tom Flood. Later, she goes by the name of Jonnie Forke. She is the woman Rudy meant to kill instead of Mary.

When Nita accuses Davey of rape, her motivation is to get her father to stop beating her. She also wants to get even with Davey for betraying her and for letting his friends dump her on her doorstep. She blackmails them to get money to pay for her granddaughter's operation.

Nita's case shows how the tide has turned when it comes to women and their sexual relationships. When she was a teenager, whatever happened to her was her fault because she was drunk and had willingly entered the house of someone with whom she was already sexually involved. Years later, because she was drunk and Davey took advantage of her, bringing that night up would be enough to ruin the career of Davey and the others.

It is also interesting to note that her character is the opposite of Lu's when it comes to her children. She does not have a lot of money, but she is proud of her children and loves her grandchild. Lu is rich and does not enjoy motherhood.



Andi Gleason

Andi is Lu's best friend, and she is now Lu's deputy. They were co-workers before Lu became a states attorney. Aided by Lu's recommendation, Andi gets the title when Lu resigns.

Like Lu, Andi is competitive. Unlike Lu, Andi must work. Andi is careful to balance her friendship with Lu with her professional aspiration. She shows more resentment than respect toward Lu by refusing to knock before entering her office and putting her legs on Lu's desk.

The author uses Andi to show what Lu feels now that she must assert her authority among people she has worked with in the past. Andi's relationship with Lu also shows the complicated relationship between women. Even though they are supposed to support each other, there is some resentment between them. Each wants what the other has in life.

Fred Hollister

Lu worked for Fred in the Baltimore City states attorney office. Fred convinces Lu to work for him again in Howard County. Fred is a good man who finds work quickly after losing the election to Lu. He is set to compete against her again as Rudy's defense attorney.

Fred's motivation is to do the right thing for his client. He also serves as a voice of reason, warning Lu about her competitive nature. Readers do not know whether or not he knew where the information he had would lead. However, it is ironic that he is the one who provides the information that causes her to resign.

Tom and Ben Flood

In the story, Tom and Ben Flood are two brothers who have little money. As such, they represent the social inequality that exists in the utopian town.

Having never graduated from high school themselves, Tom and Ben crash the high school graduation party of the most popular students. While at the party, Tom and Ben attack Davey to avenge the alleged rape of their younger sister, Nita. Davey is black, which adds another element to their wanting revenge. Ben dies, and Tom gets jail time.

As a plot device, the fact that Rudy killed Ben involves him in Nita's blackmail plot, even though Nita does not know that Rudy killed Ben.



Rudy Drysdale

As a teenager, Rudy is the photographer at the cast party. Davey and AJ defend him when two boys harass him. After that he is motivated to try and pay them back for helping him. This drives him to kill Ben Flood after he stabs Davey.

As an adult, he plans to kill Nita Flood after learning about her blackmail plan, but he kills the wrong woman.

Rudy is extremely loyal to AJ and Davey, but he is unstable. The author uses his actions to bring to light the events of the past. Those previous events rattle the world of AJ and Lu when Lu realizes the truth about memories of her father and her brother.

Randy Naim

Randy is the boy who repeats what Lu had said on her first day in first grade, and Lu gets in trouble with her teacher for it. Randy is the boy who makes the most fun of Lu when she wears a disastrous outfit to school. Later, Randy and Lu become friends.

Randy's character shows that Lu's desire to win is what keeps her from having friends. When she apologizes to him and lets down her guard, he becomes her friend.

Rudy's character highlights the inequalities that exist in the town and how the people who live in the town houses are viewed by others. His actions show that behaviors are sometimes simply due to a lack of education. In the end, the households of the rich are not all that different from the households of the poor.

It is interesting that when Lu runs into Randy at the end of the novel, his life is in a better state than hers. Yet, he had thought her house was a castle when he was young.

Teensy

Teensy is like the office manager of Lu's father's house. She helped take care of AJ and Lu and Lu's father. When Lu comes with her children, she helps to care for them. She has a strong personality and looks out for the good of the family and is discrete. She is also a snob, and her attitude toward Randy shows that social inequalities exist.

When it comes to caring for the household, Teensy is competitive, and she sets the rules. When Lu decides to leave her job and stay at home, Lu begins to compete with Teensy.



