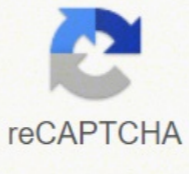




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## Big little lies book ending explained

On Sunday night, Big Little Lies capped off its limited seven episode run with a big little finale. After a season packed with palatial views, heartbreaking realism, and plenty of high-stakes drama, the HBO series finally unmasked the mysterious murderer of Monterey. The killer shouldn't have come as a surprise to those who read the Liane Moriarty novel the series is based on, but there were plenty of other differences between the Big Little Lies ending and the book. **Caution:** Major spoilers for the Big Little Lies finale ahead. For the most part, the show's final moments stayed faithful to its source material. First, it's revealed that Celeste's son, Max, is actually the one who's been bullying Amabella — implying that Perry's violent behavior has trickled down to his sons. Later, Perry inadvertently learns of Celeste's plans to leave him. She initially manages to slip away unscathed, but he eventually tracks her down at Trivia Night in a desperate rage. It's there that things finally descend into the chaotic, fatal confrontation that's been flickering throughout the season. In a rapid avalanche of events, Renata, Madeline, Celeste, and Jane all gather at the top of the stairs, where Jane suddenly realizes that Perry is the man who raped her. He charges the women, attacking Celeste in an unbridled frenzy, and then Bonnie sprints forward, pushing Perry to his death. In the show, her motivations aren't entirely clear — marking one of several changes between the book and the show.1. Bonnie's BackstoryIn the novel, Bonnie's father was a domestic abuser, and watching Perry assault Celeste dredged up painful childhood memories. The show, however, skirts over her motivations, making it seem more like a heat-of-the-moment response than a deep-seated, visceral reaction. In an interview with The Hollywood Reporter, director Jean-Marc Vallée explained that they felt her upbringing wasn't critical to understanding the story. "We had a line from the detective and it was too much explaining. We decided not even to shoot the line. It's not about that. Whether or not she has been abused, she is going to push this motherf\*cker. He's beating the sh\*t out of four women. This guy is f\*cking strong. And then the smallest guy pushes him, not to kill him, but the accident happens. To give it a reason and justify that because she was abused and had a thing against men, it's not about that."2. Jane's Reaction To PerryIn the book, Jane verbally acknowledges Perry as her rapist. He tries to dismiss her, but she insists she's sure that they've met before. "Except you said your name was Saxon Banks," she asserts. But HBO's version approaches the realization with deafening silence. As Perry approaches the women in pursuit of Celeste, Jane's face contorts into a look of sudden recognition, and a mere exchange of knowing glances is all it takes for Madeline and Celeste to put together the pieces.3. The SettingAs described in the novel, Trivia Night takes place in a large, glass-enclosed room on the school's second story, and Perry falls to his death from a balcony just outside. But, in the series, the event unfolds outdoors, with Perry meeting his demise by plunging down the same caution-taped staircase that was pictured several times throughout the show.4. The WitnessesIn the book, Ed and Nathan were among the witnesses to Perry's death, but, in the televised version, it seems fitting that only the women are present. It's a powerful testament to their strength that they take him down alone.5. Renata and GordonThe novel also featured a story line in which Renata discovers her husband, Gordon (named Geoff in the book), was sleeping with their nanny, and then Gordon finds out the nanny was also having an affair with Harper's husband, Graeme. Adding to Trivia Night's anarchy, Gordon and Graeme come to blows and crash through the event space's glass encasing just as Perry tumbles over the balcony. As a result, Renata leaves her husband and decides to move to London with Amabella. None of that was present in the show, but, with a slimmer format, it makes sense that Big Little Lies would trim its focus.6. Abigail's Virginity AuctionIn the book, an 83-year-old man from Sioux Falls, South Dakota, named Larry Fitzgerald writes to Abigail saying that he'll donate \$100,000 to Amnesty International if she closes her virginity auction immediately. Madeline suspects that Larry Fitzgerald is actually Celeste, but it's never confirmed. The series streamlines Abigail's narrative by simply having her shut down the site herself, likely because there was limited screen time and anything more may have cluttered the ending.7. The AftermathThe show ends shortly after the turmoil of Trivia Night, giving viewers one last look at the women gazing across the beach before rolling the final credits. But the book, of course, lends a little more context to what their lives look like post-Perry. She moves into her new apartment as planned, returns to her career as a lawyer, and commits herself to reclaiming her voice and sharing her experience. Elsewhere, the women cover for Bonnie, but she ultimately turns herself in and receives 200 hours of community service. Most of these shifts appear to be due to the show's