Cat's Eye

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF MARGARET ATWOOD

Born at the start of the Second World War, Margaret Atwood was the daughter of Carl Edmund Atwood, an entomologist, and Margaret Dorothy, a former nutritionist. She was the middle child of three siblings, and their father's job led them to travel frequently through rural Canada during her early childhood. This meant that she did not attend school full-time until she was eight years old. Atwood studied English, Philosophy, and French at Victoria College in the University of Toronto and went on to get a master's degree at Radcliffe College. She writes poetry, novels, literary criticism, and essays—her first book of poetry, *Double Persephone*, was published in 1961 and her first novel, *The Edible Woman*, was published in 1969. Atwood has also explored what she calls speculative fiction in her writing, exemplified in her 1985 novel *The Handmaid's Tale*, set in a dystopian near-future theocracy, and in the post-apocalyptic *Oryx and Crake* (2003). Atwood has won an extensive list of prizes for her work, including the Man Booker Prize and the Governor General's Award. She holds honorary degrees from 24 universities, including the University of Oxford, University of Cambridge, the Sorbonne, and Harvard University—which speaks to the breadth of her work's impact.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Although this novel was both originally written and ultimately published decades after the Second World War, the conflict hangs thematically over the novel. Some important historical context includes the historical colonial relationship between Canada and the British Empire. Although this novel takes place long after Canadian independence, loyalty and a connection to the British Empire surged during the Second World War. This feeling of nationalism and unity to Western and British ideals suffused the Canadian populace and influenced their willingness to participate in the war. The novel is also steeped in feminist discourse—though the narrator herself displays ambivalence towards feminism and ideology in general, the feminist movement emerges as a distinct theme in *Cat's Eye*. Although feminist themes emerged in the mid-19th century with the rise of suffragist movements, it was in the 1960s and the 1970s that broader feminist movements really built up steam and became an integral element of Western culture. The other important historical events in the novel relate to climate science—in 1958, scientists began to realize through precise measurements that the amount of carbon dioxide was steadily increasing in the atmosphere. Throughout the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s when this book was written and published, models of global climate change and warming began to be floated. Although not popularized until deeper in the 1980s and 1990s, allusions to these theories recur in *Cat's Eye* and strengthen the atmosphere of impending catastrophe in the novel.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Atwood addresses the central themes in *Cat's Eye* in several other of her works. For novels exploring feminism and gender relations, consider *The Handmaid's Tale*. For other works with intertwined narrative strands and an interest in themes of memory and time, look towards *The Blind Assassin*. Siri Hustvedt's novel *The Blazing World* resonates with *Cat's Eye* for its similarly complex female artist protagonist, whose work is often misunderstood by a male-oriented society. Atwood's other novels such as *What I Loved* also address these themes of art, memory, and gender, with the addition of questions of violence and identity formation. The short stories of Alice Munro, who won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2013, are also a great space for exploring Canadian literature that addresses both the female and the everyday experience of people in the 20th century. In the realm of science fiction, look to Ursula K. Leguin's *The Left Hand of Darkness* for a book that tackles gender stereotypes and a dystopic future. On the theme of memory and objects, consider Orhan Pamuk's novel *The Museum of Innocence*, which explores the ways that intense emotion can lead people to invest particular objects with extra power.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** Cat's Eye
- **When Written:** 1964 (begun)
- **Where Written:** Canada
- **When Published:** 1988
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary
- **Genre:** Novel, Postmodern Literature, Feminist Literature
- **Setting:** Toronto
- **Climax:** In her childhood, when Cordelia bullies Elaine into nearly drowning in the river, breaking the spell of that abusive friendship; in her adulthood, when Elaine stands at the opening of her retrospective exhibition and realizes Cordelia will not come.
- **Antagonist:** Cordelia
- **Point of View:** First person limited

EXTRA CREDIT

Autobiography. Elaine Risley (the protagonist of *Cat's Eye*) shares much in common with Atwood: both are children of entomologists who grew up traveling the Canadian backwoods, both are artists with work often lauded for its feminism, both marry and divorce a fellow artist, and so on. This has led some readers and critics to identify an autobiographic strain in the novel.

As One Who Was. In a 1989 interview, Atwood discussed fanmail she received regarding the novel. To her surprise, dozens and dozens of women wrote in saying that they had had their own Cordelias. The letters started with lines like "As one who was buried in a snowbank" or "As one who was almost drowned," and were from women of all ages, which really amazed Atwood.

PLOT SUMMARY

The painter Elaine Risley returns to Toronto, the city where she grew up, for a retrospective show of her art. Her return to the city prompts her to reminisce about her childhood—the following narrative is told in the form of extended flashbacks, which are periodically interrupted for brief interludes of the older Elaine in her ex-husband Jon's Toronto apartment or walking through the city.

The daughter of an entomologist, Elaine grows up traveling from place to place with her father, mother, and brother Stephen because of her father's seasonal work. After the end of World War II, they stop moving as often and settle in Toronto during the school year, where Elaine befriends Carol and Grace and starts attending school.

Elaine and her family travel for a few months in the summer, and when they return a new girl has moved to town and joined Elaine's friend group—Cordelia. Cordelia is charismatic and quickly becomes the group's de facto leader. However, their friendship soon takes a dark turn as Cordelia prompts the other girls into bullying Elaine. They target her self-esteem, observing and criticizing her looks and every decision she makes until Elaine falls into a state of depression and powerlessness. The only source of hope in her life is a glass **cat's eye marble** that she keeps in a red purse. She attends church with Grace's family, although her own family is not religious, and finds a faith in God that will soon be tested by the relentless abuse thrown at her by her so-called friends. Too scared to abandon her friends by turning to an adult for support, Elaine remains in these relationships until the bullying escalates to a breaking point.

One day, Cordelia throws Elaine's hat off a **bridge** into the frozen river, where the girls are not supposed to wander because of stories of dangerous men who attack women down there. The girls force Elaine to retrieve the hat but abandon her when she falls into the frozen river-water. Elaine has a near-death vision and thinks she sees an apparition of the **Virgin Mary**, who guides her to safety and helps her end these toxic relationships.

In high school, Elaine rekindles her friendship with Cordelia. She seems to have forgotten or repressed these childhood traumas, and this time Elaine has the power in their relationship. She taunts Cordelia, who has fallen into a depression and does not manage to graduate on time—in fact, Cordelia is sent to a school for delinquent girls, whereas Elaine graduates with excellence in biology and the ambition to become an artist. The two lose touch.

After high school, Elaine attends university where she studies Art and Archeology and takes additional classes in painting. She starts a secret affair with her art teacher, an artist from Eastern Europe called Josef Hrbik—though he is older and seems at first to have some power to manipulate her, she abandons him with ease in the end and ultimately leaves that relationship unscathed. At the same time, she starts a relationship with Jon, a fellow art-student. When she becomes accidentally pregnant with her daughter Sarah, the two decide to get married. She describes the relationship as toxic and hostile—they have vicious fights where they throw things at each other, and they ultimately divorce (though they remain friends).

In the midst of this period in university, Elaine meets with Cordelia again, this time in a diner. Cordelia chose not to go to university and instead pursue an acting career—she describes her roles in the Shakespearean festival, which she invites Elaine to attend, but it appears that her former power is further waning. They drift out of contact again for a couple of years, until Elaine finds Cordelia in a mental facility, where her parents have had her committed. Cordelia desperately begs Elaine to help her escape, but she refuses—Elaine sends her a letter, but it comes back return-to-sender, implying that Cordelia did manage to escape. This is the last time that Elaine and Cordelia see each other in person: for the rest of the novel, Cordelia haunts Elaine in the form of flashbacks and apparitions. Elaine never frees herself from the expectation that she will see Cordelia again and that their lives are intertwined, even decades in the future.

Elaine develops a career as a painter, which is slow at first—she paints objects and people from her childhood, usually in connection to some kind of traumatic or symbolic memory. She doesn't quite fit into the highly-political feminist art scene, but she does try it out. Over time, her work gradually gains renown, which leads to its ultimate exhibition. She falls in love with Ben, a much kinder and simpler man, has another daughter, Anne, and seems to build a successful and happy life. She faces other tragedies: for example, she grows increasingly distant from her brother in adulthood. The last time she sees him is at a talk he gives about quantum physics in Toronto—they communicate sporadically through letters, but their lives have completely

diverged, and she reveals quite suddenly that he ended up dying dramatically in a plane hold-up by terrorists, who shot him and ended his life prematurely and unexpectedly.

Though she is consistently haunted by her tragic memories and infused with strong feelings of guilt and anger, Elaine has to face the reality that she and Cordelia will never have the resolution that she hoped for when she does not come to Elaine's retrospective. At the end of the novel, Elaine has held a successful retrospective, had a relatively positive article written about her, and is prepared to return to her husband—however, what the novel reveals is the profound and lasting impact that one's past, particularly traumatic memories, have on one's life.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Elaine Risley – The protagonist and narrator of the novel, Elaine is the daughter of an entomologist who grows up in Toronto, Canada. She has a strong curiosity about the natural world and is a talented student of biology, but ultimately decides to pursue a career as a painter. When introduced, Elaine is an older woman about to have the first retrospective showing of her paintings; she spends a lot of time thinking about aging and reflecting on her unconventional childhood. It becomes abundantly clear that she has been permanently marked by her relationships with both her family and, all the more deeply, the female friends she had as a young girl—especially Cordelia. Elaine describes her experience of psychological torture when her friends, led by Cordelia, bully her; her desire to feel loved leads her into an experience of victimhood, and she grows deeply insecure due to her friends' incessant taunting. Only her **cat's eye marble** and the visions she has of the **Virgin Mary** help her get through these dark times. However, Atwood complicates the narrative, as Elaine forgets the bullying as she grows older, and ends up exacting cruelty on others. Though she never reaches the level of abuse that she experienced at the hands of Cordelia, her taste for vengeance and inflicting pain complicates a victim narrative. Elaine is prone to secrecy and to quiet; she likes to keep to herself and does not make friends easily. She trails after her older brother Stephen when they are young, but they grow more distant as they grow older. She also has a hard time building relationships with other women, which troubles her throughout her life; as a child, she says that she always wanted female friends, but that she doesn't understand girls. As an adult, she feels uncomfortable and left out in larger groups of women, which leads to an overall ambivalence in her female relationships. She further hates ideology and dogma, and does not even like to be considered an artist. She is also generally very non-confrontational, preferring to avoid negative memories in favor of moving on—with the exception of her blow-out fights with her ex-husband Jon, most of Elaine's largest conflicts involve her walking away.

Cordelia – Elaine's best friend and worst enemy, Cordelia is a young girl who moves into the neighborhood while Elaine and her family are away for the summer. At first, the reader sees Cordelia through Elaine's young eyes as sly, manipulative, and powerful. She's the lynchpin of their friend group, and devises numerous devious plans to control Elaine: she invents a metaphor of a stack of plates to characterize their relationship, and every time Elaine does "something wrong," Cordelia says "crash" to mark the plates breaking. Capricious and charismatic, Cordelia hates following rules. She also loves acting and feels insecure because of her judgmental mother and older sisters, Perdie and Mirrie, who always leave her out. As she ages, Cordelia's life slowly deteriorates; she gets held back early in high school, which puts her in the same year as Elaine. She does poorly in school, fearing dissection in biology and allowing herself to get pushed around and judged by Elaine. She never goes to college, instead trying and failing to pursue a career as an actor. After that, Elaine loses track of her for a few years and finds her again in a mental hospital, where her parents have had her committed. While Elaine sees her as a diminished and over-medicated version of her previous self, Cordelia manages to spring an escape. Elaine never sees her again. Much of Cordelia lies in paradox and contrast—when she first appears in the novel as a nine-year-old girl, she seems unambiguously evil. Only over the course of the novel does it become clear that she was made that way by an abusive father and by comparison to her older, more impressive sisters. She does evil things but spends the rest of the novel paying for them by slowing losing all of her power, ultimately appearing pitiable and weak rather than manipulative and strong.

Stephen Risley – Elaine's older brother. As a child, he collects comic books and marbles and seems to have no trouble fitting in with the other boys. Rowdy, brave, and a brilliant student of math and science, Stephen initially demonstrates an interest in biology like his father; later, he develops a passion for quantum physics that forms the basis of his career. The older he gets, the more distant he grows from his family. Elaine knows little about his later life, except that he lives in San Francisco, marries a woman named Annette, and continues to work as a quantum physicist. He returns to Toronto to give a talk on his research, which is erudite and beloved by a large audience—Elaine does not understand him, however, and their interactions after the talk show the inequalities in their relationship. While Elaine remembers songs he sang in childhood and other details of their life, Stephen seems to have forgotten much; the nuclear family clearly means less to him than it does to Elaine, and he comes across as an independent and perhaps more closed-off person. Stephen is also obsessive and somewhat absentminded in his later life. For example, he once gets caught on a private military testing zone he had wandered onto to chase a

butterfly. He is ultimately killed on an airplane that has been overtaken by terrorists. In the end, Stephen's brilliance scares his mother, his father, and his sister—none of whom fully understand Stephen, though he continues to affect them even after his death.

Elaine's Father – Elaine's father, whose name is never shared. He works as an entomologist researching spruce budworms, but he wanted to be a pilot during World War II—his research was deemed essential to the war effort, however, so he was not allowed to sign up. He prefers the outdoors and loves working with his hands. He also loves talking about natural disasters over dinner, appearing to have an endless enthusiasm about the woes of the human race. He does not ascribe to organized religion. He also does not understand either of his children, and doubts Elaine's decision to choose an impractical career as an artist. After Stephen dies, Elaine's father seems to really fade until he dies of natural causes.

Elaine's Mother – Elaine's mother, whose name is never revealed. She is more reserved, and later in Elaine's life it becomes clear that she knew about Cordelia's bullying but never intervened at the time because she was unsure of what to do. Much of her life seems defined by fulfilling a role she has no particular interest in—she does not have much of her own career, and spends her time cooking and doing housework, although she has no particular affinity for either activity. She does have her own social life, however, and invites friends over to play bridge. She also does not care much about social norms, evidenced by her going down to pick flowers by the ravine where all the young girls were warned off from. Like her husband, Elaine and Stephen's father, she does not believe in organized religion. After her son and husband die, she holds out a year longer before passing away from an unknown disease.

Grace Smeath – A childhood friend of Elaine's, whose family lives nearby. Grace is one year older than Carol and Elaine, and before Cordelia joins their friend circle she leads the group. She is pale and wears glasses, and the girls usually work on movie star coloring books together or do other activities Grace likes because she threatens to go home with a headache if they do not. All of her clothing comes from the Eaton's catalogue, which indicates that her family is not as wealthy as the other kids—Elaine does not pick up on this at first, as she also comes from a low-income background. Grace does not display very many independent characteristics outside of her interest in playing school, cutting out photos from magazines, and playing along with Cordelia's cruel games.

Carol Campbell – The first friend that Elaine makes when her family moves to Toronto because she is the only other girl who rides the school bus. Judgmental and delicate, Carol does not like any activities deemed too male or dirty, like playing with insects or lizards or climbing on things. She regards Elaine as exotic at first but does not hesitate to join in tormenting her when Cordelia's games begin.

Mrs. Smeath – Grace Smeath's mother, a very religious and strict woman whom Elaine detests. Mrs. Smeath is extremely judgmental and narcissistic. She has big bones, and wears steel-rimmed glasses and print housedresses. She smiles, but she never laughs. She also makes it her mission to "save" Elaine and bring her to church, but she always seems to judge her for coming from a different background and not knowing which hats to wear or whether she should say grace at dinner. Ultimately, she becomes a symbol of Elaine's rejection of religion and religious convention—when she becomes a painter, Elaine paints several portraits of Mrs. Smeath in vengeance for her cruelty and judgmental attitude in Elaine's childhood.

Jon – Elaine's first husband, who also aspires to be a painter and artist. Unsuccessful in his artistic career, however, he takes on a job designing props for movie sets. He has frequent affairs and seems to relish his easy relationships with women. He also does not want to keep a clean house and dismisses Elaine's art style as conventional and illustrative. Although he and Elaine marry when she becomes pregnant with Sarah, Jon continues to have affairs and they fight until they divorce. Jon represents a certain kind of young idealism that ends up quenched with the entrance into normal adult life.

Ben – Elaine's current husband, and the father of her daughter Anne. Ben works as a travel agent and can get easy trips for his family. He is portrayed as simple and old-fashioned—he meets Elaine at a grocery store, and courts her in an archaic manner. Nevertheless, she loves him, as he represents an attractive sense of simplicity and order.

Josef Hrbik – The teacher of Elaine's Life Drawing class, with whom she eventually has an affair. He is in his thirties at the time, and an émigré from Hungary, where he allegedly left behind a wife and two daughters. Often referred to as Mr. Hrbik, he seems to make a habit of having relationships with his students, as he also sleeps with Susie. He is melancholic and has a very romanticized view of how women should be. Although he appears to have some power over Elaine at the start of their affair, as he chooses her outfits, it is Elaine who walks away from him in the end; he appears to remain hung up on the relationship, as he creates a film about it.

Susie – Another student in Elaine's Life Drawing class who also has an affair with Mr. Hrbik. She falls deeply in love with him, but he does not seem to return her affections. She ends up becoming pregnant and has an illegal abortion which nearly kills her—Elaine saves her life by taking her to the hospital.

Cordelia's Mother – Cordelia's mother is the wife of a wealthy man. She arranges her own flowers and has a cleaning lady. She does seem to like Elaine, in contrast to Mrs. Smeath, but she partially uses her to make Cordelia feel bad in comparison. Her children call her Mummie and keep conspiracies from her, but they do not like to disappoint her.

Miss Stuart – One of Elaine's teachers, who has a Scottish

accent and makes herself tea in the afternoons which she spikes with alcohol. Although she can be strict sometimes, she is the students' favorite teacher. She encourages the students to draw, offering one of Elaine's first introductions to the world of art. Elaine. eventually paints Miss Stuart as one of her three muses.