Bash

Bash is one of AJ's childhood friends. Lu runs into him as an adult, and she has a secret affair with him that is only for sex. She feels that the only time she can be free is with Bash.

The narrative portrays Bash as being successful, but he is the most primal of AJ's friends. Bash likes rough sex, and AJ thinks that he most likely had sex with Nita once Davey offered her to everyone.

Bash serves as a connection to the past that helps Lu put the pieces of the puzzle together.

Miss Maude

Miss Maude is the neighbor with whom Lu's father has an affair when Lu is young. Miss Maude uses the affair to create a life for herself without her husband. Her husband is a double amputee in Walter Reed Hospital.

Miss Maude's character becomes wrapped in the motif of justice and judgement when her house burns down. She thinks that it is a sign because she has been committing adultery by having an affair with Lu's father.

Eloise Schumann

Eloise Schumann is Ryan Schumann's second wife. She claims that she killed the woman Ryan was convicted of killing. She continues to say that Lu's father knows that he sent the wrong person to prison. However, she does not implicate with the clarity that would send her to jail.



Symbols and Symbolism

Wilde Lake

The lake represents deceit. It is named after the man who deceived the original planner of the town. Ironically, a big deception happens here as AJ makes everyone think that Ben Floor fell on his knife while they were fighting. In reality, Rudy killed him.

AJ's Crooked Arm

AJ's crooked arm symbolizes AJ's character. Lu says in the first chapter that one must know where to look. However, if they knew where to look in regard to AJ, they could see he was crooked. No one can get a straight answer out of AJ when the truth matters. He knows how to use language that weaves around the truth. This was true with pivotal happenings in his youth and with his own house now. For example, AJ makes it look as if he only lives in one row house, but he lives in three. If one knows where to look, as Lu manages to do, one can see that AJ is crooked just like his arm.

AJ's Name

AJ's name represents him as a whole. People see him as AJ, the great. He is successful and a hero. However, he plays his game for too long and thinks that he is invincible. Thus, he is struck down like his other namesake, Ajax the Lesser.

Lu, the Nickname

The name Lu sounds like the boy's name "Lou." Lu's nickname represents her competitive, tomboy nature. More than likely, the nickname has helped shape her personality. Her given name, Louisa, symbolizes something sweeter. She might have been a sweeter person if she had gone by that name.

Lu's High Heels

Lu's high heels represent her attempt to rise higher than her current position.

Don Quixote

Don Quixote symbolizes Lu's father's character. He goes out into the world trying to do good. Like Don Quixote, in the end, he is left disappointed and a broken man.

Lu's Hair

The state of Lu's hair symbolizes the role she is playing. At work, where she wants to be authoritative, she wears it up. When she is with Bash, where she feels free, she lets it down just as she lets down her inhibitions.

Fire

When Miss Maude's house catches fire, she sees it as a sign that she should leave as fire is often a symbol of Hell. It is interesting that fire can also symbolize forbidden passions. Miss Maude was having an affair with Lu's father.

Nudity

When Lu is with Bash, she is naked. Nudity can symbolize two things. One is positive. In this sense, nudity represents innocence and nature. When Lu is with Bash, she can forget everything in the outside world.

In a negative sense, nudity is associated with original sin. Nudity represents The Fall, humiliation, and spiritual poverty. Lu's inability to connect with people, even the man with whom she has sex, shows her spiritual poverty. It is while she is with Bash that she learns information that leads to AJ's fall and her resignation from office.

AJ's Swimming Pool

AJ's swimming pool symbolizes his secrets. Though AJ is wealthy, he has never told the complete truth about most things in his life. He is drowning in his secrets, much like one drowns in a swimming pool. AJ commits suicide because he is overwhelmed.



Settings

Wilde Lake

Wilde Lake is a man-made lake that the village of Colombia surrounds. It is the place where AJ goes with his friends to celebrate their graduation from high school. At that celebration, Ben and Tom Flood attack Davey. Ben Flood is killed.

Columbia, Maryland

Columbia is the place where Lu grows up and returns to a job offer after husband's death. It is located in Howard County. It is a place that was supposed to be a utopia where everyone was equal. But, Columbia falls short of its reputation.

It is essential that the novel takes place here, as it enables the plot to reveal secrets of the past. The accused murderer and the intended victim both have ties to AJ's past in Columbia.

