A Thousand Acres

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF JANE SMILEY

Jane Smiley was born in Los Angeles, but grew up in Missouri. She studied English literature at Vassar College, and graduated with a B.A. in 1971. Smiley spent the rest of the decade obtaining a number of degrees in literature and creative writing: an M.A. in 1975, an MFA in 1976, and a Ph.D. in 1978, all from the University of Iowa, arguably the most prestigious school for creative writing in the United States. Smiley published her first novel, *Blind Barn*, in 1980, when she was 31 years old. Smiley had begun working on the novel while she was an MFA student at Iowa; it was a critical success, but not a commercial one. The same was the case for Smiley's next three novels, *At Paradise Gate* (1991), *Duplicate Keys* (1984), and *The Greenlanders* (1988). Smiley's greatest critical and commercial success was *A Thousand Acres*, published in 1991. This novel won both the Pulitzer Prize and the National Book Critics Circle Award, two of the three most prestigious prizes for fiction offered to American novelists (the third is the National Book Award, for which Smiley has been nominated on several occasions). Since 1991, Smiley has published 11 novels, four nonfiction books, and five children's books. She resides in California.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

A Thousand Acres is mostly set in the late 1970s, when Jimmy Carter was the president of the United States. Carter was seen by many as an incompetent, ineffectual leader, and perhaps the novel's themes of impotence and infertility, and its frustrated tone are meant to mirror the famous "malaise" of the Carter era. The novel also alludes to some of the milestones of the feminist movement of the late 50s and 60s, led by activists like Gloria Steinem and Betty Friedan. Thanks to the success of the women's rights movement, women in the late 70s had more opportunities for financial and sexual independence than their mothers, even if they continued to battle sexism and the "soft" bigotry of low expectations.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

A Thousand Acres is designed as a modernization of William Shakespeare's 1606 play *King Lear*, sometimes called the greatest play (or even the greatest work of literature) ever written. Almost every major character in the novel has a direct counterpart in *King Lear*; where Shakespeare tells the story of an elderly king who divides up his kingdom between three daughters, one of whom refuses the gift, Smiley tells the story of a powerful farmer who divides up his land between three daughters, one of whom refuses to accept. Smiley was also influenced by Pearl Buck's 1931 opus *The Good Earth*, which is set in Chinese farmland, and follows a family across multiple generations. While the plot of Smiley's book has little to do with Buck's, their lyrical descriptions of soil and land are remarkably similar. Finally, Smiley has praised the novels of Willa Cather, particularly *My Antonia* (1918). Cather's books are frequently set in Midwest farming communities (*My Antonia* takes place mostly in Nebraska, for instance), and tackle many of the same themes as *A Thousand Acres*, including gender dynamics and inheritance.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** A Thousand Acres
- **Where Written:** California
- **When Published:** October 23, 1991
- **Literary Period:** 90s realism
- **Genre:** Domestic realism, American novel
- **Setting:** Zebulon Country (Midwestern United States)
- **Climax:** The hearing
- **Antagonist:** There are many: Larry Cook, Ginny Cook, Rose Cook, and Jess Clark could each be considered the true villain of the book.
- **Point of View:** First person (Ginny)

EXTRA CREDIT

Hollywood does it again: *A Thousand Acres* was both one of the most critically claimed novels of the early 1990s, and a sweeping family epic. In other words, the movie adaptation was inevitable. It came in 1997, starring Jason Robards, Michelle Pfeiffer, and Jessica Lange. Despite the all-star cast and excellent story, the film bombed critically and commercially, making back less than a third of its budget. The famous critic Roger Ebert wrote, "The screenplay is based on a novel by Jane Smiley, unread by me, which won the Pulitzer Prize, which means that either the novel or the prize has been done a great injustice." (Spoiler: it's the novel.)

A woman of many interests: Jane Smiley's most famous novels are rich and beautifully written, and often revolve around a family in the American Midwest. But some of her most interesting books haven't been novels at all. In 2010, she published *The Man Who Invented the Computer*, a biography of John Vincent Atanasoff, the man often credited with inventing the digital computer. She's also published four other works of nonfiction, including a widely praised biography of Charles

Dickens.

PLOT SUMMARY

Larry Cook is a prominent Midwestern farmer with three daughters, Ginny (the eldest, and the narrator of the novel), Rose, and Caroline, the youngest. Ginny is married to Ty, a farmer, Rose is married to Pete, a musician from another state, and Caroline, the only one of the three daughters who attended college, is soon to be married to Frank. Rose and Ginny live on their father's land, while Caroline lives in the city of Des Moines. Rose has been in and out of the hospital for breast cancer treatment, and will have to go undergo regular tests for the rest of her life.

As he gets older, Larry comes up with a plan to avoid paying death taxes or property taxes on his land: he'll pass on his land to his three daughters while he's still alive. When Larry announces his plan, Ginny and Rose are in favor of the idea, while Caroline is skeptical of it. Larry, a drunk, taciturn man, spitefully tells Caroline to get out of his house. He cuts Caroline out of the will, leaving Rose and Ginny in control of his hugely valuable farmland.

Around the time that Larry divides up his land, Jess Clark, the son of Harold Clark, Larry's friend and rival, comes back to town after years spent traveling the world. Jess, the child of Harold and the brother of Loren Clark, is a magnetic, charismatic young man, who fled to Canada rather than fight in the Vietnam War. He immediately charms Ginny.

With Larry's property now in the hands of Ginny and Rose, and with Caroline married to Frank and practicing law in Des Moines, life moves on. Ginny and Rose have big plans for their land; they want to convert it into a modern, up-to-date farm. Ginny and Rose take turns cooking meals for their aging father. As time goes on, though, Larry becomes increasingly morose, to the point where he ignores his children altogether. Ginny is reminded that Caroline was always Larry's favorite child. Jess ingratiates himself with Ty, Pete, Rose, and Ginny, and before long the family has established a fun tradition: **Monopoly** night. However, Ginny and Rose continue to worry about Larry, who increasingly keeps to himself and seems bitter at his children.

Tension builds as word of Larry's increasingly volatile behavior reaches Rose and Ginny. Larry drinks heavily, and on one occasion drives all the way to Des Moines and back. Rose, who's tougher on her father than Ginny, suggests that Larry has Alzheimer's disease. After months of silence, Ginny calls Caroline, who accuses her of stealing Larry's property and only pretending to be reluctant to take it off his hands.

Jess takes long walks with Ginny, and Ginny finds herself falling in love with him. Ginny opens up to Jess about her inability to have children: she's had five miscarriages in the past, though Ty only knows about three of them. The family learns that Larry has been in a car accident: he was driving while drunk, and hurt himself. After the accident, Larry becomes even more morose and unwilling to talk to his children. Soon after the accident, Ginny finds herself fantasizing about Jess, and eventually they have sex.

One night, Pete discovers that his pickup truck is missing, and deduces that Larry has driven off with it. He and Ty track down Larry—when they bring Larry back home (in the middle of a storm), Larry calls Rose and Ginny "whores" and accuses them of stealing his property and not taking care of him. He then stubbornly walks away from them, out into the rain. Late that night, Rose opens up to Ginny about her past: after their mother (Mrs. Cook) died, when Rose was a teenager, Larry raped her repeatedly. Ginny can't remember anything of the kind happening to her.

Ginny and Rose proceed with their farming, borrowing lots of money to expand their land's capability. Ginny and Rose try to confront Larry about his abuse at the annual church potluck, but at the potluck Larry and Harold (with whom Larry's been staying) criticize Rose and Ginny for being bad daughters, and the entire community begins to turn against Rose and Ginny. Soon after the potluck, Ginny returns to Larry's house, which is now empty, and remembers being raped by Larry—a memory she's repressed for most of her adult life. She realizes that she and Rose always protected Caroline from Larry's advances: by offering themselves up, they ensured that Larry never tried to rape his youngest daughter.

Jess becomes increasingly distant from Ginny, and Harold has a bad accident: he sprays himself with ammonia and ends up blinding himself. Soon after, Rose and Ginny receive word that Larry (with help from Caroline) is suing them to reclaim his property. Rose and Ginny, along with their husbands Pete and Ty, hire a lawyer, Jean Cartier, who advises them to be "perfect" in the way they run their farmland. Meanwhile, Ty discovers that Ginny had a miscarriage that she hid from him, and a distance grows between them.

Soon after, Pete has a drunken argument with Harold Clark, drives off into the night, and ends up crashing into a pond and drowning. In the following days, Ginny learns from Rose why Pete was arguing with Harold: he'd learned from Rose that Rose is having an affair with Jess. Ginny is jealous and offended that Rose would "steal" Jess from her. Secretly, she finds hemlock, a powerful poison, and prepares a **jar of poisoned sausages**, which she gives to Rose in the hopes that she'll poison herself.

The hearing regarding Larry's land proceeds, and Larry is put on the witness stand. He's clearly senile, and fails to convince the judge that his case has any grounds. The judge sides with Rose and Ginny: their contract is valid, and they own Larry's land. After the hearing, Ginny is afraid that her family has been torn apart forever. Impulsively, she tells Ty she's leaving him and moves to Saint Paul, where she takes a job as a waitress and

never moves back to her home.

Years pass, with Ginny receiving occasional letters from Rose (who, to her confusion, hasn't died from the sausages yet). One day, years later, Ginny receives a visit from Ty, who, he explains, is moving to Texas. Farming the land has been hard work, and the farm has fallen deep into debt. Ty comes to ask Ginny for a divorce, but she never explicitly agrees to it.

Then, years later, Ginny learns that Rose is back in the hospital, very sick. She visits Rose and learns that Rose will die of cancer soon. After Ty's move to Texas, Rose has become the sole owner of Larry's old farmland. Ginny takes care of Rose's daughters, Linda and Pamela, but she refuses to reconcile with Rose, even on Rose's deathbed. She does, however, tell Rose about her plan to poison her. Rose is oddly uninterested in the plan—she tells Ginny that Jess left her long ago, and that Jess isn't the good, charismatic man Ginny thinks he is.

Rose dies, leaving her property to Caroline and Ginny. Ginny and Caroline reunite in their father's old house, and Ginny considers telling Caroline about how Larry used to rape her and Rose, but chooses not to. As the novel comes to an end, Ginny finds the jar of sausages, still in Rose's cellar, and throws it away. She takes care of Linda and Pamela after their mother's death, but continues to feel a profound sense of loneliness.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Ginny Cook Smith – The protagonist and narrator of the novel, daughter of Larry Cook and wife of Tyler Smith. Ginny is a frustrated farmer's daughter, full of repressed desires and thwarted ambitions. Along with Rose Cook Lewis, her sister, she accepts Larry's inheritance: his farmland. Over the course of the novel, she becomes closer to her family, especially to Rose, but begins to drift away from Rose when they compete for the same man, Jess Clark. Ginny also remembers and then contends with her traumatic childhood, during which her own father repeatedly raped her. Ginny's path in the novel is depressing and sometimes nihilistic: she's blessed with her father's inheritance, but a mixture of greed, trauma, jealousy, and vengefulness lead her to break off all relations with her husband, sisters, and father. By the end of the novel, she's still a prisoner of her own traumatic past. Ginny corresponds to the character Goneril in *King Lear*.

Rose Cook Lewis – The daughter of Larry Cook, and wife of Pete Lewis. Like her sister, Ginny Cook Smith, Rose is an ambitious, often greedy woman, but Rose is more open about her feelings than Ginny is. While she loves Ginny and Caroline, and often looked out for Caroline over the years, her defining emotion is hatred for her father. Rose remembers that Larry would abuse her when she was a teenager; she'd often encourage him to have sex with her in order to protect Caroline, her little sister. Over the course of the novel, Rose gradually gives in to her desire to get revenge on Larry. At the same time, Rose must contend with breast cancer, which eventually ends her life. She's driven apart from Ginny over her love for Jess Clark, and by the end of the novel she's permanently estranged from the rest of her family. Rose corresponds to the character Regan in *King Lear*.

Caroline Cook – The youngest of Larry Cook's daughters, and her father's favorite. Caroline is the only Cook daughter to go to college and (it's suggested) the only daughter not to be sexually abused by Larry. Largely as a result, Caroline grows up much closer to Larry than either Rose or Ginny, and after Larry proposes signing away his property to his children, Caroline is the only one who has second thoughts—so that in the end, Larry spitefully cuts her out of the will. Over the course of the novel, Caroline continues to love her father and hate her sisters for, in her view, cheating Larry out of his own money and land. As the novel ends, Caroline is still unaware that her father is a rapist. Caroline corresponds to the character Cordelia in *King Lear*.

Laurence Cook – The patriarch of the Cook family, and the father of Rose, Caroline, and Ginny, Larry Cook is a proud, intimidating farmer who's risen to own one thousand acres of fertile farmland. As a younger man, Larry was suave, charismatic, and a shrewd businessman—he wasn't above taking advantage of his neighbors when he saw the opportunity to buy their land for cheap. As he enters old age, Larry decides to sign over his property to his three daughters, though he cuts Caroline out of the will when she questions his decision. Over the course of the book, we learn that Larry repeatedly raped his two eldest daughters after his wife, Mrs. Cook, died. Larry's horrible crimes lie at the heart of the novel: he has traumatized his daughters well into their adulthood. While Larry's Shakespearean counterpart, King Lear, was portrayed as a hubristic but ultimately sympathetic character, Larry is arguably the villain of the novel: he embodies the violent misogyny and sexism against which the Cook daughters battle in different ways.

Harold Clark – Larry Cook's neighbor and friendly rival, and father to Loren Clark and Jess Clark. Harold Clark is a seemingly easygoing, eccentric old farmer, but on closer inspection, he's surprisingly shrewd and perceptive. Over the years, he's maintained a steady rivalry with Larry, so that both men make a show of buying expensive equipment and property in order to outdo the other. Harold, Jess claims, projects an image of idiosyncrasy in order to disguise his true, serious nature. And yet, unlike his son, Jess, he can't stand change or uncertainty of any kind. After Larry turns against his daughters, Harold is one of the first to take Larry's side, revealing his own sexist beliefs in the process. Harold corresponds to the character of Gloucester in *King Lear*.

Jess Clark – The son of Harold Clark, and the brother of Loren

Clark, Jess Clark is one of the most ambiguous characters in the novel. Unlike others in his community, Jess seems relatively uninterested in farming; as a young man, he runs away from home, and ends up traveling around the world, partly for his own interest and partly to avoid fighting in the Vietnam War. When he returns home, the charismatic, mischievous Jess soon begins an affair with Ginny Cook Smith, and convinces her that he's a good, honest man. Later, Jess also begins an affair with Rose Cook Lewis, leading Ginny to try to kill her own sister out of jealousy. Jess is the most charismatic character in the book, and yet he also seems to be a manipulative, greedy man—in the end, he abandons Rose as well, leaving her all alone on her vast property. Jess corresponds to the character Edmund in *King Lear*.

Loren Clark – The son of Harold Clark and the brother of Jess Clark, Loren is a minor character in the text, in spite of his close ties to Jess, Harold, and Larry. Unlike his brother, Jess, Loren is a faithful, hardworking son, and spends all his time helping his father work the farm. Loren corresponds to the character Edgar in *King Lear*.

Mrs. Cook – While Larry Cook's wife never appears in the novel, her presence hangs over every page. In flashbacks, we learn that Mrs. Cook was a meek, submissive woman who always gave Larry what he wanted. Mrs. Cook, according to Rose Cook Lewis, is the reason why Larry is so stubborn and ornery: she never challenged him, and encouraged him to get used to having everything "his way."

Tyler "Ty" Smith – The husband of Ginny Cook Smith, Ty Smith is a hardworking, ambitious farmer. Over the course of the book, his allegiances are never entirely clear: there are times when he seems to share his wife's dreams for developing their land, but there are also times when he seems to agree with Larry and Caroline Cook that Rose and Ginny have been treating their father poorly. Overall Ty is presented as a good husband, though Ginny keeps some of her miscarriages a secret from him and cheats on him with Jess Clark. When Ginny runs away from the farm, Ty stays behind to try and become a hog farmer. Ty corresponds to the character Albany in *King Lear*.

Pete Lewis – The husband of Rose Cook Lewis, Pete is a talented musician, and not a native of Rose's community. As an outsider among stoic farmers, he's often treated like a mere "tourist," even after he settles down with Rose. Though he seems charismatic and friendly in general, Pete also drinks a lot and beats Rose sometimes, to the point where he breaks her arm—and after this his abuse supposedly stops. Pete dies—whether by accident or suicide we never know—when he learns that Rose is having an affair with Jess Clark. Pete corresponds to the character Cornwall in *King Lear*.

Marvin Carson – The community's most prominent banker, who arranges for Tyler Smith and Ginny Cook Smith to borrow money and develop their new farmland. Much as the Fool's comic status in *King Lear* allowed him to speak his mind about Lear while the other characters flattered him, Marv's financial independence and neutrality sometimes allows him to speak the truth about Larry and the Cook sisters while other characters just try to tell them what they want to hear. Marvin corresponds to the character of the Fool in *King Lear*.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Frank Rasmussin – Caroline Cook's husband in Des Moines, who never appears in person in the novel. Frank corresponds to the character of the King of France in *King Lear*.

Henry Dodge – The community's pastor.

Ken La Salle – The community's resident lawyer, who represents Larry Cook in court when he tries to sue his two eldest daughters. Ken corresponds to the character of Kent in *King Lear*.

Cal Ericson – One of Larry Cook's neighbors, who ended up selling his land to Larry and moving far away.

Mrs. Ericson – Cal Ericson's wife.

Ruthie Ericson – Cal Ericson's daughter, and Ginny Cook Smith's only real friend as a child.

Alison – a woman to whom Jess Clark was engaged.

Mary Livingstone – An elderly woman who knows Larry Cook's family.

Mel Scott – A poor farmer who was forced to sell his land to Larry Cook.

Dollie – A cashier in town.

Dinah – An antiques store owner.

Nelda – The owner of a café in town.

Jean Cartier – The lawyer who represents Ginny Cook Smith and Rose Cook Lewis in court against their father.

Pamela – Rose Cook Lewis's daughter, beloved by Ginny and raised by her after Rose's death.

Linda – Rose Cook Lewis's other daughter, beloved by Ginny and raised by her after Rose's death.

John Cook – Larry Cook's father, and one of the founders of the Cook farm.

Edith Cook – Larry Cook's mother.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

KING LEAR AND GOOD VS. EVIL

It's no secret that *A Thousand Acres* is based on William Shakespeare's famous tragedy *King Lear*. Where Shakespeare's work is about an elderly king who tries to divide up his property between his three daughters, Regan, Goneril, and Cordelia, Smiley's novel is about an elderly farmer, Larry Cook, who tries to divide up his property between his three daughters, Rose, Ginny, and Caroline. There are long passages in *A Thousand Acres* that are intended as homages to famous speeches from *King Lear*, and many of the secondary and even smaller characters have direct counterparts in *Lear*. It's certainly important to keep the parallels between Smiley's novel and Shakespeare's play in mind while reading *A Thousand Acres*. But Smiley's goal isn't just to re-tell *King Lear* in a modern setting. Rather, she uses the original play as a source that she then plays with and revises, offering her own interpretation and critique of Shakespeare's themes.

Lear, as its title suggests, puts the king at its center and explores its story around that central focus. *A Thousand Acres*, with a title that focuses on the land being divided rather than on any one character, takes a broader view, and in particular spends more time on the daughters' side of the story: Ginny (the counterpart to Goneril, who in *Lear* is power-hungry and greedy above all else) is the narrator of the novel. By focusing on Ginny's perspective, the novel presents her with real complexity. It isn't that she's presented as purely virtuous or good in the novel – she's at times power-hungry, greedy, and vengeful, to name a few traits – but the novel does present her choices and actions within a broader context, and in doing so shows how so-called "evil" women might themselves be the victims of societal evils like sexism and abuse.

More broadly speaking, Smiley retells *Lear* in such a way that the characters in *Lear* who seemed more overtly evil (such as Edmund, Goneril, and Regan) are now presented as neither entirely sympathetic nor completely evil (Ginny, Jess Clark, Rose). Ginny initially seems to be a decent, moral person, and believes herself to be a decent person even after her actions grow increasingly greedy and cruel, making it more difficult for readers to condemn or condone these actions. Even a character like Larry Cook, who's guilty of an unambiguously evil crime, rape, may himself be the victim of other people's evil deeds later in life. In general, *A Thousand Acres* uses its *Lear* allusions to suggest that labels like "good" and "evil" often can't be so firmly applied in the real world.

WOMEN, SEXUAL ABUSE, AND FERTILITY

In *King Lear*, female characters tend to fall into two camps: purely good (such as Cordelia, the "good" daughter") and purely evil (Regan and Goneril, the "bad" daughters). It's the men of *Lear* – Lear, Edmund, Edgar, even Gloucester and Kent – who get the most time on stage, and who have the most psychological depth. As Smiley has stated in interviews and essays, part of her intention in writing *One Thousand Acres* was to offer the *Lear* story from a female perspective, a perspective that didn't have as firm a place in literature during Shakespeare's lifetime. Further, by setting *Lear* in late-1970s America, Smiley is able to examine the lives of women in a more recognizably contemporary environment that offers them more economic and sexual freedom. At the same time, Smiley shows how modern women are still burdened by sexism, and how the promise of being able to "have it all" is more perilous than it appears.

Thanks to feminist activists of the 1950s and 60s, women in America in the 1970s –such as Ginny, Rose, and Caroline – had more social, economic, and sexual freedom than their parents enjoyed. Caroline is a successful attorney, and Larry Cook entrusts his valuable farmland to Ginny and Rose. And yet in spite of the advantages women enjoy in the novel, their actions and decisions are still greeted with skepticism and often ridicule by the mostly male-dominated society around them. At one point Larry calls his daughters "bitches" and "whores" and says that he would have been better off with sons—proving that even as gender equality has improved, it is by no means complete, and women continue to suffer from deep-seeded misogyny and sexism.

Arguably the most important example of how misogyny continues to shape the female characters' lives is sexual abuse. Halfway through the novel, we learn that Larry Cook is an incestuous rapist: after the death of his wife, Larry began to sleep with his two eldest daughters, Ginny and Rose. Even though Larry's sexual abuse ended a long time ago, Ginny and Rose are still traumatized by their pasts—a fact that is both a realistic depiction of most sexual trauma and one that can be read as symbolizing the way that America's misogynist, disempowering, and often violent past – in which women were essentially the property of first their fathers and then their husbands – continues to limit modern women's freedom and happiness, even when they are, by all appearances, free to do whatever they choose.

Smiley further explores the relationship between female freedom and misogyny through the concept of fertility, both literal and metaphorical. On a literal level, the novel examines the fertility of the human body – a woman's ability to have children. Smiley parallels female fertility with the fertility of farmland itself; "fertile" land is capable of bearing healthy crops, and fertile women are capable of bearing children. After their father gives him their land, Ginny and Rose are expected to be "fertile" in both senses of the word: they're expected to be good farmers, and, because of their culture's sexist assumptions, they're also expected to bear children and be good mothers to them. Indeed, not only are Rose and Ginny expected to have

children, but they also expect it of themselves because they've internalized society's norms and ideas. Ginny, for instance, is convinced that her own life will be incomplete until she has children of her own.