Mr. Banerji – A scientist who stays with Elaine's family for a period during her childhood, as he works with her father. Elaine identifies with him, because he appears anxious and persecuted to her. However, he treats her extremely nicely and she later paints him as one of her three muses after he returns to India when the university refuses to hire him.

Mrs. Finestein – One of the neighbors when Elaine's family moves to Toronto and the mother of Brian Finestein, whom Elaine briefly babysits. Mrs. Finestein is a stylish lady who supports and inspires Elaine. She is also the first Jewish person Elaine meets. As one of the first adults outside of Elaine's direct family who seems to respect her and treat her kindly, Elaine loves and admires Mrs. Finestein. Although Mrs. Finestein does judge Elaine's adult fashion choices of all black, they continue to have a positive relationship and Elaine paints her as one of her three muses.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Mrs. Campbell – Carol's mother, who dresses in twin sets and sleeps in a different bed from her husband. She wears rubber gloves to wash the dishes, gets her hair done at a salon, and likes it when the kids stay out of sight.

Mr. Smeath – Grace Smeath's father, who does not seem to take etiquette or religion as seriously as his wife does. His only appearances in the novel involve making jokes at the dinner table that his wife does not react well to.

Sarah – Elaine's older daughter, whom she has with her first husband Jon. She appears to be more practical than her mother.

Anne – Elaine's younger daughter, whom she has with her second husband Ben. She does not appear much in the novel but does seem to have a happier childhood than Elaine did.

Perdita (Perdie) – Cordelia's oldest sister, who enjoys ballet. She and Mirrie are best friends and do everything together, often excluding Cordelia.

Miranda (Mirrie) – Cordelia's older sister, the middle child of the family. She plays viola. She is best friends with her sister Perdie and excludes Cordelia and her younger friends.

Miss Lumley – One of Elaine's teachers, who is extremely strict and cruel. She loves the British Empire, and the girls like to picture her as wearing dark blue bloomers underneath her clothing. Images of her and those invisible bloomers haunt Elaine.

Charna – The organizer of the gallery Sub-Versions, which is showing Elaine's retrospective. Charna is young and clearly very passionate about art. She also has very political ideas about art and interprets all of Elaine's pieces as statements about gender, war, or society.

Andrea – A young woman who interviews Elaine. She is a feminist, and clearly sees Elaine as somewhat old-fashioned or out-of-date.

Aunt Mildred – Mrs. Smeath's sister, who is similarly strict and religious. She seems to particularly dislike Elaine and see her as an irredeemable child from a family of heathens.

Brian Finestein – The child of Mrs. Finestein, whom Elaine gets paid to babysit for a short period of time before she becomes nervous that her friends will prompt her to do something horrible to him.

Jill – The first friend that Elaine makes when she ends her friendship with Cordelia, Grace, and Carol after nearly dying in the water under the **bridge**.

Babs – An older woman who also takes Life Drawing. She is best friends with Marjorie, and the two frequently gossip together.

Marjorie - An older woman who also takes Life Drawing. She is best friends with Babs, and the two frequently gossip together.

Jody – The woman who organizes the first exhibition that Elaine participates in.

Carolyn – One of the women who also participates in the first exhibition Elaine participates in.

Zillah – Another of the women who participates in the first exhibition Elaine participates in.

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.

ART, SCIENCE, AND RELIGION

A certain tension between art and science runs throughout *Cat's Eye*. In fact, Atwood's novel can be seen as a series of experiments on the path to understanding the world—as the daughter of an entomologist, protagonist Elaine Risley starts by following the pattern set by her family, which is oriented towards atheism and science; she then tests out Christianity as she comes of age, before eventually becoming a painter. Elaine reaches for art, science, and religion as a means of parsing and controlling the often-cruel or indifferent world she encounters, yet in the end, none of these options in isolation saves Elaine from loss and disaster.

Elaine ultimately chooses not to distinguish entirely between these three categories at all, and instead finds ways that they overlap through the vessel of her paintings. There is no singular way to make sense of the world, the novel thus suggests, and only through a combination of art, science, and spirituality does Elaine arrive at some form of fulfillment and self-knowledge.

As a child, science shapes Elaine's worldview. She hides out with her brother Stephen in the science building where their father works, where they seemingly never tire of using the microscopes to examine "butterfly wings" and "cross-sections of worms." Elaine excels at biology in high school but, in the "middle of the Botany examination," realizes "that I'm not going to be a biologist, as I have thought. I am going to be a painter." Though she does not explicitly reject science or her family, this decision aligns with her growing apathy towards her father—who enjoys talking about scientific catastrophes and other topics that Elaine categorizes under "this is not what people are supposed to talk about at the dinner table"—and the growing distance she feels towards her brother and his arcane knowledge of physics.

Unlike Elaine's relationship to science, which begins as her following in her father's and brother's footsteps, her relationship to religion is an active rejection of her family. She starts attending church around the age of nine with the family of her friend Grace Smeath, despite her agnostic parents' reluctance. She initially finds the ceremonies compelling—after she comes home the first day, she thinks that the stars "no longer look cold and white and remote," but instead now "look watchful." Religion directly replaces the coldness of science and gives her actions (like memorizing psalms) she can take to imbue her world with meaning. However, after she starts being regularly bullied she comes to find religion unfulfilling. She reports "losing confidence in God" and resenting the strict and judgmental Christianity of Mrs. Smeath. Elaine decides to abandon God because *she* feels abandoned. She also comes to realize she does not want to forgive her bullies, despite what religion may teach: "if it means I will have to forgive Mrs. Smeath or else go to Hell when I die, I'm ready to go."

Having found both science and religion unable to offer fulfillment, Elaine turns to art and synthesizes the categories that have shaped her through her paintings. Some of these include the influence of her scientific background, especially those that relate to her brother. She calls one painting *Unified Field Theory*, referencing the theory in physics that explains how forces are transmitted through fields—but the painting itself is of a "wooden **bridge**," beneath which "is the night sky, as seen by a telescope [...] or so you think. But there are also stones down there ... because this is the underside of the ground." This painting connects her brother's scientific passion with his childhood decision to bury a jar of marbles underground, which unites this grander theoretical field with the kinds of personal events that define Elaine's life.

In other paintings, Elaine builds in religious references. The "Virgin of Lost Things," a representation of **Mary**, appears to her during her childhood near-death experience in a frozen river. Although she ostensibly abandons religion because of her resentment towards God, this figure reappears in that same Unified Field Theory painting, where, "between her hands, at the level of her heart, she holds a glass object: an oversized **cat's eye marble**, with a blue center." The Virgin represents the figure that Elaine felt saved her, which suggests the ambiguity of Elaine's feelings about religion. She may have developed agnosticism towards strict dogma, but her *personal* sense of faith still allows religion to have meaning—here expressed in her art.

Elaine choosing to integrate her personal experiences with science and religion into her art has the effect of blurring the lines between these categories, which many people perceive as distinct pillars of society. For Elaine, religion and science provide a backdrop for connecting with other people and trying to understand the world, but neither fully satisfies her—however, instead of rejecting them entirely she integrates these modes of understanding into her paintings. Her art allows her to create an oasis of order in her life, but ultimately does not change anything—rather than impacting the world itself, art (much like science and religion as depicted in this novel) impacts one's *understanding* of the world. Therefore, combining elements of these three distinct categories allows her to at self-knowledge that she could not have found alone.

When asked "Why do you paint?" by an interviewer, Elaine replies, "Why does anyone do anything?" This question teases at the novel's core questions—that is, what orders a life, and what should one live for? On the one hand, Elaine's response points at a certain nihilism; on the other, it suggests an innate human drive to pursue fulfillment. In the end, while Elaine chooses to focus her life on art over science and especially religion, she acknowledges the way that all three methods evoke the questions that shape human existence—and encounter similar difficulties in answering them.

GENDER AND CRUELTY

Although Margaret Atwood's novels have often been described as strongly feminist, *Cat's Eye* both engages with and resists feminist ideology. The novel deals extensively with the differences between men and women, yet focuses on cruelties specific to female/female relationships and the fraught nature of developing a female identity. Although the specter of male violence remains present at the outskirts of the novel, the most potent examples of physical and psychological damage in Elaine's life occur in her relationships with women. Though some feminist narratives depict women as the victims of centuries of male patriarchal violence (and Elaine does not reject those narratives out of hand), *Cat's Eye* explores the oft-neglected subject of female

cruelty and violence—which, the novel argues, can often remain invisible, even as its consequences last a lifetime.

Although Elaine frequently discusses the nature of girls and boys, she focuses on female cruelty, particularly in childhood. Girls and boys are strictly divided in her school; there is even a "Girls" and a "Boys" door to the school building. Elaine wants "girl friends" desperately at first, but is "not used to girls, or familiar with their customs." She says, "I feel awkward around them, I don't know what to say. I know the unspoken rules of boys, but with girls I sense that I am always on the verge of some unforeseen, calamitous blunder." When Elaine has her own daughters, she feels a deep worry about parenting them instead of sons, because of her own childhood. In fact, "most mothers worry when their daughters reach adolescence but I was the opposite. I relaxed, I sighed with relief. Little girls are cute and small only to adults. To one another they are not cute. They are life sized." She consistently refers to the capacity girl children have to hurt each other, because it so often goes unnoticed in comparison to the warlike aggression of young boys.

In particular, Elaine's relationship to Cordelia highlights the perverse scope that female cruelty can take. Much of the direct violence in that relationship is technically self-inflicted: Elaine describes starting to "bite her fingers" and "peel the skin" off her feet, leaving them raw and tender, when the bullying becomes too extreme. Technically, Cordelia never touches her—Elaine's mother even tells her daughter to ignore her bullies, as "sticks and stones" are what really hurt people, not words. Yet at one of the novel's climaxes, Elaine nearly freezes to death because Cordelia has thrown her hat in a river. As small as these actions appear on the surface, it's clear that they lead to physically violent consequences and, perhaps more importantly, the total destruction of Elaine's sense of self.

As an adult, Elaine tries going to feminist meetings; however, she ends up feeling uncomfortable with the groups' ideological insistence on male violence as the main source of women's pain. She further describes how "pain is important" in these groups, but only "the pain of women." She considers herself "insufficient of scars" to fit in, in large part because most of her scars came from women and not men. Always something of a skeptic, she feels "guilty of having" too few "positions" or "dogmas." She calls her heart "a dubious object at best," and notes that she still shaves her legs.

She also thinks "women know too much"—an insistence reflected in her art. Though she does make paintings about men and women, in these artistic representations she ascribes a lack of intent or emotional depth to men that she does not to women. In her painting *Falling Women*, she says, "There were no men in this painting, but it was about men," yet she does not ascribe intentions to them: "They were like the weather, they didn't have a mind… they were like… a line of sharp slippery rocks" that you could take care walking along, but if you slipped, "it was no use blaming the rocks." By depriving men of intentionality, she softens their violence; if it's unintentional and mindless, it's no longer explicitly cruel.

Elaine's women, on the other hand, have strong traits—her **Virgin Mary** on the other hand is "fierce, alert to danger, wild," like a lion with "a gnawed bone" at her feet. Her women fall more often into categories of fierceness and wildness than good or bad—their actions and whatever cruelties come with them are often tied into this sense of wildness and self-preservation, whereas Elaine seems to find men less interesting (and perhaps simpler) as subjects.

This also suggests that female cruelty is perhaps made all the more painful specifically *because* of the fact that women are already othered by society. That is, their need for self-preservation in a patriarchal world engenders their cruelty, and women's shared experience of marginalization leads to the ability to cut other women down with vicious precision; "women know too much." Regardless of its roots, the novel's focus on the nature of violence and psychological manipulation among female relationships suggests that more explicit violence can be dealt with, whereas invisible cruelties have a ripple effect.

WAR VS. ENVIRONMENTAL CATASTROPHE

Both of the timelines in *Cat's Eye* confront themes of war and catastrophe. Elaine comes of age in the period immediately following the Second World War and describes a childhood defined by the social and economic effects of the fighting. She specifically focuses as much on the distinctive effect that it had on social values of the period, encouraging a sense of thrift and national unity. In the book's more recent timeline, however, contemporary society faces looming environmental disaster in part brought about by selfish consumerism. The novel contrasts the different ways that large-scale catastrophes shape both population-wide and individual experiences: whereas the war left behind some ambivalent and even positive values of national community, the large-scale catastrophes still approaching support a nihilistic worldview—if everything and everyone will disappear anyway, holding onto constructive hope becomes increasingly difficult for the narrator.

References to the war permeate Elaine's childhood narrative. She and her family have a migratory lifestyle because of her father's job researching "spruce budworms," which Elaine discovers later in life was "considered essential to the war effort." They hear "air raid sirens," though their "mother says the war will never come here." Still, war "filters in over the radio, remote and crackly, the voices from London facing through the static." As Canadians, their experience of the war is limited to what was communicated at a distance—which clearly leads to a

tense atmosphere and a sense of waiting but does not come with any real sense of danger. Even so, the war affects her family on several layers. Researchers are not well paid, and as such the family lives nomadically and off rations during the period. When they settle in Toronto, their neighbors look down on their poverty and "ragamuffin" lifestyle.

However, the scope of the war's impact extends beyond the negative. It instills positive values of thrift and a conscious relationship to material objects, as well as a strong national spirit—Elaine's teacher Mrs. Lumley makes them sing "God Save the King" to celebrate the free British spirit (although they are technically Canadian), and Elaine—along with the whole town—celebrates when Princess Elizabeth comes to visit. While Elaine does not consider nationalism positive in a direct sense—she expresses extreme ambivalence to all ideology, in fact—this does lead to a sense of unity and hope.

Although Elaine only realizes this in hindsight, the war led to a society and an entire generation opposed to waste and aware of a sense of community. She thus complains about consumerism in the modern day and says that there is a difference between people that remember the Second World War and those that don't: "We have long attention spans […] we eat everything on our plates. We save string. We make do." An aversion to wastefulness was born in the war, which impacted an entire generation. Meanwhile, the environmental catastrophes looming on the horizon are directly tied to higher consumerism and waste, and generations forgetting to value thrift.

Elaine also reflects on natural catastrophes in both time periods: in her childhood, her father references environmental destruction but is rarely taken seriously, whereas these themes become common place in her later life. At one point, Elaine's father shows her an infestation of budworms, saying, "Remember this… you won't see an infestation like this again for a long time." Elaine thinks that this is "the way I've heard people talk about forest fires, or the war: respect and wonderment mixed in with the sense of catastrophe." The emotions that she ties to war and catastrophe here are not singularly negative—one of them is a sense of wonder, which exposes the ambiguity that people can feel in relation to these large, defining events. Catastrophes cause a sense of wonderment as well as doom; they are fascinating but make one's life feel more precarious.

In fact, Elaine's father often discussed the fate of the human race at the kitchen table. He predicts that an increase of methane-producing cows will cause the earth to "become a giant greenhouse. The polar seas will melt and New York will be under six feet of water." However, Elaine's brother Stephen dismisses this apocalyptic prediction about the fate of the human race to say, "if the sun went supernova it would be eight minutes before we'd see it." He claims, "sooner or later we're going to be a cinder anyway… so why worry about a few cows more or less?" Elaine sees this as a victory on her brother's part, as "whoever cares the most will lose." The two themes of war and natural catastrophe weave together to create a picture of the lack of control that humans have over their fate—but where the war brought with it a sense of national community and of thrift, the looming threat of environmental catastrophe seems to make all values moot.

In some ways, wars represent the past and natural disaster the future when it comes to the narrative's relationship to catastrophe. Wars generally occur for fixed periods of time—even when they end, they continue to mark and define a society, but as they are human-driven they can eventually be forgotten. Natural catastrophe, on the other hand, marks humanity's hubris—while scientists like Elaine's father might predict them, average citizens tend to dismiss those predictions without overwhelming evidence; there is no space in the present for thoughts of future catastrophe, whereas the past cannot be escaped. Perhaps paradoxically, wartime breeds a spirit of hope, as nations come together to fight a common enemy—in contrast, these environmental catastrophes are sparked by accidental individual actions and come with a sense of doom.

IDENTITY AND CONFLICT

Much of the novel confronts how identities form in adolescent relationships. As a child, Elaine experiences severe bullying at the hands of her closest friends, which scars her and affects the work she later produces as an artist. However, Elaine does not merely take on the role of the victim—she also observes the ways in which she begins to merge with her bullies—Cordelia in particular—and take on some of their traits and behaviors. She notes both how these childhood cruelties impact her self-image and how her ability to identify with those who inflicted such cruelties shape her all the more intensely. Atwood's coming of age story ultimately depicts an intertwining of love and aggression that exposes the role that conflict plays in forming one's identity.

Elaine's best friend and worst influence is Cordelia, the friend who bullies her in childhood, acts as a chaotic companion in adolescence, and haunts her adulthood. In the first movement of this relationship, Cordelia moves to Elaine's neighborhood during the summer and alters the dynamic of her friend group. Cordelia becomes the de facto leader of the former trio, egging on Grace and Carol in twisted games of psychological manipulation, which culminate in Elaine's near death by freezing. However, Elaine continues to love her, though "Hatred would have been easier […] Hatred is clear, metallic, one-handed, unwavering; unlike love." The depth of the damage was possible due to her love for Cordelia, which made her vulnerable.

While the story could have ended with this lesson about bullying, Cordelia and Elaine become friends again in high

school and their dynamic begins to reverse. Elaine becomes cold and hurts both Cordelia and other classmates but says "it disturbs me to learn I have hurt someone unintentionally. I want all my hurts to be intentional." She develops a vicious side that directly mirrors the way that Cordelia acted towards her years before—but this viciousness is still dissonant with her core instincts. Instead, it stems from a desire to understand Cordelia and, thus, better understand her own childhood.

By the end of the novel, the dynamic established in childhood has almost entirely reversed. Cordelia suffers failure after failure, unable to go to college and experiencing mental health break-downs that result in institutionalization. Elaine, on the other hand, builds both a family and a career—though she also suffers, by all standards her life is happier than Cordelia's. Even when she gives money to a woman begging for help, Elaine says, "I'm a fool, to confuse this with goodness. I am not good. I know too much to be good. I know myself. I know myself to be vengeful, greedy, secretive and sly." The traits she names in herself mirror those she identifies in Cordelia, demonstrating the ultimate inversion of their roles and extent to which this relationship has shaped Elaine's own sense of self.