Lu's office

Lu's office is the same one that her former boss occupied before she won the election. Here, she deals with issues of authority. These issues come from two sources. First, she is a woman. The second is that the people who work under her were her former coworkers. She grapples with how to deal with people who come in without knocking and put their legs on her desk. Her office symbolizes her insecurity.

Lu's House

The house that Lu lives in is in the same one that she grew up in, only bigger. It stands out from the others because her father had it moved there. Inside the house, Lu's father tried to instill moral values into his children.

To people like Randy, it looks like a castle. Lu and AJ meet Noel because he is interested in the house.

Davey's House and His Church

Davey's parents' house is where the cast party takes place and where Davey and AJ defend Rudy. Is also where the sexual encounter with Nita takes place. His parents try to make it a good house. but bad things happen inside it. The same happens with Davey's church. It is supposed to be a good place, but Davey lies while inside the church.



The Groves

The Groves is the name of the apartment complex where the victim's body is found. Nita Flood is the victim's neighbor. In addition, the apartment complex shows that social inequality exists. The complex was once a place for up-and-coming people. So, the history of The Groves proves that people who lived there from the beginning were not on the same level. Now the complex, has deteriorated. The "r" in Grove is missing. The inhabitants are not surprised to see police cars there. Lu thinks that the inhabitants are barely making it. They are treading water.

The Courtroom

During the narrative, Lu appears in court. She feels comfortable in that setting as she selects a jury. It is in the courtroom that Rudy attacks her. He is hoping that the police will kill him. This is the place where justice is supposed to be done. However, that does not happen because Rudy does not get a fair trial. He commits suicide.

Bash's Apartment

Bash's apartment is where Lu goes for her secret, sexual encounters with Bash. It is also where Bash gives her information that helps her find the answers to her questions.

AJ's House

AJ's house is in a bad neighborhood, and it gives the impression that he lives in one row house. Actually, it is a visual illusion. He has three row houses, but he disguises them to look as if he only lives in one in order to hide his wealth. He commits suicide in his house by drowning himself in the pool. The way he constructs this house is the way he constructs his life. He only tells part of the truth and hides, through the use of words and omission, the whole truth.



Themes and Motifs

The Existence of Social Inequality

From the first page, the narrative begins to highlight this theme that social inequality exists. When Jim Rouse establishes Columbia, he builds the community on the premise that social inequality exists. He wants to build a new type of town. It is supposed to be a utopia where everyone is equal, bringing everyone together. Lu's fathers sees it as the future. "Breaking down barriers. Here, people of different classes and races will leave side by side" (Loc 312).

Reality does not turn out as planned. Inequality exists, but the citizens try to make it disappear by not talking about it. Lu's friend Randy lives in "the town houses near the high school. The ones where poor kids live, but you weren't supposed to say that" (Loc 2239). The Floods live in that neighborhood, too. Though Randy is in Lu's class and she later becomes friends with him, Teensy does not accept him the way she accepts Noel and Davey. Noel lives on the right side of town. Davey is black, but his father is a doctor and he lives near the golf course. Teensy views Randy as white trash. Lu even calls him this when he eats with them on Thanksgiving day. Even though her father punishes Lu for calling him that, he admits that she is more privileged than Randy. "When someone who didn't have the privilege of my upbringing came into our home, it was my duty to demonstrate good manners without calling the guest out" (Loc 2602).

As for the Floods, none of the boys had graduated from high school. They did not have the full version of names. The ones who attacked Davey were Tom and Ben. From someone of Lu's privileged world, it is surprising that those are their full names. "I remember being surprised to learn that those names were not nicknames, shortened versions of Thomas and Benjamin... Maybe their parents didn't have the energy to come up with any more names..." (Loc 106).

Later, as an adult, Lu comments on the apartment complex where the murder victim had lived. "When they were first built in the mid-twentieth century, the Grove apartments had been a place for people - families, even - on the way up. All the little telltale of aspiration are still here..." (Loc 375). Now, though, while the Grove apartments look okay on the surface Lu has the feeling that the people who live there are "at best, treading water" (Loc 378).

Even Lu's old high school is not what it used to be. Mike tells Lu that Randy attended Wilde Lake High School. Lu tells Mike that she and AJ also went to Wilde Lake Middle and High School. She comments, 'Mike is too polite to note that the school's reputation is lackluster these days' (842).

