

The Gathering

Chapter Discussions

Ch. 1

Mom: It is a bit of a confusing tough read so I am going to have to reread things

Kate: Hmmm 🤔

Kate: I'm definitely on the same page as Mom. Am having to go back and reread as I go.

Mom: Very difficult read. Hard to make sense of some stuff, or is it just me?

Kate: Definitely not just you!

Ch. 2

Michelle: This quote from chapter 2, caught my eye: "If my mother committed a crime, there would be no witnesses - she is forgetfulness itself." What an interesting way to describe someone! Is she describing the fact that she is forgetful or is she describing the fact that she is forgettable?

Kate: I think both!

Michelle: A nick in the wall ... where Liam threw a knife at our mother ..."? She dropped that in pretty casually! I had to read that twice just to make sure!

Kate: "She would cry no matter what son he was. It occurs to me that we have got something wrong here, because I am the one who has lost something that can not be replaced. She has plenty more." - This is a crazy conclusion from Veronica in my opinion and really showcases a sense of resentment. I understand this as her implying that her mother's grief is more diffused and almost impersonal because she has so many sons. But couldn't the same be said about Veronica with the number of siblings she has? Veronica taking this moment to compare the severity of her grief, which she believes is more absolute than her mother's, is interesting. So far, Veronica comes across like the person she describes her mother to be (emotionally distant, cold) with an extra side of bitterness. I'm beginning to get a sense of her potential unreliability as a narrator.

Michelle: That's interesting Kate ... I took that line to mean that the mother would mourn a son (any son) ... almost implying a higher value on sons?

Kate: Yeah, I hadn't thought about it that way. I think right before this line, she talks about how much she would mourn each sibling, some more than others, which kind of lead me to read this as more comparative in a negative sense.

Ch. 4

Kate: "I lie down and look at the corrugated perspex roof, and I wonder how you might undo all these sheds and extensions, take the place back to the house it once was. If it would be possible to unbuild it all and start again." The house feels like a metaphor here for her family, built up in a way that no longer makes sense to her. Perhaps she wishes to erase the damage/trauma/mess she alludes to with her mother and the broader family. But can you ever really unbuild the past?

Kate: Veronica rejects emotional connection, and then resents its absence. Seems self-sabotage-y to me! She cuts off the call to avoid hearing "I love you" ("It's all right," I say. "Bye bye. Bye bye."), only to almost immediately complain that she spends her life "picking up for people who are too lazy even to love her." She's built a narrative where she's unappreciated (which is probably partly true), but when given real affection, she shuts it down. Maybe she doesn't believe it, or maybe she doesn't want to be comforted. Grief has given her an excuse to stop trying, and now she's left with anger and resentment.

Ellen: "There is something wonderful about a death, how everything shuts down, and all the ways you thought you were vital are not even vaguely important." This feels very true -- death puts so many things into perspective.

Ch. 5

Kate: Really did not enjoy the incestuous undertones of the end of this chapter 🙄

Judy: Agree Kate.

Ch. 6

Kate: "They don't really want me, I think. They are just putting up with me for a while." - It's giving fearful avoidant attachment style

Ch. 10

Ellen: I thought the description of the fly on Charlie's body was so evocative and shows the way someone can fixate on something minor to ignore the big thing right in front of them. Also, the description of Charlie's mustache as a living thing was so sad. And seeing the mustache still (not the toy that she perceived it as) was the moment that Veronica broke down and mourned his death (or rather, the "death" of the mustache).

Ch. 11

Kate: “How did you meet Daddy?’ says Emily, my rival. ‘How did you meet him?’” - very interesting to call your own daughter your rival.

Ch. 15

Kate: “Ada believed in very little. She believed in a clean house. But she did not believe, or ever suggest, that if you ate the pips an apple tree would grow out of your belly button. I don’t think she would believe in my picture of ‘the orphan Ada Merriman’; though it is technically true that her parents died before she was grown. Ada just didn’t do all that stuff” - Interesting to see the contrast of how these two characters react to their pasts. And, how Veronica seems to think that Ada’s disinterest in it has fueled her own.

Kate: “Because if I look to where my imagining started, it was at Ada’s sink, in Broadstone.”

Ch. 16

Kate: “ Maybe that was her mistake. She thought she could choose. She thought she could marry someone she liked and be happy with him, and have happy children. She did not realise that every choice is fatal. For a woman like Ada, every choice is an error, as soon as it is made” - would be interested to get people’s take on what this is implying?

Ch. 17

Michelle: Ok ... no one else is really commenting ... but I find myself feeling oddly uncomfortable. I am having a hard time distinguishing between Veronica’s actual memories and perhaps what she has made up in her mind over the years. I have a real sense of foreboding ... although I cannot explain why.

Kate: Same!

Ch. 19

Ellen: Thought the last sentence of the chapter was hilarious, “He [Liam] also liked three Roman saints with funny names who were turned upside down and had milk and mustard put up their noses, which killed them, apparently. It didn’t seem to bother Kitty, as I recall.”

Ch. 21

Kate: “All women are heartless because they are desired” - Wow, very powerful sentence, I think. The idea that women are cruel when they reject a man’s desires rather than just expressing their autonomy. Especially after reading so many pages about Nugent and his insistence on continuing to exist in Ada’s life. I’ve thought his prominent presence after Ada

and Charlie were married was strange, and I'm still not quite over the weird, incestuous allusions that were made surrounding his relationship with his sister earlier in the book.

Michelle: I went from finding him a sympathetic figure when we first met him to being completely repulsed by him.

Kate: Agreed!!

Ch. 39

Kate: I felt like I kind of got a handle on the style by the end and it was a bit more enjoyable, but still. It was a painful, arduous read. I'm not sure what I'll take away from it. I was expecting to read more about the family's dynamics, and I suppose I got that to an extent. But it was all so vague and difficult to follow that I didn't even enjoy those bits. I just felt like I was stuck in a deeply miserable, grieving women's mind, and not in the fun, interesting to dissect way. Just in a way that made me miserable too. In the end, all there is left to do is apologize for suggesting this book :/

Michelle: First rule of Fight Club (sorry ... Book Club 😊) - no apologizing! We all voted. Not every book is going to be a home run!

Kate: 😊