Unfortunately, Elaine's desire to understand Cordelia's perspective can never be fulfilled. She wants Cordelia's version of the story, where she is not the center—she says, "But I could give her something you can never have, except from another person: what you look like from outside. A reflection. This is part of herself I could give back to her. We are like the twins in old fables, each of whom has been given half a key." This desire for reflection and for being seen from the outside justifies the push and pull tension between the pair, and explains the process through which individuals, who yearn to be seen and understood, come to resemble each other even in cruelty.

Even in her later romantic relationships, Elaine describes a tendency towards spiking hostility and aggression that occurs between her and her partners, which reinforces her relationship between conflict and identity formation. She pursues a romantic and sexual relationship with her mentor and art teacher Mr. Hrbik, which reflects undertones of the strange dynamic she had had with Cordelia. She describes "I walk away from him. It's enormously pleasing to me, this walking away. It's like being able to make people appear and vanish, at will." Some of her cruelty appears to be, therefore, a desire for control.

Later, she falls in love with and ultimately marries Jon, but their relationship is also deeply defined by conflict and tension. They fight and throw things at one another, and, "The things I throw miss, although they are worse things. The things he throws hit, but are harmless," and she starts to see "how the line is crossed, between histrionics and murder." The intensity behind this relationship reflects Elaine's clear association between romantic love, identification, and aggression—love, for her, manifests in relationships of mutual conflict. After her divorce with Jon, she says "What we share may be a lot like a traffic accident but we get one another. We are survivors of each other. We have been shark to one another, but also lifeboat. That counts for something." She does not categorize this relationship as abusive—nor does she categorize Cordelia in her childhood as the sole aggressor. Instead, she notes in both of these cases how violent behavior from one party shapes and fuels the other to become a more violent and cruel person in return.

Ultimately, the picture of identity formation that arises through the novel is not one of each individual having an inherent natural identity that is built into them at birth, but rather one built from complicated and tense exchange. While individuals might be influenced by their families, their environments, or their friendships, the things that leave the strongest and most indelible marks in every situation have to do with conflict. Conflict leaves scars that run deeper than compassionate relationships throughout this narrative—and one of the most significant ways it does so is in the ways that individuals come to mirror and reflect traits of cruelty to each other. This does not have to be inevitable—Elaine hopes that her daughters have escaped this cycle of violence—but the cycle that she describes, beginning with her family and Cordelia and extending throughout her life—molds aspects of her identity that dramatically define her worldview.

TIME AND MEMORY

Cat's Eye unfolds across two separate but interweaving timelines, which depict different phases in the life of its artist-protagonist, Elaine Risley. The timelines of the novel jump back and forth between Elaine's childhood growing up poor in Toronto following the second World War and her recent (and reluctant) return to the city for her first retrospective exhibition as an aging painter. The novel's structure itself thus reflects Elaine's skepticism about the notion of linear time; she states explicitly that time is not a line but a *dimension*, and this alters the way that the narrative perceives the borders between past, present, and future. With dimensional time, the past does not remain strictly past—unlike with linear time, which marches inevitably forward, things that are lost may inevitably recur or reappear; nothing goes away. The novel suggests that the dimensionality of time manifests most directly through the acts of remembering and forgetting, through which the past may continue to influence the present and future.

Elaine encounters the notion of dimensional time through her brother, Stephen, a physics student who teaches her, "Time is not a line but a dimension, like the dimensions of space." He believes that one could bend time if they knew enough and could "travel backward in time and exist in two places at once" if they travelled faster than light. This leads Elaine to "think of time as having a shape … like a series of liquid transparencies,

one laid on top of another." As a consequence, "sometimes this comes to the surface, sometimes that, sometimes nothing." The scientific explanation that she introduces here establishes the groundwork for the novel's structure: rather than a straightforward narrative that starts in the past and ends in the future, *Cat's Eye* layers Elaine's past and present and explores the elements of her life that recur or double back.

The structure of the novel itself reflects this resistance to linearity, as it interweaves two different timelines that develop at different paces. Elaine's childhood timeline proceeds in fits and spurts—it starts in the 1940s as the war is still going on, and continues until after she marries, has her own children, and divorces. The "present moment" timeline occurs over a very condensed period of a couple of days, from Elaine's arrival in Toronto through the night of her retrospective exhibition. In this timeline, Elaine reflects on the past and as well as her current, more disturbed experience of time. At one point, she finds herself in the living room "not knowing exactly how" she got there, except "a little time jump." Some of this she ascribes to aging, "early Alzheimers," but other aspects of her mix-ups in time come from her memories mixing with her experience of the present. She describes this as "the middle of my life … halfway across, halfway over … I'm supposed to be a person of substance," but "since coming back here I don't feel weightier. I feel lighter, as if I'm shedding matter…" except instead of rising, "I descend … I am dragged downward, into the layers of this place as into liquified mud." The place she refers to is Toronto and being in that space drags her back to the time of her childhood.

Even objects and images that Elaine ostensibly forgets reappear throughout the novel, attesting to non-linear time that exceeds the bounds of conscious memory. Elaine was bullied during her childhood, a fact that the narrative introduces in a linear way. However, she also later forgets that experience of bullying, and describes it as "missing time," which only her mother describes as "that bad time" she had. She had "forgotten all of the bad things that happened," and the names of her childhood friends became "like names in a footnote" with "no emotion attached." This process of forgetting supports the illusion of a linear life, but forgetting can also be less permanent than it seems.

Indeed, in one of the novel's most climactic moments, Elaine rediscovers a **cat's eye marble** that she had hidden in her parents' basement as a childhood. She had acquired it during a phase where all the students in her school collected marbles obsessively, and it forms a symbolic space of solace for her: when she looks at it, "she can see the way it sees … she can look at [people's] shapes and sizes … without feeling anything else about them." This clarity protects her from being completely overwhelmed by bullying. Although she had forgotten the marble, its discovery causes her to "look into it and see my life entire." The marble, a fragment of her past, contains the key to unlock an entire flood of memories—this demonstrates the mysterious ways that the past can intrude on the present, and that one does not have control over the arc of one's life.

The concept of the preservation of the past developed in *Cat's Eye* provides only a cold comfort to the inevitability of death and loss. Elaine's body "ticks like a clock" because "time is inside it"; she is aging, and she will die. While she resists linearity in the form of perception and memory, there is also an undercurrent of mortality in the novel—while the present might be composed of fragments of the past, there remains the sense that both one's individual life and that of the universe itself is leading up to something: an ultimate disappearance. The preservation of the past that the novel explores entails not a permanent or eternal preservation, but rather a proof that the present itself is composed of elements that don't disappear because of memory. Memories of the past compose one's experience of the present, the way that tinted glasses alter the way one sees the world.

SYMBOLS

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

CAT'S EYE MARBLE

Elaine's cat's eye marble has multiple layers of symbolism in the novel, at once representing isolation, the persistence of trauma, and Elaine's innermost self. One year, all of the kids in Elaine's class get caught up in a craze of marble-collecting. They compete by gambling their marbles against each other in games, with a winner-takes-all policy. Unlike her brother Stephen, who always wins, Elaine rarely succeeds in these marble competitions. She does possess one special marble, however—a cat's eye with a blue center, which she keeps secret from others and stores in a red purse. There are three layers to the symbolism of the cat's eye marble. When Elaine first finds it, it acts as a talisman to ward off her negative emotions. The marble, then, represents Elaine's sense of isolation, and the refuge that beloved objects can provide to people. It holds all of her memories and her secret, hidden thoughts when she becomes the victim of bullying and no one steps in to rescue her. Things of beauty create an oasis against negativity; the glass marble represents clarity and the importance of protecting inner thoughts against outer disturbances.

As she ages, Elaine forgets about the marble, only to rediscover it years later in a trunk in her mother's basement. This discovery leads to the second layer of the cat's eye's role in the novel: it unlocks all of Elaine's repressed memories from her childhood. In a single instant, looking at the blue glass core of the marble throws open the doors of her memory. When

people endure traumatic events, they often repress them in order to move forward; the marble marks the ways that different objects from one's past can reappear and trigger these floods of memories. For the novel, part of what this means is that nothing ever totally disappears—the past continues to stay with us, in the form of objects and memories.

In the third layer of meaning, the cat's eye recurs as a motif in Elaine's artwork. In one image, the cat's eye replaces her own head. In another, she paints the **Virgin Mary** holding an oversized version of the marble between her hands. On some level, this becomes a symbol about symbols—the cat's eye represents how an object from someone's real life can be made to carry different meanings. The relationship to that symbol can begin to define one's self-identity, as demonstrated by Elaine's fixation on the cat's eye. For Elaine, then, the cat's eye ultimately represents her inner self—and by focusing on it, she can shut out the rest of the world.

THE BRIDGE

As a child, Elaine has to walk to school past a ravine with a wooden bridge over it—which becomes a complex symbol of transition, uncertainty, and imagination. There are rumors of dangerous men who lurk to attack young women in that ravine, so Elaine and her friends aren't supposed to ever stray from the bridge. The bridge, then, represents hidden dangers and the perverse ways that some people use public spaces in order to make targets—it is a space of vulnerability, uncertainty, and darkness. It's also a space that marks the divide between the sexes: men wander freely, making young women unsafe.

The bridge also becomes the subject of several mysteries. First, Elaine's brother Stephen buries his collection of marbles somewhere out by the bridge. Later, Cordelia tries to convince Elaine, Carol, and Grace that dead people populate the water beneath it because the river runs from a cemetery. After that, she throws Elaine's hat down into the "ravine where the bad men are" in winter and forces her to fetch it, which leads Elaine to nearly freeze to death until she thinks she sees an apparition of the **Virgin Mary**. Even when these mysteries are debunked, they captivate Elaine's imagination. Her own mother collects plants down by the ravine, and Elaine knows the Virgin Mary apparition was just wishful thinking; no one came to help her. This shows the ambivalence of the bridge space—it takes on at once the darkest and most hopeful rumors, some of which prove true—a young woman is killed by the river during Elaine's high school years—and others of which fade away.

Bridges also represent duality and transition—they link a starting point and an end point, creating a sense of uncertainty and ambivalence. When one stands on the bridge, one is no longer on solid ground. This is especially evident in Elaine's painting *Falling Women*, which depicts three women falling off the bridge. This work further underscores that not only do bridges stretch between two horizontal points, but they also mark the dimension between the high and the low—and call into question what might be lurking underneath a simple surface. Elaine again works the bridge into her painting *Unified Field Theory*, this time with a galaxy of marbles buried underneath it. The bridge exists as a space of intense romantic imagination as well as deep fear.

The wooden bridge of Elaine's youth eventually gets torn down, and Elaine watches it with "an uneasy feeling, as if something's buried down there, a nameless, crucial thing" or as though there were "someone still on the bridge, left by mistake, up in the air…" Years later, she walks across the concrete bridge that has replaced it and thinks, "Nevertheless it's the same bridge." As a symbol, it does not matter if years pass or the bridge changes in form—it stands regardless for a period of suspension between two extremes, the potential fear of falling, and the uncertainty about whether danger or beauty lurks beneath the surface.

VIRGIN MARY

Elaine learns about the Virgin Mary when she starts going to church with the Smeaths. Although she ends up growing distant from organized religion, visions of Mary recur throughout her life; Mary emerges as a force of maternal protection and hope, who stands in contrast to the neglectful figures in Elaine's life. Mary takes on many names in the novel: "The Virgin, Our Lady of Perpetual Help, The Virgin of Lost Things." When she starts getting bullied by Cordelia, Carol, and Grace, Elaine decides "to do something dangerous, rebellious, perhaps even blasphemous": to pray to the Virgin Mary instead of to God. For Elaine, Mary represents a kind of freedom or hope that she does not find in the Christian God. She paints the Virgin Mary as a lioness later, and describes her as "fierce, alert to danger wild" with a "gnawed bone" at her feet. This wildness and fierce protectiveness defines her image of Mary. By contrast, her parents, even her own mother, disregard the bad things that happen to her, as does God.

When Elaine nearly freezes in the ravine after Cordelia throws her hat down, Elaine notably sees a vision of the Virgin Mary. She says she feels "her around me, not like arms but like a small wind of warmer air." Mary says to her, "You can go home now." At the end of the novel, she admits that this was only a fantasy, and that "nobody came." This suggests that Mary represents Elaine's fierce desire to be seen and protected. She is a symbol of maternal intervention, the voice of intercession that Elaine has so sorely lacked. For Elaine, she is "wrapping me in warmth and painlessness, she has heard me after all." The core of the bullying that Elaine faces consists of her friends overly-scrutinizing her and judging her behavior; this fantasy of Mary represents the desire to just be seen and supported.

The particular iterations of Mary that recur to Elaine are the "Lady of Perpetual Help" and the "Virgin of Lost Things." She sees the later on an altar in Mexico when she visits with her husband Ben, and examines the tin symbols of items that other people lost and pinned to her. In her own later painting, she depicts a Lady of Perpetual Help descending to earth with "two brown paper bags of groceries." In this painting, "she looks tired." These versions of Mary represent the domestic role of women, who humble themselves in service to others. This suggests Elaine's view that helping others, particularly in the manner expected of women, requires a certain sacrifice of self.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Anchor Books edition of *Cat's Eye* published in 1998.

Part 1 Quotes

Time is not a line but a dimension, like the dimensions of space. If you can bend space you can bend time also, and if you knew enough and could move faster than light you could travel backward in time and exist in two places at once [...] But I began then to think of time as having a shape, something you could see, like a series of liquid transparencies, one laid on top of another. You don't look back along time but down through it, like water. Sometimes this comes to the surface, sometimes that, sometimes nothing. Nothing goes away.

Related Characters: Elaine Risley (speaker), Stephen Risley

Related Themes:

Page Number: 3

Explanation and Analysis

The opening words of the novel, this description about the nature of time informs both the novel's structure and its primary themes involving identity and memory. The first section of the quote describes the way physics explains the nature of time, which Elaine's brother (a physicist) explains to her. The primary significant details here are that time is non-linear, which goes against a typical experience of time, and that one could theoretically travel to the past. In the second part of the quote, Elaine focuses on her own interpretation of time, more based on experience. This vision of time is one that is cumulative, with events adding up through memory. With memory as a tool, this indicates that one can look back through these accumulated events; however, it's not possible to control or predict exactly what will come to the surface. This creates an eerie and ambivalent relationship to time, which isn't totally hopeful due to this lack of control and the sense that the past is inescapable, but also is a direct contradiction of a more pessimistic understanding of the universe as constantly in decay.

Part 2 Quotes

This is the middle of my life. I think of it as a place, like the middle of a river, the middle of a bridge, halfway across, halfway over. I'm supposed to have accumulated things by now: possessions, responsibilities, achievements, experience and wisdom. I'm supposed to be a person of substance.

Related Characters: Elaine Risley (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 13

Explanation and Analysis

In this section, Elaine reflects on her own life in terms of social expectations. By framing her life in this way, she automatically casts it into question, and in doing so demonstrates the ways that those expectations can be toxic. By saying that she is supposed to have certain things at this stage in her life, she invokes a particular linear narrative about human life that goes from birth to death pursuing certain goals, and ultimately implies that she feels she has not fulfilled those expected goals. The image of the bridge is extremely potent here, because it shows how a space that is meant to mark transition, a direct trip from point A to point B, can become a space of suspension. The expectation of achievement that comes with aging also carries with it the connotations of one's own mortality and inevitable death; these thoughts haunt Elaine even though they don't reflect her actual experience of living as defined by repetition and looking backwards into her memories.

What we share, Jon and I, may be a lot like a traffic accident, but we do

share it. We are survivors, of each other. We have been shark to one another, but also lifeboat. That counts for something.

Related Characters: Elaine Risley (speaker), Jon

Related Themes:

Page Number: 18

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Elaine reflects on her relationship with her ex-husband, Jon, and the nature of her reflection provides important insight into her understanding of relationships more generally and how they influence the formation of someone's identity. She describes their relationship using catastrophic language—their relationship was like a traffic accident or a shark attack, something that one narrowly survives. At the same time, it seems that the very crisis of their relationship is what Elaine finds important. The intensity of catastrophe creates a lasting impact, one which she ultimately values, or is at least able to see the value in. This shows one of the critical aspects of Elaine's personality, which is a tendency to fixate on negative or traumatic experiences and reflect on the aspects of those experiences that might have neutral, if not positive results. In this sense, she thinks about the ways that traumatic experiences shape one's identity, for better or for worse.

❝ We like scabs. We pick them off—there isn't room for a whole arm or leg under the microscope—and turn the magnification up as high as it will go. […] We look at earwax, or snot, or dirt from our toes, checking first to see that there's no one around: we know without asking that such things would not be approved of. Our curiosity is supposed to have limits, though these have never been defined exactly.

Related Characters: Elaine Risley (speaker), Stephen Risley

Related Themes:

Page Number: 40

Explanation and Analysis

This scene occurs soon after Elaine and her family have settled down in Toronto and her father has started his job as a researcher in zoology. Elaine and Stephen play regularly in the zoology building, which is where they play with microscopes and make their own little experiments. In this scene, Elaine teases out part of her relationship to social norms, as she reflects on how her and Stephen's unlimited curiosity would be disapproved of. She associates science, therefore, both with curiosity and its limitations—the thirst for knowledge, and the certainty that only some particular kinds of knowledge are socially acceptable. There is an important equality between Stephen and Elaine at this point, which dissolves later in the novel—for now, though, despite their different ages and genders, they share this interest in allegedly repulsive substances. What this establishes in the implication that, when they diverge later, some of that divergence has society to blame, not their innate natures.

Part 3 Quotes

❝ There are days when I can hardly make it out of bed. I find it an effort to speak. I measure progress in steps, the next one and the next one, as far as the bathroom. These steps are major accomplishments. I focus on taking the cap off the toothpaste, getting the brush up to my mouth. I have difficulty lifting my arm to do even that. I feel I am without worth, that nothing I can do is of any value, least of all to myself. What do you have to say for yourself? Cordelia used to ask. Nothing, I would say. It was a word I came to connect with myself, as if I was nothing, as if there was nothing there at all. Last night I felt the approach of nothing.