Lu's exchange with the woman at the women's professional meeting also shows the existence of social inequality. The woman is a single mother who is in debt. Lu is



wealthy and can afford a good education for her children and nice clothes. She does not even have to work.

Justice and Judgment

The concepts of justice and judgment run throughout the novel. Lou and her father have faith in the legal system to make the right decision when it comes to right and wrong. People who take an oath to testify promise that what they are about to say will be the whole truth and nothing but the truth. Yet, Lu knows that people can swear to tell the truth and still tell lies. People go to court and think that the right decision has been made, but the decision can turn out to be flawed in spite of the best efforts to find the truth.

The novel starts with such a decision. AJ goes in front of the grand jury at his father's insistence because his father wants to make sure that there is no doubt that justice was done. Yet, even though the grand jury is correct in not indicting AJ, the real murderer is not brought to justice because AJ does not tell the truth. Ben did not die from falling on his own knife. Randy killed him.

When AJ becomes involved in another case, the alleged rape of Nita, Lu's father once again does what he believes to be moral. This time he makes sure that Davey goes in front of the grand jury. Once again, his reasoning is to make sure that justice is served. During the process, he worries about Nita being exposed as a liar, but he still does what he thinks is right. In the end, it is questionable as to whether or not justice prevailed. Even if Davey did not rape Nita, Bash, who probably did, escapes justice.

Another case concerns the conviction of Ryan Schumann. He dies in prison, but his wife claims that she is the one who committed the crime. She had told Lu's father the truth in the past. However, he felt that he was the ultimate judge of right and wrong and what people were capable or not capable of doing. Thus, he continued to build a case against Schumann and managed to get the jury to convict him of murder. In this instance, Lu's father's personal judgement influenced the justice and judgment that the legal system tries to impose.

In addition to justice and judgment imposed by the law, Davey points out the concept of justice and judgment imposed by God. People who commit sins have to pay for them, just as people who commit crimes have to pay for them. Miss Maude's house burns down. As she sees it, she is guilty of adultery and having sex without marriage. Noel dies at a young age. Death is his punishment because, as Davey sees it, homosexuality is a sin. The stabbing incident dashes Davey's dreams because, as he sees it, he committed a sin by having sex before marriage. AJ and Lu are proud, and Lu is overly competitive. Both of them fall because their type of pride is also a sin. The saying that "pride goeth before a fall" fits their situation well.



The Roles of Women in Society

Throughout the narrative, several observations are made about the roles of women in society. The roles include women as professionals, women as mothers, and women as sexual beings.

The fact that Lu is a woman is one of the things that contributes to her competitive nature. As the youngest in the household, she always feels as if she has to keep up with AJ and her father. She finally manages to do this when she becomes the first woman states attorney in Howard County. Yet, she is very sensitive to signs that people do not respect her authority because she is a woman.

During the election campaign, Fred says that she only wants the job to have something to do. She notes that no one implies that a rich man wants to work just to have something to do. When she goes over the murder scene with Mike, she makes observations about things that he does not have to worry about because he is a man. When Mike refers to the killer, he uses the pronoun “he”. Lu picks up on this and points it out to Mike who does not think that the pronoun he uses matters. “Hunt shrugs, indifferent to pronoun. Men can afford to be” (Loc 407). When she sees the body she thinks that she has seen some things that women are not to see and even though the sight bothers her, she does not show it because Mike is looking at her.

She had to also convince her husband that she should be working. He had asked her “Why work?” (Loc 230). He was making money, and he saw her job as a hobby, especially once the children were born. He expected her to be a stay at home mom because she is a woman. Motherhood does not appeal to Lu though. She cannot admit that so she says that she has to work because she loves law. Gabe gives her permission to work, but she still has to balance the kids and her career. “OK, but it's on you to make it work. Spend whatever it takes and let's hope it's a financial wash, state salaries being what they are” (Loc 242). This is similar to the situation that Lu imagines her mother found herself in. I am your wife so goodbye to my life.

When Lu is in court, she must pay attention to how she looks at the jury. “Lou is just pretty enough that she has to be careful in her courtroom interactions with members of the opposite sex” (Loc 2875). At the same time she has to make sure that the women respect her and not resent her.