truncated format. With only seven episodes, there simply wasn't enough time to squeeze in a full novel. But the story didn't suffer: Big Little Lies was just as affecting, heartfelt, and satisfying as ever, whether you read the book beforehand or not. This post contains spoilers for the Big Little Lies Season 2 finale. Did Big Little Lies just deliver an ambiguous ending for the story of thee Monterey Five, or did we just end Season 2 on a cliffhanger?HBO's star-studded adaptation of Liane Moriarty's novel was, in 2017, originally pitched to audiences as a limited series, before its controversial renewal. So while its sophomore season concluded with the weight of finality—and, it should be pointed out, the same way Moriarty's novel did—it would perhaps be unwise to assume this is definitely the end for the series.Sunday's episode did, however, offer several hints that its group of wealthy, shellshocked protagonists have finally found the closure they need—even if, as in real life, the journey to get there was more than a little messy.As of the finale, each of our protagonists is ready to start over with a clean slate, having confessed their darkest truths. Celeste wins custody of her sons after playing a video of the abuse she endured throughout her seemingly perfect marriage to a courtroom full of strangers and loved ones. Madeline and Ed Mackenzie decide to reconcile, renewing their vows with clearer eyes. Bonnie admits to Nathan that she doesn't love him, and perhaps never did. Renata, in a characteristically dramatic moment, destroys her philandering man-child of a husband's train set, shouting, "No more bullshit. No more lies."With those truths exposed, all of these women—together with a newly confident Jane Chapman, who finally feels secure enough to sleep with her new boyfriend—gather in the finale's last moments to kill the lie they all share: filing into the Monterey police station together, presumably to confess to their roles in Perry's murder.That final moment provokes an obvious question: What happens now? HBO might be tempted to answer it with another season of Big Little Lies, although off-screen tumult might make that prospect fraught. But judging solely by what occurred on-screen, the end of Season 2 feels like a natural conclusion for this story. It's like Ed said as he offered Madeline the olive branch of a vow renewal: "This is not some kind of tidy, put-a-ribbon-on-it, let bygones be bygones ending." Real life seldom provides those, and it seems Big Little Lies could forego doing so as well.The journey to reach this conclusion has been a bit chaotic. Season 1 of Big Little Lies was a suspenseful murder mystery, crafted to keep audiences—at least, those who had not read Moriarty's book—guessing about who had been killed, and who was responsible. Season 2 went broader, calling into question the nature of responsibility. Was Perry responsible for his own abusive nature, or should we blame Mary Louise, who once blamed him for his brother's death in a car accident? Celeste makes clear in court that Perry's behavior stemmed from Mary Louise's mothering: "That man that you saw on that tape, that was because of your parenting," she told her mother-in-law in court.But in the end, Celeste also encouraged her sons to hug their grandmother after she won full custody of them—suggesting, perhaps, that she's not entirely sure what to make of Mary Louise's behavior, or "responsibility" for her own actions. Bonnie also told her own abusive mother she loved her, and her mother returned the emotional sentiment just as she flatlined. And Ed forgave Madeline for an act of infidelity.All of these people have made poor decisions—but the series stops short of vilifying them, of defining their "responsibility" in two-dimensional terms. Instead, it seems to suggest that in all of our lives, we will play the role of both victim and culprit—we will all help, and we will all do harm. Even after exposing her husband's reprehensible cruelty to the world, Celeste still spends some of her final moments of the finale basking in the memory of his kindness as a father. This does not absolve him of his monstrous acts, both toward her and Jane. It does not undo the damage he did to so many lives. But in washing her hands of the lie, Celeste does find her own form of closure.As Celeste tells Madeline at one point, "The Monterey Five, whatever we call ourselves—the lie is the friendship." In confessing to Perry's murder, all of these women all might together find their first steps toward inner peace—or they might become victims of a system that's not always capable of translating such truths into just outcomes. But the series seems to argue that whatever comes of this confession will be beside the point; instead, this season ends on the message that there's more to be gained from vulnerability than from insulating oneself with a fabricated projection of the "ideal," whatever that might be.More Great Stories from Vanity Fair— The scoop on Midsommar's totally wild sex scene— A new Elvis biopic casts its King— A toast to When Harry Met Sally, the romantic comedy for grown-ups— The best books of the year, so far— The media reflects on its actions in the decades-long Jeffrey Epstein sagaLooking for more? Sign up for our daily Hollywood newsletter and never miss a story.



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