Related Characters: Elaine Risley (speaker), Cordelia

Related Themes:

Page Number: 45

Explanation and Analysis

In this quote, the adult Elaine is in bed at Jon's apartment and still waiting for the art opening. She reflects on an experience that she has had repeatedly in her adulthood, which she connects with events that happened in her childhood. Most specifically, she reveals that Cordelia had made her feel like she was nothing when she was a child, and that this sense of nothingness and worthlessness has come to define her identity and her adult life. Elaine describes a psychological experience very common to depression, which has less to do with active pain and more with the absence of value and motivation. In connecting her ongoing struggles with depression with her experience of bullying with Cordelia, she shows how deeply that relationship affected her, and how vulnerable individuals often are to the judgments of others. Her past stays with her, and inflects her experience of the present.

As I turn back, I see my purse, lying on the floor where I put it, and after all these years I should know better. It's open. The cubicle wall comes down to only a foot above the floor, and back through the gap a noiseless arm is retreating, the hand clutching my wallet. The fingernails are painted Day-Glo green. I bring my shoeless foot down hard on the wrist. There's a shriek, some loud plural giggling: youth on the fast track, schoolgirls on the prowl. My wallet is dropped, the hand shoots back like a tentacle. I jerk open the door. Damn you, Cordelia! I think. But Cordelia is long gone.

Related Characters: Elaine Risley (speaker), Cordelia

Related Themes:

Page Number: 49

Explanation and Analysis

In this moment, Elaine is in a dressing room because she had decided to purchase a new dress for the art opening. This decision has its own gendered connotations, as it demonstrates her concerns about being taken seriously as a female artist. However, this scene, where a girl tries to steal her purse, centers on Cordelia and the extent to which Elaine's childhood trauma still haunts her. The sense of mischief and rejection of social norms here is clear, and is a part of Elaine's identity even as an adult. However, she feels affronted by the appearance of this ghost Cordelia, which shows her unhappiness about these visions—she is not thinking of Cordelia consciously because she wants to, but is rather haunted by her memory. However, the final sentence indicates that Elaine has not seen Cordelia for a long time, whether due to her death or just a drifting apart. The fact that Elaine is followed by visions of Cordelia despite her being long gone indicates that this relationship has inscribed itself on Elaine's identity.

The cat's eyes are my favorites. If I win a new one I wait until I'm by myself, then take it out and examine it, turning it over and over in the light. The cat's eyes really are like eyes, but not the eyes of cats. They're the eyes of something that isn't known but exists anyway; like the green eye of the radio; like the eyes of aliens from a distant planet. My favorite one is blue. I put it into my red plastic purse to keep it safe. I risk my other cat's eyes to be shot at, but not this one.

Related Characters: Elaine Risley (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 69

Explanation and Analysis

This quote occurs right after Elaine has discussed the sudden popularity of marbles on the school playground—children collect them and use them to bet against each other in games, and it's a sign of coolness to be able to collect as many as possible, a feat that Elaine's brother, Stephen, excels at. Elaine, on the other hand, is less interested in the process of accumulating the highest quantity of marbles, and focuses instead on the symbolic value of her favorite marble, the cat's eye. She has a very private relationship to this marble, which she hides and keeps secret from others—she feels a sense of risk in the public eye. The cat's eye represents clarity of vision for her, as well as mystery—she associates it with her radio or with aliens, and it comes to represent both the secret identity she builds for herself and the sense of clarity she consistently seeks.

"Remember this," our father says. "This is a classic infestation. You won't see an infestation like this again for a long time." It's the way I've heard people talk about forest fires, or the war: respect and wonderment mixed in with the sense of catastrophe.

Related Characters: Elaine Risley, Elaine's Father (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 72

Explanation and Analysis

In the summers during her childhood, Elaine and her family still travel out of Toronto so that her father can pursue his research on spruce budworms. During one of those trips, Elaine's father says these words when looking at budworms in a forest. This passage sets up his relationship to science and data collection, which is one of love and passion, but also attaches that interest directly to the theme of natural catastrophe. Catastrophes, whether manmade or not, can be beautiful due to their mere scale: they embody both traditional connotations of the word "awful"—both terrible, and inspiring of a feeling of awe. In that sense, Elaine sets up an ambivalence about the nature of catastrophe, as it's negative aspects are somewhat tempered by the sheer beauty that can come with a sense of scale. It also reminds

the reader that these past events are such, as the tone that Elaine uses indicates that she is reflecting back on these events from her standpoint as an adult.

Part 5 Quotes

Most mothers worry when their daughters reach adolescence, but I was the opposite. I relaxed, I sighed with relief. Little girls are cute and small only to adults. To one another they are not cute. They are life-sized.

Related Characters: Elaine Risley (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 129

Explanation and Analysis

Elaine expresses these thoughts as she reflects on her experience of motherhood, as she has two daughters whom she raised to adulthood. In this sense, she interrogates common assumptions about the innocence of childhood, informed by her own dark experience of bullying. On one level, this shows the permanence of the trauma she experienced—the way that Cordelia treated her in her childhood has changed her perspective forever. On another level, this quote shows the importance of perspective in relationships; no person is objectively "cute" and innocent or wholly cruel and threatening. Instead, the power and potential threat that a person poses depends on their relationship to the other—a certain amount of vulnerability. This shows the role that relationships have in forming a person's identity, and the push and pull involved in tense relationships.

But Cordelia doesn't do these things or have this power over me because she's my enemy. [...] In the war there were enemies. Our boys and the boys from Our Lady of Perpetual Help are enemies. [...] With enemies you can feel hatred, and anger. But Cordelia is my friend. She likes me, she wants to help me, they all do. They are my friends, my girl friends, my best friends. I have never had any before and I'm terrified of losing them. I want to please. Hatred would have been easier. With hatred, I would have known what to do. Hatred is clear, metallic, one-handed, unwavering; unlike love.

Related Characters: Elaine Risley (speaker), Grace Smeath , Carol Campbell , Cordelia

Related Themes:

Page Number: 131-132

Explanation and Analysis

In this section, Elaine has just described several of the ways in which Cordelia bullies her and makes her feel like nothing. However, she doesn't yet confront Cordelia or end their relationship, and this quote explains the logic underpinning Elaine's attitude. She perceives this relationship as loving, and therefore internalizes the cruel messages being passed on to her. Elaine sees her friends as not only loving, but also essential in a way, as she associates with their gender. Female friendships are therefore associated with this potential manipulation and betrayal, instead of explicit conflict and aggression. This develops a new form of cruelty, one where the individuals in conflict get in each other's heads and have a more permanent impact that way.

My father has eaten everything on his plate and is digging for more stuffing in the cavity of the turkey, which resembles a trussed, headless baby. It has thrown off its disguise as a meal and has revealed itself to me for what it is, a large dead bird. I'm eating a wing. It's the wing of a tame turkey, the stupidest bird in the world, so stupid it can't even fly any more. I am eating lost flight.

Related Characters: Elaine Risley (speaker), Elaine's Father

Related Themes:

Page Number: 145

Explanation and Analysis

This quote appears at the end of Christmas dinner, a meal where Mr. Banerji—the graduate student from India whom Elaine relates to—is also present, and where he and Elaine's father have spent time discussing genetic modifications and abuses of science. At the same time, Elaine has been suffering from bullying at the hands of her so-called friends (Cordelia, Carol, and Grace) for months now. In that context, Elaine looks at the turkey carcass and falls into a spiral of pessimistic thoughts that show that she relates to the turkey in a sense. When she calls it "lost flight," she reflects on her own sense of lost potential and her fears about her own life. Instead of engaging with the reality she is presented with, she focuses on the realities not to be—the could have been.

We cross the wooden bridge on the way home from school. I am walking behind the others. Through the broken boards I can see the ground below. I remember my brother burying his jar full of puries, of waterbabies and cat's eyes, a long time ago, down there somewhere under the bridge. The jar is still there in the earth, shining in the dark, in secret. I think about myself going down there alone despite the sinister unseen men, digging up the treasure, having all that mystery in my hands. I could never find the jar, because I don't have the map. But I like to think about things the others know nothing about.

Related Characters: Elaine Risley (speaker), Grace Smeath , Carol Campbell , Cordelia, Stephen Risley

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 156

Explanation and Analysis

In this moment, Elaine is walking home from school with her friends and bullies, Carol, Grace, and Cordelia. Elaine is forced to walk behind them, which is a sign of their cruel exclusion of her. However, Elaine escapes thinking about her exclusion by reflecting on the jar of marbles that Stephen buried in a previous year. In doing so, she already invokes the theme of the past inflecting the present through the objects and memories that last. She also adds a dimension to the symbol of the bridge, which represents both the beautiful space where the marbles are hidden and the place of terror where bad men might attack. The bridge represents both hope and fear, and more importantly a sense of suspension. The marbles are a less ambiguous symbol: they represent hope and beauty, as well as clarity of thought. Just knowing they are there comforts Elaine, which means that their presence is more symbolically than literally important. Her final line about liking to know things that her friends know nothing about marks Elaine's attempt to build an identity independent of her so-called friends, and her desire to have freedom from their unrelenting cruelty.

Part 6 Quotes

I walk away from her, guilt on my hands, absolving myself: I'm a good person. She could have been dying. Nobody else stopped. I'm a fool, to confuse this with goodness. I am not good. I know too much to be good. I know myself. I know myself to be vengeful, greedy, secretive and sly.

Related Characters: Elaine Risley (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 170

Explanation and Analysis

The adult Elaine is walking through the streets of Toronto when she encounters a woman desperate for help, who has nearly passed out in the street. Elaine gives her money, but does not help her in a more involved way. After, Elaine feels a tension between her own identity as a good or a bad person, and this obsession with her own moral qualities reflects back to her childhood friendship with Cordelia, who made her feel as though everything she did was wrong. However, instead of presenting herself as the victim that she truly was at the time, Elaine's thoughts in this moment reveal her to be a person in a privileged position, and a person who chooses herself over others. Her sense that she is not a good person is ambivalent; the reader can't tell whether this is her internalized self-criticism speaking, or her referring to negative thing she might have done that have yet to be revealed. This tension and multiplicity is key, as the novel stresses the nuance of real people's personalities, and the potential that everyone has to be cruel.

I begin to spend time outside my body without falling over. At these times I feel blurred, as if there are two of me, one superimposed on the other, but imperfectly. There's an edge of transparency, and beside it a rim of solid flesh that's without feeling, like a scar. I can see what's happening, I can hear what's being said to me, but I don't have to pay any attention. My eyes are open but I'm not there. I'm off to the side.

Related Characters: Elaine Risley (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 191

Explanation and Analysis

As a child, Elaine discovers this ability to faint well into the period of time when she is being bullied by Cordelia, when she faints accidentally at an event with her family. Her desire to dissociate and self-harm highlights the depth of the cruelties she suffers at Cordelia's hands, and emphasizes that their nature is to get inside Elaine's head and cause her to harm herself. In general, Elaine focuses on self-negation as a form of escape. She prefers transparency

to confrontation, as active conflict can be far more difficult than avoidance. This also emphasizes the role of subjectivity—by stepping outside of herself, there is a degree to which Elaine steps out of time, and escapes reality. Though theoretically events must continue to occur chronologically, if Elaine can step outside of herself temporarily, then she can enter a fragmented world where her psyche is protected.

Part 7 Quotes

❝ I hear someone talking to me. […] The person who was standing on the

bridge is moving through the railing, or melting into it. It's a

woman […] She isn't falling, she's coming down toward me as if walking, but

there's nothing for her to walk on. […] Now she's quite close. I can see the white glimmer of her face, the dark scarf or hood around her head, or is it hair? She holds out her arms to me and I feel a surge of happiness. Inside

her half-open cloak there's a glimpse of red. It's her heart, I

think. It must be her heart, on the outside of her body, glowing

like neon, like a coal. […] You can go home now, she says. It will be all right. […] I don't hear the words out loud, but this is what she says.

Related Characters: Elaine Risley (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 209

Explanation and Analysis

This is a crucial moment for Elaine, as she has just had a near-death experience after Cordelia forced her to fetch her hat (which Cordelia threw) in the frozen river under the bridge during winter. Though she makes it down to the river, Elaine nearly drowns in the water. In this quote, she sees a vision of a woman she takes to be the Virgin Mary, who gives her encouraging words and helps her escape this situation. This apparition plays a role in her life that the real adult women she knows—her mother, but also Mrs. Smeath—have failed. There is a clear parallel drawn to Mrs. Smeath here, as Elaine pictures this woman having a red heart in contrast with the rotting heart she imagines for Mrs. Smeath. This shows her yearning for adult female support and her sense of betrayal by the adults around her. Though at every point she seems to know this figure has mystical properties and may not be real, she seems to need the religious experience at this moment in the book. Religion and spirituality mean to her the ability to escape dreadful circumstances, even if they are also associated with illusion. It's also significant that Mary appears to melt and float through the bridge, as it symbolizes the negation of the negative aspects of that symbol, with its associations of falling and risk.

❝ I am still a coward, still fearful; none of that has changed. But I turn and walk away from her. It's like stepping off a cliff, believing the air will hold you up. And it does. I see that I don't have to do what she says, and worse and better, I've never had to do what she says. I can do what I like.

Related Characters: Elaine Risley (speaker), Cordelia

Related Themes:

Page Number: 213

Explanation and Analysis

After nearly drowning, Elaine finally builds up the courage to end her friendship with Cordelia. She does not see this act as one of courage, as she still perceives herself as a coward. However, she has had a revelation that allows her to finally achieve her independence from that toxic relationship. This relationship was based on psychological cruelty, so once that tie is broken, there is nothing left to actually hold Elaine down—once she makes the leap, she is fully free. Cordelia's power has dissipated. At the same time, breaking this power makes Elaine feel like it was never real to begin with, which is an ambivalent thought because it makes her feel as though she could have ended the friendship at any time. The implications here is that Elaine was implicit in her own bullying, as she could have ignored or rejected Cordelia the entire time. However, this novel acknowledges the difficulty of doing so sometimes, as relationships and love come with inherent risk; one has to trust the other won't abuse their power, and the dissipation of that power is also the dissolution of the relationship.

Part 8 Quotes

❝ Knowing too much about other people puts you in their power, they have a claim on you, you are forced to understand their reasons for doing things and then you are weakened.

Related Characters: Elaine Risley (speaker), Elaine's Father

Related Themes:

Page Number: 240

Explanation and Analysis

Elaine has been reflecting about her father, in particular about facts she learned about his life when she got older. She learned that he had wanted to serve in the army and couldn't, as well as other details from his youth growing up poor and having to put himself through university by "working in lumber camps and cleaning out rabbit hutches." This quote puts a cynical spin on an essential element of close human relationships, which is empathy and the trust and vulnerability that come with it. From Elaine's perspective, that empathy and vulnerability make one far too at risk of some kind of catastrophe. She fears the claims that others have on her, which indicates her sense that caring for others reflects on and changes the self.

Part 9 Quotes

❝ Girls at school learn to look out for my mean mouth and avoid it. I walk the halls surrounded by an aura of potential verbal danger, and am treated with caution, which suits me fine. Strangely enough, my mean behavior doesn't result in fewer friends, but, on the surface, more. The girls are afraid of me but they know where it's safest: beside me, half a step behind [...] Some of them are already collecting china and housewares, and have Hope Chests. For this kind of thing I feel amused disdain. And yet it disturbs me to learn I have hurt someone unintentionally. I want all my hurts to be intentional.

Related Characters: Elaine Risley (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 258

Explanation and Analysis

During this period in the novel, Elaine is already in high school, where she studies with Cordelia. The key aspects of this quote focus on the fact that Elaine, who was previously the victim of severe bullying and cruelty, appears to have switched roles and become the person liable to hurt others. Not only that, her cruelty appears to be both something she is conscious of and something that she particularly directs against women. Elaine has critical relationships to other women, which might tie to her low self-esteem as well as her frustration with being lumped into a social category against her will—she doesn't want to be like other girls. Importantly, she wants her hurts to be intentional, which implies that she has an active desire to cause pain in others, a sadistic desire that resembles the behavior Cordelia displayed years before. This reversal, or mirroring effect, complicates a reading of the novel as a simple analysis of a single bully, and opens up dialogue about the infectiousness of cruelty, and the possibility that cruel behavior might multiply as people seek self-defense.

❝ A wave of blood goes up to my head, my stomach shrinks together, as if something dangerous has just missed hitting me. It's as if I've been caught stealing, or telling a lie; or as if I've heard other people talking about me, saying bad things about me, behind my back. There's the same flush of shame, of guilt and terror, and of cold disgust with myself. But I don't know where these feelings have come from, what I've done.

Related Characters: Elaine Risley (speaker), Cordelia

Related Themes:

Page Number: 278

Explanation and Analysis

This scene occurs while Elaine is in high school, sitting in a diner with Cordelia. Cordelia has just brought up the subject of their past, which triggers this set of intense emotions in Elaine. Significantly, Elaine had repressed these memories herself, and she furthermore has a tendency to be cruel to others herself in this stage in her life. This reference to the period where she was bullied bubbles straight up into the surface, plunging Elaine into an old emotional state as if it were completely renewed. This moment shows how close at hand the past can be on an emotional level, even if time technically appears to move forward. It also shows the profound effect that Cordelia had on Elaine's psyche, given her ability to put Elaine in a state where she punishes herself like this. Elaine's feelings of shame and disgust are weapons against herself, ones that she wields but doesn't control.

But in the middle of the Botany examination it comes to me, like a sudden epileptic fit, that I'm not going to be a biologist, as I have thought. I am going to be a painter. I look at the page, where the life cycle of the mushroom from spore to fruiting body is taking shape, and I know this with absolute certainty. My life has been changed, soundlessly, instantaneously. I continue my explication of tubers, bulbs, and legumes, as if nothing has happened.