Resentment is something Lu has to deal with throughout the narrative. Andi is Lu's deputy. In essence, Lu is Andi's boss. Though Lu does not have to work because she is wealthy, Andi must work. Naturally, this sets up some resentment by Andi toward Lu. Her resentment is manifested in various ways. Andi refuses to knock on the door when she enters Lu's office. She puts her legs on Lu's desk and says that she is just testing her. She questions Lu because she thinks that she is going to keep all the good cases for herself, thus not giving Andi the chance to shine.

Later a woman confronts Lu at a professional meeting for women. She resents Lu because she is rich and has advantages as a single mother due to her wealth. She



resents Lu to the point that she gets mad at Lu for calling herself a single mother, even though she is.

It is ironic that Lu resents the woman who was supposed to have given the speech. The woman stole the limelight from when she won the state attorney's election in Baltimore City. She is also not nice in the way she describes Eloise Schumann. "...while she looks younger than her age, she still looks like a middle-aged woman" (Loc 3980).

Sexual Relationships

Various sexual relationships occur throughout the novel. There are relationships between teenagers, minors and adults, married and single adults, and the notion of same-sex relationships. Each of the relationships carries its own consequences.

One of the major sexual relationships that reverberates throughout the novel is the one between Davey and Nita. Nita is a girl with a reputation for being easy. When AJ and his friends see her in the mall, Lynne makes a joke about her that Lu does not understand at the time. Later, readers find out that Nita has been having sex with Davey. Giving her reputation and her relationship with Davey, the question of whether or not he raped her remains.

As Lu notes, Davey is bigger than Nita. It would have been difficult for Nita to have fought him. Yet, the fact that they already have a sexual relationship makes Nita's claim of being raped less than convincing. If he really had sex with her while she was passed out or too drunk to know what she was doing, then she had sex without her consent and that was rape. However, did she set herself up for it by being in the house with teenage boys and playing drinking games with them? Did they think there was nothing wrong with what they were doing because of her reputation? Also, she said that Davey raped her, not Bash.

Lu's father, the same man who teaches his children moral lessons, is having a relationship with Miss Maud, a married woman. She is legally married, but her husband is in the hospital and is a double amputee. She does not see herself as having a husband anymore. Lu's father knows that technically it is not right, but he can rationalize that he is not doing anything wrong, at least not too wrong. It worries her, though, and the fire makes her think that it is a sign that she should leave.

Ryan had an affair with an under-aged girl. This is morally wrong, as he is married, and it is illegal as she is under-aged. Yet, neither one of them sees anything wrong with it. He does know that it is wrong in the eyes of the law, so he wants to keep the relationship quiet. When the minor becomes an adult, she says that they were in love. The person whom the law protects was not willing to follow the law.

Lu like her father is supposed to represent what is right and is always looking for the truth, yet she is having a secret affair with Bash that is purely sexual. At one point she worries that he may be tiring of her and considers ending it with him so that he does not end it with her first. When she does end it, it is because of what Bash may have done to



Nita and the fact that AJ says that he would have sex with anyone, not because he is a married man.

While Noel never has a sexual experience except that the one that gets him kicked out of school, there is a discussion about the acceptance of homosexuality. Ariel supports Noel. Davey does not. AJ says that he was afraid to see him once he found out that he had AIDS.

Finally, Gabe, Lu's own husband may, or may not have been, with another woman when he died. The other woman claims that they had loved each other.

It is interesting to note that Noel's friends view him differently when his sexual orientation makes him sick. Would these other characters have been treated badly if their sexual secrets had come out? That is one of the questions that is not answered in the narrative.

Truth

The concept of truth is prevalent in the novel. The narrative deals with different kinds of truth. There is the truth that one tells himself to survive. There is the truth that is not intentionally blurred. However, twisted memories prevent the person from telling the whole truth. There is also the truth which people block because they do not want to know the whole truth.

Lu's father is a man with high morals who tries to set a good example for his children. Yet, he does not always tell the truth himself. It is not until Lu is an adult, in her 40s, that she learns that her mother did not die a few days after her birth. She learns that truth by accident. When she confronts her father, he tells her the truth he created for himself helped him deal with the situation. Her mother would have been dead to her anyway.