Smiley also shows how the two senses of "fertility" can conflict with one another. Ginny, who's had five miscarriages, suspects that the farmland itself keeps her infertile. The very water she drinks is tainted with chemicals like DDT to ward off pests — what's good for fertile crops is bad for her body. Put simply, Ginny not only struggles to be a good farmer and a good mother, but the novel suggests that the effort to be a good farmer (to excel at work) is sometimes at odds with the effort to be a good mother. By the same token, Smiley implies that the literal, financial freedom of women in the 70s (and even today) has been undercut by persistent sexist ideas, particularly the idea that a woman's purpose in life is to have a baby. The women of *A Thousand Acres* are expected to "be both" — to be successful, "modern" women with jobs and businesses, but also traditionally submissive, childbearing wives — even when doing both is almost impossible.

INHERITANCE, LAND, AND MEMORY

A Thousand Acres studies inheritance: the passage of property, especially from one generation to the next. Sometimes, the "property" in question is literal: as the novel begins, Larry Cook signs the papers that turn over his thousand acres of farmland to his two eldest daughters, Ginny and Rose. But in reality, the characters' most importance inheritance is abstract: the memories and influences passed on from parents to children, and the way such memories and influences are often inextricably connected to concrete inheritances like land and money.

The tragedy of Ginny and Rose's lives is that they want to inherit certain aspects of their father's legacy, such as his land and his money, but *don't* want to inherit other aspects of his legacy (they don't want to remember their father's cruelty and abusiveness—in fact, they don't really want to remember their father at all). Ginny and Rose talk about moving away from their farmland altogether and becoming waitresses in Saint Paul, thus freeing themselves from the memory of their father. But because of Ginny and Rose's strong desire for wealth and independence, and their sense of having a legitimate claim to their father's property, they remain on and take over running the farm.

Because Ginny and Rose choose to inherit their father's property, they must also "inherit" memories of their father, traumatic though some of the memories are. As the novel goes on, Ginny and Rose try to maintain their new property and forget about their father, but nothing they try works. Their property is so closely connected to Larry's life and career that to live on the farm is to remember Larry. Smiley demonstrates the link between Larry and his property throughout her novel, most directly in the scene where Ginny walks through her father's house; the sight of specific rooms, especially her own, triggers her to vividly remember her father raping her. In the end, Ginny seems to realize the futility of her struggle: as long as she keeps her father's old property, her father will be "with" her. Her decision, toward the end of the novel, to leave the farm and move to the city suggests that her desire to be free of the traumatic familial legacy, her family's emotional inheritance, outweighs her desire for the potential wealth that ownership of the farm, her physical inheritance, offers.

REVENGE

Throughout the second half of the novel, Ginny and Rose are motivated by the desire to get revenge on their father for abusing them when they were teenagers. Perhaps surprisingly, Ginny and Rose don't try to get their revenge on Larry by simply telling people about his crimes—as Rose says, their vengeance must be more personal and "total." Instead, Ginny and Rose attempt to get revenge by reshaping the farmland Larry gives them and by treating Larry with condescension and contempt; in short, rubbing Larry's face in his own powerlessness after he has given up his land.

Ginny and Rose's attempts to humiliate their father illustrate an important idea portrayed in the novel: revenge may be rooted in the legitimate need for justice (certainly, Larry deserves to be severely punished for his crimes), but ultimately it also corrupts the people seeking vengeance. As Ginny and Rose become increasingly hell-bent on defeating Larry, they begin to feel the "seduction" of revenge and, more generally, of cruelty and selfishness. As a result, they begin to treat other people (not just their rapist father) cruelly. Ginny and Rose succeed in "humiliating" Larry in a court dispute over the farmland, driving him further into senility, but in the process of pursuing this vengeance, they turn on each other. For instance, Ginny jealously attempts to murder Rose as revenge for Rose's decision to sleep with Ginny's former lover, Jess Clark. Once Ginny has established a "precedent" for revenge against one of her family members, her father, she begins seeking revenge against another family member, Rose, seemingly for a much more forgivable offense.

In addition, the characters' attempts at vengeance – successful and otherwise – ultimately fail to bring the desired results. Ginny and Rose's "victory" over Larry doesn't bring them any peace. On the contrary, Ginny's "addiction" to revenge has torn her and Rose apart. Moreover, Ginny remains haunted by her father's abuse, even decades later. Revenge has not helped Ginny move past Larry's crimes; its primary consequence has been to destroy her life and connection to others even more thoroughly.

APPEARANCE VS. REALITY

A Thousand Acres takes place in the American Midwest in a community so small that, at times, its inhabitants seem to know everything about one another. And yet many of the novel's characters, including some of the community's most prominent and popular residents, have dark secrets to hide; for example, Larry Cook abused his children, Ginny and Rose, even as he pretends to be a proud, upstanding member of the community. Smiley's novel studies the relationship between appearance and reality; particularly the appearance of innocence and goodness as it hides secret sin or evil.

For some of the novel's characters, the separation between appearances and reality can be a source of freedom. Characters maintain a certain affect or public image, but beneath the surface, their personalities are very different. Appearance acts as a mask for reality, disguising and enabling the characters' true thoughts and feelings. Consider Harold Clark, Larry's neighbor and rival. Clark pretends to be an old eccentric, when in reality, he's extremely sharp and single-minded. Because he's so successful in affecting the *appearance* of eccentricity, Harold's neighbors mostly steer clear of him; they give him a lot of privacy, and even let him get away with overcharging on farm crops. In short, Clark manipulates his public image in order to benefit himself—that is, to benefit his secret, shrewder "self." Harold's son, Jess Clark, represents an even more extreme example of the divide between appearance and reality. Jess spends most of his adult life "trying on" different careers and, with each career, a different personality. Whenever Jess tires of the external elements of his life, such as his job, his home, or his friends, he just moves on to somewhere else. Jess can do so because, beneath his kind, charismatic façade, he's cold-hearted and selfish—Jess is so good at affecting the appearance of kindness that we don't realize how cruel he really is until the end of the book.

By manipulating their own appearances, affects, and reputations, many of the characters in the novel achieve a kind of freedom. But of course, there's a limit to how often the characters can get away with such manipulations; furthermore, many characters, particularly female characters, are *forced* to adhere to a certain public image instead of crafting one for themselves. While Jess Clark has the freedom to start over again and again, Ginny and Rose are "locked into" the same sexist roles year after year. They're expected to be obedient children, to cook and care for their aging father, and to marry and have kids.

Ginny and Rose struggle to "be themselves" in private while adhering to the image that's expected of them. Their public image doesn't offer them freedom; on the contrary, it burdens them, to the point where, on some level, they start to believe that their public image is the truth. Ginny and Rose also have a horrible secret: Larry raped them when they were teenagers. The novel never explicitly explains why the two women never tell other people what happened. Smiley implies, however, that Ginny and Rose remain silent about their father's horrible crimes at least in part because they're afraid of disrupting appearances. In other words, they're afraid of challenging Larry's image as a pillar of the community, their own images as obedient daughters, and even their community's "image" as a tranquil, ordinary place. In short, Smiley shows a basic disagreement between her characters' appearances and their true natures. While some of the characters succeed in manipulating their own appearances, many of the women in the novel suffer because they internalize the image that other characters have imposed upon them.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

THE JAR OF SAUSAGES

Toward the end of the novel, Ginny Cook Smith learns that her sister, Rose Cook Lewis, has been sleeping with Jess Clark, with whom Ginny herself has been having an affair. Furious with her sister for betraying her, Ginny researches poisons and cooks Rose some sausages poisoned with hemlock, which she places in a jar. Ginny, knowing that Jess is a vegetarian, is hoping that Rose will eat the sausages at some point and die. The jar comes to symbolize Ginny's (seemingly-irrational) capacity for hatred, jealousy, and revenge. Her desire to be revenged on her abusive father has corrupted Ginny more than it's punished Larry, leading the two sisters to become broken down by hatred and bitterness, and to turn on each other. Over the years, the jar remains in Rose's cellar, uneaten—symbolizing Ginny's longstanding, unrelenting hatred, and her inability to really move on in her life while still burdened by her past and her desire for revenge. (At the same time, some critics have noted that the "jar of sausages" murder plot seems a bit far-fetched and out-of-character even for the jealous Ginny, though it does echo the plot of *King Lear*.)

MONOPOLY

After Rose Cook Lewis and Ginny Cook Smith inherit their father's property, they strike up a family tradition in which they play a nightly game of Monopoly with their husbands, as well as with Jess Clark. The game is extremely enjoyable for all concerned, but it also symbolizes the characters' latent desire for power and property (and allows them to access these desires behind the façade of a game). Their enjoyment of the Monopoly game—and the other characters' fascination with it—is an early sign that the Cook

family will be torn apart by greed and acquisitiveness (after all, a game of Monopoly ends when one person has all the wealth and everybody else is broke).

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Anchor Books edition of *A Thousand Acres* published in 2003.

Book 1, Chapter 3 Quotes

There was no way to tell by looking that the land beneath my childish feet wasn't the primeval mold I read about in school, but it was new, created by magic lines of tile my father would talk about with pleasure and reverence. Tile "drew" the water, warmed the soil, and made it easy to work, enabled him to get into the field with his machinery a mere 24 hours after the heaviest storm.

Related Characters: Ginny Cook Smith (speaker), Laurence Cook

Related Themes:

Page Number: 15

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Smiley sketches out a "creation myth" for the Cooks' portion of the Midwestern United States. Ginny, the narrator of the novel, describes how her great-grandparents, and later her grandparents, built an elaborate agricultural system using "tiles" (mechanisms that filter the soil and make it easy to control). Larry inherited his ancestors' tiles—not unlike a king inheriting a kingdom from his father. The passage lends a majestic, semi-mythological tone to the novel: Ginny feels tied to the farmland of her community, because it's been in her family for a long, long time, and because her family actually *changed* the farmland at an almost geological level. If anybody has a claim to owning the land, it's a Cook.

Book 1, Chapter 4 Quotes

At the pig roast, Jess Clark and the new machinery were Harold's twin exhibits, and guests from all over the area couldn't resist, had no reason to resist, the way he ferried them between the two, asking for and receiving admiration with a kind of shameless innocence that he was known for.

Related Characters: Ginny Cook Smith (speaker), Jess Clark, Harold Clark

Related Themes:

Page Number: 18

Explanation and Analysis

Early on, Smiley gives us a vivid sense of the competitiveness and nosiness of small-town farm life. Because the community is pretty tiny population-wise, everybody knows about everybody else—there's a constant surveillance process going on. When Jess Clark, Harold Clark's "prodigal son," returns from years of draft dodging and traveling, Harold makes sure he throws a party to prove to everybody that his family is strong: whether or nor he's actually angry with his son, he wants to demonstrate to others that he's proud of Jess and happy to have him home. As far as other neighbors are concerned, Jess is a "prop" for Harold, equated in the passage with Harold's prized new tractor (a mark of his wealth and sophistication as a farmer). Harold wants to prove to other people in the community that he's a successful man and a good father—there's no better way to do both than to host a big party and invite everybody.

Book 1, Chapter 6 Quotes

We'll stop making allowances tomorrow. This is important. He's handing over his whole life, don't you understand that? We have to receive it in the right spirit. And Rose and Pete and even Ty are ready to receive it. Just do it this once. Last time, I promise.

Related Characters: Ginny Cook Smith (speaker), Tyler "Ty" Smith, Pete Lewis, Rose Cook Lewis, Caroline Cook, Laurence Cook

Related Themes:

Page Number: 34

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Ginny tries to convince her sister, Caroline, to go along with Larry's plan to divide up his property between his three daughters. Previously, Caroline has been the only daughter to question her father's sudden decision. Larry is getting older, he drinks a lot, and there are legitimate reasons to believe that he's not in the right state of mind to voluntarily give up his own land and money. And yet Ginny and Rose go along with Larry's decision—they want his property, even if they don't admit it. Caroline, who, Ginny notes, has always loved Larry most dearly, is the only one to question Larry's decision: an act that, on the surface

of things, might seem disobedient, but is actually a sign of respect. It's also important to note that Caroline is more financially independent than either of her siblings (she's a lawyer) and less closely tied to her father's farmland (unlike her siblings, she lives in Des Moines). It's easier for Caroline to speak about the farmland frankly, because she's not as biased by financial motives or by an emotional connection to the land.

The passage also implies some of Ginny's latent guilt at accepting her father's property so eagerly: she wants Caroline to accept her father's generosity because of her own guilty conscience. Ginny tries to trick Caroline into accepting the money out of a sense of duty to her father—when in reality (as Caroline seems to know), the truly "dutiful" thing to do is probably to turn down the property altogether, or at least advise Larry to wait before making a rash decision.

Book 2, Chapter 8 Quotes

What is a farmer?
A farmer is a man who feeds the world.

Related Characters: Ginny Cook Smith (speaker), Laurence Cook

Related Themes:

Page Number: 45

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Ginny reiterates some of the mythological, even religious elements of life on a farm. Larry is just a man—but he thinks of himself as doing almost holy work, providing food and nourishment for others. It's hard to deny that Larry has a point: he does incredibly valuable work. And yet Larry's high opinion of himself (an opinion that he's passed onto his daughters, as evidenced by the quote, which he's repeated many times over the years) is a kind of smokescreen. *Because* Larry thinks of himself as an important, powerful farmer, he can justify even his most morally dubious actions: taking advantage of his poorer neighbors, bullying his wife, and even abusing his children. By worshipping his own profession like this, Larry arguably feels justified in even his most horrible sins.

The passage is also a great example of the importance of appearances and images in Larry's community. Larry tries to cultivate an image of benevolence and importance among his daughters and his neighbors, even though, deep down, he's something very different altogether.

Book 2, Chapter 9 Quotes

I have this recurring nightmare about grabbing things that might hurt me, like that straight razor Daddy used to have, or a jar of some poison that spills on my hands. I know I shouldn't and I watch myself, but I can't resist.

Related Characters: Rose Cook Lewis (speaker), Ginny Cook Smith, Laurence Cook

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 62

Explanation and Analysis

Rose differs from her sister in many important ways; one of these is her acquisitiveness. Rose has no illusions about her personality: she was always a greedy person, even when she was a young child (or dreaming, as here). Whenever she saw something she liked, she had to have it immediately—even if the item in question was bad for her. Rose knows perfectly well that her greediness is a flaw: she recognizes that sometimes, she desires things that are bad for her; hence her nightmare about grabbing razor blades and poison. And yet Rose is powerless to change who she is.

The passage is important because it foreshadows the events of the rest of the novel. Rose will soon be seduced by her own wealth and power, to the point where she'll be "chained" to her own farmland, even though she knows that it's bad for her soul. (Also notice the subtle foreshadowing: Rose mentions a "poisoned jar' much like the one Ginny will later use in an attempt to kill her.)

Book 2, Chapter 12 Quotes

It was a pantry cabinet, a sink, four base cabinets, and two wall cabinets, as well as eight fee of baby blue laminated countertop, … which my father had bought for a thousand dollars.

Related Characters: Ginny Cook Smith (speaker), Laurence Cook

Related Themes:

Page Number: 80

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Rose and Ginny have accepted their father's

generosity and taken control over his property. And yet they're still responsible for taking care of their father—giving him food and shelter, and providing for him financially. Larry maintains some control over his own assets, as well—he still has money to spend. Here, Ginny notices that Larry has made a series of extravagant purchases, including cabinets and countertop. As before, Larry is just trying to compete with his neighbor, Harold Clark.

The difference between now and then, as Ginny seems to sense, is that Ginny and Rose don't want to lose their own money. When he buys cabinets and other things, Larry is taking money from his children—and while Ginny never says so explicitly, Smiley makes it clear that she doesn't like Larry doing so. Ginny is less overtly acquisitive than Rose, but she still wants land and money for herself. Notice the way she spells out the cost of Larry's new stuff—that's one thousand dollars that won't be going to her. The passage's subtle displays of Ginny's materialism and acquisitiveness foreshadow her more overt greed later on in the novel.

❝ "He *is* crazy," said Rose. Anyway, Ginny, you're running out of money

and you have all the expensive rentals left before you get to Go."

Related Characters: Rose Cook Lewis (speaker), Ginny Cook Smith

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 82

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Smiley uses the symbol of Monopoly to signal her characters' latent greed and selfishness. The characters are playing a friendly game of Monopoly, but they're also talking about Larry, who continues to spend money on elaborate house purchases, like cabinets and countertops. Rose moves the discussion from Larry to Monopoly, but because of the syntax of the paragraph, we *think* that she's talking about real life when she says, "You're running out of money."

Smiley's point is that, even if they won't say so explicitly, Rose and Ginny are afraid that Larry is going to spend all their money before he dies. Now that Rose and Ginny are in power, they don't like the idea of their father wasting his (and their) cash on things he doesn't need. Smiley never comes right out and says that Rose and Ginny are greedy for land and cash—one has to read between the lines to see that they are, and this passage is a great example of how Smiley uses subtle hints (and the façade of a game) to alert readers to the truth.

Book 2, Chapter 14 Quotes

❝ Now that I remembered that little girl and that young, running man, I couldn't imagine what had happened to them.

Related Characters: Ginny Cook Smith (speaker), Laurence Cook

Related Themes:

Page Number: 106

Explanation and Analysis

In this chapter, Ginny remembers her father at his most heroic: saving Harold Clark, his rival, from underneath a truck. The memory is vivid, and because Ginny remembers her father's heroism so clearly, she's moved to tears. As a child, Ginny (apparently) hero-worshipped her father, and thought of him as a larger-than-life figure. Now that Ginny and Larry are older, Ginny thinks of her father as a pathetic old man—still intimidating, but hardly the hero he used to be in her eyes.

In the near future, Ginny will begin to question everything she knows and believes about Larry. So here, it's possible that Ginny is lying to herself—i.e., she never really thought of her father as a hero, and is just idealizing her own memories. Ginny seems to feel guilty about her role in Larry's mental decline; she's guilty about accepting his money and property without a second thought. Moreover, Ginny is nostalgic for a time in her life when she and the rest of her family got along perfectly. The days of idyllic childhood are long behind her: in their place are confusion, rivalry, and resentment. No wonder she's crying as she remembers.

Book 2, Chapter 15 Quotes

❝ "Now that I'm back, after all those years away, I'm really amazed at how good Harold is at manipulating the way people think of him."

Related Characters: Jess Clark (speaker), Harold Clark

Related Themes:

Page Number: 108

Explanation and Analysis

Jess Clark, returned to the country after many years, notices that his father, Harold Clark has cultivated a certain image of himself: Harold presents himself as a bumbling older man, a little eccentric, and not to be taken totally seriously. As Jess points out, however, Harold is a lot shrewder than he lets on: in reality, he's hard working, quick-witted, and insightful. Harold just pretends to be an old eccentric because he knows that such a persona is a good way to convince people to leave him alone. Harold knows that it's hard to find privacy in a small community—and he does this by pretending to be weirder than he really is.

It's also important to notice that it's Jess who sees through Harold—this is probably for two reasons. First, and most obviously, Jess is Harold's son; Jess has seen Harold when he's not in public, and knows more about what kind of man his father really is. Second, and more interestingly, Jess might be a fellow manipulator. Smiley never gives us much of an idea what Jess is "really" like (our impressions of him are nearly always filtered through Ginny's adoring eyes), but she leaves open the likely possibility that he's a shrewd, manipulative, and devious person, just like his dad.

Book 2, Chapter 16 Quotes

❝ After you've confided long enough in someone, he or she assumes the antagonism you might have just been trying out. It was better for now to keep this conversation to myself.

Related Characters: Ginny Cook Smith (speaker), Rose Cook Lewis

Related Themes:

Page Number: 119

Explanation and Analysis

In this strange passage, Ginny has just had a long, angry conversation with her sister, Caroline, in which Caroline accuses Ginny or dong a bad job of taking care of her father. Caroline suggests that Ginny and Rose are ungrateful children; in spite of everything their father has done for them, they treat him like an annoyance, to be tended to from time to time without any affection or compassion. Although Ginny denies that Caroline has a point, she declines to tell Rose about the conversation. Her stated reason for doing so is fascinating: essentially, she says that when somebody accuses you of being evil, you'll eventually *become* evil. This fits with the novel's complicated ideas about appearances and reality: sometimes appearances are a mask or diversion from reality, but sometimes one's reality actually shifts to fit appearances.

The passage is especially ambiguous because it's not clear if Ginny really is innocent of any maliciousness toward her father, or if, deep down, she senses that Caroline is right. If the former possibility is the case, the quote might suggest that Ginny and Rose aren't really "villainous" at all at this point; they're driven to mistreat their father because their father hates them and thinks of them as "whores." If the latter possibility is true, then Ginny refuses to tell Rose about the conversation because she senses that Caroline is telling the truth.

Book 3, Chapter 19 Quotes

❝ She wore a cast for eight weeks, and she made a sleeve for it with the words PETE DID THIS, glued on it in felt letters.

Related Characters: Ginny Cook Smith (speaker), Rose Cook Lewis, Pete Lewis

Related Themes:

Page Number: 141

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, we learn that Pete Lewis beat his wife, Rose, until he eventually he broke her arm. Rose was so furious about Pete's actions that when she wore a cast, she wrote, "Pete did this" on it. The cast acted as a reminder to everybody in the community that Pete wasn't the good, easygoing man he pretended to be: Rose refused to give Pete the luxury of hiding from his crimes.

As we'll eventually learn, though, Rose's actions have a deeper meaning. Rose advertises Pete's abuse because she refuses to let someone *else* get away with mistreating her, after Larry. Larry raped Rose repeatedly when she was a teenager, and Rose has been living with the trauma for decades. She refuses to let anyone take advantage of her ever again—hence the sleeve on the cast. Rose's willingness to publicize Pete's abusiveness contrasts with her reluctance to tell anyone about her father's actions. In part, the difference is that, in the case of Larry's abuse, there is no "this"—in other words, there is no physical mark that Rose can point to as a sign of her father's cruelty. (See

quotes from Chapter 24 for more on Rose's reaction to Larry's abuse.)

Book 3, Chapter 20 Quotes

❝ It was exhilarating, talking to my father as if he were my child, more than exhilarating to see him as my child.

Related Characters: Ginny Cook Smith (speaker), Laurence Cook

Related Themes:

Page Number: 148

Explanation and Analysis

This passage is another sign that Ginny isn't quite as virtuous as she often believes herself to be. After Larry drinks and drives, he winds up in the hospital. As Ginny drives Larry home, she gets a little thrill from asserting so much power over her own father, of whom she was frightened for many years. Now that Larry is old and growing senile, Rose and Ginny have become the powerful people in the Cook family: Larry is practically their child (they have to support him and provide for him in almost every material way).