Related Characters: Elaine Risley (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 280-281

Explanation and Analysis

At the end of her senior year, Elaine has to take her final examinations. She focuses the most on biology, as up to this point, she has shown the most skill and interest in that field and seems to believe she will continue to study it. In fact, biology is Elaine's father's field, and if she had gone on to study it, she would have followed in his footsteps—and not been far from her brother, either, who studied physics. The very engagement with the material of her family and childhood triggers this moment of revelation where she decides to become a painter, and so there's a degree to which her career as a painter and relationship to art will always symbolize this drastic breaking off from science and from her family. However, this is no active rebellion—Elaine is careful to express that this realization simply came to her, and that she did not consciously make a decision. One possibility this opens up is that some parts of human life are not pre-determined, either by nature or external circumstances. There is room for surprise and for possibility in one's life, as well as for escape. However, there is also the possibility that this represents a direct rejection of her family and symbolizes her desire to build her own identity in contrast with theirs. Regardless, this passage calls into question both the idea of free will as totally free (because Elaine has this revelation against her own accord) and of pre-determination (because it marks a breaking from previous intentions).

Part 10 Quotes

We are silent, considering shortfalls. There's not much time left, for us to become what we once intended. Jon had potential, but it's not a word that can be used comfortably any more. Potential has a shelf life.

Related Characters: Elaine Risley (speaker), Jon

Related Themes:

Page Number: 289

Explanation and Analysis

In this scene, the adult Elaine meets her ex-husband, Jon, for dinner—they have Thai food, talk about their daughter, and discuss details of their lives and careers. Reconnecting with her ex-husband in this way prompts Elaine to reflect deeply on the past, and part of what she thinks about connects to mortality. The novel tends to connect the past with memory, and sees it therefore as layered and non-linear. The future, however, still comes with this linear tinge caused by the inevitability of death. Notions like potential require a sense of remaining time, a lack of limitations. As one ages, that always drops off, and one's intentions and control over their life start to matter less and less. This is a somewhat cynical perspective on the human lifespan, but one that Elaine seems relatively comfortable with.

Part 11 Quotes

I go back to my apartment, lie down on the floor. [...] I feel as if I'm at the center of nothingness, of a black square that is totally empty; that I'm exploding slowly outward, into the cold burning void of space. When I wake up it's the middle of the night. I don't know where I am. I think I'm back in my old room with the cloudy light fixture, in my parents' house, lying on the floor because I've fallen out of bed, as I used to do when we had the army cots. But I know that the house has been sold, that my parents are no longer there. I have somehow been overlooked, left behind.

Related Characters: Elaine Risley (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 366

Explanation and Analysis

Although the experience that Elaine describes here is one that occurs at different parts in the novel, this particular moment is significant because she has recently realized she is pregnant with Jon's child and has not told him yet. Her thoughts about potential motherhood are inflected by her memories of Susie's nearly fatal abortion, as well as reflections on her own mother. More than this, Elaine's thoughts plunge her into the past and set her back into a mood of feeling like nothing. Elaine's sense of nothingness connects to the time Cordelia nearly buried her alive, or Elaine's later experiences with depression. She associates

the experience of her physical form changing with the grand image of the burning void in space, which reflects both the longer-term influence of Stephen and his discussions of physics on her, and the loss of control she feels—science represents objective knowledge of the outside world, not personal experience. When Elaine wakes up, she feels transported into the past in a traumatic way, as she is split between the contemporary self who knows the house was sold and her younger self who feels left behind. This shows that part of her psyche feels trapped in the past, like the rest of the world kept moving without her, but it also shows her fear of being abandoned—this is ironic, given that Elaine consistently abandons others throughout her life.

Part 13 Quotes

My brother Stephen died five years ago. I shouldn't say died: was killed. I try not to think of it as murder, although it was, but as some kind of accident, like an exploding train. Or else a natural catastrophe, like a landslide. What they call for insurance purposes an act of God. He died of an eye for an eye, or someone's idea of it. He died of too much justice.

Related Characters: Elaine Risley (speaker), Stephen Risley

Related Themes:

Page Number: 424

Explanation and Analysis

Stephen's death comes as a shock in the novel—although she had alluded to the possibility of his death at a couple of points in the novel, she mostly told anecdotes about their shared childhood; their relationship faded as they aged, and he mostly disappeared from the novel. Given that this death is still clearly situated in the past for Elaine, revealing it so late in the novel is quite jarring, and helps further fragment the sense of discontinuity in the novel's plot. Thematically, Stephen's death ties into topics of war and nationalism, as he was killed by terrorists who had captured a plane he was traveling on to a conference. However, Elaine prefers to think about her brother's death as a natural catastrophe because she prefers the sense of accident. This refines the difference in her mind between war and natural disaster, as the former is manmade and therefore should be preventable and moral. The latter, on the other hand, comes out of nowhere and cannot be blamed on anyone—though this can be bleak. She identifies this war as a religious conflict, which also informs her sense of organized religion as potentially dangerous—groups of people who choose to act on ideology, which can escalate out of hand for no concrete benefit.

Part 14 Quotes

Really it's Cordelia I expect, Cordelia I want to see. There are things I need to ask her. Not what happened, back then in the time I lost, because now I know that. I need to ask her why. […] Perhaps she's forgotten the bad things, what she said to me, what she did. Or she does remember them, but in a minor way, as if remembering a game, or a single prank, a single trivial secret, of the kind girls tell and then forget. She will have her own version. I am not the center of her story, because she herself is that. But I could give her something you can never have, except from another person: what you look like from outside. A reflection. This is the part of herself I could give back to her. We are like the twins in old fables, each of whom has been given half a key.

Related Characters: Elaine Risley (speaker), Cordelia

Related Themes:

Page Number: 450

Explanation and Analysis

The novel has finally progressed to the opening of the retrospective of Elaine's work, but Elaine spends the entire event still stuck in the past. She expects Cordelia to come, although she has also revealed by now that she has not seen Cordelia in years—not since refusing to help her break out of a mental institution where Cordelia was placed after a suicide attempt. Although some of the themes here are familiar, such as the haunting effect Cordelia has on Elaine, and the sense of not being able to escape her past, this quote reveals part of what Elaine was hoping for. Elaine wants to understand Cordelia's perspective, even though she's aware that her own ability to lose, forget, or distort the past means that Cordelia will likely have done the same. She wants to move beyond repression and beyond her own memories, even though she knows she can't. She also acknowledges the reciprocity of that relationship: she could offer Cordelia precisely what Cordelia could offer her. In fact, Elaine suspects that she might have played as cruel and complex a role in Cordelia's life as Cordelia did in hers; there's no simple answer or parable about good and evil here, but rather the acknowledgement that intimacy can sometimes lead to hurt, and that cruel behavior can breed more cruel behavior. However, the answers Elaine seeks are not to be found outside her speculations, demonstrating one of the most ubiquitous dissatisfactions of life: one has to either forget, or accept uncertainties.

Part 15 Quotes

❝ This is what I miss, Cordelia: not something that's gone, but something that will never happen. Two old women giggling over their tea.

Related Characters: Elaine Risley (speaker), Cordelia

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 462

Explanation and Analysis

In this final chapter of the novel, Elaine has finally returned to Jon's apartment after the opening and is forced to acknowledge that Cordelia will never appear. In a turn that might seem surprising, she fantasizes about a future friendship with Cordelia, a touching image of the two of them old and content, like other older women Elaine has observed throughout the novel. This adds another dimension to the novel's reflections on time, by focusing on the future and its relationship to desire. It is possible to miss things that have never happened because of the intensity of desire, and its relationship to identity. At the same time, Elaine has such a strong sense of certainty that this future won't come to be, though the future ought to be unpredictable. This might imply that Cordelia is dead, but it might also just imply that Elaine's desires are conflicted and that she knows the pair would never be able to connect without cruelty due to their history. Regardless, this is a bittersweet moment for Elaine, as she expresses a desire to move on from the places she has been stuck in the same breath as indicating the impossibility of moving on.

❝ Now it's full night, clear, moonless and filled with stars, which are not eternal as was once thought, which are not where we think they are. If they were sounds, they would be echoes, of something that happened millions of years ago: a word made of numbers. Echoes of light, shining out of the midst of nothing. It's old light, and there's not much of it. But it's enough to

see by.

Related Characters: Elaine Risley (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 462

Explanation and Analysis

This quote expresses the final words on the novel, and the final tone. Elaine reflects on the stars with reference to knowledge from physics that she learned from her brother, Stephen, as a child. She acknowledges scientific objectivity here, but she dismisses it as relatively unimportant—science used to use the stars to prove eternity and certainty, but stars now represent the fragility of that certainty. Stars also represent a translation of the past—however, it is very clearly indicated to be a translation, and a weakening. The past remains in "echoes" and fragments, not in full pieces or certainties. There's an absence of clarity and of light. However, Elaine's final words are optimistic—enough light remains to navigate the world, and to build a life. Perhaps a great revelation is never coming, just the ability to attempt to see clearly, and to survive.

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.

PART ONE: IRON LUNG

Elaine thinks about the nature of time, which she identifies as dimensional instead of linear—her brother (Stephen) told her this when she was a child, and she comes to believe that time has a "layered shape," and "nothing goes away."

This description of time sets the tone for the entire novel, which is composed of interconnected narratives and motifs of repeated, layered events. This also establishes the role that physics and a scientific understanding of time will play in the novel as it interweaves with Elaine's subjective experience of the passage of time.

Elaine tells her friend Cordelia that time isn't linear while the two ride the streetcar together. They make fun of that idea, as well as the old ladies they see on the train. Elaine is particularly captivated by the women who seem like they have made an effort, with stage prop earrings and verbal tics—Cordelia says that she wants to be like these women. Elaine intends to have a pet iguana and wear nothing but cerise. Suddenly, the narrative voice skips forward and it becomes clear that Elaine is much older now, and that she was remembering the time on the streetcar.

Elaine and Cordelia clearly share a close relationship, the narrative quickly establishes connotations of cruelty underpinning the way that they treat other women. Their girlhood involves a fear of aging along with an established sense of how a woman should look and act, which illustrates how early social expectations for women and girls set in. When the narrative jumps to the future, readers realize that the novel occurs over two different timelines, despite the vivid nature of Elaine's childhood memories.

Elaine thinks about aging, and how she resembles those old ladies they made fun of. These days, she sometimes even goes to restaurants with pink walls because those with yellow walls make her skin look too old. She hasn't seen Cordelia in years, and wonders where she is and if she has aged. She pictures her aging badly, growing fat and trying to give the public illusion of youth by wearing fashionable glasses. Elaine pictures bad things happening to Cordelia, sickness and infirmities—she fantasizes about Cordelia ending up in an iron lung, where she "could not move or speak." Their eyes would meet.

Elaine's reflections on her aging body establish a certain amount of chronology—although she can look backwards at her childhood via flashbacks, her body carries the marks of irreversible aging. The negativity of these thoughts points to gendered expectations about what a woman's body should look like, and how female worth is lost once that outer appearance changes. The dark fantasies that she has about Cordelia point to the degree to which that relationship was defined by conflict.

Elaine walks through the city, which is the same one she grew up in. She walks through January slush and observes changes in the city, the growth of towers that remind her of gravestones, and fashionable people walking along the sidewalk. She says that she's started chewing her fingers again, and that the blood tastes like "orange Popsicles, penny gumballs, red licorice, gnawed hair, and dirty ice."

Elaine continues to have a negative perspective on the passage of time, as demonstrated by her association of tall buildings with gravestones. The habits that she remembers sound childish, as she references chewing her fingers and eating copious amounts of old-fashioned candy. This gestures to events that happened in her childhood, and implies that a specific moment in her early adolescence greatly shaped her identity.

PART TWO: SILVER PAPER

Elaine lies on the floor on a futon, and thinks about her brother, Stephen. She wonders if he had ever figured out futons, and thinks about how inexpensive ice cream was when she was a child (five cents as opposed to a dollar). She feels like she has reached the middle of her life, "like the middle of a river, the middle of a **bridge**"—she feels suspended, as though she is "supposed to be a person of substance, with responsibilities and achievements." She feels like she's "sinking back through layers of time and space like layers of liquefied mud." She hates the city, which she identifies as Toronto, and it becomes clear that she no longer lives there. Toronto has "become a world-class city."

Elaine's thoughts about her brother speak to the lasting effect that their friendship had on defining her identity—even doing something as mundane as lying on a futon makes her think about him. This theme of banality extends to the ice cream cone, which illustrates how universal the impact of the passage of time is; nothing escapes its effects. The image of her life as a bridge over the river refers to a specific bridge that she used to live near.

Elaine lives in British Colombia now, which has an unreal landscape, like that of a greeting card. She lives with her husband, Ben, who runs a travel agency. She has two daughters, Sarah and Anne, and thinks about how sensible their names and lives are—she compares their names to Cordelia's, which may have led to what happened to her. Elaine has a career as a painter, which she sees as a job respectable people would not have, but she does not identify as an artist because she finds it embarrassing—she sees being an artist as something lazy. These days, she sees her life as a narrow escape; it's "the kind of life that she never thought she would have when she was younger."

By every standard, it seems that Elaine has achieved an admirable life, and only her sense of insecurity prevents her from taking pride in her life. Elaine's discomfort with respectability and normalcy becomes clear here, although she does not explain the source of that discomfort. The fact that she prefers to identify as a painter rather than an artist speaks to her discomfort with grand labels or fixed categories, though the reader is left wondering what she sees this life as an escape from.

Elaine has come back to the city for a retrospective showing of her work at an alternative gallery called Sub-Versions, which is run by women, and is annoyed that the Art Gallery of Ontario wouldn't do it because they favor dead men. She is staying in the apartment of her ex-husband, Jon, a studio on the waterfront. He left a note that said "*Blessings*" with the key, which she sees as a mark of how much he has "mellowed" since their youth. The neighborhood used to be full of "dingy warehouses," before being overrun by artists—now a wave of lawyers is coming through, and she predicts that Jon will be forced out.

Given that Elaine is having a retrospective showing of her work, she has clearly had a fairly successful career—however, that career has been somewhat defined, if not limited, by her gender, and Elaine's frustration points in part to her desire to be taken seriously as an individual rather than a member of a category. Her return to Toronto makes her think about change in terms of gentrification; the city, which used to be poor while she lived there, has become a cosmopolitan hub for artists and elites.

Elaine thinks about the last time she saw Jon, at Sarah's graduation. They stole away to get lunch and "got plastered," which confused her husband, Ben, as she used to call that relationship a disaster. She likens the relationship to a traffic accident—"the two survived each other, which counts for something." Jon used to make avant garde artistic constructions, including pieces made with hair clippings and pieces from his friends' garbage—now he supports himself doing special effects for movies, making fake "hacked-up" body parts. Elaine wishes that he were there—she does not feel ready to meet strangers, and thinks that the whole thing will be more of a hassle than a source of excitement.

Elaine's description of her relationship to her ex-husband refers explicitly to the intense conflicts that she had with him, but the closeness that the two maintain indicate that Elaine does not have a singularly negative view on conflict. Despite the violence between Jon and Elaine, their relationship remains integral to her identity. Rather than burying or running away from a catastrophic past, Elaine continues to engage with it—this also speaks to her understanding of time as involving layers that do not disappear, but just accumulate.

Elaine goes into the kitchen to make herself tea, and feels like she has experienced a little jump in time when she finds herself in the main room without knowing how she got there. She then puts on a light blue sweatsuit (her "disguise as a non-artist") to go look at the gallery. She considers getting glasses instead of contact lenses, but does not want to "look like an old biddy." She sees a poster with her name on it, "RISLEY IN RETROSPECT," which someone defaced with a mustache. She admires it, and thinks about male facial hair and their opportunities for disguise and concealment. She wonders if Cordelia will see the poster, and if she will come to the show.

Elaine's choice of outfit, which she explicitly thinks about as a disguise, proves that she thinks about her social identity as somewhat malleable; using an outfit, she can change the way that people perceive her. However, misperception or alterations of her image do not inherently bother her: when she sees the defaced poster, she thinks more about concealment and men than any sense of offense. The fact that Elaine thinks about Cordelia here, despite no explicit reference to her, emphasizes again the centrality of that relationship and the fact that through memory absence can be as potent as presence.

Elaine thinks about her childhood. She had been happy before they moved to Toronto—her family had lived nomadically, moving from place to place for Elaine's father's research. The roads were mostly empty because of the war, and food was rationed. They used to camp out and drink tea and go to the bathroom in the woods, where their father taught them to hide all evidence of their visit by burying toilet paper. They walked through forests so her father could research the spruce budworms—he loved "a beautiful infestation." They stayed in motels, in tents, or in cabins. They kept their furniture in storage most of the time, so when they briefly stayed in apartments and took it out, it always looked unfamiliar.

This moment provides context about Elaine's upbringing—on a national and historic level, she grew up during World War II, and the impacts of that on her family appear to have been primarily financial, although the empty roads point to a larger social impact. On a more familial level, her father is a scientific researcher, and their whole family moved around for his work, centering their lives around work and a scientific understanding of the world. Elaine seems comfortable with this rootless and nomadic lifestyle, which could be the effect of nostalgia or an indication that her experiences of settling down, still to come, will be painful.

Elaine's brother, Stephen, used to play at war with wooden toy guns and swords. He liked to color blood onto the blades with red pencils. He used to sing "Wing and a Prayer," and they would play war together, although Elaine had to play as the infantry and do everything he said. They also got into secret fights, and the secrecy contributed to a sense of collaboration and collusion. Stephen always won these fights, as he was bigger. One night, Stephen taught her to see in the dark; they were camping out by a fire, far from the war. Elaine thinks that "these are her memories of the dead."

Although Elaine's relationship to Stephen appears to have been extremely close, the secret fights that she describes serve two functions: firstly, they lay out a pattern of conflict and intimacy that will define many of Elaine's later relationships. Secondly, though they may just be childhood games here, they also describe a "children's world" that exists separately from the world of adults—their parents can't know about the details of their fights, and this isolation between children and adults will also deeply influence Elaine. When Elaine reflects at the end about the dead, it comes as a bit of a shock to the reader, as she does not clarify who is dead. Besides establishing the theme of mortality, this reminds the reader that Elaine has already lived through this childhood, so any of these memories might be influenced by her later life—just as the past influences the present, the present state of recollection might shape memories of the past.