Then, there are the truths that he tells himself that influences how he handles cases and his life. Lu calls him the protector. He does not face the truth about his wife's illness. He does not face the truth when it comes to the real killer in the Schumann case. He does not believe that a young girl could kill, so the wrong person goes to jail. He could not face the truth about Nita. This leads to a rejection of her. When people shut out the truth as Lu's father does because it does not coincide with their concept of reality, it is impossible to know whether one can ever know the truth.

AJ's manner of telling the truth makes one wonder the same thing. There are times when he lies, as he does when he says that Ben Flood fell on his own knife. He also lies through omission. He only tells part of what happened at Davey's house. He leaves out the part about Davey offering Nita to the other guys. Even when Lu gets the truth out of him, she has doubts about whether he told her the whole truth.

Lu has been telling herself a lie about her marriage. In the beginning, she makes it sound as if she and Gabe had a happy marriage. Readers sense that everything was not perfect though because he did not like the fact that she worked and wanted her to



be a stay at home mom. Later, at the end of the novel, readers discover that a woman claims to have been with him on the night he died and that they had loved each other. Lu tells herself different versions of the truth on different days concerning the woman and Gabe.

It is interesting to note that at the end of the novel, the tradition of playing with the truth continues. Schumann's wife does not tell the truth so that his name can be cleared. Lu does not tell her father the truth about why AJ commits suicide. She does not tell her children about their father and the woman who claims to have loved him and she keeps the entire story from them by making sure that it is sealed for 100 years.



Styles

Point of View

The narrative is written from two distinctive points of view which appear to be based on the time period where the author wants the reader to place their focus. The sections dealing with Lu's childhood use Lu's first person perspective. This is appropriate given that it helps support the truth motif. Can one really know the whole truth? Lu is there when the events she tells happen. This is her life, yet none of what she thinks to be true is the real truth because it is based on what others tell her. She does not even know the meaning of what she sees and hears at times until later in life.

The narrative that takes place in the present uses a limited third person point of view from Lu's perspective. It is a more removed stance as is appropriate as it is following a murder investigation. It is well handled in that readers can sense Lu's desire to win and to be respected in her own right. She is intelligent and readers can follow her thought process as she pieces together the evidence.

The narrative uses the convention of using the past tense to reference the events in Lu's childhood and the present tense to focus on the current day events. There are times, however when Lu is talking about the past, but then references current events. When she does this, the tenses switch to the present as she does in the chapter, The Boy In The Bush.

One final point is that as Lu does not always understand what she sees and hears. Since she is talking about people she idolizes, her father and brother, she may not always be a reliable narrator.

Language and Meaning

As the the novel involves a murder case and many of the characters work in the legal profession, legal jargon appears in the narrative. It is not complicated language, however, and readers will not have a hard time following it.

As it is Lu who is telling the story, the language in general is sophisticated, using adjectives and and rich words to denote what is happening at the time. The word choice does not overpower the narrative, however, and readers will be able to determine the meaning of words they do not know by reading them in context.

Structure

The novel is divided into three parts and uses alternate chapters to describe events in the past and the present in the first two parts. Part 3 contains the solution of the mystery

and only takes place in the present as readers no longer need information about the past.

The structure serves to support the concept of truth that the narrative features as it shows how wrong Lu's concept of the truth is and how people have created versions of the truth that they can handle. All of this comes to light as the events of the present lead her to investigate the past.

It is also important to note that the chapters about the past have titles that relate to whatever happens in that chapter. The chapters that cover the present have dates as titles. This functions well with the point of view in these different chapters. The ones in the past are in the first person. Thus using titles that let readers know the basic content is like Lu telling the readers, "Now I am going to tell you about the time when..." The present day chapters are written in the third person. The point of view is more removed, and they cover the events surrounding the murder investigation. The dates give a logical flow as to what happened when, as a lawyer would want a witness to do.



Quotes

I was your wife. Good-bye to my life.

-- Narrator (Oh Brave New World That Has No Trees In It paragraph 26)

Importance: Lu imagines a TV show with this name. It represents what she imagines her mother felt when her father decided that they would live in Columbia. He managed to get around her objections by finding a house she liked and having the house moved there. As his wife, she had no choice, even though she did not want to live there. It says that being married is a death sentence for women. This idea is supported by the fact that she thinks her mother really did die four months after moving there.

if you make unity everything you never be happy

-- Lu's father (We're All In Columbia paragraph 53)

Importance: Lu's father tries to get her to understand that winning is not everything as he talks to her after going to the parents-teacher meeting. However, she does not listen to him and trying to win almost costs her everything she cares about.