Ginny, while she thinks of herself as a good, responsible caretaker, is actually more vengeful and assertive than she lets on. She doesn't take care of Larry just out of the goodness of her heart; she takes care of Larry partly because she likes feeling powerful. Rose and Ginny assert their power over their father in two ways: Rose does so by bullying him, while Ginny does so more subtly, by babying him.

Book 3, Chapter 23 Quotes

❝ I flattered you when I called you a bitch! What do you want to reduce me to? I'll stop this building! I'll get the land back! I'll throw you whores off this place. You'll learn what it means to treat your father like this. I curse you!

Related Characters: Laurence Cook (speaker), Rose Cook Lewis, Ginny Cook Smith

Related Themes:

Page Number: 183

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, a direct homage to *King Lear*, Larry Cook accosts his two eldest daughters in the middle of a wild storm. Larry is furious that his daughters have mistreated him and disrespected him. It's hard to say exactly what Larry's children have done to offend him, however; they take care of him and invite him to spend more time with them. And yet, by Ginny's own admission, the Cook daughters have also taken some pleasure in belittling their father—treating him like a child—and perhaps Larry is reacting to his children's barely-concealed (and, in light of his abuse and rape, justified) contempt. Moreover, Larry is angry with himself for rejecting Caroline, and he takes out his frustration on Rose and Ginny.

As a result, Larry yells at Rose and Ginny, accusing them of being bad daughters and bad people. He even claims that he should never have given up his land, and that he's going to try to get it back. The passage reiterates what an important part of Larry's identity his land was: now that Larry has signed away his property, he's "naked," stripped of his identity and power. (Notice also that Larry calls his daughters "bitches" and "whores," both exposing his deep sexism and foreshadowing the events of the next few chapters.)

Book 3, Chapter 24 Quotes

❝ "He didn't rape me, Ginny. He seduced me. He said it was okay, that it was good to please me, that he needed it, that I was special. He said he loved me."
I said, "I can't listen to this."

Related Characters: Rose Cook Lewis, Ginny Cook Smith (speaker), Laurence Cook

Related Themes:

Page Number: 190

Explanation and Analysis

In this horrifying passage, Rose confesses that Larry had sex with her when she was only a teenager. Curiously, Rose refuses to admit that Larry raped her—even thought it's pretty clear that, for all intents and purposes, he did. The way Rose puts it, she was "seduced" by Larry—suggesting that, on some level, she feels responsible for her own father's incestuous crimes ("raped" would suggest that Rose had no control in the matter; "seduced" would suggest that on some level she chose to have sex with Larry).

The passage is a good example of the irrational guilt that

survivors of rape and incest often feel: they believe that they themselves are responsible for their own abuse. Rose's explanation is not logical; she was a child, and can hardly be blamed for *not* fighting back against her intimidating, frightening father. But her guilt explains why she's wrestled with her traumatic memories for so long. Also notice that Ginny refuses to listen to the truth about her father; she's in denial about Rose's mistreatment because she's also in denial of her own.

"He won't get away with it, Ginny. I won't let him get away with it. I just won't."

Related Characters: Rose Cook Lewis (speaker), Laurence Cook, Ginny Cook Smith

Related Themes:

Page Number: 192

Explanation and Analysis

One question hangs over the second half of the novel: why doesn't Rose go to the police or make Larry's crimes public? Why can't she just tell the authorities and townspeople that her father is a criminal, an incestuous rapist? What we gather, based on this chapter, is that Rose feels partly responsible for her own rape—an irrational, but all-too common response among traumatized rape victims. Furthermore, there's no indication that anybody would believe Rose if she said that Larry raped her years ago (as is often the case in situations like this, unfortunately). Finally, as the quote suggests, Rose would never be satisfied with merely a legal punishment for her father: she wants to destroy her father completely, expunging her own sense of guilt in the process.

The only way for Rose to totally destroy her father, Smiley implies, is to control everything he owns, including the farm. Rose's plan is to humiliate her father until the day he dies: reshaping his farmland into a hog farm, and never showing compassion or love of any kind for him. By asserting her ownership of the farmland, Rose hopes to purge all memory of Larry from her surroundings, and therefore from her own mind. The problem, however, is that such an obsession with revenge usually leads to more pain and corruption for the person seeking vengeance than punishment for the original offender.

Book 3, Chapter 28 Quotes

It was incredible to hear Rose speak like this, but it was intoxicating, too, as sweet and forbidden as anything I had ever done.

Related Characters: Ginny Cook Smith (speaker), Rose Cook Lewis

Related Themes:

Page Number: 216

Explanation and Analysis

As the novel goes on, Rose and Ginny become more overtly villainous, confirming, perhaps, Ginny's observation that she has a habit of taking on the antagonism people attribute to her. At the church potluck, Rose confides to Ginny that she wants to humiliate Larry—show him how far he's fallen from his former glory and prestige. Ginny, who's always thought of herself as a kind, loyal daughter, is a little shocked by Rose's cruelty. But as she says here, she's also "intoxicated," knowing that Larry deserves whatever humiliation and punishment he might receive because of his past crimes, and relishing the shift in the family's power dynamic.

The passage, at the simplest level, is about evil and how evil perpetuates itself. Ginny might not be an "evil" person, but she finds herself seduced by evil in trying to punish her father's evil. While Regan and Goneril, the counterparts to Rose and Ginny in *King Lear*, are presented as more overtly and unambiguously villainous, Smiley wants to treat Rose and Ginny's seemingly "wicked" actions with more nuance, particularly by identifying their source (Larry's past abuse). Rose and Ginny both commit some horrible crimes of their own during the novel, but at the same time, they are the victims of their monstrous father; they're trying to escape the traumatic past, but are trapped in a cycle of suffering and vengeance.

Since then I've often thought we could have taken our own advice, driven to the Twin Cities and found jobs as waitresses, measured out our days together in a garden apartment, the girls in one bedroom, Rose and I in the other, anonymous, ducking forever a destiny that we never asked for, that was our father's gift to us.

Related Characters: Ginny Cook Smith (speaker), Linda, Pamela, Laurence Cook, Rose Cook Lewis

Related Themes:

Page Number: 220

Explanation and Analysis

Here Ginny expresses her desire to escape from the farmland where she's spent most of her life and go to the Twin Cities (Minneapolis and Saint Paul). Ginny recognizes that she'll never be entirely happy on the farm: there are too many bad memories. The farmland itself is a symbol of her family and her family's legacy (the tiles themselves were laid by Larry's ancestors), so Ginny can't live on the farm and also forget about Larry and Larry's crimes. As long as she accepts his property, she has to accept his influence and her memories of him. The alternative to accepting Larry's influence is to "escape" the influence of Larry's property by moving to a city. This is why the thousand acres is both a blessing and a curse to the Cook daughters.

But even if working as a waitress in the city would be a welcome release from Larry's overbearing, intimidating presence, Ginny isn't strong enough to leave (yet). She wants her father's land and money, and she feels a legitimate family connection to the land. (She also feels she deserves it, and wants to get back at Larry by taking his power and wealth.) Like Rose in her nightmares, Ginny feels drawn to the things that slowly kill her.

Book 5, Chapter 36 Quotes

❝ I was so remarkably comfortable with the discipline of making a good appearance!

Related Characters: Ginny Cook Smith (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 285

Explanation and Analysis

After Larry announces his intentions to sue Ginny and Rose and get his former property back, Ginny and Rose consult a lawyer in the city. The lawyer, Jean Cartier, advises Ginny and Rose to be perfect—to do a great job tending their father's property, and keep up an appearance of being successful farmers. Larry can only sue Ginny and Rose according to a clause of their contract that allows him to repossess his land if his daughters treat it badly. So as long as Ginny and Rose treat the farmland well, they'll be fine—it doesn't really matter how they treat Larry himself.

Ginny finds that she's very good at putting on the appearance of competence, normality, and graciousness. In a way, Ginny has been practicing for such a role for most of her life—as the resident of a small town where everybody knows everybody else, she knows how to "seem" one way and secretly "be" another.

Book 5, Chapter 39 Quotes

❝ One of the jars of sausage was close to the edge of the table. I pushed it back and looked at Jess again. For the first time in weeks what was unbearable felt bearable.

Related Characters: Ginny Cook Smith (speaker), Jess Clark

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 314

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Ginny has fixed a jar of poisoned sausages, designed to kill her sister, Rose. Rose has offended Ginny by sleeping with Jess Clark, Ginny's former lover. Ginny had thought of Jess as a symbol of escape and freedom from Larry, and had seemingly truly fallen in love with him. Now, instead of hating Jess for his manipulation and deception, Ginny takes out her sense of betrayal by hating her sister, and even going so far as to try and kill her. (Whether this plot twist is plausible or not is arguable, but it does echo the events of *King Lear*, where Goneril poisons Regan.) Ginny makes sausages in particular because she knows that Jess is a vegetarian; Rose is the only person in the house who's going to die.

Interestingly, Ginny feels eerily calm as she delivers the tool of her sister's murder. When she presents it before Jess, she finds it easy to smile back at him, even though she's been uneasy around him ever since hearing that he and Rose slept together. It's interesting to compare the passage to Jess's earlier description of how Harold Clark enjoys pretending to be eccentric in order to conceal his true nature: similarly, Ginny takes genuine pleasure in hiding her true feelings. At this point, she really is acting more overtly "villainous" (like her counterpart in *Lear*)—she's no longer trying to escape from or punish an abusive father, but has now been corrupted by revenge and greed to the point that she turns a murderous hatred against her sister.

Book 5, Chapter 40 Quotes

I continued to behave as if I was living in the sight of all our neighbors, as Mr. Cartier had told us to. I waited for Rose to die, but the weather was warm for sauerkraut and liver sausage—that was a winter dish.

Related Characters: Ginny Cook Smith (speaker), Rose Cook Lewis, Jean Cartier

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 316

Explanation and Analysis

The strength, but also the weakness, of Ginny's murder plot is that it's slow-acting and relies heavily on chance. As a result, it's less likely that Ginny will be linked to the murder—but until Rose dies, Ginny has to twiddle her thumbs and wait. Moreover, until that time, Ginny can't focus on anything but the murder. There's a constant cloud of vengeance hanging over her—her life is "stalled" until the day that Rose dies.

Ginny's murder plot is intended to free Ginny from her anxieties about life on the farmland: by killing Rose, she can (she assumes) run off with Jess and escape Larry forever. But because the sausages don't kill Rose right away, Ginny can't live normally; she's always looking over her shoulder and putting on appearances of normality (as her lawyer told her to, mentioned here). As we'll see soon enough, Ginny will spend the next decade and more with the burden of Rose's potential murder.

One thing was surely true about going to court. It had marvelous divided us from each other and from our old lives. There could be no reconciliation now.

Related Characters: Ginny Cook Smith (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 326

Explanation and Analysis

Ginny seems to be seeing the truth more and more clearly. She was seduced by the promise of power, as represented by Larry's land. But now that she's won a victory against her father in court (determining that she and Rose really are the owners of the farmland), she can't savor her victory. Instead, Ginny sees clearly how the farmland has torn the family apart: she and Larry will never reconcile after their disagreements in court, and Caroline has seemingly turned against her sisters to side with Larry, meaning that the family will always be fractured.

Rose has said that she accepted Larry's property as a form of revenge—her intention was to humiliate her aging father. In other words, her goal was to tear the family apart (at least in the sense of destroying Larry—Caroline didn't seem to factor into it). Here, Ginny recognizes, Rose has gotten her wish—the Cook clan is in ruins—but in enacting their revenge on Larry, Rose and Ginny have hurt themselves too, not just their father. Ginny has sought revenge against Rose for sleeping with Jess, and it seems unlikely that they'll ever be close again.

Book 5, Chapter 41 Quotes

Ty yelled, "I gave my life to this place!"
Without looking around at him, I yelled back, "Now it's yours!"

Related Characters: Tyler "Ty" Smith (speaker), Ginny Cook Smith

Related Themes:

Page Number: 330

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Ginny makes the choice to turn her back on her husband and her own farmland. She's won a victory in court by defeating her father, and yet it seems to bring her little pleasure. Instead, her court victory seems to remind her how toxic her farmland really is: it's corrupting her soul. Instead of staying around to run the farm, Ginny gives it up to her husband in the middle of a fight, and impulsively leaves for the city (to become a waitress, just as she and Rose had vaguely planned).

The irony of the passage is that Ginny is finally escaping from her old life in the country—but too late. Ginny and Rose had talked about getting away from their father and starting fresh, but their greed and guilt kept them around. Now, Ginny has finally summoned the courage to move away from her childhood home—but only after she's plotted to murder her sister and is cutting ties with her husband. Ginny can't truly escape her past, because the possibility that Rose will "drop dead" will always be hanging over her head.

Book 6, Chapter 45 Quotes

"Look at Daddy! He knew he'd treated me unfairly, but that we really felt love for each other. He made amends. We got really close at the end."

…

"How did he mistreat you?"

"Well, by getting mad and cutting me out of the farm."

Related Characters: Ginny Cook Smith, Caroline Cook (speaker), Laurence Cook

Related Themes:

Page Number: 362-363

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Ginny comes ever so close to telling Caroline the truth about their father. Caroline claims that she found the strength to forgive Larry for how he "mistreated" her—but she seemingly has no idea that her father was an incestuous rapist, and thinks that his "mistreatment" was merely cutting her out of inheriting the farm. At this point, Ginny seems poised to tell Caroline the truth about Larry. But she never does.

The passage is full of ambiguities: Caroline ended up having the best relationship with Larry (she even helped him sue Rose and Ginny), but only because she had the shallowest understanding of who he really was. Smiley leaves open the possibility that Caroline was *also* raped by Larry (neither Ginny nor Rose knows to a certainty whether or not she was, though they tried to protect her from being abused) and repressed it, or even forgave him. Because Caroline and Ginny never open up to one another, we never know the truth. Smiley suggests that Caroline's supposed "goodness" might be nothing more than ignorance of her father's horrific crimes. (It's also worth noting that Caroline calls Larry "Daddy" here, something she refused to do at the beginning of the book.)

I had a burden lift off me that I hadn't even felt the heaviness of until then, and it was the burden of having to wait and see what was going to happen…

Related Characters: Ginny Cook Smith (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 367

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Ginny gets rid of the poisoned sausages that she's just rediscovered in Rose's basement. Years before, Ginny cooked the sausages with hemlock, in an attempt to murder her sister as punishment for sleeping with Jess, her lover. Ginny has spent the last decade with the burden of her sister's impending death hanging over her. Now, she's gotten rid of that burden by throwing the sausages away.

The irony of the passage, of course, is that Ginny relieves herself of guilt and responsibility too late. If she'd thrown away the sausages years ago, before she ran away from her old home, she possibly could have preserved her relationship with Rose. As it stands, Ginny loses her property, her husband, and her sisters because she has a bad habit of doing the right thing too late.

Epilogue Quotes

I can't say that I forgive my father, but now I can imagine what he probably chose never to remember—the goad of an unthinkable urge, pricking him, pressing him wrapping him in an impenetrable fog of self that must have seemed, when he wandered around the house late at night after working and drinking, like the very darkness. This is the gleaming obsidian shaft I safeguard above all the others.

Related Characters: Ginny Cook Smith (speaker), Laurence Cook

Related Themes:

Page Number: 371

Explanation and Analysis

As the novel comes to an end, Ginny finds herself in a dark place. One of her sisters is dead; the other one barely talks to her. Her parents are dead, and her property is gone—indeed, almost all memories of the Cooks' former glory are gone (except, in a brutal irony, the community's memory of Larry as a kind of "saint"). As Ginny contemplates her life, she thinks back to her father, the man who raped her, setting in motion the cycle of guilt, regret, and revenge that has made her adult life so hard.

Ginny's recollections of her father are important for a number of reasons. First, it would seem that, understandably, Ginny is no less traumatized by her father's actions than she was years before: she's tried to enact revenge on him, but she's ended up destroying her own life in the process. Larry's incest continues to darken her life—it's "lodged" in her mind, impossible to remove. Second, the passage suggests a sinister connection between Larry

and Ginny. After so many years of greed, domination, and revenge, Ginny s no longer a good, virtuous person; one could even argue that she's become a lot like her father in some ways. Notice how easily Ginny puts herself in her father's place—disturbingly, she claims to understand the motives that led Larry to rape her; the innate darkness and sinful urges that can impel a human being to do evil (the same sinful urges that impelled Ginny to try to murder her own sister). If there's a theme to this passage (and maybe to the book as a whole), it's that evil begets more evil. Here, Smiley implies that Larry's horrible, incestuous crimes have both permanently scarred Ginny and pushed her to become a dark, jealous, and in some senses, evil person.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

BOOK 1, CHAPTER 1

An unnamed narrator describes a large farm near Cabot Street Road. The narrator has grown up on this farm, and has always thought that its land is perfectly flat, desolate, and lonely. She once had neighbors, the Ericsons. The Ericson family had two daughters, about the narrator's age. The narrator also has a sister, Rose. Her other neighbors are the Clarks, who have two sons, Loren and Jess. The narrator's father is friends with Harold Clark, Loren and Jess's father.

The first thing to notice in the novel is the place*; an area of America so remote that it almost seems like another planet. In spite of the vast plains and big farms, the world feels "smaller" here—the characters all know one another closely, as a byproduct of living in the same tiny community.*

The narrator gives more background information about her life and experience. She lives in Zebulon County, Iowa, a place where "acreage and financing" are essential parts of life—as essential as one's name or gender. From a very early age the narrator is conscious of the differences between her family's wealth and that of her friends. When she played with Ruthie Ericson, the Ericsons' young child, for instance, she noticed that the Ericsons' property is technically on Harold Clark's territory, meaning that it should be Clark's. She also felt a strong sense that all of the land in the area—"a thousand acres," she claims—should belong to her family alone. The narrator first felt this way in 1951, when she was eight years old. This was also the year that the narrator's younger sister Caroline was born.

Zebulon County is the setting of the novel, and it's a place where land is an essential part of life. Another important detail to pick up in this passage is the desire for more *that dominates the narrator's worldview, even when she's a young girl. As a child, the narrator (later revealed to be Ginny Cook) thinks that her family should own everything around her. Since the impulse to own is coming from a child, it seems relatively innocent. But as we'll see, it develops into a deep-seeded greed that will eventually prove to be her downfall.*

As a young child, the narrator and Rose used to take rides with their father in his new car. These rides stopped abruptly when Caroline was born. The narrator always savored her memories of the car rides: her mother and father would talk, in a calm, reassuring tone, about the state of the farm. Life, the narrator concludes, "seemed secure and good."

The chapter ends on an ambiguous note: Smiley seems to be writing about an idyllic, all-American family, with the father taking his kids and wife around for "Sunday drives," and the family's land proving fertile and secure. Yet the birth of Ginny's little sister, Caroline (the favorite child) seems to drive a wedge between the Ginny, Rose, and their father, and foreshadows trouble to come.

BOOK 1, CHAPTER 2

In 1966, Jess Clark, one of the Clarks' children, is drafted to fight in the Vietnam War. In the end, he's gone for thirteen years. The narrator gets word of a homecoming party for Jess in the spring of 1979, when she runs into Loren Clark at the local bank. As Loren and the narrator talk, they discuss several important things. The narrator's mother has passed away, something of which Jess has been informed. The narrator also learns that Jess is unmarried, and has no children—he is, seemingly, exactly the same as when he left in 1966.

Here, we're introduced to Jess Clark—and it's significant that when we first met Jess, we learn that he left home and didn't come back for 13 years. (The implication of this passage, as we'll later learn, is that Jess was a draft-dodger—during the Vietnam War thousands of young American citizens fled the country rather than fight in the war). Ginny's mother (Mrs. Cook, as we later learn) has died, and Mrs. Cook's death might symbolize the overwhelming patriarchy of Zebulon County: strong maternal characters are mostly absent from the novel.

On Valentine's Day (a few weeks before the narrator's meeting with Loren), Rose is diagnosed with breast cancer at the age of 34. As a result, the narrator spends much of March and April cooking and cleaning for her entire family. The narrator cooks for her father, who lives alone now that his wife is dead. She also cooks for Rose and her husband, Pete, and for herself and her own husband, Tyler. She works long, hard days, often waking up at five am.

Rose, Ginny's sister, is diagnosed with breast cancer, and Ginny spends a lot of her time taking care of Rose, and cooking for her. Smiley conveys the difficulty of her narrator's life: although she does cooking and cleaning (traditionally feminine work) instead of farm work (traditionally reserved for a man), she works just as hard as any man.

In the fall of 1978, Rose decides to send her two children, Pammy and Linda, to a boarding school. Pammy and Linda don't want to leave their home, but Rose insists that they do so. The narrator is devastated by this news, since Pammy and Linda are like her own children. The narrator has tried and failed to have children before. She had a miscarriage shortly after Linda was born, and as a result, she was always very close with Linda. Following Rose's diagnosis, the narrator throws herself into caring for Rose, and sends food to Linda and Pammy. By May of 1979, at the time when the narrator is preparing for Jess Clark's return, Rose's health is starting to improve: she's undergone a mastectomy, and regained some of her strength.

The passage parallels the fertility of the Zebulon County soil (it's good farmland and bears a lot of crops) with Ginny's infertility: she's been unable to have a child, despite trying for a long time. Perhaps as a result, Ginny feels a deep attachment to her niece, almost as if she (Linda) were Ginny's own child. Part of Smiley's goal is re-writing Shakespeare's King Lear (the source text for her novel) from a feminine perspective, and so it's important to note all the physical, biological details we've learned about the female characters: they suffer from distinctly female problems, such as miscarriage and breast cancer, and these complications reject the idea that the female characters are either wholly good or wholly evil, as they are in Lear.

The narrator attends a huge pig roast at the Clarks' farm, held to celebrate Jess's return. The narrator notices the differences between Jess and his brother, Loren. Both are handsome and have similar mannerisms, but Jess hasn't aged as clearly as has Loren: Jess seems young, energetic, and utterly alien to the conventions of life on a farm. At the same time, Jess's face is rougher and less friendly.

Jess and Loren are the novel's counterparts to Edgar and Edmund, the two brothers (one good, one evil) in King Lear. Once again the ideas of good and evil are complicated in Smiley's retelling, as Jess, the counterpart to the evil Edmund, will be a more sympathetic and inscrutable character in the novel. Jess seems like a likable, charismatic man: in part, his charisma seems to come from the fact that he's a stranger; he's not as tied to the land as the rest of his family, and his appearance seems to hide something that the other characters don't have.

Jess greets Rose and the narrator and gives them both a hug. As they chat, they see a car pulling up to the house. Out of the car step Tyler, Pete, and–unexpectedly—Caroline. When the group walks through the door, Caroline doesn't walk toward the narrator and Jess. The narrator explains to Jess that Caroline is living in Des Moines, where she's planning to get married to a young lawyer, Frank. Jess seems amused and happy with this news. Together, he, the narrator, and Rose reminisce about their lives on the farm. Rose tells Jess that nothing has changed—their parents are still stubborn, old-fashioned, and subtly competitive. Jess addresses the narrator as Ginny.