Elaine remembers a picture taken of her at a motel on her eighth birthday—she knows that she was wearing hand-me-down clothing, but does not remember what she wants, besides pipe cleaners and silver paper from cigarette packages to make "something amazing" with. She also wants a balloon, because she has only seen one—an old balloon Elaine's mother tucked in the bottom of her steamer trunk before the war, which she takes out when Elaine has the measles; it breaks immediately. She is given a Brownie box camera as her present that year, which she uses to take photos and put into scrapbooks. They live in this motel for weeks, and the war is already over at this point so there is more food. They do schoolwork in notebooks that their mother assigns.

The young Elaine wanted a set of very simple, almost useless objects, like a balloon or the paper from cigarette packs, both because her family was not particularly wealthy and because material resources were more limited during the war. This ability to be more thrifty defines a generational relationship to materials that contrasts with the modern-day consumerism. It's also significant that Elaine was homeschooled at this point, as it partially explains her discomfort with certain established social institutions. The camera and scrapbook are significant objects, as they allow memories to persist over time—even if Elaine does not remember a particular moment in her past, she might remember a picture, or be able to look at those pictures and know that the moment must have occurred.

In the winter, Stephen and Elaine like to roll around in the snow like puppies, wearing winter shoes that do not fit. Their parents tell them they are finally moving to a real house and settling down for a while. When they get there, the house is in a horrifically downtrodden condition, covered in mud and dead flies and cigarette butts; Elaine's mother says that they all will have to pitch in to fix up the house. Elaine feels trapped in their new house, and wishes for the rootlessness and impermanence of their old life. They have to sleep in sleeping bags, but Elaine has her own room. The house starts to look like a real house as time passes, but Elaine still thinks that it's a far cry from picket fences and white curtains, there in their "lagoon of postwar mud."

The relationship between Elaine and Stephen continues to display a level of energy and intimacy that contradicts strict gender norms—they tussle around with each other, not treating each other as "girls" and "boys" but as siblings. The decision to settle in Toronto marks the first major transition in Elaine's childhood, overturning many of the norms and expectations from her more nomadic childhood. The association between their settling down and the end of the war further intensifies the connections between the war and her family's financial situation, and the catastrophic state of the house symbolizes the fact that these consequences are not easily or quickly dismissed: the end of the war does not mean the immediate end of all of its consequences.

Elaine's father now dresses in jackets and tweed for his job as a university professor, instead of the flannel and heavy pants he wore as a researcher. These days, their house is full of drawings by his students rather than jars of collection samples. He judges the drawings based on their accuracy, whereas Elaine judges them based on color. Elaine and Stephen get to play in the labs in the zoology building on the weekends; they spend time with snakes and cockroaches and rats and get to use the microscopes to look at slides. In private, they like to look at their own scabs and blood under the microscope, but they feel like their curiosity is supposed to be more limited so they keep it secret. From the building, they watch a Santa Claus Parade, their first parade—it changes Elaine's image of Santa Claus, which she forever connects to the "lizards and smell of formaldehyde."

The way that Stephen and Elaine play in the zoology building is particularly interesting, because they feel that their scientific interest in their own bodies is somehow taboo—on the one hand, science supports the pursuit of knowledge and development of reason, and on the other they feel that their curiosity should be limited. This feeling is particularly acute for Elaine because of her gender; young girls are not supposed to be interested in scabs or blood, and even Elaine's genuine interest in those things is influenced by the knowledge that she is crossing social norms. The moment where she views the parade and begins to associate it with formaldehyde provides important insight into the formation of memories—although these associations are not completely random, Elaine also does not have control of them and cannot change her impression once is has been made.

PART THREE: EMPIRE BLOOMERS

In Jon's apartment, Elaine reflects on the difficulty that she sometimes has getting out of bed, and even taking the steps to brush her teeth. She feels like she has no worth, and thinks about Cordelia asking her what she had to say for herself, and Elaine answered "Nothing," which she now associates with herself. She "felt the nothingness coming on" last night, so she tried to call Ben; however, their answering machine was on, and she heard her own voice instead. She gets out of bed and paces amongst the severed fake arms and feet in Jon's apartment—she likes the dinginess of his studio, as she feels more comfortable around "things that are falling apart." She feels like she is at least "in better shape than them." Though she still feels off, she gets dressed and leaves the house.

Back in the present, this moment reveals the darker sides of Elaine's mental health. She attributes her low self-esteem directly to Cordelia, which suggests that the girls' friendship was rooted in psychological manipulation. The fact that Elaine feels so comfortable in Jon's messy apartment surrounded by fake severed arms speaks both to the fragmented nature of her mind and self-esteem, and to the violence underlying her thoughts and memories.

Walking through the city, Elaine has the jingle from the Happy Gang stuck in her head. Whereas Toronto used to be empty, the city is now full and chaotic. Elaine feels like she needs a new dress for her opening, as the one she brought with her is a somber black dress chosen not to outdress any of the clients. She considers a pink dress, a color that "is said to make enemies go soft on you"—she wonders why the army has not caught onto this yet. She tries on different dresses in a shop, hoping to be transformed, although she believes that this becomes less possible as one ages. In the dressing room, she catches a girl nearly stealing her purse—all she sees is a hand slipping away, and this makes her think of Cordelia, who is long gone.

The Happy Gang was a radio show that played during the 1930s and 1950s—though the exact timeline of the novel is unclear, Elaine would not have heard this tune for at least a decade or two. These cheerful variety shows provided a contrast to wartime woes, and Elaine's memory of that song is attached to her observations of the newly vibrant city because she can't help but think about what the city was like during the war. The fact that Elaine feels like she needs to reconsider the dress for her opening indicates her anxiety that she will be negatively judged by an audience; it's telling, then, that she compares choosing a dress to developing a military strategy. It's also poignant that she feels so haunted by Cordelia, and particularly helpful in this instance that she sees her in the behavior of a young girl—whatever her relationship with Cordelia was, it was clearly at its most potent during their childhood.

Back in her childhood, Elaine thinks about the school they were sent to: the Queen Mary Public School. Girls have to wear skirts, and there are different doors for girls and boys. Although they lead to the same place, the children are never allowed to use the wrong door. Elaine wants to know the secret behind the boys' door, but she is not allowed. The schoolyard is also separated by gender, and Elaine only sees her brother when they're lined up outside. She isn't supposed to talk to him at school, since boys get teased for having younger sisters, which is a stark contrast from their relationship at home, where they fix up fake walkie-talkies with cans and string and slip coded messages under each other's doors. Now she has to make friends with girls. However, she feels awkward and on the edge of some "unforeseen, calamitous blunder" among girls.

Elaine's complicated relationship to other women begins at a young age, as she is sent to a school where gender divisions are strict—the contrast between her relationship with Stephen at home and at school is one of the first keys to this confusing gendered division. Whereas at home the two can play freely without much regard for the categories of boys and girls, at school those exact divisions form the center of social life. The inherent exclusion formed by these categories breeds a sense of secrecy, which occupies Elaine. Her desire for female friends stems from a lack of that very thing, but her fear of some kind of "blunder" points to the sense of awkwardness that Elaine already feels among women. She fears mistakes on her own part, and this sense of internalized shame comes from the strong social expectations placed on young women.

Carol Campbell befriends Elaine, partly because she also takes the school bus. She lives closer to school and has a pageboy haircut, which she gets done at the hairdresser's. She and her sister wear matching outfits every Sunday. Her family is Anglican, unlike Elaine's family who never goes to church. They walk home over a decaying **bridge** over a ravine, where they aren't allowed to play because there could be dangerous men down there. Carol shows Elaine all her different clothing and the nice things in her house, and talks about piano lessons and tells her secrets. When Carol visits Elaine, she is surprised by their poverty and gossips about her at school. However, she presents the gossip as exotic rather than mean, as Elaine's friendship matters to her.

Carol and Elaine's friendship is defined by contrast. Carol and her family differ from Elaine's both in their wealth and their relationship to religion, and it is through that difference that Elaine learns that her family is poor. This is also the first time religion is explicitly mentioned in the book, indicating that it takes a secondary place in Elaine's family, if it has a place at all—this establishes a dynamic of "home" being the space of science, and "outside" being the space of religion. Carol's decision to gossip about Elaine from the very beginning hints at more sinister impulses hiding underneath this friendship, while the decaying bridge and warnings about bad men in the ravine add a sense of explicit danger, as though one wrong move could lead to devastating consequences.

Elaine and Stephen take Carol to the zoology building, but the different animals and scientific tools creep her out. Elaine thinks that Carol is a "sissy," but she also finds her "delicacy" somehow compelling and worthy of pride. Elaine feels like she can't pretend to be grossed out, because her brother would know she was lying, but also cannot express her interest in anything boyish or revolting. She chooses to say nothing. After they leave the building, they go to Carol's house, and Carol takes her into her parents' bedroom. Carol's parents sleep in twin beds and her mother wears rubber gloves to wash the dishes. She shows Elaine everything in her house as if it were a museum, and she is surprised about all of the different things that Elaine does not know, such as what a cold wave or a coat tree are.

Elaine seems to define herself primarily in relation to others at this point, so it becomes difficult for her when she has to choose between Carol and her brother. One of the underlying threads here indicates that science is, at this point in time, a distinctively male field, because Elaine sees the "delicacy" and revulsion that Carol displays as plausible and even admirable. The type of relationships modeled here are ones where sameness and similarity matters the most—just as Carol's parents sleep in matching twin beds, Elaine feels an impulse to agree with and follow after Carol. This impulse to agree maps onto having a sense of the "normal" that a person prioritizes over his or her own instincts.

Carol introduces Elaine to her best friend Grace Smeath, who is a year older and in the next grade. Elaine stops visiting the zoology building with Stephen, and instead plays with Carol and Grace, and feels self-conscious, as if she is only doing an imitation of a girl. Grace, who is pale, beautiful, and delicate, controls the games they play by threatening to go home with a headache if the girls refuse. They mostly draw in coloring books and look through *Eaton's Catalogues*. They also play school, and Grace is always the teacher. In their games, Grace and Carol always insult their own work and compliment the other, which Elaine finds fake but mirrors. She starts to want things that the girls want, like braids and a purse, and feels like she is coming to understand a girls' world where she just has to cut out pictures and say she has done it badly.

The closer that Elaine becomes to other girls, the more she compares herself to them and tries to be like them. Elaine consistently seems a little bemused by the activities that the other girls like, and just plays along because she values the friendships. This shows, in part, the psychology of these relationships, which require not explicit demands or threats, but rather more subtle and internalized mechanisms of peer pressure and social norms. A particularly significant moment here is when Elaine realizes that a large part of girlhood social identity consists of doing things like cutting out pictures and then self-deprecatingly saying that one has done a bad job on it. Her decision to choose these girls over her brother and over time in the zoology building makes this the first major swerve away from science and scientific curiosity and into a more vibrant social world instead. Grace defines this world and provides the initial contours for female relationships—because of her beauty and delicacy, she is able to control both of the other girls.

At Christmas, Elaine gets gifts from Carol and Grace—bath salts and a coloring book, as well as a photo album and a red plastic purse from her parents. She takes pictures carefully because she does not want to waste any of them, and she enjoys looking at the negatives where everything white—like snow and people's teeth—appears black. She puts the pictures in her photo album, though only one of them contains a photo of her, looking "shrunken and ignorant." The house finally looks nicer in the living room and kitchen, but the bedrooms are still unfinished. Elaine likes to lie on the new hardwood floors and read comic books while listening to the radio, which is made of dark wood and has a single green eye—Stephen says it makes eerie noises from outer space between stations.

Although the two gifts from her friends are relatively neutral—fairly gendered but not particularly symbolic—the camera and photo album are extremely important. Cameras create semi-artistic images of a person, forcing them to look at themselves from an external perspective. Elaine does not seem to like looking at pictures of herself and does so with particularly critical eyes. It's also important that she prefers the negatives to printed images, revealing an interest in the theme of inversion and opposites—it shows how easily different realities can hide under the surface.

Grace starts inviting Elaine over without Carol, which she says is because of her mother's bad heart. Mrs. Smeath has to rest every day because of her heart, and she is controlling, sturdy, and hardworking. Grace and her siblings share all hand-me-downs, including underwear. On Valentine's Day, Elaine thinks about Mrs. Smeath's bad heart while she cuts out hearts from red construction paper to put on the windows—she finds it mysterious and pictures it as "red, but with a reddish-black patch" like a bruised apple. She thinks of it as a "compelling," "horrible treasure." Elaine, reflecting back later, pictures Mrs. Smeath reclining on the sofa and thinks about how much she hates her.

Grace choosing Elaine over Carol shows the beginning of competition in these friendships, as well as manipulation, though it favors Elaine. Instead of representing life and love, which would fit her maternal role, Mrs. Smeath's heart symbolizes corruption. When the adult Elaine interjects that she hates Mrs. Smeath, it suggests that Mrs. Smeath's behavior mirrors the symbolic corruption of her heart. Elaine's admission also reminds the reader that adults can traumatically influence children.

After the winter, the snow melts, and the children all lick icicles like popsicles. The house looks like something left over from the war, surrounded by rubble and devastation. Stephen wants to make a bunker out of the hole next door when the water level goes down. He has started collecting comic books and running around in the mud with other boys. Sometimes Elaine reads quietly in Stephen's room with them, but she has to keep silent.

In this seasonal change from winter to spring, Elaine continues to see any evidence of rubble or devastation in relation to the war. This persistent metaphor both attests to the literal influence of World War II, and serves as a means of either directly foreshadowing negative events to come or just reflecting Elaine's own cynical perspective. Though she and Stephen still spend time together, the marks of aging and gender divides only grow stronger as Elaine is only allowed to keep company with Stephen and her friends if she keeps totally quiet.

At school, Elaine skips rope with Carol and Grace, though she finds the songs unsettling. The sun starts to set later, and the girls wear cotton dresses to school and cardigans they take off on the way home. They dress Grace up in flowers with her hair unbraided and take a photograph where she "looks like a princess." They play in the houses under construction in the neighborhood, although it is forbidden, and Elaine climbs in the rafters alone because Carol is too frightened, and Grace does not want anyone to see her underwear.

Elaine's play with Carol and Grace also continues to reflect her ambivalent relationship to them. On the one hand, she desires these relationships, even when they center around Grace and her feminine beauty. On the other hand, she sees herself as different from the other two girls, and that difference leads to isolation when she chooses to climb into the rafters alone. Elaine's decision reflects her divided character, split between her yearning for intimate female friendships and her more independent, introverted impulses.

Everyone starts collecting marbles at school, which they use to gamble against each other in games. There are plain marbles and more exotic versions, which are the **cat's eyes**, puries, waterbabies, metal bowlies, and aggies. It's considered cheating to buy marbles instead of winning them. Elaine's favorites are the cat's eyes, which she thinks actually look like eyes—but not of a cat, rather "something that isn't known but exists anyway," "like the eyes of aliens." She has a blue one that she hides in her red purse. Stephen wins the most marbles, jars and jars of them, and one Saturday afternoon he takes the best ones out by **the ravine** and buries them. He also buries a treasure map, and tells this to Elaine, "but he doesn't say why, or where the jars are buried."

This scene introduces the inspiration behind the novel's title, Cat's Eye. *The fact that the marbles are won through these schoolyard competitions adds a sense both of risk and of commonness to the marbles—Elaine's prized treasure is something that could be lost at any point, and something that everyone has but that she still wants to keep secret because it is precious to her. This sense of secrecy extends to Stephen as well, who decides to bury the best of his marbles just for the pleasure of the secret. This passage establishes two key images: the cat's eye marble that Elaine hides in her purse, and sees as a sign of the unknown, and the buried jar of marbles out by the ravine. Because they are out by the ravine, these marbles also add something beautiful to an area that has thus far been described as the place where "bad men" might be.*

Elaine and her family leave town to go north for the summer, where the land is less developed and the air smells clearer. They fish and sleep in an abandoned logging camp, and Elaine and Stephen wander together. Elaine finds a tin of maple syrup that was rusted shut, and thinks of it as "an ancient artifact, like something dug up out of a tomb." Their father changes from his city clothing into baggy pants and work boots while he investigates a massive caterpillar infestation that leaves the trees denuded, as if burnt. He tells them to remember it, in the tone of voice people usually use for "forest fires, or the war: respect and wonderment mixed in with the sense of catastrophe."

This summer trip out of Toronto lets Elaine and her family return to their old lifestyle for a while, and Elaine reconnects with her brother—this shows the degree to which the changes in their relationship have to do with social expectations, because their relationship reverts with the disappearance of those expectations. This is true for Elaine's father, as well, who relishes the return to research. The description of this caterpillar infestation reflects the novel's relationship to natural catastrophe—there is a sense of powerlessness, but this gets mixed in with admiration.

At dinner, Elaine's father talks about the end of the world, inevitable with the atom bomb; only insects will survive. Elaine thinks about Carol and Grace, and they already feel less real to her. Elaine's mother pays them to collect blueberries, a cent a cup, and makes puddings and sauces. Stephen writes in urine on the sand, not his name but rather words like "Mars" or "Jupiter." In the middle of September, Elaine walks to the outhouse without a flashlight and looks back at her parents sitting by the kerosene lamp; she finds it unsettling to look at them, knowing that they don't know they're being watched, and feels "as if I don't exist; or as if they don't."

Elaine's father seems to have an extremely apocalyptic attitude, one that ties scientific development—in the form of the atom bomb—with the unintended consequence of the end of the world. Humans can spark grand-scale catastrophe, but they cannot control those catastrophes. Elaine's sense of isolation here is also important, because she seems prone to isolating herself both from her friends, in their absence, and from her family, though they are all there. The experience she has watching her parents refers to how easily a person can feel unseen by others, and how the experience of being ignored or unseen can mess with one's sense of reality.