Has anyone ever suggested that a rich man wanted to work simply because he had nothing else to do?

-- Narrator (January 9 paragraph 6)

Importance: This quote reflects one of the methods Fred had used to try to discredit her during the campaign for the state's attorney job. As she she was wealthy due to her inheritance from her husband, he had tried to say that she only wanted the job because she was bored. His statement shows sexism in the workplace. This is a topic that Lu is very sensitive about and it is one of the things that drives her competitiveness. She wants to prove that she is equal, if not better, than the men she works with and the ones in her family.

She had sent Andi to the bail review, an easy bone to toss.

-- Narrator (January 9 paragraph 16)

Importance: This quote highlights Lu's superior attitude and competitive nature. She knows that Andi would love to have her job and even though she is her friend, she is able to see her as someone she needs to manage when it comes to work. She gives her something to do that is not a threat to Lu, but will keep Andi satisfied.

He could just sit in the glow of his own saintly perfection.

-- Narrator (January 10 paragraph 4)

Importance: This quote personifies the image Lu has of her father. He is perfect and someone she looks up to. Still, as it is the answer to a joke and she thinks this while talking about her first murder case as the state's attorney, it has a sarcastic overtone,



implying that she resents being seen as having success because she following in his footsteps and not being good in her own right.

It's amazing how much of life comes into focus years later, how much memory can drift without context, then suddenly make sense.

-- Narrator (January 10 paragraph 41)

Importance: This quote references the fact that she remembers AJ and Noel smoking pot, but had not realized what was going on when she was young. This statement though acts to foreshadow future events, because there are other memories that she has which are also drifting that she soon will be able to make sense of.

You can never know the whole truth of anything. And if you could, you would wish you didn't.

-- Lu (Intemperance paragraph 19)

Importance: This quote foreshadows the ending of the story in which even as the story unravels, neither Lu nor the readers know the entire truth, but even what she finds out is something she wishes she had not and she never tells her father the truth about why A.J. commits suicide partly because he would not be able to handle it.

A SAHM. The very acronym looks like some dreary department within the Social Security Administration, or a form one has to fill out for benefits.

-- Narrator (February 1 paragraph 2)

Importance: This quote shows that Lu does not like the idea of being a stay-at-home mom. It is interesting to note that this is something Gabe would have liked. It shows that their marriage was not as perfect as she makes it sound earlier in the narration.

Now Lu wonders if her father worried that moving up through the political ranks would cost him that adjective, beloved.

-- Narrator (February 11 paragraph 3)

Importance: Lu is thinking this while she is at the woman's luncheon. The adjectives are referring to her father as part of her introduction. It shows how important her father's morals are to him and that one risks having to sacrifice them when they are in politics.

That's a bit disingenuous isn't it. Describing yourself as a single mother.

-- A Woman in the Audience at the Luncheon Lu Speaks At (February 11 paragraph 6)

Importance: A woman at the professional women's group luncheon says this to Lu. It shows that women are not even supported by other women. This woman is jealous of Lu because she is rich. The woman implies that Lu cannot relate to the world of the single mothers.

Our minds shape our memories to be something we can bear.

-- Narrator (April 8 paragraph 48)



Importance: This quote references how Lu believes Nita has come to believe her story about being raped. It touches on the motif of truth. How can you know what the truth is if memories can be shaped in such a way?

Maybe it's not really Jonnie at all, but Blind Lady Justice, the omnipresent conscience that insists on what is right and wrong, a conscience whose voice sounds strangely like Lu's father.

-- Narrator (April 10 paragraph 21)

Importance: Lu cannot get Nita out of her head. The fact that the voice of Blind Lady Justice sounds like her father's voice shows that he instilled a strong, moral impression in Lu.

This present, this day, this very moment we inhabit - it all will, be held accountable for the things it didn't know, didn't understand.

-- Lu (Miguel De Cervantes Is Called to the Inquisition, Or The Final Shoe Drops paragraph 31)

Importance: Lu is reflecting on her father's legacy. He did things that were morally right at the time that he did them. When people look back, they judge actions by their present standards, not by the standards of the time.