This passage is important for a number of reasons. First, we learn the narrator's name for the first time: Ginny. (Note that her name starts with a "G," like her corresponding character Goneril in King Lear, and following the pattern of the rest of the characters: Larry as Lear, Rose as Regan, and Caroline as Cordelia.) Second, the passage shows the first interaction, or rather, non-interaction between Ginny and Caroline. Caroline, the youngest daughter of the family, is also the most independent of the three daughters: she doesn't live at home anymore, and seems disconnected from her sisters. Third, the passage emphasizes the static nature of life on the farm.

Ginny asks Jess where he's been living, and what he's been doing with his life. Jess explains that he lived in Seattle and, "before the amnesty," in Vancouver. He went to Vancouver, he explains, as soon as he was finished with infantry training. He's not sure if his father knows that he is a deserter. Ginny explains to Jess that she's been married to Tyler Smith (or Ty, as she calls him) since she was nineteen. After seventeen years, she still loves him very much, she thinks to herself. Tyler is five years her senior, and very well mannered. He gets along well with Ginny's father, in contrast to Pete Lewis, Rose's husband, who often quarrels with Ginny's father.

Here, it's revealed that Jess was a draft-dodger ("amnesty" is the key word, plus the fact that Jess was in Canada, a haven for draft-dodgers), and that he's seemingly kept this fact a secret from his father. The passage is also important for expository reasons, as Ginny explains her recent life to Jess (while also explaining it to us, the readers). The passage also contrasts Pete and Tyler, the two son-in-laws (corresponding to the Dukes of Cornwall and Albany in King Lear), in terms of how well they get along with Larry Cook (Ginny and Rose's father). This reinforces the idea that Larry is in some ways a center of life in this small community.

Tyler arrives at the party, and greets Jess warmly. The last time Tyler and Jess talked, Ginny thinks, Tyler seems far more mature. Now, it seems, Tyler and Jess are equally old and experienced. Abruptly, Caroline walks up to Jess and greets him, shaking his hand with a strange, impersonal formality. Ginny has thought about their interaction at the party many times, she notes, always wondering if it could have gone some other way. She's always concluded that there was no way to "do things differently from the way they got done."

The tensions in the Cook family are now much clearer than they were in the first chapter: Caroline is literally and metaphorically distanced from the rest of the family, though it's not clear why. By describing life as a series of inevitabilities, Ginny seems to be responding to her imprisoned lifestyle and seemingly predetermined fate. She still lives on her father's farm after all these years, and seems incapable of breaking away, so she feels powerless.

BOOK 1, CHAPTER 3

Ginny describes her great grandparents, who emigrated from England to Zebulon County in 1890. At first, they shied away from buying land there, since it seemed dry and arid. Only after they formed a partnership with a young man named John Cook, another English immigrant, did they resolve to buy land in Zebulon. Together, the three of them worked to convert their land from dry soil to rich, moist terrain. Their techniques were so successful that Ginny's family still boasts about them nearly a century later.

This passage is a kind of "creation myth" for the Cook family's farm: an idealized vision of American ruggedness and independence. The myth doesn't explain how, exactly, the family became so successful, but the implication seems to be that Ginny's great grandparents and John Cook succeeded because they worked together, and because they got lucky in finding such fertile land (though it has the appearance of being barren).

When Ginny's great grandparents' daughter (i.e., her grandmother), Edith, was 16 and John Cook was 23, they were married. Shortly afterwards, they had Ginny's father. They continued farming the land, cleverly laying "tile" (a kind of tubing that extracts maximum water from below the soil). The tiling has continued to provide for Ginny's entire family, resulting in good harvests year after year.

Notice that Edith marries John even though she's much younger than he is: her purpose, in the context of Zebulon's patriarchal farm culture, is to bear children and unite families through marriage, not to be an independent businesswoman. This is an important, though short, chapter, because it reminds us of the "stakes" of the novel: the vast, valuable, and almost holy land that belongs to the Cooks and gives the novel its title.

BOOK 1, CHAPTER 4

Harold Clark's house, according to Ginny, is more or less identical to her own father's. Clark's property is smaller and less impressive than Ginny's father's, though he manages to farm it cleverly and efficiently, thereby making a large profit for himself. The year before the pig roast celebrating Jess's return, Harold irritated Ginny's father (Larry Cook) by purchasing an air-conditioned tractor that could play tape cassettes. Ginny's father wasn't annoyed about the tractor itself; he was annoyed that Harold didn't tell him how he'd paid for it. If Harold paid with his own money, that meant Harold was becoming richer than Ginny's father. If, on the other hand, Harold had to go to the bank to procure the funds, it meant that Ginny's father was still the wealthier man.

We get a sense for the petty rivalries between farmers: Harold Clark (the counterpart to Gloucester in King Lear) is seemingly less successful than Larry Cook, but they compete with one another nonetheless. Larry expects to know everything about everybody—the fact that Harold keeps a secret from him, even if it's a fairly insignificant secret, irritates Larry. Larry needs to know that he's the top dog in the county, and therefore, he needs to keep regular tabs on Harold Clark. Larry's behavior suggests that he's insecure about his wealth and power—he's always looking over his shoulder.

Ginny comes to Harold Clark's house, where she finds Rose, Caroline, and Larry. Larry is explaining his plan to form a corporation, in which Ginny and her sisters will each have a 33% share. While he's still alive, Larry is dividing up his large land holdings to avoid forcing his children to pay property taxes after his death. Ginny tells Larry she likes the idea, as does Rose. Caroline, however, says she's not so sure.

Here, in a nutshell, Smiley lays out the premise of the novel (and of King Lear)—an elderly patriarch divides up his possessions between three daughters. In the play, it's suggested that Lear divides up his kingdom while he's still alive because he wants to prove to himself that he has some inherit majesty, independent of his crown. In the novel, Larry divides up his farm while he's still alive because he wants to avoid property taxes. Notice that we're offered no explanation for why Caroline turns down the offer of so much money and power (though based on Lear, one could guess that it's because she's more loving and less greedy than her siblings). So far, Ginny has seemed like an even, levelheaded character, but her behavior here suggests a hidden greed for Larry's land—a desire that's rooted, admittedly, in her family legacy, and seems pretty legitimate (she is his heir, after all).

Abruptly, Ginny turns to describing her father, Laurence Cook. From her earliest memories onward, Ginny was afraid of her father. He was big, imposing, and loud—qualities which made Ginny avoid looking at him whenever possible, but also made her glad that he could protect the family from robbers and thieves. Ginny always thought of Larry as a highly competent farmer—indeed, he was so talented that the trees and hills seemed like a part of his own body. Ginny sometimes senses that her mother died too early—carrying the mysteries of Larry Cook to her grave.

Larry is a frightening, intimidating man, albeit one who's become a little less intimidating with old age. Larry is depicted as having an almost magical connection with his land: he can grow anything using his skill and experience. And yet there's a mysterious side to Larry. Like everyone else so far, Larry has secrets, which he conceals beneath his larger-than-life farmer's demeanor.

Back in the present, Larry argues with Caroline, his youngest daughter. Caroline went to law school, and married a lawyer—she has no desire to live on her father's farm or inherit his property. Larry, who's drunk, angrily tells Caroline that if she doesn't want his money, she's "out." As Ginny witnesses this exchange, she realizes a crucial difference between Caroline and herself and Rose: Ginny and Rose are always careful to speak to their father as daughters, never as women. Caroline always speaks as a woman.

Larry is depicted as a boorish old man: in spite of his vast wealth (and, apparently, his talent), he's a mean alcoholic. Even so, Ginny is willing to go along with Larry's plan because of her desire for more and her strong emotional connection to the farmland. Caroline, who is both more financially independent and less biased by her emotional connection to the farmland (she works as a lawyer in Des Moines) is far more likely to speak the truth: Larry's plan doesn't seem very well thought-out. Because Larry values his daughters' loyalty more highly than their honesty, he spitefully cuts Caroline out of his will.

Still at the Clark house, Ginny talks with Jess Clark about Larry's plan for the "corporation." Ginny says that the idea feels "suspiciously levelheaded." Jess thinks that the plan is a good idea, but promises not to tell anyone about Ginny's misgivings. If Larry died, Ginny realizes, his children would have to sell part of his farm to pay off the large inheritance taxes. Larry's land, which has been in his family for three generations, is now worth many millions of dollars, easily. By giving his land to his children *now*, the Cooks will avoid the taxes.

Ginny admits that Larry's plan seems unusual, and not really consonant with his usual behavior. And yet she goes along with it, anyway—presumably because she feels she has a right to own the land, anyway. Jess is depicted as someone who can play both sides of the field at once: he can be friendly with Larry and Harold while also keeping Ginny's secrets safe.

In bed with Tyler later that night, Ginny thinks about her relationship with Tyler. In the past, Tyler has always been completely open with Ginny, so much so that other people seem stiff and dishonest by comparison. Tyler thinks that Ginny has had three miscarriages, but in actuality, Ginny has had five. After their third miscarriage, Tyler insisted on Ginny using birth control whenever they had sex. Instead, Ginny secretly didn't wear a diaphragm, and went about trying to get pregnant without telling Tyler. Ginny has told Rose about her secret, and Rose has sworn not to tell anyone. Ginny enjoys keeping a secret from Tyler—she feels alive and "full of possibilities."

Ginny keeps secrets from everyone, even Ty, whom she trusts. Ginny clearly feels guilty for being unable to have kids—her own lack of fertility is contrasted with the land her family's life centers around, and with the expectations for women in her society. But Ginny seems to savor her secrets—because her opportunities for independence are so limited, and because she lives in a small community where everybody seems to know everybody else, she relishes any chance to escape from other people's "surveillance," even that of her own husband.

BOOK 1, CHAPTER 5

The morning after the party, Ginny goes to her father's house, and finds Larry driving with his friend, Marv Carson, who works at the bank. Ginny proceeds to cook breakfast for Larry and Marv and serve it to them. As they eat, Marv speaks frankly about his self-control when it comes to dieting and exercising: he urinates 10 times a day, sweats copiously, and has regular bowel movements. Ginny marvels that Marv can say such things without any embarrassment.

One of the recurring images of the first part of the novel is the decay of the body. The land—Larry's property—lives on, eternal and fertile, and yet individual people (their bodies) decay and die over time. Even mighty Larry, the legendary farmer who controls a thousand acres, will eventually die. The character of Marv corresponds to the Fool in King Lear, as here he shows the Fool's characteristic frankness about uncomfortable topics.

Ginny thinks back to Rose's decision to marry Pete. Ginny was impressed with Pete, since Pete was handsome and charming, as well as a talented musician who traveled the country performing in orchestras. Ginny can't understand why Pete was attracted to Rose—Rose wasn't smart or particularly beautiful. But Pete wanted to marry because he was tired of traveling. Over time, Ginny came to realize that Pete was actually an angry, abusive husband who beat Rose all the time. Shortly after breaking Rose's arm, Pete stopped beating her. Pete and Larry always had a connection, rooted (Ginny feels) in their love for drinking. Back in the present, Larry tells Ginny to gather her sisters and their husbands so that they can all meet that evening.

Rose marries an outsider who has no real connection to the land. Rose, it would seem, is rebellious and eager for escape, hence her decision to marry a "stranger," rather than someone Larry knows and trusts. And yet her plan backfires when Pete begins to hit her. At this point in the novel, the outsiders in the society are depicted as untrustworthy and deceptive. And yet there's a sinister hint here that Larry accepts Pete's abuse, suggesting, perhaps, that Larry has been abusive too, or that he at least has no problem with the patriarchal nature of his family and community.

BOOK 1, CHAPTER 6

Ginny prepares to go to church. At church, the minister Henry Dodge speaks about the importance of tilling the soil. Afterwards, Ginny meets up with her sister, Caroline, and tells her that it's not too late to reconcile with Larry—she just has to call him "Daddy." Caroline tells Ginny that she refuses to be a "little girl."

The community is so centered on farmland that even the pastor makes a speech about the importance of the soil. Notice, too, that Ginny tries to get Caroline to "respect" their dad and act like a little girl. Ginny seems so frightened of her father that she wants Caroline to mimic her (Ginny's) own fears. She can't conceive of a situation in which Caroline could respect Larry and yet not be frightened of him.

Ginny continues to try to convince Caroline to go along with Larry's plan for a corporation, but Caroline grows angry. She accuses Ginny of tricking Larry into giving up his property in order to get rich quick. Caroline walks off with Rose and Pete, who drive her away from the church. As Ginny watches her sisters drive away, she thinks that Larry's plan was good, if not for him then for his children.

This is the first point in the novel when one of the characters accuses Ginny of being antagonistic to her family's needs. Ginny is the protagonist of the novel, and so far has seemed like a reliable witness to the novel's events. So it comes as a genuine surprise when Caroline accuses Ginny of trying to cheat Larry out of his property. An important point to realize is that Ginny, the narrator, would never admit to being greedy, so readers have to study her carefully by paying attention to the way other characters, such as Caroline, treat her.

BOOK 1, CHAPTER 7

Ginny and Tyler go to Larry's house, where Jess is drinking coffee, alone. While Ty drives off to find the rest of the family, Jess tells Ginny that Pete has already expressed his plans for the land: he'll install electricity and grow new crops.

It doesn't take long for the family to begin making plans for Larry's land: now that they own it, they can manipulate it however they like. Notice that it's Pete who wants to change the farmland—Pete, who presumably knows the least about farming, but is also very assertive and aggressive.

Ginny asks Jess to tell him about his time in Seattle, and Jess obliges. In Seattle, he ran a food co-op and held other odd jobs. He claims that he liked his lifestyle, since it helped him cultivate a sense of "inner peace."

Jess is a little bit of everything: he seems like a hippie to Ginny, since he's a draft-dodger, a co-op owner, and has a vaguely Zen demeanor ("inner peace").

Ginny hears Ty driving back: she sees that he's found Harold and Loren. Another car pulls up, carrying Marv Carson and Ken LaSalle (Larry's lawyer and friend). Pete and Rose arrive, and soon there are lots of people inside the house, talking happily. Ginny sees Larry, who seems to be in a good mood; in fact, Ginny sees that everyone is cheerful, even Harold and Rose.

Ginny has the sense that her family is happy, sincerely and profoundly. But as we've already seen, and will continue to see, the family's happiness is short-lived and rather surface-level. The sense of jealousy and competition (between the sisters, between Larry and Harold, etc.) tears them apart.

Caroline's car arrives. When Caroline comes to the front door, Ginny opens it, but then Larry slams the door in Caroline's face. Larry yells for the party to go on. Ginny looks out the window, but Caroline's car is gone already.

Smiley never reveals what Caroline was going to say to Larry—whether she was going to apologize or not. Larry doesn't give her a chance to speak her mind: he's so spiteful, so insistent that his children honor him, that he disrespects her, even though she seems to be the only daughter who's behaved truly honestly. This scene parallels Lear's banishment of Cordelia in Shakespeare's play.

BOOK 2, CHAPTER 8

Ginny recalls a neighbor, Cal Ericson. Cal owned lots of animals, which he kept on his vast farm. Cal was educated, but he didn't know how to repair his machinery, and so Cal and Larry Cook came up with a deal whereby Cal would make fresh cream and ice cream in return for which Harold and Larry would repair his machines. Larry seemed to dislike Cal because his only ambition in life was to be happy. Larry, by contrast, believed that it was a farmer's duty to feed the world.

As Ginny thinks about her family history in more detail, she comes to realize that her father wasn't exactly the legendary leader and farmer she remembers him being. Yet he is motivated by seemingly noble goals: he thinks of himself as doing almost holy work, providing food and nourishment for the entire world (and he looks down on farmers who don't share his idealistic worldview).

Ginny's mother, Mrs. Cook, got along decently well with Mrs. Ericson, though deep down she agreed with Larry that the Ericsons were too trivial to be "real farmers." Ginny, however, loved the Ericsons: Ruthie Ericson, the daughter, was Ginny's close friends for years.

Everyone in the community seems united in agreement that farming is a holy profession: even Mrs. Cook (about whom the novel says very little) believes that a good farmer is never trivial. Ginny seems not to fit with the rest of her family: she doesn't care about holy work; she just wants a friend.

After the corporation is established, Ginny and Rose take turns having Larry over for dinner. For months, Larry visits his two daughters every week, but never seems to relax: often he'll finish his meal and just go home. Larry never visits Caroline, who lives in Des Moines now.

As in Lear, *Ginny and Rose begin by showing their gratitude to Larry by taking care of him, one night at a time (in the play, Lear travels back and forth between the two sisters' kingdoms). Although Caroline lives far away from Larry, she claims to love him more than either Ginny or Rose.*

One night at dinner, Ty and Ginny talk with Larry about their plans to enrich the land Larry has given them. Larry is quiet and says nothing except, "Do what you want." After dinner, Larry leaves instead of staying to watch TV with his daughter.

Larry isn't happy with the way things have worked out: he seems to be resentful of Caroline for daring to challenge his judgment (especially because Caroline seems to have been his favorite daughter). Notably, Larry seems be the one to lash out first against his daughters with his morose, rude behavior—much as Lear's coterie offends Regan and Goneril in the play.

The next day, Ginny goes to plant tomatoes on her property. While she's outside planting, she sees Jess Clark, who greets her cheerfully. As they talk, Jess mentions that his old fiancée, Alison, was killed in a car crash while they were living in Canada. Jess was so saddened by the accident that he almost drank himself to death afterwards. While Ginny plants tomatoes, Jess claims that since Alison's death, however, he's become "all sweetness and light."

Ginny finds it easy to open up to Jess, and it's important to understand why. Jess is eager to talk about his own rough experiences—to share them with someone else in the community. Jess is an especially mysterious character because he claims to have found a way to get over his own misery—a talent that could be considered impressive or sociopathic (in some potential foreshadowing).

Jess goes on to talk about meeting Alison while working with her at a crisis center. Jess admired her kindness and dedication. Ginny is reminded of Rose's breast cancer diagnosis, and Jess insists that nobody told him that Rose had cancer—not even his own father or brother.

Jess continues to open up to Ginny about his romantic life, and Ginny seems inspired to open up about her own feelings, too. It's surprising that Jess hadn't heard about Rose's breast cancer, considering how close the Clarks and the Cooks are—Smiley suggests that Harold and Loren aren't interested in the problems with Rose's body or with the female body in general.

Jess turns to talking about his mother, who died years ago. As he talks, he begins to cry. He explains that he went to Canada to dodge the draft, and his mother never properly forgave him. Ginny tells Jess she's sorry, and Jess smiles, saying that he believes that life is good, in spite of everything he's been through. Ginny finds Jess's smile not just charming, but beautiful.

Jess and Ginny both have dead mothers—there are no strong mother figures in the father-dominated novel (and play). Jess also feels a great rift between himself and his mother's memory: she never forgave him for dodging the draft. Ginny seems charmed by Jess—not just because of his beauty but because of his honesty; in a community where everybody controls their appearances, it's refreshing to see some genuine emotion. (Of course, Jess could be "performing" for Ginny.)

BOOK 2, CHAPTER 9

Ginny knows that it's been three months since Rose's operation, meaning that Rose, who's been undergoing chemotherapy, has to check in with the hospital. Ginny drives her sister out Mason City. Rose and Ginny go to Rose's doctor's appointment, planning to go shopping afterwards. The appointment goes well: the doctor says Rose is doing very well.

Ginny takes care of her sister and supports her through her medical crisis—the two seem close, or at least much closer than they are with Caroline. At this early stage in the novel, Rose's body seems to be in relatively good condition—she's still healthy and young.

Rose and Ginny walk through the city, and Rose admits that she's been depressed for a long time. Rose suggests going to a strip club to celebrate her appointment—something that would scandalize Larry. But eventually she settles for going shopping for clothes.

Rose, it's implied, is a more rebellious daughter than Ginny: where Ginny seems more submissive and mild-mannered, Rose looks for opportunities to rebel against Larry (even if she'd never disrespect him to his face).

While shopping, Ginny and Rose talk about Caroline, who hasn't spoken to Larry since he slammed the door in her face. They agree that it'll have to be Caroline who makes the first move toward reconciliation.

On the surface of things, it seems that Rose and Ginny are reluctant to talk to Caroline: perhaps because they feel a little guilty about accepting Larry's money and land so thoughtlessly; their consciences are guilty.

Ginny admits to Rose that she's always had problems opening up to people outside her family; she remembers that Rose, by contrast, has always been friendly with strangers. Rose laughs and tells Ginny that she's always struggled with "not grabbing things"—ever since she was a child, she wanted to grab objects, even when the objects were sharp or dangerous, like a razor. Ginny drives Rose back to her home, and Rose kisses Ginny goodbye. Ginny realizes that she's known Rose her whole life and never tired of her.

Rose explains that she's always has an acquisitive personality—a character flaw that seems minor for the time being, but will eventually prove to be a "fatal flaw." Rose can't help but grab things, even if they're bad for her: the passage foreshadows the way Rose will "cling" onto her father's land, even after it begins to destroy her, both spiritually and biologically. The relationship between the two sisters, which seems so loving here, is doomed to fall apart.

BOOK 2, CHAPTER 10

Caroline was six when her mother died, Ginny remembers. She was an agreeable child who never bothered anyone, and Larry often said she was better than Rose or Ginny. Larry would ask Caroline to give him a kiss, and she'd oblige right away, whereas Rose and Ginny would hesitate.

Caroline has always been her father's favorite child—although it's interesting that he defines "good child" as the child who obeys him with the least hesitation. Also notice Ginny and Rose's reluctance to show their father affection, foreshadowing the later events (and revealed memories) of the novel.

Rose and Ginny looked out for Caroline, their little sister. In high school, they made sure that Larry granted her more freedom than either of them had gotten: as a result, Caroline got to go to prom, dances, read fashion magazines, etc.

Rose and Ginny, in spite of their current estrangement from Caroline, always tried to protect her: selflessly, they made sure that Caroline's life was better than their own. Notice that Larry seems to exert enormous force over his children's freedom in general, and their sexual freedom in particular.

After driving Rose home, Ginny decides to call Caroline. She drives back to her home, past Larry's house, and notices Larry sitting outside, very stiff and stone-faced. Afraid that her father has died, Ginny stops the car and drives back to ask Larry if he's all right—Larry turns out to be alive. Ginny tells her father she visited Rose, and Larry says that if Rose were to die of her cancer, her children would be "Stuck"—a remark that Ginny doesn't know how to respond to. Ginny invites Larry to her house for dinner, but Larry doesn't respond, and Ginny leaves.

Ginny is haunted by the specter of her father: as he gets older and older, he remains intimidating, yet also reminds Ginny of a ghost. Larry seems keenly aware that his children are trapped in Zebulon: hence his observation that Rose's children would be stuck if Rose died. Larry is curiously blasé about his daughter's cancer, as if he can't muster sympathy or compassion for her.