Elaine and her family return in September, and their house looks "enchanted," with thistles and goldenrod grown up out of the mud around it. A third girl has joined Carol and Grace: Cordelia. The three of them watch from the apple trees as Elaine comes home, but they do not run up to greet her. Eventually, Grace waves, and Carol too—but not Cordelia. Cordelia is tall, with hair cut in a pageboy and a lopsided smile. She introduces herself like an adult with a handshake, and points out dog poop on Elaine's shoe (though it turns out to only be part of an apple).

Because the reader has already encountered Cordelia at two different stages in Elaine's life—later in her youth and as a phantom occupying her adult thoughts—this introduction feels particularly loaded. First of all, Carol and Grace greet Elaine much more lukewarmly than she expects, which signal that the arrival of this third person has shifted the dynamics of their friendship. Cordelia herself is described as being unconventional—the pageboy haircut, lopsided grin, and adult handshake—but all in ways that give her more power. From the outset, she disarms Elaine by mixing propriety with a somewhat conniving attitude; telling her that she stepped in dog poop, for example, could be interpreted as polite advice or a warning that Elaine is going to be scrutinized.

At the start, Elaine feels intimidated by Cordelia but also a sense of intimacy. Cordelia lives in a bright house with Swedish glass vases in which her mother arranges flowers. This differentiates her from Elaine's mother, who only ever puts wildflowers she picks herself in pots sometimes—thinking about this, Elaine realizes her family isn't rich. Cordelia's family has a cleaning lady, and eats eggs out of egg cups. She has two older sisters, Perdie and Mirrie, who always say they look like Haggis McBaggis, an ugly old hag they made up. They do ballet and play viola. All three sisters call their mother "Mummie," and are afraid of disappointing her, though they keep secrets from her as well. One day, Perdie tells Elaine that Cordelia wants to be a horse when she grows up.

The comparison between their two mothers is important, because Elaine begins to develop a stronger sense of what a "normal woman" and "normal family" are supposed to look like by observing Cordelia's mother and sisters. Elaine starts to form her sense of identity through her conflicts with Cordelia at this point—she admires Cordelia, and that admiration gives Cordelia her power. On the other hand, the novel hints that Cordelia's family life is not as simple as it seems—at home, she is excluded from her older sisters and made to feel less accomplished than them. The conflicts that arise out of that could point both to the reason for Cordelia's desire to exert power over her friends, and to the infectious nature that hierarchies and exclusion have—the more one is excluded, the more one wants to exclude others.

Elaine, Carol, Grace, and Cordelia play dress-up with Cordelia's clothing; she wants them to perform plays, but they mostly walk around aimlessly because Carol giggles too much and forgets her lines, and Grace does not like to be told what to do and claims to have headaches. When they go to school together, they pool their allowances to buy popsicles and gumballs that they share. On their path, they pass **the wooden footbridge** and all the weeds along the way, which include goldenrod and burdock and deadly nightshade, with its red berries. Cats prowl along the path, staring at them, and they even find a condom along the path one day (which they call a safe) and conceal it below the grating on the sidewalk. They walk across the **rotting wooden bridge over the ravine** and Cordelia says the water is "made of dead people" because it flows from the cemetery.

The story that Cordelia tells about the dead people here adds another dark layer to the bridge metaphor, which fits with the novel's sense of layered time. What Cordelia picks up on is that if there is a cemetery upstream, dead bodies very literally would decompose into the water—however, she gives more profound meaning by treating the water as an accumulation of these dead bodies. This adds to the sense that, even if something changes form or appearance over time, it can never fully lose its history.

Cordelia dares the other girls to go down into the water, but none of them want to, although Elaine knows it is only a game as her own mother goes down into the ravine during her walks and the boys play down there. Instead, they collect flowers made of deadly nightshade and make pretend meals they leave; when they disappear the next day, Cordelia says the dead people ate them.

The pretend meals made of nightshade stand for the dangerous games these girls are playing—on the one hand, there is the whimsy of the fantastical worlds of their imagination, and on the other is the very deep shadow of death. Underpinning all of this is Cordelia's desire for control and leadership, which manifests in her attempts to shock the other girls.

The girls start wearing skirts instead of pants at school which comes with all sorts of rules about how to cross one's legs to avoid flashing one's underwear. Underwear becomes a popular theme at school, and Cordelia makes up fake underwear for the different teachers—lavender frills for Miss Pigeon, plaid for Miss Stuart, and red satin long johns for Miss Hatchett. The girls get a nasty joy thinking about what underwear their teachers wear. Miss Lumley, Elaine's current teacher, is cruel and gives boys the strap. She rules by fear and hates sniveling, so if children cry she often says "I'll give you something to cy about."

The rules that develop for girls are strict but universal—they are expected to wear clothing that directly restricts their behavior, because they will be blamed if their underwear shows. This restricts rowdier activities, and the novel hints at the ways in which these rules further divide girls and boys. However, the response among the girls is not anger but rather to respond with cruel humor, turning the rules into an excuse to make fun of their teachers. The cruelty is reciprocal, however, as evidenced by Miss Lumley's strictness. The girls clearly develop their attitudes in response to their teachers. Furthermore, because Miss Lumley's cruelty is framed as appropriate punishment, she is teaching the children to blame themselves for certain abuses—if they step out of line, even just in the form of showing fear, she is allowed to punish them physically. This kind of demonstration of power can be easily internalized.

They have a photograph of the King and Queen in the schoolroom, and Miss Lumley teaches the students to draw the Union Jack and support the British Empire. She makes them sing "God Save the King" every morning, even though they are Canadian. She brings in newspaper clippings about the Royal Family, which she sticks to the blackboard, as well as pictures of children in scruffy clothes standing in front of rubble. These are the war orphans, which Mrs. Lumley uses to remind the students to eat everything on their plates and never waste, to not complain (as their houses did not get bombed) and to collect used clothing to donate. Even though she is not afraid of snakes or worms, Elaine is afraid of Miss Lumley's invisible bloomers, which Cordelia says are navy blue.

Miss Lumley's obsession with England clearly speaks to the culture of nationalism that developed around World War II. One of the deepest impacts the war seems to have had on this generation's psyche was the reinforcement of an international culture that celebrated England and the UK. The etiquette born here, of thrift and avoiding waste, clearly strikes a chord with Elaine, who remembers these events many years later.

PART FOUR: DEADLY NIGHTSHADE

Elaine walks along Queen Street past comic book stores wishing she were back in Vancouver with Ben and thinks about her ambivalence towards making this trip in the first place. She had decided to come because of the difficulty of getting a retrospective at all as a female painter. She finds Sub-Versions, the gallery, located between a tattoo parlor and restaurant supply store, which she thinks will go due to gentrification. She does not like galleries, because they remind her of churches—"too much reverence" and a "sanctimonious" feeling. Inside, her paintings have been uncrated, many of which are owned by various purchasers by now and have been specially borrowed for the retrospective.

Elaine's resentment towards being back in Toronto for this retrospective clearly stem from multiple sources: her unpleasant childhood memories and hatred of the city of Toronto tied with her frustrations with being seen and treated as a "female painter," along with her complicated emotions of having a retrospective at all, perhaps because it is a sign of aging. The complexity of Elaine's identity as a painter comes to light here, as she expresses her conflicts about galleries being similar to churches. Although Elaine herself paints, she holds herself at a distance from arts culture, in large part because she seems to resent and question dogma.

Elaine wonders if her market value would go up if she cut off her ears or killed herself. She sees a painting she did two decades before of Mrs. Smeath in egg tempera wearing nothing by a flowered bib apron, reclining on the sofa rising to Heaven; she called it *Rubber Plant: The Ascension*. She has a hard time looking at her paintings now, and feels the strong urge to take an Exacto knife to them all. Charna approaches her, and Elaine regrets choosing to wear a blue jogging suit; she wishes she had worn all black. She introduces her to Andrea, who wants to interview her. Andrea says that she thought Elaine would be bigger, and Elaine responds "I am bigger."

Elaine has difficulties with her own work, unable to have empathy for the way that she executed her thoughts and feelings back then—this strong desire to destroy her paintings speaks to the ways that one's identity can change over time, as well as to the high level of self-criticism that Elaine feels. However, criticism and cruelty is not only self-directed—this interaction with Andrea helps one understand why Elaine might doubt herself, because the first interaction has with it a teasing tone of cruelty—the expectation that Elaine would have been bigger comes with sexist undertones, and even recalls the way that Cordelia and Elaine talked about older women when they rode the streetcar together as children.

They sit down for the interview, and Elaine is concerned that Andrea is judging her for seeming like a normal middle-aged woman. Andrea says the interview will be placed in the Living section, and asks her questions about fame and her generation of artists. Elaine says that her generation was the forties, not the seventies, because she grew up then—she attributes an influence to the colors in her work, and identifies a generational gap between those who remember World War II and those who do not. Her generation has longer attention spans and a mentality towards thrift.

This conversation with Andrea marks one of the first extended interactions that Elaine has had with another human being in the adult portion of the novel, and it brings out important themes of gender, the war, and her identity under the unique lens of her adult life. A relatively unified picture of Elaine's identity emerges through these different threads—she is a person who resists dogma and easy categorization, and feels frustrated or uncomfortable with being forced to conform to conventional viewpoints. Her identification with the forties is particularly important, as she draws a generational gap based on values of thrift between herself and anyone who did not live through the war—this indicates both that the war had pervasive impact, but also that some of the consequences on social values were not negative. Elaine values the parts of her identity born in this conflicted time of World War II, which adds a layer of nuance to the novel's treatment of the war.

They also discuss gender, and whether Elaine was discriminated against or how she balanced art with having children and getting financial support from her husband. Elaine does not give her the stories of outrage she wants. When asked if she had had female mentors, Elaine says there were none and that her teacher was a man: Josef Hrbik, who was kind and taught her to draw naked women. Elaine says she does not identify as a feminist and hates party lines; when asked why she paints, she says "why does anyone do anything?"

This resistance towards conventions includes feminism—Elaine clearly experiences discomfort identifying proudly as a woman, though her whole interviewing being categorized in the woman-oriented "Living" section, and she does not want to say anything bad about her male art teacher—this shows an obvious discomfort with typical "men versus women" narratives, which is accentuated by the obvious hostility between the two women. The lack of direct conflict shows how much damage and frustration that just enforcing expectations can have—Andrea at no point explicitly antagonizes Elaine, but because the questions she ask imply that certain responses are more normal than others, the expectations that this sets frustrates Elaine.

Back in Elaine's childhood memories, she walks home from school with Cordelia. At Grace's house, Cordelia realizes that the Smeaths order all their clothing from *Eaton's Catalogue* and judges her for it. While flipping through the catalogues, she fixates on the brassiere section and adds hair to the models under their arms. They talk about breasts and periods, which Perdie and Mirrie have just gotten. Elaine has never thought about adult women's bodies before, and she finds it embarrassing, though she doesn't know why. They start looking at their own bodies for signs of change, but are safe so far. The girls feel like they can't ask their mothers questions about their bodies or puberty, as "an abyss exists between them." Cordelia talks about babies and male anatomy—she says that "men have carrots between their legs" and that "seeds come out and get into women's stomachs." Elaine has a hard time imagining any of their mothers permitting this to happen, especially not Mrs. Smeath.

These discussions about women's bodies and development have both a bitter and a sweet layer—there's a sense of familiar "coming of age" attached to any discussion of puberty where children come up with odd metaphors about body parts and activities that they don't understand. Images like the "carrots" between men's legs bring a sense of innocent naivete to these conversations. At the same time, that naïveté is somewhat undermined by the way that Cordelia tries to use these conversations to her own advantage. Using information as power, she tries to freak out the other girls by talking about their aging bodies and the relationships they will have with men. There's cruelty in her persistence, but a cruelty that none of the girls know to question—especially because it seems that these girls aren't meant to ask their mothers or siblings about puberty. That indicates that these topics are supposed to be private, or even shameful.

Grace says that God makes babies, which ends their discussion. However, Elaine has her doubts, as she has seen insects mate before. She considers asking her brother, but she thinks the question would be indelicate, even though the two of them have examined scabs under the microscope and aren't grossed out by things like gutted fish they find under logs. Cordelia says that boys put their tongues in your mouth when they kiss you, which repulses Carol and Grace, and makes Elaine wonder why they would do it—she thinks it would be just to be repulsive.

Elaine's reference to insects shows one of the uses of science in dismissing human social conventions when they are unnecessarily controlling—social conventions and dogma try to claim that certain behaviors are "normal" or "natural," whereas examples from nature prove that they aren't. The fact that Elaine keeps herself enough at a distance from these conversations to reflect on those questions says a lot about her character and about how relationships form her identity—she feels torn between her instinctive questioning of social norms and her desire to fit in with her friends.

Elaine goes to the cellar at Grace's house and sees Mrs. Smeath peeling potatoes; Mrs. Smeath invites her to come to church with the family. When she tells her parents about the idea, they try to dissuade her but Elaine chooses to go anyway. Elaine's mother finds the idea particularly stressful, as her own parents had been strict and had forced her to go to church whether she liked it or not; Elaine's father says he "does not believe in brainwashing children" and thinks that religion is responsible for wars, bigotry, and intolerance.

This section of the novel contains an extremely pivotal moment for Elaine, as she both discovers religion and also enters a world very remote from her family in doing so. Elaine's parents offer some common secular perspectives on religion, in that her father—who represents science—perceives religion as nothing more than dogmatic brainwashing, and Elaine's mother associates it with parental control. However, Elaine does not like to take this information just based on her parents authority—in this case, she chooses to reject one form of dogmatic beliefs by replacing it with another, which foreshadows some future problems for her.

Elaine wears a plaid secondhand dress she got secondhand from a family friend. She takes the **cat's eye marble** from her purse and leaves it in her bureau drawer and brings a nickel for collection instead. When she gets to Grace's house, they notice that she doesn't have a hat, so she has to borrow a hat for church. Mrs. Smeath's sister, whom they call Aunt Mildred, comes along with them, and they drive through the empty Sunday streets to church. Inside, they sit in a pew and Elaine observes the stained-glass windows depicting Jesus hovering, with messages like "The kingdom of God is within you," "Suffer the little children," and "The greatest of these is charity." She tries to follow along when everyone stands up and sings, but does not know the tunes.

Elaine's experience at church resembles her experience among other girls, in that she perceives it as a desirable or comforting community that is full of rituals that she just doesn't know the steps of yet—the implication here is that fitting into society and feeling fulfilled just requires learning the right rules and following them, after which harmony and success will naturally follow.

They then go to Sunday school, at the end of which Elaine feels suffused with goodness and loved by God. Elaine and the Smeaths go to Sunday dinner, where they eat baked ham and baked beans and baked potatoes and mashed squash. Elaine starts eating before grace because she does not know what it is, which Mrs. Smeath chides her for. After dinner, Grace and Elaine sit on the velvet chesterfield in the living room and read their Sunday school paper. When she goes home, she tells her parents she has to memorize a psalm and thinks about heaven. When she looks out the window that night, she sees the stars—instead of "cold, white, and remote," they now look watchful to her.

Although Elaine consistently makes minor mistakes (such as eating before saying grace), she still finds this world comforting at this age because she knows what she has to do to improve herself. Religious belief orders her world—even the stars are transformed, metamorphosed into a comforting force that can watch over and protect her. This shows the nature of her internal struggle and dissatisfaction with scientific understanding—Elaine clearly does not reject science or logic fully, but rather sees something cold and remote in an overly-logical mode of engaging with the world. She has spiritual longing that, for now, she wishes to solve with religion and social ritual.

Boys and girls exclude each other actively at school now; the girls stand in small clumps, whisper amongst themselves, and use spools to make potholders, though Elaine still reads comic books in her brother's room quietly if no other girls are around. She used to take boys for granted, but now she pays attention to them because she feels that boys and girls are not the same—boys do not take baths as often and they take pride in drab clothing. The boys are growing more aggressive with each other, and work at acting like boys.

As the children age, gender becomes more important—girls and boys are expected to exclude each other, which shows how extensively these gender roles are meant to direct one's life. Gender is associated with a kind of pack mentality, one that ought to mean showing hostility to anyone not included—of course, Elaine's behavior shows that this division between the genders is not born of an inborn instinct toward dislike—in fact, she still wants to do the same things as before, like reading comic books, and changes her behavior at times only to conform.

Stephen has his first girlfriend, whom he keeps secret from everyone but Elaine. He writes Elaine notes in code that usually end up being about this mystery girlfriend. Elaine feels ambivalent about holding his secret, as it both makes her feel singled out and like she isn't important. Eventually, they break up and he returns to comic-book collecting and astronomy. He gets a chemistry set and does weird experiments in the basement. When he gets a star map, he looks at the stars through binoculars and teaches Elaine the constellations—"he's started collecting stars."

Stephen resembles Elaine in his tendency to conform to the behavior of his peers to a degree, but regularly diverge at a certain point—for instance, he gets a girlfriend, but then promptly immerses himself in science and refuses to completely ignore his sister. In a sense, science becomes a refuge or replacement for emotions; through scientific research, one has a certain amount of control over their environment. This places scientific interest in a positive but limited light, as it cannot replace or account for feelings outside the scope of knowledge.

On Halloween, Grace wears an ordinary lady's dress, Carol a fairy outfit, Cordelia a clown suit, and Elaine a sheet because that is all there is. When Halloween passes, Cordelia starts digging holes in the yard, claiming she "wants to make a clubhouse." Poppies made of red cloth blossom on the streets for Remembrance Day, and the schoolchildren are expected to memorize poetry about the war dead and wear poppies on their coats. One day, the other girls make Elaine dress in all black as Mary, Queen of Scots. They have her lie in the hole and bury her in dirt, and she stops feeling like it's a game—instead, she feels "sadness, betrayal, and the darkness pressing in on her." Later, she describes forgetting what it was like to be buried. She cannot picture the hole, only nothingness. She "does not remember being rescued."

On Remembrance Day, all of the children are forced to dress up and memorize poetry to honor the war dead; these rituals demonstrate the continued and significant impact that the war had on the social practices even of Canadian schoolchildren far to the West. Morbid rituals seem to shape the girls on a much smaller scale as they enact their own with Elaine as the target; this burial event is the first time the girls cross the line between play and punishment, games and reality. By burying Elaine, they put her in real danger. Supposedly, this behavior is part of an innocent girls' game, but Elaine's experience completely contradicts that innocence. It also evidences a moment of trauma, which Elaine associates with darkness and with forgetting—though her memories leading up to the event are vivid enough, she cannot recall the rescue, which indicates that strong emotional moments can impact one's experience of time and can create gaps only to be filled by logic—she must have been rescued, if she survived.