Rose calls Ginny later that evening and reports that she can see Larry from her house, watching Ty operate a tractor. She suspects that Larry and Ty have had a fight of some kind. After hanging up the phone, Ginny thinks about calling Caroline, but eventually talks herself into waiting until Sunday: if she hasn't heard from Caroline by Sunday, she decides, she'll call Caroline.

This passage gives a better sense for the physical space of the novel: Rose, Larry, and Ginny are so close to one another that Rose can actually see Larry from her house. Ginny may be deluding herself into believing that she should wait to talk to Caroline, because she's really afraid to do so (again suggesting a guilty conscience).

BOOK 2, CHAPTER 11

Ginny realizes that she's waiting to run into Jess Clark again. She thinks about the death of Jess's fiancée and mother, and wonders how he's remained so happy for so long. One evening, Ty comes home with Jess, saying that Jess is staying for dinner; he's been working for Ty all day. Ginny is concerned that Jess is a vegetarian and won't be able to eat the meal she's prepared.

Ginny seems interested in Jess Clark (even if readers recognize her interest before she herself does). Ginny seems attracted to all things that make Jess different from the average farmer: he's a vegetarian, which is pretty rare in the America Midwest. One could interpret Jess's vegetarianism as a rebellion against a farmer's way of life, and presumably against his father as well.

Jess emerges from the bathroom and talks about Ginny's house, which used to belong to the Ericsons: Larry bought the property from them when Ginny was a teenager. Jess proceeds to have a lively meal with Ginny and Ty, during which everyone eats noodles, cottage cheese, and other vegetarian dishes, and Jess talks about his admiration for Jimmy Carter. Ginny asks Jess if he'll move in with Harold now that he's back in town, but Jess says he doesn't know. He also mentions his brother, Loren, who's been acting odd lately: he won't even talk about whom he's been dating.

This passage is important for a number of reasons. First, it establishes that the novel is set in the late 1970s, during the Carter administration (Jimmy Carter was the successor to the highly unpopular Nixon/Ford Republican administrations, though Carter went on to be unpopular as well, and communities like this one were traditionally conservative—unlike Jess). Second, it captures the dynamic between the Clarks and the Cooks—everybody seems to be getting along well right now. The passage mentions Loren (the Edgar counterpart from Lear*), however, he'll be a minor character in the novel, and Smiley won't reveal much more about his personal life.*

Ty suggests that Jess rent out some land next year, and Ginny realizes that Ty likes Jess as much as she does: he wants Jess around for good. Jess says it sounds like a good idea, though he's scared of committing to anything: he should get married and settle down some day.

Ty likes Jess, but the only way he can express his admiration for Jess is in "farm terms"—talking about land with him. Jess's fear of commitment and his love of freedom are both charming and irresponsible.

It's late at night, but Ty, Jess, and Ginny talk about a news story: a woman was murdered in a nearby town. A man tried to break into his ex-girlfriend's house, and stabbed her to death—the police shot him when they found him inside. Ginny notes that cities are full of murder. On this sinister note, Jess leaves and evening comes to an end.

The story of the woman and the ex is important because it reminds us that these characters regard cities as places of danger, and consider their land and family as a site of trust and love. It also brings up themes of revenge and violence which have connections to the rest of the novel.

BOOK 2, CHAPTER 12

The next evening, Jess comes for dinner again. Rose, Ginny has heard, will be out of town tomorrow to pick up Linda and Pammy from boarding school. Ginny invites Rose and Pete over, and everyone—Ty, Ginny, Rose, Pete, and Jess—plays a game of **Monopoly**. Everyone has a great time: Jess and Pete tell stories, and Jess's presence in particular seems to cheer everyone up.

The passage introduced one of the key symbols of the novel: the game of Monopoly. In the books, Monopoly is a symbol for the characters' repressed greed or selfishness. While it's impolite for the characters to talk about money upfront, they channel their greed and selfishness through a game.

Pete plays **Monopoly** aggressively, spending all his money on property instead of saving it. Ginny notices that Pete can be a lot of fun: he tells goofy stories about hitchhiking as a teenager, and he sings songs nobody's heard in years.

As the family spends more time in each other's company, they begin to bond. Ginny realizes that even Pete, whom she's always regarded as an outsider, is a likable guy (she seems to have forgiven him for breaking her sister's arm, suggesting that Ginny is strangely accepting of abuse).

One night, Jess comes over for **Monopoly** with Rose and Pete, and says that Harold is planning to remodel his house using concrete in the kitchen—a plan that everyone finds absurd. The next day, Ginny sees that Larry has ordered expensive new doors and cabinets for his own kitchen, but has nowhere to put them, and so stores them outside in the sun. Ginny laughs, thinking that her father must be competing with Harold Clark yet again. She notices that the cabinets cost over a thousand dollars.

Harold and Larry continue their crazed competition: whenever Harold buys anything, Larry has to top it with a big purchase of his own. For the time being, Ginny and Rose don't care about Larry's purchases—now that their hold on his money is secure, they don't care what he does. And yet it's important to notice the way Ginny notes Larry's expenses; she's still counting his money, and becoming a little more possessive.

One night, Larry comes to Ginny's for dinner and Ty mentions that it's going to rain soon. Ginny asks what Larry will do about his wooden cabinets, but Larry angrily says that he'll leave them outside in the rain, and adds that he'll leave the tractor out in the rain, too. When Ginny tries to tell Larry to store his possessions inside, Larry yells for Ginny to leave him alone.

Larry is becoming increasingly unstable and erratic—instead of taking care of his own possessions (with the expectation that he'll pass them down to his children one day), he abuses his cabinets and tractor. It's as if Larry has no more reason to live: he's already passed on his possessions, meaning that he has no more "use" in life. (And Ginny and Rose aren't exactly going out of their way to spend time with him.)

At **Monopoly** night, Ginny and Rose talk about Larry's expensive, irresponsible orders, and Rose notes that Ginny is "running out of money"—in the Monopoly game. Pammy, who's come over for Monopoly with her sister, Linda, and their mother (Rose), asks Ginny if Larry is "crazy," but Ginny assures her that he's fine. Ginny tells Pammy that Larry isn't anywhere near as scary as he used to be. Later in the evening, Rose suggests to Ginny that Larry is getting Alzheimer's, and the sisters agree that he's "out of control."

Notice the subtle way Smiley conveys Ginny and Rose's greed by talking about Monopoly. When Rose says Ginny is "running out of money," she's talking about the game, but of course, she's also talking about real life. Ginny and Rose seem afraid that Larry is spending their own money on useless items like cabinets; they've become increasingly obsessed with cash, to the point where they want to control their father's behavior. This closely parallels King Lear, as Lear starts to go insane and Goneril and Regan grow increasingly cruel towards him. The real twist—which makes Rose and Ginny more sympathetic, and Larry less so—is yet to come.

BOOK 2, CHAPTER 13

The next day, Ginny drives Linda and Pammy to the nearby community swimming pool. In the car, the children complain that they don't like boarding school because they're far away from the children they grew up with. Ginny tries to reassure the kids that they'll have a great time at the pool, seeing children they haven't seen in a long time. But deep down, she's worried.

Notice how little time Rose spends with her own children, partly because of her condition, and partly because she seems not to feel much affection for them. Ginny seems to love spending time with Rose's children, however, based largely on the fact that she doesn't think she herself can have kids.

At the pool, Pam wears a pair of sunglasses that she bought in Iowa City, and Ginny realizes that nobody will recognize her while she's wearing the glasses. Mary Livingstone, an older woman Ginny knows, greets Ginny, Pammy, and Linda. Mary tells Ginny she's selling her farm soon and going to live far away. Ginny recalls that two of Mary's sons were killed in Vietnam. Mary brags that she'll be able to clear more than a million dollars by selling her property.

Even Pam, a child, intuitively understands the use of appearances and disguises—they're a necessity in her community. Notice also that Ginny's neighbors seem even more acquisitive and obsessed with cash than she does—Mary, for instance, brags about her millions of dollars in property sales. Everything in this community is tied up in both business and land.

Mary and Ginny talk about Ginny's mother, whom Mary knew well. Mary tells Ginny that Ginny's mother was more afraid of what would happen to her daughters after her death than of death itself. Mrs. Cook wanted her daughters to have freedom to go to college and explore their options, instead of staying around to work the farm. Ginny hasn't taken risks in life: she never went to college, and she married young. Ginny begins to cry as Mary speaks to her, and Mary apologizes.

Ginny's mother is the most mysterious character in the text—it's hard to imagine what kind of person she was. Mary is a "witness" to Mrs. Cook's personality; she suggests that Mrs. Cook wanted her daughters to break free of their father's control, and implied that he was somehow dangerous to them in some way. Instead, Ginny and Rose have done exactly the opposite; they're more tied to their father's land, and therefore their father, than ever before.

As Ginny watches the children, she thinks about what Mary has said: Mary sized her up completely. She also realizes that Rose has ended up a lot like their mother, Mrs. Cook: both women ended up in the hospital at an early age, and they're very similar in appearance and personality. On the car ride home, Ginny sighs tiredly, and Linda assures Ginny that she and her sister had a fun time at the pool.

Ginny seems to sense that she's sacrificed her freedom by marrying young and declining to receive a good education. Similarly, she seems to recognize that the traditional path in life for a woman (in particular, marrying young, not pursuing an education or a career, and having children) does not necessarily lead to happiness, as evidenced by the lives of her mother and her sister.

BOOK 2, CHAPTER 14

Back at Rose's home, Ginny finds Ty, Rose, and Pete. Rose tells Ginny that Jess is coming over for a big dinner. Ginny reminds Rose that it's her turn to host Larry for dinner, and Rose irritably tells Ginny that she already fed Larry.

As time passes, Rose and Ginny both tire of taking care of their aging father (just like Regan and Goneril in Lear*). Rose, the more rebellious of the two of them, cracks first.*

On Sunday, Ginny honors her promise to herself and calls Caroline. She calls, and Caroline immediately asks if Larry is all right. When Caroline is sure that Larry is fine, she asks Ginny if she and Rose have signed the corporation paperwork, and Ginny says that everything has been taken care of. Ginny guiltily says she had no choice but to sign, and Caroline shoots back that Ginny *did* have a choice.

Caroline's attention to Larry's health and happiness is immediate: the first words out of her mouth are about her father. The scene emphasizes the increasing carelessness with which Ginny and Rose have watched their father (even if we should also keep in mind that Larry has been pushing away from his daughters, too).

After her phone call, Rose tells Ginny that Caroline barely visited her during her time in the hospital, and suggests that Caroline thinks she's better than the rest of the family. Preparing for dinner, Ginny imagines Caroline cross-examining her about her decision to sign the corporation papers and take Larry's money and land. She's not sure what she would say. At dinner, Ginny stares at Jess, who looks very handsome.

Ginny continues to feel attracted to Jess—he seems to represent "a way out" for Ginny, an escape from the drudgery of life on the farm (and the family quarrel over the inheritance of the farm). Ginny's guilt grows and grows; it's as if she senses that, deep down, Caroline is right to attack her for greed.

A few days after the dinner, Ginny and Rose go to visit Larry for their annual Father's Day dinner. At dinner, Larry is morose—the contrast with the sisters' dinners with Jess is clear. Larry mentions a freak hailstorm that occurred recently, and says that he drove all the way to Des Moines earlier in the week. He's curt and brusque with his guests, especially Ginny and Rose.

Larry is becoming increasingly pessimistic following his decision to give up his property. Perhaps he's always thought of himself one day giving away his land to his children—but now that that day has come, he's not sure what else to live for, and feels robbed of all his power. Furthermore, Larry seems to continue to love Caroline best, as evidenced by the fact that he keeps trying to visit her.

After dinner, Ty says that Ginny and Rose don't understand their father at all. Ty explains that Larry is now afraid of his own children: he doesn't have any real money anymore, and that means he doesn't have any real power over his family. Ginny insists that she feels as if nothing at al has changed: she owns a lot of property, but she hasn't changed her behavior at all.

Ty seems to have divided loyalties. Even though he criticizes Larry at times, he's sympathetic to Larry's condition, and wishes that Ginny and Rose would pay more attention to their father. Ginny and Rose seem to be doing the bare minimum at this point: they treat taking care of Larry as an annoying duty.

As she falls asleep, Ginny thinks about all the stories she's heard about her father, a legendary farmer, over the years. As a young man, he'd been incredibly handsome, and wooed Ginny's mother with great skill. She also remembers an accident that Harold Clark had in his truck, when she was a little girl. Larry told Ginny to run over to Harold, who was trapped under his own tire, and give him a bottle of whiskey. Then Larry helped pull the truck off of Harold. Ginny cries as she remembers her father: she can barely remember the man her father used to be.

Ginny notices the contrast between her father now and her father as a young man: without his property, Larry is nothing: it's as if he's lost a part of his body (maybe even the most important part of his body). Larry has always tried to assert his power and manliness: when Harold is injured, he gives Harold the help he needs, but refuses to be too personally compassionate with his neighbor (he sends Ginny to give Harold the whiskey, instead of doing so himself).

BOOK 2, CHAPTER 15

Harold Clark is a strange, contradictory man, Ginny thinks. He loves showing off with his new tractor, annoying Larry greatly. One night over **Monopoly**, Jess points out that Harold is a lot sharper and more manipulative than he lets on. People think he's just a silly old man, but Harold only pretends to be silly in order to get some privacy for himself: people ignore him because they don't take him seriously.

Jess is a shrewd observer of character in general, and a good observer of his father's true ways. Harold is an interesting character because he seems to have found a way to survive in the small, claustrophobic town: he just pretends to be an eccentric old man, so that people leave him alone.

Pete, who's also playing **Monopoly**, announces that he's talked to Harold recently: Harold is thinking about changing around his will. Ginny knows that Harold's current will probably favors Loren over Jess. Jess jokes that Harold is probably going to leave his entire farm to the National Conservancy Society instead of giving it to his children. Nobody mentions the will again.

The inheritance plot concerning Larry's family is paralleled by Harold's plans to give away his property (as Gloucester's story parallels Lear's). Jess, who had seemed so interested in escaping from his family, now seems oddly invested in Harold's will—even though he jokes about the matter, there's a curious tension in the air, suggesting that he's more interested than he lets on (why did he come back to Harold, after all?). Once again, it's through the game of Monopoly that real-world greed and manipulation gets played out.

Before Jess leaves, he asks Ty about an area of land that Ty has been working for a long time. Jess notes that the land is heavily farmed, and suggests that if he controlled it, he would experiment with different crops and a more ambitious farming schedule. Ty is offended, Ginny can tell. The next day, Ty complains to Ginny that Jess is overly ambitious with his farming ideas because he's done little actual farming himself—he's book-smart, but inexperienced.

Jess seemingly wants to inherit some property from Harold: in spite of all his travels, he wants to become a farmer, and he's not experienced or wealthy enough to become one on his own. This is important information, because it suggests that Jess, in spite of his affectations of adventurousness and innocence, wants the same things as everybody else: land and money.

BOOK 2, CHAPTER 16

Later in the day, Ginny goes to run errands and then visit her father. She thinks about Larry driving all the way to Des Moines by himself. She remembers him praising Ty's father, also a farmer, for dying of a heart attack instead of living into old age. It occurs to Ginny that Larry must hate himself for signing away his land.

Larry seems to intuit that it's nobler to die as a young man than as an old one—one of the classic rules of "machismo." Larry doesn't want to go through the indignity of becoming an old man who can't take care of himself: he's so independent that he doesn't want to give up his power and agency to his children.

Ginny arrives at Larry's house, where she finds him sitting out back. He complains that nobody has brought him eggs. Ginny can tell that his complaint is a challenge: she can either make him breakfast without eggs or she can go get some for him. In the end, Ginny chooses to run home and get some eggs, even though she could have simply gone across the street to get some from Rose.

Larry doesn't really need eggs, but he's "flexing" in order to test whether or not he still exerts any power over his children. Ginny is still frightened of her father—even if he doesn't have any financial control over her, she still remembers how scary he can be.

Ginny "flashes back" to describe her most recent phone call with Caroline. After learning about Larry's drive to Des Moines, Ginny talked to Caroline, and learned that Larry went to Caroline's law offices, drunk, but was sent away before he could see Caroline. Caroline, seemingly annoyed, tells Ginny to take Larry's keys to stop him from visiting Des Moines again. Then Caroline says that Larry's "passage of power" clearly hasn't gone well. By passing on his land to his daughters, and therefore to Ty and Pete, Larry has found himself becoming increasingly irrelevant to the lives of his loved ones. Caroline also accuses Ginny of pretending to be reluctant to accept her father's land, when in reality she was more than happy to take it from him.

Caroline is the most matter-of-fact of the three siblings. Here, for example, she's quick to state the obvious—Larry doesn't like the way his daughters have been treating her since he signed away his money. And yet Caroline isn't entirely right to criticize Ginny and Rose without blaming Larry too: Larry has been morose and irritable about getting old in general, and he seems disturbed that he has no way of controlling his daughters anymore. He's depressed, but only because the way he expressed his love to his daughters was never healthy to begin with (and this is even before we learn of his past abuse).

Ginny remembers that Caroline always got along with Larry better than she or Rose did. In college, Caroline would have complicated psychological theories about why Larry was the way he was, but Rose would always conclude, "He's a farmer." Ginny hangs up the phone, shaking. She can't tell if she's feeling guilty or just angry. She decides not to tell Rose about her conversation, lest Rose "assume the antagonism" Caroline was talking about.

Caroline was sure that she could crack Larry's "code." Caroline's behavior suggests that she was genuinely interested in becoming closer with Larry, whereas her older siblings were more likely to avoid thinking too closely about him at all—suggesting either a lack of love (as would be suggested in King Lear) or a wariness based in past trauma.

BOOK 2, CHAPTER 17

The next morning, Ginny cleans the house from top to bottom. In the middle of her work, Jess pays her a visit and asks her to go for a walk with him. Ginny agrees, reluctantly, and they walk to a shady spot under a big tree in the local dump (i.e., the place where farmers throw their trash when they can't afford the local landfill).

Ginny and Jess's interactions become increasingly illicit: here, for example, they're sneaking off together. Appropriately, the place where they sneak off to is isolated and altogether unlike anywhere else in the community; they're coming as close as possible to escaping the farm without actually leaving it.

In the dump, Jess cheerfully points out different species of flowers and snakes to Ginny. Suddenly, he asks Ginny who Larry's favorite child was: Ginny immediately replies that it's always been Caroline. Ginny then asks Jess who Harold's favorite child is, and he replies, "Me." Jess notes that Harold is always suspicious of Loren for trying to "take over." Nevertheless, Loren and Harold are very alike in temperament, and Harold seems to know it.

Jess, as always, is quick to bring up sensitive subjects, such as family loyalties. The passage further reinforces the idea that Jess may be putting on several acts at once—and one of them involves making himself the "favorite," thus inheriting more land and money from his father. Also notice that Jess talks about flowers and snakes—perhaps symbolizing the two sides of his character, one innocent, one evil.

Jess tells Ginny that sometimes he's afraid that after his father dies, he'll end up living on the farm with his brother, sad and lonely forever. Ginny urges Jess to wait for "something concrete" to happen before he starts worrying. Jess says that Ginny has calmed him down, and thanks her. Abruptly, he kisses her, and Ginny, in spite of herself, realizes that she's been waiting to kiss him for a very long time.

Jess seems lonely and desperate: after many years of trying to survive in the world on his own (which, in a material sense, he succeeded in doing), he's come back home. The farmland isn't so easy to escape: even if Jess isn't financially dependent on his father, farming is in his blood. Ginny has clearly been attracted to Jess for a while, and this kiss begins the more dramatic action of the novel. (It also once again parallels King Lear, in which Edmund has an affair with both Goneril and Regan.)

BOOK 3, CHAPTER 18

Ginny imagines the geological processes that led to the creation of Larry's farmland: volcanoes and storms that eventually led the soil to become extremely fertile. Growing up, Ginny and her sisters learned hundreds of "lessons" from Larry, all of which tied back to the importance of soil in some way. The goal of the family, Larry always said, was to "consolidate" land through marriages and business deals.

With each chapter, Ginny's descriptions of the land become more elaborate and far-reaching—here, for example, she thinks of the land as a geological marvel. All of her life has revolved around the soil and the farmland in some way: thus, she feels she has a real claim to owning it. We also see just how businesslike and selfish Larry was in terms of family, and particularly women—a worldview that he passed on in some degree to his children.

Ginny remembers Mel Scott, a poor farmer who didn't know how to take care of his own land. When Larry was a younger man, Mel fell into debt: he couldn't afford to pay his own taxes. Desperate, Mel went to Larry for help, and Larry agreed to pay the taxes if Mel signed over all his land to Larry. With no other choice, Mel agreed. Mel's family was outraged by the deal, but they had no choice but to honor it: a deal is a deal. Larry never spoke of his deal with Mel, suggesting that he was ashamed of having taken advantage of a poorer man.

This passage shows Larry at his most ruthless. Larry is hardly the noble, selfless farmer we've been hearing about—he's actually something of a con artist, desperate to accumulate as much land for himself as possible, even if it involves taking advantage of his poorer neighbors. Larry seems to know that he's done wrong, which is why he shuts up about it for good.

Larry acquired land from many of his other neighbors. Shortly after his wife died, he bought the Ericsons' property (the Ericsons moved back to Chicago). Larry never stopped negotiating business deals, even when Mrs. Cook died. Ginny has grown up with one key lesson: land is always moving from one owner to the next.

Larry accumulates farmland as if it's the only thing in the world that matters—which to him, it often seems, it is. As a result, Ginny thinks of farmland as constantly shifting hands, rather than remaining in the hands of the same family—in saying so, she foreshadows the disintegration of the family bonds that allow the thousand acres to remain in the Cook family. Furthermore, the more we learn about Larry's greed and selfishness, the less sympathetic he becomes (and the more sympathetic Ginny and Rose become).

BOOK 3, CHAPTER 19

One **Monopoly** night, Ginny and her family learn that Caroline has gotten married to Frank in Des Moines. Rose only discovers the marriage while she's shopping at the store and absent-mindedly reading the paper. Rose is furious that Caroline didn't tell her about the wedding. Ginny is hurt by Caroline's silence, and remembers that Caroline has always been distant with her siblings. Ginny blames herself and Rose for not teaching Caroline better manners.

Caroline and her husband are so removed from the rest of the family that Ginny only hears about her marriage after the fact. As usual, Ginny relates everything back to childhood, and to herself: thus, Caroline didn't tell her because when they were children, Ginny didn't do a better job of teaching Caroline how to be polite. (Also note that Caroline's husband is named Frank, which is similar to Lear*'s King of France, Cordelia's husband.)*

Rose angrily stands up from the **Monopoly** game and throws the board to the ground, infuriating Pete. Ginny remembers that Pete used to beat Rose. Ginny remembers that when Pete broke her arm, Rose wore a cast on which she wrote, "Pete did this" for all to see.

Rose's destruction of the Monopoly game foreshadows the destruction of the corporate agreement designed to keep the family in control of the farmland. It also shows that she's becoming more reckless and emotional.

The phone rings and Ty answers it: he reports that Larry has been in a car accident, and he's in the hospital. Rose mutters, "It's about time." Rose and Ginny drive separately to the hospital, and in their car, Ty and Ginny talk about how to deal with Larry. Ty suggests that Ginny "grin and bear it." Ginny is reminded of how handsome her husband is, and yet she thinks about sleeping with Jess.

Rose's behavior has become increasingly disrespectful: she doesn't show the slightest sympathy when Larry ends up in the hospital, probably injured seriously. Rose has always been the most vocally resentful of the three daughters, but here, it become clear just how angry she is—but why, we don't know yet.

BOOK 3, CHAPTER 20

In the hospital, Ginny and Rose find Larry in the waiting room, being very quiet. Larry has been mildly injured, but he's cleared to leave the hospital. One of the nurses confides in Ginny that the police will probably be in touch soon: Larry was probably drunk, meaning that he could be charged.

Larry has broken the law by drinking and driving; a sign of how far he's fallen since signing away his property to his children. Without a sense of family connection, he begins abusing his property and his body—he has nobody to live for anymore.

Ginny and Ty drive Larry home, and Larry sits in the back, silent. As Ginny sits in the car, she thinks of Jess. Suddenly, Larry groans, and Ty asks him what happened. Ty reminds Larry that the police might try to arrest him soon—he'll probably lose his license. Still, Larry doesn't say a word. Secretly, Ginny savors the idea that she and Ty are treating her own father like a naughty child.

Ginny begins to show her true motives—motives she'd repressed before now. Ginny, the passage suggests, is just as much in love with the idea of exerting power over her father as Rose is—she enjoys the feeling that she can treat her father like a child, as if she's making up for all the years when her father looked down on her (or worse).

Ty and Ginny take Larry to their home and put him in bed. The next morning they fix him breakfast as usual, and Rose drops by to see him. Privately, Ginny and Rose discuss what to do about their father, and Ginny suggests that Larry should be treated gently. Rose admits that she hates it when Ginny talks about forgiving Larry. Ginny tries to convince Rose that they can continue to "share the work" of taking care of Larry. Ginny recalls that Larry used to be easier to get along with when Mrs. Cook was alive. Rose looks like she's about to say something important, but then she falls silent. Reluctantly, she agrees to help Ginny take care of Larry.

Ginny seems more likely to forgive Larry than Rose is, and yet they're both seem to enjoy the idea of asserting their power over Larry, albeit in subtle ways. Rose wants to exert her power over her father by ignoring him, while Ginny wants to do the same thing by babying him and treating him like a naughty child. The passage implies that Rose was about to tell Ginny a big secret—the plot thickens.

BOOK 3, CHAPTER 21

Ginny finds herself becoming annoyed with Ty. Ty was lucky: his father died just as Ty was becoming a man, sparing Ty the indignity of having to take care of an elderly, senile man.

Ginny distances herself from Ty and becomes more attracted to Jess. Ty can't relate to Ginny's problems with Larry because he never took care of his own father.

In the days following Larry's accident, the police impound his car, and Ginny sees that it was almost destroyed in Larry's accident. Ginny's main source of happiness during the fallout from Larry's accident is Jess; she finds herself imagining Jess's beautiful, muscular body.

Larry begins abusing his property: because he has already passed on his most important possessions to his children, he treats his other possessions like trash.

Harold Clark begins to talk about changing his will. One afternoon Ginny is driving Linda and Pammy to the pool, and she runs into Harold while stopping for gas. Harold is talking to the cashier, Dollie, at a store, telling her about how it's hard to divide one's property between two sons, even if it's the "right thing" to do. After Harold leaves, Ginny chats with Dollie, and Dollie notes that she's never been comfortable with Jess, because he behaves like a tourist.

Harold, it had seemed, was planning to include Jess in the family will. And yet here he makes a big show of implying that he's going to write Jess out of the will, even saying that it's a pain to have to include one more than one child. Harold's complaint could also signal the opposite, however—that Jess is becoming his favorite child, and it's a pain to include Loren *now. (We have so little knowledge of Loren and his relationship with his family that it's difficult to say.) Also, the passage is an early sign that not everybody sees Jess as Ginny sees him: it's because Ginny is so restless and rebellious that she idolizes Jess the adventurer.*

One day, shortly afterwards, Jess, Harold, and Loren come by to drop off some frozen supplies with Ty and Ginny. Jess kisses Ginny when Ty isn't looking, and tells her to meet him in the dump. While delivering the frozen supplies, Harold chews out Loren for making a mistake with the chemical sprayer and Jess angrily defends his brother, even pushing Harold away from Loren. Harold, much to Ginny's surprise, laughs and apologizes instead of fighting back.

Jess finally shows his true feelings for Ginny. The passage contrasts the new sexual tension between Jess and Ginny with the family tension between Harold and Loren (while the chemical sprayer also foreshadows the scene in which Harold goes blind). We also see just how much Jess is the "favorite" now—he can even defuse his father's anger without repercussions.

As Jess finishes the delivery and says goodbye to Ginny, he mentions to Ginny that he's planning to farm organically on Harold's property after Harold's death. That night, Ginny and Ty have intense sex, but Ginny thinks about Jess the entire time.

Jess continues to plan a future for himself on the farm—ironically, considering that Ginny seems to like him because he represents an escape from the usual life of a farmer.

That afternoon, Ginny meets Jess in the dump as they'd planned. They have sex (though Smiley doesn't describe it, and only says that "afterward," Ginny shivers). Ginny admits she's never had an affair before, and also confesses she's had five miscarriages in the past, though Ty only knows about three of them. Jess suggests, "it's the water."

Notice the differences between the way Smiley describes sex with Ty (in vivid detail) and sex with Jess (in no detail at all). It's as if sex with Jess is so pleasurable (or guilt-inducing) that Ginny can't describe it—Ginny thinks of Jess as the answer to all her problems, opening up to him about the most intimate parts of her life. Also note that Jess believes that the farming chemicals and pesticides in the water have poisoned Ginny's body—a possibility that Ginny will take to heart.

Ginny eats dinner with Ty that night, and they discuss having a child. Ginny says she was wearing a diaphragm when they had sex last night. She remembers that she last had a miscarriage two years ago.

Ginny wants have a child; indeed, her persistence in attempting to have one suggests that she believes her life will never be complete until she succeeds.

BOOK 3, CHAPTER 22

Ty and Ginny plan to expand their equipment so that they can have a hog farm. Their plans become more elaborate, and they look into buying a silo and other top-of-the-line technology to transform the farmland. They plan on getting a loan with the help of Marv Carson, the banker.

Ginny and Ty want the best farmland possible, and this means spending a lot of money on equipment. They're becoming increasingly ambitious and concerned with money in general, meaning that they pay more and more attention when Larry wastes money (their money, ultimately) on frivolous purchases.

Ginny drives Larry to the chiropractor, who needs to take a look at Larry's injured back. In the car, Ginny feels a sense of foreboding, as she almost always does when she's alone with her father. To calm herself, she thinks of Jess, who is a strange combination of "American greed and Oriental serenity," she thinks.

Jess represents an interesting synthesis of types: he's something of a hippie, based on his draft dodging and Zen ideas, but he's also just as invested in farmland and property as everybody else. It's suggested that his "serenity" is in part an act to cover up his greed and allow him to manipulate people.

At the chiropractor, Ginny tells Larry she's going to go shopping, but Larry forces her to wait in the office so that he doesn't have to wait for Ginny to return from shopping. Ginny realizes that she's almost as intimidated by her father as she was when she was a child.

Larry still exerts a huge amount of control over Ginny, forcing her to wait for him instead of pursuing her own pleasure—not a bad metaphor for the way their relationship has always worked out.

After the appointment, Larry and Ginny go eat dinner, though Ginny isn't hungry. Larry mutters that Rose and Ginny should show him more respect—just because his land is theirs doesn't mean they don't have to respect him. As Ginny listens to Larry's lecture, she finds her point of view "vanishing."

Larry is conscious that Ginny and Rose seem more concerned with their property than with taking care of him. Smiley suggests that Larry is being unreasonable and irrationally resentful, but also that Rose and Ginny should take better care of their father.

BOOK 3, CHAPTER 23

Ginny drives Larry home, and he gets out of the car without saying a word to his daughter. At home, Ginny plans a dinner with one of the businessmen she's been talking to about the hog farm, a confinement building man from Kansas.

Notice the contrast between the way Ginny plans ahead for her meal with the businessmen from Kansas and her indifference to her meals with Larry: the former is a "passion project" and the latter is an unappealing duty.

Rose calls Ginny at night, saying that Pete's truck has disappeared; Larry might have taken it. Rose complains that the police should have put Larry in jail for a few nights to teach him not to drink and drive. Ty and Pete to go search for Larry.

In this important chapter, Larry takes things too far, riding off on his own into the night. The simmering family tensions finally burst in a dramatic action.

It's a stormy night, and Ginny entertains her nieces Linda and Pammy by watching TV. Late at night, after the nieces are asleep, Ty returns home and tells Rose and Ginny that he's found Larry: Larry has some things to tell his daughters. Rose and Ginny come outside, holding hands. Larry is standing outside; he yells that he'd rather stand outside in the storm than go back to either his own house or one of his daughters' houses. Rose, infuriated, tells Larry, "Do whatever you want," and Larry calls her a bitch. As Larry and his daughters argue, Pete pulls up, driving his pickup truck.

Ginny, as usual, seems closer to her nieces than their own mother is. It's important to contrast the way Ginny acts around her nieces with the way Larry behaves in front of his two daughters: in spite of passing on his own property to them, he regards them as weak and incompetent, and his obvious sexism is evidenced by the way he calls Rose a "bitch" in his moment of anger. The tables have turned: where before Larry had all the power, now Larry himself is struggling for freedom and independence (even stealing someone else's truck).

Larry asks Ginny how she can treat him like this: he's her father, and deserves her respect. He calls her a whore, and he warns her that her own children will treat her just as horribly when she's old. Rose pulls Ginny into the house. Ginny sees that outside, Larry has punched Pete in the face and walked away, into the night. Suddenly, it begins to rain, very hard, and the electricity goes out. Ty and Pete stagger into the house, and Ty says that he's lost sight of Larry altogether.

The word "whore" triggers a long series of flashbacks for Ginny, though they don't yet arrive in this scene. Larry's attitude around his daughters suggests that he's always regarded them as incompetent women and sexual objects. This passage is based on the scene in King Lear in which Regan and Goneril cast their father out into the storm, where he rages about and finally succumbs to madness. Here, of course, we see things from the point of view of the daughters, not "Lear" himself.

BOOK 3, CHAPTER 24

It's raining hard, and the family is trying to figure out what to do about Larry. Eventually, Pete and Ty agree to go check if Larry has found his way back to his own place or Rose's place.

Rose and Ginny don't want to go looking for their father; they're still shocked by their father's sudden expressions of hatred and sexist scorn.

Ginny has been shocked by her father calling her a whore—she wonders if he could possibly know about her affair with Jess. Inside the house, Rose says that Larry is clearly crazy. The phone rings, and Ty reports that Larry is nowhere to be found.

Ginny feels guilty about her affair with Jess, and in her panic over the insult "whore," she guesses that Larry knows about it (though that seems incredibly unlikely). The passage suggests that Ginny still fears her father, and on some level ascribes total power to him.

Rose and Ginny continue talking about Larry. Rose remembers the time after Mrs. Cook died, when Larry would come into his daughters' rooms and "came after" them. Ginny claims she can't remember this, and Rose indignantly shouts that Larry used to have sex with Ginny when Ginny was a teenager. Rose used to watch Larry go into Ginny room and come out shortly afterwards. Ginny insists that she can remember nothing of the kind. Rose admits that Larry used to have sex with her, too, when she was thirteen years old. As far as Rose knows, Larry never had sex with Caroline.

The horrible truth starts to emerge in the climactic setting of the storm: Rose admits that her own father raped her years ago. At this point, however, it seems that Ginny either wasn't raped or can't remember being raped. Rose, whether because she was younger at the time or because she chose hatred over repression, doesn't ever forget her father's crimes—thus, she despises her father and takes every opportunity to get revenge on him (unlike Ginny). To state the obvious, Larry becomes a much less sympathetic character after this passage, and the main twist in Smiley's interpretation of King Lear comes to light—the "Regan" and "Goneril" characters are hardly epitomes of evil (as they are in the play), but have in fact turned out this way because of the story's true monster—"Lear" himself.

Rose continues to tell Ginny about Larry's sexual abuse. In high school, Rose felt that it was her mission to distract Larry from Caroline. She claims that Larry didn't rape her—he seduced her, claiming that it was her duty as a daughter to pleasure him. Rose has told few people about her father's sexual abuse: she told Pete after Pete broke her arm. She even sent her daughters away to boarding school so that they'd see as little of Larry as possible.

Rose's resentment for her father seemed petty and unmerited at first, but now it seems perfectly reasonable and justified. The passage makes another interesting twist on Lear*: in the play, Cordelia is the only truly good daughter; in Smiley's novel, however, Rose and Ginny are the ones behaving most selflessly in their defense of Caroline, Linda, and Pamela.*

Ginny doesn't know what to say to Rose, except, "It didn't happen to me." Rose hisses that she won't let Larry get away with abusing her for so many years.

Rose is going to get her revenge on Larry, no matter what it takes. She wants to "bury" her father—erase his awful memory from what is now her farmland. The question becomes: why doesn't she just go to the police? Presumably, Rose wants her revenge to be total and personal—she wants to take away Larry's land (which is, in part, rightfully hers), render him totally powerless, and wipe away his memory forever. Also, in the late 1970s (as, unfortunately, often still today), it's not clear that anyone would believe Rose's charges even she did make them official. (Later in the novel, for example, Ty doesn't believe his own wife's account of Larry's abuse).

BOOK 3, CHAPTER 25

It's after midnight, and Ty and Pete come back from their search for Larry, only to go out again. As she falls asleep, Ginny can't stop thinking about what she's just learned: Larry used to sexually abuse Rose. Although Larry never had sex with Ginny (that Ginny can remember), Ginny remembers Larry coming into her room and looking at her body, in what now seems like a predatory way.

It's not completely clear if Ginny actually avoided sex with her father, or if she's just repressing the memories—some people who have been sexually abused are so traumatized that they forget about the event itself. Little by little, Ginny seems to be uncovering her old memories.

The next morning, Ginny finds Jess waiting for her. As she looks as Jess, she begins to cry. Jess explains that Larry has been wandering around all night. He eventually wandered to Harold's house, where he yelled until Loren found him there. Larry was yelling about Rose and Ginny being whores. Jess also mentions that he and Pete had an argument: Pete didn't want to keep looking for Larry, but Jess insisted that they continue.

Pete seems less willing than Jess to track down Larry, perhaps because it was Pete's truck that Larry stole. Pete has also always been an aggressive, competitive man and something of an outsider in the community. He doesn't feel the strong sense of duty to his neighbors that the others feel—Jess, on the other hand, in spite of having spent little time in the county, feels a need to look for Larry (but whether this need is feigned or not, however, is in question).

Later that morning, Ty comes back, very tired. Ginny makes him some breakfast. As she cooks, Ginny imagines herself in a horse's body, trapped in a tiny, cramped stable. She stares at her two nieces, Linda and Pammy, who are sleeping on the couch.

Ginny becomes increasingly conscious of how repressed and trapped she is: she's spent her entire life living under her father's thumb, and now she's beginning to realize how horrible her life really was. At this point, Linda and Pammy represent the possibilities of innocence in this community of cyclical abuse and revenge—they are not intimately attached to the land, and have also been kept from abuse and the knowledge of abuse.

BOOK 3, CHAPTER 26

Owning a farm, Ginny thinks, is all about keeping up appearances. So when it becomes clear that there's a major argument going on within the family, it's immediately agreed that the argument needs to be hidden from the public, so that the Cook family continues to project an image of unity and success.

Appearances have already been a key theme of the novel: in a small community, everybody knows (or thinks they know) everybody else, and there's a constant process of surveillance going on. But now that Ginny and Rose control their father's farmland, they feel a special burden to keep up appearances: to show that they, as women, can be as successful as their famous father.

Ginny dines with Marv Carson, from whom she and Ty are planning to borrow some money to expand their farm. Marv tells Ginny the problem: the bank is afraid that Ty and Ginny won't be able to honor their loan, due to Larry's "problems." Ginny is confused: she and Rose control the land because of their corporation deal. Marv explains that the bank feels uncomfortable loaning money due to the rumors about Larry's sanity. Ginny assures Marv that he doesn't have to worry about Larry, and Marv says he has to return to his office.

Ginny and Ty continue with their lofty plans for the farm. They're young, ambitious, and forward-thinking, and they channel their dreams into farming equipment and silos. The passage offers a concrete example of the importance of keeping up appearances: Marv will lend the family money, but only if he's confident that Larry is doing all right—Larry continues to command a certain measure of respect in the community, even after he gives away his fortune.

After Marv's visit, Harold Clark stops by to tell Ginny that there's a problem: Larry refuses to visit with Ginny or Rose anymore. Ginny insists that Larry is being foolish; she and her sister treat their father well, even though he's a drunk and a thief (he stole Pete's truck). Harold tells Ginny that Larry is staying with him for now, but that Ginny and Rose need to start treating their father with more respect—if they were sons instead of daughters, they'd understand. He also says that Rose has always been "trouble," leading Ginny to tell Harold to shut his mouth. Harold insists that Ginny and Rose must have a Sunday dinner with Larry and try to reconcile with him.

Larry holds a grudge against his daughters—but now that it's been revealed that he raped Rose (and possibly Ginny) years ago, it's difficult to muster any more sympathy for him. By withholding the information about Larry's abuse until halfway through the novel, Smiley challenges readers to form impressions of her characters and then change them mid-stream. (This doesn't just apply to Larry, but to almost all the characters—even Harold, for example, is now suddenly acting like the victim-blaming defender of a rapist.) The passage also conveys the sexism of Larry's society: Rose and Ginny may own the farm, but whatever they do will be suspect because of their gender.

For diner, Ty and Ginny host a businessman from Kansas, who's been talking to them about state-of-the-art farming equipment. The man from Kansas says that his company could bring a silo to the farm very soon. In the following days, bulldozers clear the way for the new equipment. Ginny watches the bulldozers destroy the old machinery and housing.

This is one of the best examples of how Ginny uses business ventures to bury the past. Ginny has a conflicted relationship with her memories and her father, and she seems to want to escape them in some form or other. By bulldozing Larry's old property, she tries to bury his memory.

BOOK 3, CHAPTER 27

Ginny decides that it's time for her family to start seeing a psychiatrist: about Larry's insanity, Rose's sexual abuse and trauma, etc. Ginny tries to find a suitable psychiatrist, but then it occurs to her that she should talk to Henry Dodge (the local minister) instead. She visits Henry in his office at church, and when she arrives, Henry seems oddly young. He's just come from cutting the grass outside, and he seems like a part of his community. Before he can begin his conversation with Ginny, Henry answers the phone, and while he's speaking, Ginny walks out.

Ginny, far more than Rose, wants to repair her family's problems using a professional's help. And yet she doesn't know where to begin. It's difficult to open up to strangers, or even distant acquaintances, about something so personal. Ginny's world is defined by her father and her family, to the point where she struggles to open up to anybody who's not *related to her (except Jess).*

Ginny meets with Rose and tells her that it's time to confront Larry about his abuse. Rose is reluctant to talk to Larry about the past, but Ginny insists that doing so is the only way to move forward. Ginny also acknowledges that everyone in the community thinks that she and Rose have treated Larry badly. Rose hesitantly agrees to talk to Larry after the Sunday supper.

Ginny wants to bring catharsis to the family: she thinks that by confronting Larry about his abuse, she and Rose can repair their psychological wounds. And yet Rose seems more reluctant than Ginny—surely because she's the one who actually remembers *Larry's sexual abuse, and thus has been more immediately traumatized by it. What Ginny is asking of Rose is something hugely courageous and risky.*

BOOK 3, CHAPTER 28

It's Sunday, and the church holds a huge potluck. Ginny and Rose wear their best clothes and go to church, where they find Larry, looking oddly submissive and weak. Larry and Harold wander around the potluck together, greeting various people they know. Rose doesn't speak to Larry directly, but she learns that he's been telling people about homes for the elderly, complaining that "bad children" send their parents to such places. Rose tells Ginny that Larry is making it look like his daughters are plotting against him.

In this chapter, Rose and Ginny try to confront their father, only to find that their father is getting the moral high ground because of his standing in the community. He's been telling everybody who will listen about his daughters' "cruel" behavior, and as a result, almost everybody in town has come to believe that Ginny and Rose are plotting against him.

Finally, Larry comes to speak with Rose and Ginny. He immediately launches into a description of homes for the elderly, insisting that the conditions are horrible. Then he rejoins Harold and walks away. Shaken, Rose insists that Larry is trying his hardest to embarrass his daughters, and tells Ginny that they need to humiliate him in return—teach him how weak and powerless he is. Ginny is frightened of what Rose is saying, but also finds it "intoxicating."

Larry preempts Rose and Ginny's conversation with a long, rambling speech about homes for the elderly; nevertheless, Rose and Ginny haven't been planning to throw in such a place (at least not vocally). Smiley wants us to question who the "villain" of the novel is—or if there really is a villain. Rose and Ginny are intoxicated by the possibility of getting revenge on their father, and yet they're also obviously their father's victims.

At the potluck, Ginny runs into Jess. Jess reports that his brother Loren went into Mason City. In the meantime, Jess has been exploring organic farming in more detail—he's sure that organic farming will bring health and happiness to anyone who eats his crops.

Jess continues to pursue his dreams for farming, albeit with a hippie "twist" (in the 70s organic farming was considered much more radical than it is today).

Everybody takes food and sits down to enjoy the meal. Rose and Ginny sit near Larry and Harold and try to make conversation with their father, but he ignores them. Harold says that Rose and Ginny are a "couple of bitches" for throwing their father out in the middle of a storm.

Harold continues to insult Ginny and Rose, taking Larry's side. It's telling that Harold, Larry's old rival, sides with Larry. His bond as a farmer, with Larry, is far stronger than his bond with Rose and Ginny—and perhaps more importantly, he automatically sides with the man, not the women.

Rose and Ginny leave the potluck—Harold Clark's insults have left them unable to talk to their father. The sisters feel that they're fleeing—both from their father and from the entire community. Ginny wonders if she and Rose wouldn't be better off if they just left their community altogether and became waitresses in the Twin Cities.

Rose and Ginny have heard from so many different people that they're the "bad guys" that they seem to be starting to believe it. Ginny and Rose wish they could escape from their pasts in the city—but they're too tied to the land, both by legacy, right, and their own greed.

BOOK 4, CHAPTER 29

Ginny remembers her mother. Mrs. Cook was a dedicated, hard-working woman, though not especially smart or pretty. Ginny's mother went to high school and some college, though she never finished. Her greatest indulgence was her closet, in which she kept her beautiful clothes. Growing up, Ginny would look at the clothes with fascination—they were like holy relics to her.

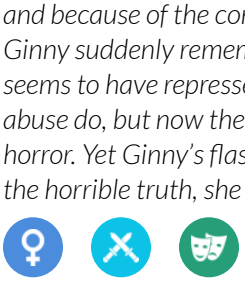
The novel offers more information about Ginny's mother, but still an air of mystery surrounds her—Smiley doesn't offer a good sense for how Mrs. Cook felt about her children, or how she felt about Larry himself. Mrs. Cook's closet could be said to symbolize her attempts at "escape." Because she felt confined and repressed in her life on the farm, she turned to clothing and appearances to forget about the drudgery or smallness of her life.

After the disastrous potluck, Jess tells Ginny and Rose that he needs a new place to stay while Larry and Harold calm down. Rose tells him to stay in Larry's own house, though not in Larry's bedroom. Ginny drives over to prepare Larry's house for Jess. She has a strange sense that her mother might be waiting for her there—now that Larry is gone, it's as if Mrs. Cook can live again.

Jess has sided with Rose and Ginny (Harold doesn't trust him any longer, and has kicked him out of the house). In this passage, Ginny returns to her old house, and prepares to bring Jess, a new person, into it—and yet in the process of doing so, she has a vivid flashback to her mother.

Inside the house, Ginny explores the attic and comes across old decorative plates and clothes that belonged to her mother. In a closet she finds old Kotex pads, which, she thinks with some amusement, Larry never "dared to touch." Next, Ginny walks into her own old bedroom. There, she begins to weep: she can suddenly remember, very vividly, Larry sucking on her breasts when she was a teenager. She screams, louder than she's ever screamed before. As she falls silent, Ginny feels an eerie calm falling over her: she's back in the present. She has the strange sense that she's beginning a new life.

The house is a museum, full of old memories, most of them centered around Ginny's mother. Ginny has grown up largely without a maternal presence; Larry's firm, cruel hands dominate her. Her mother, then, becomes a kind of saint or goddess—idealized but also unreachable. It's presumably because Ginny remembers her mother, and because of the concreteness of her sense of her bedroom, that Ginny suddenly remembers Larry raping her years before. She seems to have repressed the memories, as many victims of rape and abuse do, but now they come flooding back in this moment of horror. Yet Ginny's flashback is also cathartic: now that she's faced the horrible truth, she can try to rebuild her life.



BOOK 4, CHAPTER 30

Ginny waits for Jess to stop by talk. Strangely, she only sees him twice, and he's quiet on both occasions. She's prepared Jess a bed in Larry's house—the very bedroom where Larry molested her years ago. Even so, Ginny doesn't want to tell Jess about her past.

Something has changed with Jess—just as something has changed in Ginny. Strangely, Ginny seems to want to bring Jess into her old bed, the very bed where Larry raped her years ago. Ginny is perhaps trying to replace the memory of Larry with Jess's concrete presence.

A few days later, Harold has a bad accident. He's driving his tractor and there's a malfunction in one of the hoses in the tractor, and when he tries to repair it, it sprays ammonia into his face. Harold tries to wash the ammonia out of his eyes, but there's no water in the tank. When Loren comes home that day, he finds his father in agony on the ground, and drives him to the hospital. Nobody was around to take care of Harold: Jess was jogging, Larry was talking to Marv Carson, Ty was working, and Ginny was driving Pammy. At the hospital, Harold discovers that he's now blind.

This scene is another overt reference to King Lear: just like in the play, the "Gloucester" character (Harold) suddenly goes blind. It's not a coincidence that Harold goes blind because his family has abandoned him, just as Gloucester had his eyes torn out because of Edmund's betrayal and Regan and Goneril's cruelty: both scenes suggest the breakdown of family loyalty. Furthermore, Harold's blindness suggests the moral blindness of the other characters—their ignorance of each other's secrets, and their inability to feel compassion for one another or to forgive each other.

Ty tells Ginny about Harold's blindness, and seems angry that Ginny isn't more sympathetic. Ginny goes to tell Rose about the accident. Rose is completely unsympathetic to the news: she reminds Ginny of how, years ago, Harold drove his tractor right over a wounded fawn.

At this point, Rose seems beyond sympathy of any kind—at first for Larry, and later for Harold (who, she no doubt remembers, recently defended Larry and called her and Ginny "bitches"). Rose is, at least partly, the victim of her family and neighbors' sexism and abuse—she's been made *into a vindictive, greedy woman.*

Jess enters the house, and has a serious talk with Ginny and Rose. Rose accuses Jess of pretending to feel sorry for his father because he wants to make sure that he gives Jess "what he wants." Rose reminds Jess of how his mother would be excessively timid and meek around Harold—now Jess is making the same mistake, changing his behavior in the hopes that Harold will be nice to him, when in fact he's never going to change his ways. She warns Jess that Harold is probably looking forward to having another opportunity to humiliate his son. Ginny finds Rose's speech strangely soothing: she's not saying anything that Ginny can disagree with.

Rose criticizes Jess for trying to make sure that he inherits Harold's property—being hypocritical, to say the lest. Rose, one could argue pretty easily, just wanted Larry's property all along (as she's told Ginny at the potluck, she wanted the property so that she could erase Larry's memory from the land forever). Rose doesn't like that Jess is trying to make up with his father, because she remembers her own *mother trying to please Larry, thereby training Larry to expect to get whatever he wants. Rose is talking about Harold, but she's really talking about her own relationship with Larry.*

After their conversation, Ginny, Rose, and Jess don't visit Harold in the hospital at all. When Ginny sees Loren, they don't talk. Then, one day, Ken LaSalle visits Ginny with a handful of papers, and informs her that Larry is suing her and Rose to reclaim his property—Caroline is party to the suit, too. Ken, who used to be Ginny's own lawyer, tells Ginny that he doesn't think she's behaved well toward her father.

There's a distance gradually growing in the community, and everyone is picking sides. Rose, eager to maintain her farmland and still haunted by her father's abuse, doesn't visit Harold, and criticizes Jess, because she's still furious with her own father for his *crimes. She can't show sympathy for Harold because she can't forgive her own father (and Harold's cruel defense of him). The slow buildup of tension in the community will eventually culminate in a court case. (Ken also seemingly corresponds to Kent in* King Lear.*)*

BOOK 4, CHAPTER 31

Ginny remembers a time when Caroline was fourteen years old. Caroline was performing in a school play, and in rehearsals she wasn't any good in her role, which was a sexy, free-spirited flapper. But when she performed on stage, she became totally convincing in her role. Caroline made sure that Larry never saw her perform. Caroline also joined her debate team, and did very well in school.

Caroline carefully guarded her sexuality from the rest of her family, especially her father. Rose and Ginny also protected Caroline from Larry's advances—as a result, Caroline learned to channel her sexuality into theater and performance. The fact that Caroline made sure Larry never saw her in her "sexy" role suggests that she too may have been aware of his incestuous, abusive tendencies.

Back in the present, Ginny learns that Caroline is helping Larry sue her and Rose, citing the revocation clause of the corporation agreement. Several days after hearing the news, Ginny calls Caroline, and Caroline tells Ginny that she can't talk about the lawsuit. Caroline tells Ginny that she should never have sent Larry out into the storm. Ginny insists that Larry stubbornly walked out himself. Caroline hints that she's heard different, both from Larry and from Ty. Angrily, Ginny reminds Caroline that years ago, she and Rose "did everything for you!" Caroline says "that's not the issue," and hangs up.

The irony of the chapter is that Caroline—the only daughter who doesn't know about Larry's sexual abuse—is helping Larry sue her two sisters, the victims of Larry's abuse. The dynamic of King Lear*, in which Lear and Cordelia are the "good guys," is twisted—but, crucially, not perfectly reversed. Ginny and Rose aren't exactly the villains, but they're not exactly the heroes either (their greed and desire for revenge is seemingly starting to corrupt them as well).*

BOOK 4, CHAPTER 32

After her call with Caroline, Ginny feels as if she has the flu. She drives by herself to the Columbus quarry, the biggest body of water nearby. She thinks about how everyone in town has come to hate her and her sister for mistreating Larry. At the quarry, she sees Pete. They talk in a friendly way, and Ginny tells him about her lawsuit. Without answering, Pete asks Ginny, "What do you think Rose wants?" Ginny isn't sure what to say—eventually, she answers, "For this all to be over."

Ginny and Pete seem to be talking past one another. Rose is concerned about the status of her family in the community, and her ownership of the farmland Larry has given her. Pete, however, seems to be talking more personally, about his love for Rose. Pete's presence at the quarry foreshadows his death.

Pete and Ginny both agree that they should be getting home soon. As they walk back to their cars, Ginny sees a snake, and Pete bumps into Ginny in the confusion. Ginny senses Pete's solid, sweaty body. When Ginny points out the snake, Pete is oddly disinterested.

Smiley hints at the sexual tension between Ginny and Pete—compare this passage with earlier passages in which Ginny thinks about Jess's muscular body. The snake, a Biblical symbol of temptation, suggests Jess and Ginny's sinful natures (and recalls Jess pointing out snakes to Ginny in an earlier scene).

BOOK 4, CHAPTER 33

When Ginny returns home, she finds that Ty has eaten and left the house. She sits outside and watches the building crew that's been developing the farmland: there are now hog pens, costing many tens of thousands of dollars.

Throughout the novel, Ginny's family's plan to install hog pens continues, even while the family goes deeper into debt. Rose and Ginny have a financial interest in maintaining control of their land—if they left, they'd be deep in debt with no way to pay it off.

The narrative flashes forward to Sunday afternoon: Ginny is in the kitchen, basting a turkey. Ty enters the room carrying some of Ginny's clothing—clothing that's covered in "rusty stains," which she had buried underneath the dairy barn. The building crew found the clothes while installing the new hog facilities. Ty, furious, tells Ginny that they have something to talk about that night, but Ginny says there's nothing to talk about.

Ty learns that Ginny had a miscarriage she didn't tell him about. Ginny has thought of the bulldozers and movers as burying the past, but in reality, they're uncovering it.

Ginny reveals that the clothes are a relic of her most recent miscarriage—she threw her bloody clothes away, thinking that Ty would never find them. She considers the fact that it's still possible that she could get pregnant. She also considers that she and Ty haven't had sex since she remembered her father's abuse.

Here, one senses that Ginny is considering telling Ty the truth about her father, but she doesn't. Ginny's life is still shadowed by her father's crimes; she finds it impossible to have sex with her husband. Also compare this scene with the trust and love that defined Ginny and Ty's relationship at the start of the novel—secrets, affairs, revenge, and greed have driven the couple apart.

Ty and Ginny eat dinner with some of their workers, who tell Ty that they'll be done with the construction soon. Later that night, when Ty and Ginny are alone in their bedroom, Ty asks Ginny about the old clothes, and Ginny admits that she had a miscarriage that she never told Ty about. Ty reveals that he already knew that Ginny had *another* secret miscarriage—Rose told him about it. Ginny is surprised that Rose would betray her trust. Ginny also mentions that Jess has suggested that she's had so many miscarriages because of the bad water in the community.

Ty is furious that Ginny had a miscarriage, and yet his response makes Ginny angry, too. At the beginning of the book, Ginny and Rose had seemed to have a close relationship: Ginny was taking care of Rose and cooperating with her on their farmland. And yet now there's a distance between the two elder sisters: Rose and Ginny can't entirely trust one another anymore. Once again the idea of the land's fertility (which is associated with water, fertilizer, and pesticides) is connected to Ginny's infertility.

Ty accuses Ginny of hiding secrets from him, and Ginny realizes that lately she's hated Ty: for talking to Caroline about Larry, for weakening her trust in Rose, etc. Ty says that Ginny has destroyed his excitement in the hog pen: he was looking forward to the future until he discovered Ginny's miscarriage.

As is sometimes the case, fighting and confrontation has a cathartic function: Ty and Ginny have a fight, but their fight uncovers an important truth (Ginny has been hating Ty lately). The secrets and divisions within the family continue to grow.

Late at night, Ginny wakes up next to Ty. She sneaks out of the house and goes over to Larry's house, where Jess Clark is sleeping. She calls out to Jess and Jess comes outside. Ginny tells Jess she loves him, and Jess replies, "Oh, Ginny." He starts to come down to talk to Ginny, but Ginny, afraid that Jess is just going to clarify why he doesn't love her, walks away and returns to her home. That morning, she learns that Ty has been forced to stop work on the hog plant because of Larry's lawsuit.

In this passage, inspired by her argument with Ty, Ginny professes her love for Jess. Ginny is sure that her disagreements with Tyler amount to irreconcilable differences; Jess, on the other hand, represents a way out and an escape from her traumatic memories. And yet Jess doesn't share her feelings. Without Jess to "save" her, Ginny is still dominated by Larry's aggressiveness, and by her own past.

BOOK 4, CHAPTER 34

Two days later, Ty and Ginny get a visit from Henry Dodge, the minister. While Ty works outside, Dodge eats a meal with Ginny and tells her that the events of the church potluck were embarrassing for everyone. Still, he insists that it's time for Ginny to make peace with her father. He hints that there's been a lot of "gossip" about what Rose and Ginny have done to Larry, but when Ginny presses him for details, he gives none.

It's strongly suggested that Dodge and the rest of the community, have turned against the Cook sisters. Rose and Ginny think of themselves as calm businesswomen, but Dodge seems to consider them ungrateful, greedy children. As before, Ginny refuses to tell Dodge about her father's abuse, even though it would justify her own actions—it's too painful and difficult.

After Henry Dodge leaves, Ginny decides to drive to the center of Cabot, her town. She goes to an old antique store where Rose used to sell furniture. There, the store's owner, Dinah, recognizes Ginny, and tells her that she's heard that Larry is moving to Des Moines soon—something Ginny hadn't heard. Afterwards, Ginny has some coffee at a café. The owner, Nelda, seems oddly curt with her—perhaps because she's heard the gossip about Ginny.

Ginny gets more and more proof that the town has turned against her; Larry has been telling anyone who'll listen about his ungrateful daughters. Ginny is the real victim, but she's being painted as the villain—as once again Smiley humanizes the seemingly "evil" characters of Lear.

While shopping at a store called Roberta's, Ginny hears Caroline, Larry, and Loren. Without showing herself, Ginny listens as Caroline helps her father shop for shoes—she speaks in the same gentle, kind tone that Ginny herself used to use with Larry. While they shop, Caroline tells Larry that they'll need to talk to Ginny and Rose today. Larry insists that there's no need: he's perfectly happy spending his time shopping with Caroline. Larry tells Caroline that they should head back to Harold Clark's place—and they all leave the store.

Larry and Caroline's relationship is rooted in a fantasy—that Larry is a kindly, easy-going old man, and not an incestuous rapist. Larry seems to have found "paradise" in his daughter's love; he recognizes that Caroline loves him more sincerely than either of her two siblings, but only because she doesn't know the truth about him.

Afterwards, Ginny leaves the store and drives back the town. There, she tells Rose that she overheard Caroline and Larry, and she was shocked by how kindly and affectionately they spoke to one another. She also admits the truth to Rose: Larry abused her, too.

Ginny and Rose reach an emotional connection: they agree that Larry abused both of them. In a way, they're envious of Caroline's simple, naïve love for her father—they wish that they could have had the same happy relationship with him. Instead, Larry has scarred them for life.

BOOK 5, CHAPTER 35

Ginny remembers when she was a child and she ate dozens of baby aspirins. She was rushed to the hospital, and narrowly escaped dying. Ginny also remembers marrying Ty at the age of nineteen. It occurs to her that she never really touched her own body: even when washing herself, she always used a washcloth, so that there was a "layer" between her hands and her skin. On her wedding night with Ty, she felt alienated from her own body—and in the present, she realizes that Larry took her body away from her.

The passage conveys a sense of distance between Ginny and her own body. Whether as a child or as an adult, Ginny didn't really understand her own body; she barely even touched herself. The passage is also representative of the sexism of Ginny's culture—because she grows up in a patriarchal farm society, she's taught to fear her own femininity, and surrender to men like her father.

Ginny thinks about one more memory: being fourteen years old, on a Saturday night. Larry had sex with her, and she felt dominated by his smells: the smells of whiskey, sweat, cigarettes, etc. It's the smell that she remembers most vividly, not the pain of penetration.

The memories of Larry's abuse become more and more vivid and horrifying, as Ginny can't stop reliving them. This past trauma is then powerfully contrasted with the present situation, in which Larry seems (on the surface) like a harmless old man, just longing for respect and love from his ungrateful daughters.

BOOK 5, CHAPTER 36

In Mason City, Ginny, Ty, Rose, and Pete meet with their new lawyer, Jean Cartier. Ginny thinks of Mr. Cartier as a skilled attorney—next to him, Ken La Salle is incompetent. Rose tells Cartier about Larry's drunk driving. Cartier tells the family that the best way to win the lawsuit is to be "perfect." Larry can only reclaim his property if his daughters mismanage the farm—so as long as they do a good job, Larry won't have any basis for suing.

It's appropriate that Ginny and Rose have to go out of the community to find a suitable lawyer, as everybody else in their hometown hates them. Cartier intuitively understands the importance of perception: they have to keep up appearances in order to prove that they've honored their agreement with Larry.

Back on the farm, Ginny takes Cartier's advice to heart. She tries her best to make a good appearance. The weeks pass quickly: Ginny is so devoted to the upkeep of her land and home that she barely notices the days going by. However, in August, Pete has an argument with Harold. He yells at Harold and points a gun at him. Then, he drives away, very drunk, and ends up driving his truck into the nearby Columbus quarry. There, Pete drowns. Nobody knows whether it was an accident or a suicide.

Ginny already has a lot of practice with keeping up appearances: she knows how to hide her true feelings and put on a happy face. And yet Smiley implies that Ginny can't keep up the charade much longer: sooner or later, her inner turmoil will burst out. Pete's argument with Harold (which, at this point in the novel, we don't understand at all) and ensuing death represent the "gathering storm."

BOOK 5, CHAPTER 37

The morning after Pete's death, Rose comes to Ginny's house and tells her that Pete has "drowned himself." Ginny is stunned, not because of Pete's death but because it's the only time she's ever seen Rose shaking.

As tragedy reaches the community, Rose and Ginny seem strangely removed from reality: it's as if they're so lost in the past and in their own desire for revenge that they can't spare any more emotion for the present.

Still stunned, Ginny sits down and tries to wrap her head around Pete's death. As she sits, Linda and Pammy wake up and greet Ginny, asking her to drive them to the pool for a swim. Ginny notes that it would be some time before she heard about Pete's argument with Harold, or his heavy drinking.

Painfully, Linda and Pamela are innocently talking about swimming, just after their father has drowned. Then, Ginny doubles back to explain how ignorant she herself was of the truth at the time—her tone is rueful and melancholy, as if she wishes she could forget what she's soon to learn.

Ginny thinks back to her mother's death. She and her sisters were in school when they heard the news. They go through the rest of the day in a daze. The next morning they go to the funeral, and that night Caroline cries herself to sleep while Ginny stays up, silent. Back in the present, Ginny realizes that there's absolutely nothing she can do for Linda and Pammy to make their lives easier now that Pete is dead.

Ginny and Rose have always struggled to express their emotions: their conflicted feelings for their own father are so repressed that they can't express themselves in normal human ways. Caroline, spared from her father's abuse, acts more "naturally," and yet her natural behavior is also rooted in an ignorance of the truth.

Rose gathers Linda and Pammy and tells them "some really bad news." Meanwhile, Ginny proceeds with her usual daily routine, designed to keep up appearances at all costs. At the funeral, everybody cries, although Ken LaSalle goes up to Ginny and says, "This is a big place for one guy to farm." Ty gives a eulogy for Pete, in which he calls Pete a hard worker and a loving husband.

It's important to note that even here, Ginny doesn't actually see Rose express any emotion to her children—Ginny wants out of the room before she hears what Rose tells them, creating the impression of an emotional gap between Rose and her daughters. As the tragedy grows, the neighbors become increasingly callous and insensitive themselves; Smiley suggests that Ken is as heartless and greedy as he imagines Ginny and Rose to be. Furthermore, his comment is blatantly sexist—he assumes only a man can run a farm, rather than the two women to whom the land actually belongs.

Late at night, Rose calls Ginny and asks her to come over. Ginny remembers that after Rose was diagnosed with cancer, she stayed up for three days straight. Ginny prepares to go to Rose's house.

Ginny and Rose have an undeniable (but painful) bond, based in their sisterhood, their traumatic memories of Larry, and Rose's sickness.

BOOK 5, CHAPTER 38

Immediately after the events of the last chapter, Ginny goes to see Rose, where she finds her sister very drunk. Rose confesses to Ginny that she's furious with Pete for traumatizing their children. Rose insists on cleaning the house, even though it's very late at night.

Rose's immediate response to Pete's death is not sadness, but rather a feeling she is more accustomed to: anger. Despite the fact that she never shows real affection for her kids, she's angry that Pete has traumatized them.

Rose and Ginny walk outside, and Rose admits that her marriage to Pete was sad, even after he stopped beating her. She slept with other men, and has been sleeping with Jess lately. She confesses that she hoped her lovers could "supersede Daddy." Rose explains that she's been sleeping with Jess for almost a month, and that she's in love. Ginny carefully tells Rose that she should be cautious: Jess "probably" has many other lovers. Rose tells Ginny that she told Pete about Jess just a week before he died. Bizarrely, Pete's response to the news that his wife was sleeping with Jess was that he wanted to kill Larry.

Rose and Pete had a sad marriage (which was already clear, considering that Pete beat her). The passage is important because it confirms something Smiley has already hinted at: Rose and Ginny partially choose lovers in order to replace Larry. Their memories of being raped by their father are so traumatic that they can't conceive of sex without thinking of their father. It's interesting that Rose spills the beans on Jess here: just like Ginny, she thinks of Jess as a welcome alternative to Larry's influence. (And in a way, Pete's reaction when he hears the news is perfectly appropriate: without Larry's abuse, Rose would never have begun sleeping with Jess.)

Rose reminds Ginny that Larry used to beat them and have sex with them. As Ginny remembers the way Larry would beat her with all his strength, she finds the courage to tell Rose the truth: she's been sleeping with Jess, too. Rose smiles and says that she knew: Jess slept with Ginny before he began sleeping with Rose. Ginny is secretly hurt, especially when Rose insists that Jess loves her and only her. Ginny accuses Rose of taking everything for herself, and Rose agrees, smirking. Ginny thinks of Pete drowning, and guesses that his last thoughts were of Rose "crushing him."

The chapter implies a strange connection between Larry and Jess. On a psychological level, Rose and Ginny seem to desire Jess because he's not *Larry—i.e., because he symbolizes everything that Larry stands against. To sleep with Jess is to escape from Larry; to start again with a new lover. Ginny, as usual, expresses her sympathy in a more straightforward way than her sister does—thus, she pities Pete. This scene is also crucial, of course, in that it reveals another vital plot twist—Jess has been sleeping with* both *sisters, and both are in love with him. His façade of innocence is slipping.*

BOOK 5, CHAPTER 39

The immediate effect of Ginny's discovery that Rose is sleeping with Jess is that she thinks she understands everyone in her life now. In turn, she thinks of Larry, Caroline, Pete, Ty, and Rose. When she thinks of Rose, she imagines her sleeping with Jess, and imagines that she can smell Rose's body. Ginny wonders if Jess lost interest in her because she's unable to have children. Then, without warning, Ginny imagines Rose and Larry having sex—it's unbearable, but she can't stop.

Ginny continues to obsess over her own fertility: she seems to think of herself as a failure because of her inability to have a baby. Ginny seems jealous of Rose, Smiley suggests, because of her own insecurities about her fertility. Ginny's jealousy will be the emotion that drives the final third of the novel.

Ginny also thinks back to the funeral, and her conversations with Jess. Jess was cheerful and friendly, but he felt like a stranger.

Ginny continues to desire Jess, but she's rethinking everything about him now that she knows he slept with Rose.

Ty, Ginny realizes, is in a crisis. Without Pete and Larry to help him, he can't harvest 1000 acres all by himself. He tries to find farmers who can help him with his work, but complains that there aren't talented farmers to help him anymore.

As the book goes on, the farmland begins to decay, and no suitable farmers rise up to the challenge.

Ginny describes the various poisons lying around on the average farm. She tries to find an especially deadly poison, like arsenic, and explains that she was trying to kill Rose with it. After much research, she settles on hemlock for the murder, and thinks with some relish that her murder will be completely "premeditated." She finds hemlock growing near a river, and cooks into a dish of **sausage** and sauerkraut. She then cans the dish and brings it over to Rose's house, where she offers it as a surprise. While she's at Rose's house, she sees Jess. Although Ginny had previously found it hard to think about Jess, she now finds it easy to look him in the face and smile.

In this surprising section, Ginny tries to poison her sister by cooking hemlock into sausage. Some critics have complained that this "twist" in the plot is implausible and a little absurd—and perhaps they're right, considering the previously close relationship the sisters shared, but it does echo the events of King Lear, where Goneril poisons Regan out of jealousy over Edmund. But Smiley has already suggested that Ginny's highest priorities in life are escaping her father's influence and having a child (and in a way, those two things are one and the same). Therefore, Rose, Ginny thinks, has destroyed Ginny's chances for escape (by sleeping with Ginny's lover)—a crime for which she must die.

BOOK 5, CHAPTER 40

It's the middle of September, and Ty prepares for the harvest with the help of Jess (one of the few able-bodied men around who's willing to help Ty). There's less than a month until Rose and Ginny are set to appear in court. Ginny watches her husband and Jess harvest crops, and wonders when Rose is going to "drop dead."

The plot seems oddly stalled at this point—Ginny is just waiting for Rose to die. The irony is that in trying to kill Rose for ruining her life, Ginny pauses her own life; she can't move on until she knows that Rose is dead.

A month goes by, and Caroline and Frank appear in court opposite Ginny and Rose. In court, Caroline ignores her sisters but smiles at Ty, who smiles back. Ginny is struck by how peaceful and happy Caroline and Larry seem together, though Ginny is furious that Caroline has betrayed her and Rose—her two older sisters, who took care of her when she was younger.

The trial scene is important because it reinforces the widening emotional distances within the family—distances that may have existed all along, but which hadn't previously been brought to light. Caroline is innocent and independent, precisely because her two older sisters protected her as a child.

The hearing begins, and Ginny feels confident that she'll win: the harvest has been a great success, meaning that, per Cartier's advice, she and Rose will be able to withstand Larry's attacks. The first witness is Larry, and he's examined by his lawyer, Ken. Ken asks Larry about the corporation agreement, but in response Larry rambles to Caroline about how "the land won't produce." Ken continues to try to examine Larry, but he won't answer a single question; he just continues to describe "the land."

The passage shows how far Larry has fallen. Although he continues to command a certain measure of respect from his peers, he's basically lost his mind. Larry can barely string together a sentence; the combination of drunkenness, resentment, and abandonment has destroyed him. And yet he's still drawn to his own land—farmland, one could say, is the one part of Larry that survives intact.

Suddenly, Larry shouts, "Caroline's dead." Caroline, who's sitting in court rushes to Larry's side. Larry mutters that Rose and Ginny, "those bitches," have killed Caroline. Larry says that Caroline used to sing "like a bird," and Ginny, in spite of herself, shouts out that Larry is wrong: it was *Rose* who used to sing. Larry ignores Ginny, and the hearing continues.

This passage is an interesting variation on Lear, *in which Cordelia dies suddenly and tragically. In the play, Lear talks about living a carefree life with Cordelia, singing like birds in a cage. And yet, Smiley implies, Larry (and Lear) is wrong to focus his love on one child so exclusively—he's just confusing Caroline with Rose. The trial might seem to be about the land, but it's really about the family.*

The hearing goes on. Ken manages to enter some evidence of Larry's corporation agreement, while Ty testifies about the business that he did while in control of Larry's land. As the hearing moves on, Ginny notices that Jess, who's sitting in court, seems very cold and calculating.

Ginny begins to see Jess in a new light: he's not the kind, charismatic guy she fell in love with; he's actually manipulative and cruel, putting on an act of innocence and kindness to get what he wants. In this, Jess, finally begins to more fully resemble his Lear *counterpart: the wicked Edmund.*

Caroline takes the stand and testifies that she was immediately suspicious of Larry's plan to divide up his property—it wasn't at all like her father. Caroline tries to say that her sisters have mistreated Larry, but the judge interrupts her and clarifies that the point of the hearing is to determine if the farmland has been mismanaged—not how poorly Ginny and Rose treated Larry.

The trial scene is something of an anticlimax: Caroline is about to get to what is, from out perspective, the heart of the matter (Larry's decision to divide up his land, and his daughters' subsequent treatment of him). And yet, as the judge says, that isn't the principle legal issue: the only question that matters is how Ginny and Rose have farmed.

Marv testifies that the farm is in debt, but only because Ginny and Rose are planning a hog farm that, in Marv's opinion, will be highly successful. After Marv's testimony, the judge says that he's made up his mind: the facts of the case are very simple. Larry signed a document, and there's essentially no legal basis for him to "un-sign" the document. The Judge also reprimands Larry and Caroline for pushing a "family matter" into court, and orders them to pay all outstanding legal fees. Rose is gleeful with the result of the trial, while Caroline is visibly furious. Ginny, however, is worried that the decision will permanently break up her family.

Ginny and Rose win their case easily, and yet nothing is really achieved. Larry is humiliated, but his daughters continue to resent one another and their father (their revenge hasn't brought them any real pleasure), and the town continues to resent both Rose and Ginny. Rose seems more overtly villainous, while Ginny (who, let's not forget, tried to kill her own sister) seems a little more guilty about what she's done to her father.

BOOK 5, CHAPTER 41

After the verdict, Rose and Ginny pursue their farming ventures: they have no other choice, since they're deep in debt. Ginny and Ty are unsure how to feel about their victory: they become increasingly quiet and distant. One evening, Ginny tells Ty that they should buy a new range for their property, but Ty disagrees—it's not the right time. Ginny also suggests that they move to Larry's house, an idea that Ty dismisses at once. Ginny insists that the house is her property now—she should have the right to live there and "show off."

Rose and Ginny, Smiley suggests, are "imprisoned" by their own property. They've talked about escaping to the city to be waitresses, but now they feel they'll live on the land for the rest of their lives, inheriting their father's wealth but also the memories of his abuse and influence. On the farmland, Ginny and Rose's behavior becomes more arrogant and stubborn: they're turning into their own father (showing off, refusing to budge).

Ginny asks Ty for 1000 dollars, and Ty gives it to her; he's just collected rent money on the family property. Ginny takes the money and silently walks outside, gets into her car, and drives away. As she does so, Ty cries, "I gave my life to this place!" and Ginny replies, "Now it's yours." She drives all the way to Saint Paul, where she checks into the YMCA.

Surprisingly, Ginny makes a final bid for freedom here. She can't stand the thought of living on her father's old property and, perhaps, becoming like her own father in her greed and bitterness. As a result, she abandons Ty and goes to the city. Ty's parting words to her are ironic, since Ginny, far more than Ty, has devoted herself to the farmland; it's in her blood. And it's precisely because Ginny has devoted her life to the farmland that she feels she needs to leave it forever; she needs to get out before it's too late.

BOOK 6, CHAPTER 42

Ginny continues to live at the Saint Paul YMCA, and takes a waitressing job in town. She likes the job because it allows her to make small talk with customers. She stays in the YMCA until Christmas, when she writes a note to Rose telling her where she is. Ginny is surprised to get a note in return: she was sure Rose would have eaten the canned **sausage** by now.

Ginny had made a bid to start her life all over again. The tragedy of the end of the book, however, is that she tries to start over, too late. She can't stop thinking about Rose's death—she can't move on with her life until Rose has died from the poisoned sausage.

In Rose's note, she explains that she and Ty divided the farm evenly: Rose and Jess will farm their half organically, while Ty will convert his half into a hog farm. In February, though, Ginny gets another note from Rose, explaining that Jess has left her. Rose is forced to give more of her land to Ty while she studies organic farming. Rose admits to Ginny that she's not surprised about Jess.

Ginny has opted out of the family business altogether. (Smiley doesn't get into the legal questions of how Ty just assumes sole ownership of his wife's things; Smiley is seemingly more interested in looking at the way Ginny survives in the city, and she speeds up the pace of the narrative at this point). Meanwhile, Jess abandons Rose, suggesting that he's not the kind, faithful man Ginny or Rose wanted him to be.

BOOK 6, CHAPTER 43

Years pass, and Ginny remains in Saint Paul. One day, she waits on a man in a cap, and she realizes that the man is Ty. Ginny greets Ty casually and asks how Rose is doing—to Ginny's surprise, Ty explains that Rose is just fine. Ginny realizes that today is her own birthday: she's 39 years old.

As the novel comes to an end, Smiley skips ahead many years (the first half of the book focuses on just a few months in the characters' lives, by contrast). Away from the land and her family, Ginny has become so alienated from herself that she doesn't even remember it's her own birthday until Ty arrives.

At lunch (really more like 10:30 with Ginny's shift), Ty takes Ginny to lunch. He explains that he's leaving the farm behind and going to find work on a hog plant in Texas. Hog farming didn't work out well for Ty: the work nearly "killed" him. Ty hasn't gotten along with Rose in years, and claims that Rose has just become Larry all over again. Nevertheless, he's sold away his farmland to Rose. Ty also says that Rose has told everyone that Larry used to abuse her, but Ty makes it clear that he doesn't believe her.

Ginny has gone to the city to find freedom from her past, and in a way, she has. The irony is that in doing so, she's surrendered her financial freedom (she can't even choose when she eats lunch) and her sense of connection to her family. The passage is also important because it shows why Rose and Ginny tried to get their revenge on Larry by controlling his land: simply telling the community about his abuse would never have worked (and it doesn't work now—even Ginny's own husband doesn't believe it).

Ty explains why he's here: he wants a divorce. Instead of replying, Ginny accuses Ty of talking to Caroline all those years ago: giving her the information about how Ginny and Rose ignored Larry. Ty doesn't deny it, but just says he was "on one side" of the farm. Ginny reminds Ty of the things Larry told her on the night of the storm, and asks Ty if he agrees with them; Ty says he never paid much attention to Larry.

Tyler hasn't come to the restaurant to make up with Ginny—just the opposite. In a way, Tyler is a reminder of the kind of life Ginny could have had: she could have spent the next few years tied to her farmland, trapped in her traumatic memories and anger and watching in agony as the land slowly dried up.

Ginny leaves Ty to return to her job. As she returns, she remembers meeting him, years ago. Ty was a football player, and Ginny was in the stands. Ty waved, and Ginny assumed he was waving to her. In fact, he was waving to a girl a few feet away from Ginny. When Ginny and Ty began dating five years later, Ty claimed he'd forgotten the incident. Ginny has always remembered it: proof that she should never think too highly of herself.

Ginny is a strange combination of humility and hubris: at times, she's unwilling to draw the slightest attention to herself; at other points, she seems hell-bent on attracting attention (kicking Larry out of his house and claiming it for herself, for example).

BOOK 6, CHAPTER 44

Ginny continues to get letters and postcards from Rose, and each one infuriates her: they're proof that Rose still isn't dead, and that she and Rose are still sisters.

Ginny is still spinning her wheels, waiting for the day that Rose drops dead (although it's unclear why Ginny still resents her sister to such a murderous degree). The problem, of course, is that Ginny spends entire years waiting instead of moving on.

One day, Ginny gets a letter from Rose: Rose will be in the hospital in Mason City. Ginny agrees to go see her. In the hospital, she's shocked to see Rose looking very thin and pale. She's been in and out of chemotherapy for a long time. Rose makes Ginny promise to take her children back home—she also hints that she and Ginny need to talk about "when."

After many years, Rose's cancer has finally and tragically caught up with her. The understated way that Rose talks about her impending death ("when") suggests her fear of death. It's Rose's fear of death that has inspired her to reunite with her sister (by sending the letter). But even while she's close to death, Rose's behavior around Ginny is subdued, suggesting that the sisters remain somewhat estranged. The sisters don't show strong emotions around one another; therefore, there's no catharsis or reconciliation between them (a fact that Smiley emphasizes, powerfully, at the end of the chapter).

Ginny reunites with Linda and Pammy, both now teenagers. Ginny has sent them both gifts every year, but never opens their thank-you notes for fear that they'll be too painful to read. Back on the farm, Ginny sits in Larry's old house with Linda and Pammy. She learns that the girls are both vegetarians, though they'll sometimes sneak some Kentucky Fried Chicken. Ginny is amazed to learn that her nieces haven't seen their mother in the hospital. She promises to take them tomorrow.

Linda and Pamela remind Ginny of how long she's been away, and how much joy she has denied herself (she loved her nieces, and yet she's missed out on most of their childhoods). The fact that Linda and Pamela have become vegetarians, yet also cheat sometimes, reminds us that they could still eat the poisoned sausage (Ginny's revenge plan wasn't very well thought-out), and also suggests that they've absorbed some of Jess's tendencies (perhaps through their mother).

Ginny drives back to see Rose in the hospital, and tells her that Linda and Pammy are coming to see her soon. Rose wonders why Ginny is still trying to fight with her, and assumes that she's still angry about Jess. She tries to tell Ginny that Jess was crueler and more manipulative than Ginny knew, but Ginny refuses to believe Rose.

To the very end, Rose is distanced from her children; she doesn't let them see her at the hospital, and maintains the same stoic tone while talking about them. Jess continues to drive a wedge between Ginny ad Rose, despite the fact that he's left them both behind. Ginny continues to think of Jess as the solution to all her problems—a dangerous way to think about any person, let alone someone as devious as Jess.

Rose tells Ginny what's going to happen: after she dies, she's leaving the farmland to Ginny and Caroline, not Linda and Pammy—she wants the family quarrels to end in "this generation" instead of poisoning Linda and Pammy. The farm hasn't been profitable in a long time, and Ginny will probably have no choice but to sell it all.

Rose is a hardened, loveless woman, and yet she's perceptive enough to realize why *she's so unhappy: it's the farmland she owns and her memories of Larry's abuse. Thus, she refuses to allow the land to tear her own children apart. After four generations, the Cook family will have to part with its most valuable property—but will also be free of the greed, revenge, and abuse that have accompanied it.*

Ginny tells Rose that she tried to kill her years ago with the **jar** of poisoned sausages. Rose barely reacts; she explains that after Jess abandoned her she put the jar in the cellar, along with everything else that reminded her of Jess.

This should *be an emotional highpoint of the text, and yet it's curiously anticlimactic. Rose and Ginny are finally honest with each other; Ginny even owns up to her murder plot. And yet Rose doesn't express either forgiveness or anger—she and her sister are both essentially broken by tragedy and their own inner corruption.*

Rose takes Ginny's hand and tells her what she thinks about her own life: Rose hasn't been a success in any way, not even as a parent or a mother, let alone as a farmer. Everyone in town speaks of Larry as a saint, and nobody believes Rose's accounts of how Larry used to abuse her. Her only accomplishment, she claims, is refusing to forgive anyone in her life. As Rose says all this, Ginny pulls her hand away from Rose, and Rose waves her out the door.

Notice that Larry has died at some point before the events of this chapter. While Smiley never describes when or how, exactly, this happens, Larry dies before his daughters can confront him about his crimes, meaning that, agonizingly, he's never brought to justice, and Ginny and Rose continue to suffer in secret. The chapter (and really, the novel) ends on a note of hopelessness: Ginny and Rose are estranged from one another, and they seem to look back on their lives with nothing but regrets. Their desire for land and control, as well as their traumatic memories of their father, have kept them from a happy life—and their abuser is still remembered fondly in the community.

BOOK 6, CHAPTER 45

It's the day Caroline and Ginny are selling the farm. Both sisters are on their soon-to-be-former property, clearing out old silverware and plates. They speak casually but not warmly. As they explore the house, they decide how to divide up Rose's old things, such as her clothes and glasses.

Rose has died shortly before the beginning of this chapter. Much as we saw with Larry, the fact that Rose's death happens "off-stage" suggests its anticlimactic nature, as well as the fact that she and her family had unfinished business, so that now, Ginny is burdened with more trauma, resentment, and guilt. The death of Rose, one might think, would lead Caroline and Ginny to make up, but there's no warmth as this chapter begins. Caroline and Ginny are strangers, separated by their adult lives (and Ginny's knowledge of Larry's abuse).

The sisters stop to look at an old picture of their family. They can tell that Larry, a young man, is standing in the center of the picture, but they can't tell who any of the other people are. Even the baby in the picture could be Rose, or Caroline, or Ginny.

Ginny can remember Larry (because his memory now dominates her entire life), and yet she can't remember anything else about her past. Larry is still at the center of her worldview, even after his death.

Caroline tells Ginny that she can't understand how Ginny and Rose bankrupted Larry's farm. She reminds Ginny that she (Caroline) was very close to Larry toward the end of his life. Caroline mentions that she's forgiven Larry for "mistreating" her—but when Ginny asks what she means by "mistreat," Caroline explains that she means Larry cutting her out of his will.

This passage is agonizing because of how close Ginny comes to revealing the truth—ironically, Caroline is the one who speaks of forgiving her father, even though she seemingly has no idea how much there is to forgive. (Compare this scene with the "running out of money" exchange between Rose and Ginny in Chapter 12.) The scene also raises a disturbing possibility: Caroline may have been abused by Larry too—she just might have repressed the memories, like Ginny, or even forgiven Larry. Smiley doesn't affirm or deny such possibilities; the point is that neither sister is willing to open up about their traumatic experiences, and so we never know the truth.

Ginny considers telling Caroline the truth about Larry, but in the end she loses her nerve. She imagines Rose, urging her to talk about how Larry raped his own children. But there are some pieces of information, she tells herself, that you have to ask for—you can't be told out of the blue. Ginny and Caroline part ways and drive off.

Ginny doesn't tell Caroline the truth about Larry—her excuse is that Caroline hasn't asked for the information. Ginny's refusal to ruin Larry's memory for Caroline could be considered noble, and yet she's also still too traumatized, too frightened, or even too guilty to open up to her long-absent sister.

Before she's gotten far, Ginny turns around and drives back to the farm. She goes down to the cellar and finds the **jar** of poisoned sausages. She also notices some old tins of DDT. Ginny takes the sausages back to her home, where Linda and Pammy are sleeping. She thinks about what to do, and eventually throws the sausages down the garbage disposal. As she does so, she feels a powerful sense of relief.

In this section, Ginny finally gets rid of the sausages—symbolizing her attempts to move on with her life and escape her own guilt. For years, she's waited for Rose to drop dead. Now Rose has died of cancer, and Ginny can presumably move on with life—but now that she's alone, she has almost no life to "move on" with. Also notice the mention of DDT—a poisonous chemical that was used to spray crops and, it was later suggested, may have increased cancer risk in humans. Smiley implies that Rose got cancer from farm chemicals—the very pesticides that helped ensure the land's fertility. Ginny (with her infertility) and Rose (with her cancer) have both had their bodies ruined by the land, just as their memories have been ruined by their father.

EPILOGUE

In the aftermath of Rose's death and the sale of the farm, Caroline and Ginny find that they owe 34,000 dollars. Caroline pays her half, and Ginny works extra hours, in return for which the IRS won't burden Linda and Pammy with the debt. Ginny thinks that regret is a part of her inheritance: paid off, 200 dollars a month.

The Epilogue suggests an ironic redemption for Ginny; she works hard to pay off her half of the debt, apparently channeling her guilt and trauma into strict monetary terms.

Ginny is lonely: she meets men, but never anyone like Jess. However, she has "inherited" Linda and Pammy, and she takes care of them as they finish high school and go to college.

The key word here is "inherited." Ginny has lost her family—and yet there's a hint that she's going to keep the Cook family alive and going, by taking care of her two nieces. Linda and Pamela are the silver lining to Ginny's story, and to the novel itself, but even here, Ginny won't get much time with them, since they're almost adults themselves by now. After inheriting so many other things from her family, Ginny finally inherits the thing she always wanted—children.

Ginny thinks about her other kinds of inheritance. There are farming chemicals—diesel, plant dust, ammonia, etc.—coursing through her body. She's also inherited the sad memories of her family history. Ginny walks the streets and feels a wave of sadness whenever she sees a child: children remind her of the five children she might have had, if she hadn't been "poisoned" by the farm water.

As the novel comes to a close, Ginny is still thinking about all the different kinds of inheritance she's faced with: her father's farm, her memories of her father, and the farming chemicals that may have poisoned her entire body (and Rose's body, too). The tragedy of the book is that Ginny isn't allowed to choose which parts of the family legacy she inherits and which she gets to avoid: Ginny inherits the farmland and the memory of Larry's rape; she inherits Linda and Pamela and the toxic chemicals that hurt her body.

Finally, Ginny thinks of Larry. She can't forgive him for anything he did, and she often thinks of the way he staggered drunkenly through the house, years ago, and raped her. She thinks of the darkness of those nights, and compares the darkness to an "obsidian shaft," which she remembers above everything else.

Ginny can't forgive Larry and, now that he's dead, she can't confront him about his crimes, either. She's lost so much over the course of the novel: her family, her property, her husband, etc. In trying to enact a long complicated revenge on the people who wronged her (Larry, Rose), Ginny has only caused herself more pain. And as we see in this pessimistic ending, the basic cause of all Ginny's pain, her father's crimes, continues to harm her—it's buried so deep that she can't get rid of it.

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