Elaine does not remember her ninth birthday, although she tries—she "only sees emptiness," and when she tries to picture it she sees the image of a thicket of nightshade. She knows there must have been a cake and presents, and that Cordelia, Grace, and Carol must have been there, but she cannot remember anything outside a "vague horror of birthday parties." Though she knows it's the wrong memory, she still pictures the nightshade flowers, the smell, and "a sense of grief."

This gap in Elaine's memories clearly comes from her traumatic experience at the hands of her friends, but she also knows that they all continued to be at her party and to celebrate with her, which implies that there was no direct punishment for them having buried her alive. The vivid image of the nightshade, a flower associated with death, encapsulates this duality—nightshade is something that looks beautiful on the outside and yet is lethal. As a flower, it also represents a type of deadly femininity, like the gendered cruelty of Elaine's young friends. That it impacted her memory and her sense of past narrative time further proves that the subjective experience of time is not linear, but formed of a mixture of real memories, logic, and sense-based fantasy.

PART FIVE: WRINGER

Elaine leaves the gallery and decides to go shopping and buy yogurt and oranges. On her own, she usually forgets about eating. She watches teenagers on the street outside a department store and wonders if she and Cordelia looked like that at their age. She thinks about all the cloth they sell in the form of bath towels and sheets, which are designed to be disposable—in the old days, people bought for quality and checked the way buttons were sewn and how good the cloth was. Inside the department store, she gets lost on her way to the food hall and goes the wrong way on an elevator. She looks at all of the cosmetics and thinks of them as a form of religion, designed to "stop the slow passage of time." She wonders why children's dresses are designed in plaid these days, the color of the Scots, despair, and murder.

The scene at the start of this chapter is inflected by the events at the very end of the last chapter, as Elaine's unhealthy habit of forgetting to eat and her compulsive tendency to think about Cordelia are now inflected by the event of the burial. It's difficult to untangle the degree to which Elaine still feels friendship for Cordelia, which only shows the nuance of their relationship and the degree to which cruelty must have been normalized. Elaine's reflections on disposability relate to her having come from a wartime generation, as the tendency to ration and to take care of objects for durability comes directly from this more frugal national consciousness. Elaine sees some positive consequences to the war—the creation of a generational consciousness around waste is something that she valued, as she does not understand the wastefulness of this new generation. That she sees cosmetics as a means of slowing time suggests that if one looks younger, one may as well be younger, though the disguise would be unlikely to slow death.

Elaine remembers peeling the skin off her feet during the time when Cordelia had power over her. She did it at night, when she ought to have been sleeping, because nobody but her ever looked at her feet so no one could know. It made it painful to walk, but she enjoyed the exposure. She also enjoyed having something definite to think about and hold on to. She also chewed the ends of her hair and bit her cuticles, but these habits were unconscious, whereas her feet were deliberate.

This habit that Elaine develops is a visceral representation of the cruelty she undergoes at Cordelia's hands, but it also directly represents the type of gendered cruelty that it was. Cordelia does not inflict physical violence on Elaine, but she is responsible for the physical violence that Elaine inflicts upon herself. This foot-peeling habit demonstrates the power of psychological manipulation, as Elaine seeks vulnerability, exposure, and distraction that she can only achieve by injuring herself.

When she had her own children, Elaine initially wished that she had had sons instead of daughters; she thought she knew what to do with sons, but not with daughters. As a mother herself, she was always on the lookout for chewed and bitten nails and skin on her daughters' hands and feet, afraid they would develop the same habit. Her girls, however, were well-adjusted—even when Elaine needed to lie down alone in a dark room, they said she just had a headache and would get better in a day. While thinking about these things, Elaine stands among the plaid dresses absent-mindedly until a sales lady interrupts her and asks if there's anything she needs, so she asks for directions to the food hall.

When Elaine looks for her old habits in her daughters, it implies that she believes that her experience was not unique and that it would be not only plausible but probable that her daughters should undergo the same torturous bullying. However, even in adulthood, the symptoms of her cruel childhood relationships affect Elaine alone; she has to retire to her bedroom to be alone, and this indicates the degree to which her identity was permanently marred by her experience.

Back in the past, Elaine sits on a window ledge in the zoology building watching the parade; Cordelia, Grace, and Carol sit on a different ledge because they are not speaking to Elaine. They say she said something wrong, but they won't tell her what. They want her to guess what she said, so that she learns never to say such a thing again—it is "for [her] own good, because they are [her] best friends and they want to help [her] improve." She thinks that everything will be better if she keeps quiet, because she can't remember saying anything different from usual. Elaine's father walks into the room and asks the girls if they are enjoying the parade; afraid of saying something wrong, Elaine says nothing. However, Cordelia accuses her angrily of impoliteness after he leaves. She asks what Elaine has to say for herself; Elaine has nothing to say.

This form of bullying is defined by indirectness and a sort of coyness that means that the girls could drop the ruse at any point—they cannot be easily targeted for their behavior, as they inflict damage as much by what they won't say as by what they will. This forces Elaine to hurt herself in service of self-improvement, an elusive project defined by her so-called friends. By telling her that she has done something wrong, the girls grant themselves an authority borne of nothing outside of their own judgment, but by assuring Elaine that they are her friends and only "want to help [her] improve," they convince her to play along and continue hurting herself; merely by pretending friendship the girls can exact endless power, As a consequence, Elaine tends towards silence, stillness, and nothingness—she experiences a reduction of her own ego, something that might be invisible on the outside but is clearly deeply violent.

Elaine stands outside Cordelia's room while Cordelia, Grace, and Carol have a meeting about her. They think that she does not measure up, although they have given her every chance. They want her to "do better," though they refuse to clarify what they mean by that. Perdie and Mirrie come up the stairs, and Elaine wishes she were as old as them—she thinks they would be her allies. They ask if the girls are playing hide and seek, but Elaine says that she cannot tell them what game they are playing. She feels mute and dissociative. Meanwhile, Cordelia's Mummie walks by in a painting smock and tells Elaine that there are cookies in the tin for the girls.

The fact that everyone in Cordelia's family manages to see the bullying unfold without noticing or intervening indicates that the bullying was relatively invisible on the outside, as the girls enact it under the guise of friendship and play. This also helps clarify Elaine's tendency to play along; if everyone around her treats this behavior as normal, it would inevitably normalize it for her as well.

Ultimately, Cordelia permits Elaine to return to the room, but she stands for a long time with her hand at the doorknob, looking at her own hand as if it were not a part of her. This is one of many games that they play with her, which makes Elaine an anxious mother—she scrutinizes her children for bitten nails or chewed hair, and asks them leading questions. She thinks that little girls are particularly cruel to each other. In her own childhood, the girls grow meaner and meaner as more time passes— they tell her everything that needs improvement with her, but promise to help her.

Games of exclusion are treated as the natural realm of girls—just how girls act and how they treat each other. However, innocent behavior can contain as much damaging cruelty as direct aggression; accusing someone of inherent imperfection can be as violent as directly attacking them, if they are too vulnerable. Elaine comes to believe that young girls are just cruel to each other and that cruelty is a typical aspect of girlhood.

The weather grows colder, and Elaine lies in bed peeling the skin off her feet and thinking that she is abnormal and not like other girls. She gets dressed in the morning, puts shoes and stockings on over her peeled feet, and goes into the kitchen. She has started having trouble eating breakfast in the morning, and instead takes time watching coffee percolate or making toast. When she looks at the toaster, she contemplates sticking her finger on the red-hot grid. She wants to slow down time to avoid having to go out and play. Whenever she does leave, Grace, Carol, and Cordelia are waiting for her. The girls constantly order her around, but only when no one is watching. They say things like "Stand up straight!" and tell her that people are watching her, that she holds her sandwiches wrong, and that she moves weirdly when she walks.

At this stage, Elaine has begun to fully internalize the messages that her so-called friends have been throwing at her about her own worthlessness. She exhibits depressive and anxious behavior in being unable to eat and continuing to self-harm by peeling her feet, but instead of blaming the girls or externalizing any of her feelings, she just retreats inwards. This demonstrates how easily one's identity can shift due to the influence of others.

Elaine knows that if she told anyone about what was happening, it would be a violation of secrecy and she would be cast out of her friend group. That matters to her because she does not see Cordelia as her enemy, because enemies are people who yell at each other and fight, like the boys in the schoolyard; enemies feel hatred and anger. Cordelia is not her enemy, but rather her friend, who "loves her and wants to help her." All of the girls are her friends, "her girl friends, her best friends." Because she has never had any before, Elaine still loves them and is afraid of losing them. She does sometimes wish she had hated them, as "hatred is metallic and unwavering; unlike love."

Elaine loves her friends and wants them to love her too, so she gets further sucked into their scheme of bullying. The theme of secrecy is also important, as this defines how Elaine sees the gendered aspect of it—whereas boys are associated with outright public aggression, girls are responsible for these private modes of behavior. Furthermore, if it's a secret, no one intervenes and this behavior is further mobilized. Framing this bullying as constructive criticism is what truly gets to Elaine, as she believes that she could return to the girls' good graces if she just acts right; she blames her own behavior rather than that of her friends.

Sometimes Cordelia decides to make Carol the target of improvement, and invites Elaine and Grace to walk ahead and discuss her faults. Elaine does not feel bad for her when this happens, but instead rejoices because of all the times that Carol had done the same to her. However, this happens less frequently as Carol cries too easily and can't be trusted not to draw too much attention to herself. On other days, Cordelia acts normal and does not make any efforts to improve anybody; Elaine thinks she might have given up the task. She is supposed to act normal on those days, as if nothing had ever happened, but she still feels like she is being watched—she worries she will "cross some invisible line." Elaine starts to make excuses to avoid playing with them; she says she has to do chores for her mother.

The ebb and flow of the bullying shows its complexity and explains the nuances of Elaine's feelings about the other girls, especially Cordelia. By making other girls the target of bullying sometimes, her authority is legitimized; it makes it appear that her judgments come from special knowledge that the other girls don't have, and that their friendship is still truly real. The fact that Elaine plays along when this happens also begins to complexify the victim narrative; Elaine, though innocent of her own victimization, plays along when Carol is made victim. This shows that sometimes people in conflict can adapt to and even adopt traits of those they are in conflict with. The fact that Elaine's entire identity and perspective has been shaped by this is proven by the darkness of her feeling of always being watched.

Elaine likes doing the laundry and using the old wringer to get the clothing dry, because she enjoys watching the dirty water run out and feels "virtuous" about "leaving the clothing clean and pure." She has to be careful when using the wringer, because women can get their hands or hair caught. Elaine thinks about what would happen if she got her hand caught in the wringer, and pictures the "blood and flesh" traveling up her arm while her hand comes out the other end "flat as a glove" and "white as paper." She finds "something compelling" about the image of a person traveling through the wringer and coming out flat and complete "like a flower pressed in a book." Eventually, the girls catch on to Elaine's ploy to avoid them, and accuse her of thinking that she is better than them. They ask Elaine's mother directly to let her play; she agrees.

Elaine's extremely visceral morbid fantasy of being flattened out by the laundry wringer has profound symbolic weight; it represents on the one hand the depth of Elaine's psychic trauma, as she wishes to negate herself as a means of escaping criticism. On the other, this flatness represents a desire for perfection that is actually impossible for humans—she wants to be complete, like a flower pressed in a book, but even the image she fantasizes about far exceeds human capacity. Elaine does not wish to become Cordelia or another role model, but rather a flat representation much like the paper dolls that the girls cut and paste in magazines.

Elaine still goes to church on Sundays with the Smeaths, because Mrs. Smeath seems to enjoy seeing herself as a charitable person, though she does not appear particularly pleased with Elaine. She always asks Elaine if she would like to bring her brother Stephen along next time, or perhaps her parents, and Elaine feels judged for the failure to bring along any other members of her family. By this point, she has memorized all the books of the Bible, the Ten Commandments, and the Lord's Prayer. She receives perfect scores on quizzes in Sunday school. However, Grace reports back on her even when she is a "goody-goody," and that makes Elaine feel shame and worry that it is wrong to be right. She then tries to do worse and deliberately gets a 5 out of 10, but gets chided by Cordelia for getting stupider.

At this point, Elaine's relationship to religion appears to have evolved significantly, but she does not notice more support in the church than she does in other parts of her life. In fact, learning to be more pious and demonstrate her faith actually only brings her more trouble than good, as her "perfect" behavior brings in just as much criticism as her failures and imperfections. At this point, the indication is that religion cannot protect her, and religious communities are not always as wholesome or dedicated to good as they are made out to be—in fact, Mrs. Smeath embodies this in her total disinterest in Elaine. She wants to convert the heathens, but makes it clear that nothing Elaine can do will work to prove herself sufficiently.

On White Gift Sunday, everyone brings cans of food to church to donate to the poor. Elaine has brought Habitant pea soup and Spam, which she thinks might be the wrong kinds of things to donate, but were all that her mother had in the cupboard. She dislikes the concept of white gifts, because they become "hard" and "uniform" under the tissue paper—she finds they look "sinister," "bleached of their identit[ies]," and "could be anything." Sitting in the pew and singing hymns, Elaine feels like she wants to be good and follow instructions for Jesus, but she starts to feel like it's less possible. She sees a glint of light off Grace's glasses and knows that she is watching her.

Elaine's disenchantment with the church comes to a head in this section. She arrives at that point in part because she starts to feel like nothing she will do can ever be good enough as a result of the scrutiny and bullying of her friends. It's important that her sense of wrongdoing extends even to something like donating food, as Elaine's family is not wealthy—to donate anything at all means more from them than from a family who could give more easily, but Elaine is unable to see that because of her anxieties around doing the right thing.

After church, they watch the trains and return home for dinner, and Elaine comes along because these activities happen every Sunday, and she knows that it would be bad to break the routine. She has gotten used to the Smeaths and their specific habits, like using only four squares of toilet paper and saying grace. At the dinner table, Mr. Smeath makes a joke about farting that Elaine doesn't understand. Mrs. Smeath chastises him, but he asks Elaine if she found it funny; she says that she doesn't know, because she doesn't want abandon Mr. Smeath but also doesn't want to provoke anger when Grace inevitably tells Cordelia what had happened. Grace does report the incident, and they make fun of her for not knowing what the joke meant—however, Elaine realizes a strong loyalty to Mr. Smeath that resembles her loyalty to her brother, to the outrageous, and to subversion.

The scene at the dinner table marks an important turning point, as Mr. Smeath's crudeness shows Elaine other possibilities for living and acting even within this highly proper family. He reminds her of her own family and her brother, who disregard propriety. Although Elaine is not able to stand up for herself on the outside, because she still loves Cordelia too much, she does start to come into her identity as a person who prefers subversion to conforming.

The weather is cold enough that the milk comes frozen in its bottle in the mornings. Miss Lumley notices Elaine's handwriting deteriorating, and chastises her, which makes Elaine even more anxious because she knows that Carol will hear and report the exchange later. All the girls go to watch Cordelia in a play, but instead of feeling excited to attend her first play, Elaine can only think of her anxiety. The holiday season starts, and the radio fills with sugary music like "I'm Dreaming of a White Christmas" and other songs that all of the children are expected to sing in school. Elaine feels most ambivalent about "Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer," as it bothers her that there is something wrong with him, but it gives her hope that he eventually ends up beloved and accepted—Elaine's father dismisses him as a sign of commercialism.

Elaine is so driven by anxiety that she can no longer perform well in class or enjoy even nice moments with her friends, but rather focuses on the bad. The Christmas season comes with a set of customs that are usually meant to feel magical for children, but between Elaine's jaded scientist father and Cordelia's bullying, she seems to have lost her interest in the season.

Despite all of the festive tasks, Elaine goes through the season "like a sleepwalker" and takes no interest in snowmen or Santa Claus (Cordelia recently told her that he does not exist). She gets a Barbara Ann Scott doll for Christmas, which is what she said she wanted, and is the first girl-shaped doll that she has ever possessed. It looks nothing like the real figure skater Barbara Ann Scott, who is muscular where the doll is a stick, and it has what Elaine considers to be "the worrying power of effigies" to be a kind of "lifeless life." Elaine ends up packing it away, which she says is to keep it safe but is actually to prevent the doll from watching her.

Elaine's doll is a sexist depiction of a strong female skater, as it tries to make her body appear thinner to fit standards of beauty applied to women. This concept of effigy is important, because it reflects the process that has been happening to Elaine all along, as she also sees herself as being shaped into nothingness and lifelessness. These recurring themes of life versus lifeless, and nothing vs something, are shaped by gendered discourses, as girls are expected to act in certain ways lest they be disqualified from some unspoken standards of womanhood.

A student of Elaine's father, Mr. Banerji, joins them at Christmas dinner, as it would be too far for him to fly back to India. Elaine thinks he seems afraid and ill at ease and that he reminds her of herself. Elaine has developed a knack for uncovering hidden misery in others. Elaine's father serves the stuffing and the turkey, while Elaine's mother adds the mashed potatoes and cranberry sauce and asks Mr. Banerji whether they have any turkeys in his country. During the meal he only seems comfortable when exchanging biology-related jokes and facts with Elaine's father, such as the Latin name of the turkey and other stories about turkeys.

Mr. Banerji is a critical character for Elaine, because he is one of the first people that she really identifies with—regardless of his age, gender, or race, she sees herself reflected back in his anxiety and nervousness. Though these may not be entirely positive points of comparison, the fact that this identification was possible at all is a turning point for Elaine, and it also means that some of her problems are not an inherent problem of her gender necessarily—it's a problem that belongs to anyone made vulnerable to judgment and social exclusion.

Elaine and Mr. Banerji both pick at their meals, and Elaine thinks that wild things are smarter than tame ones because they know how to look out for themselves. She divides everyone she knows into the categories of "tame" and "wild," with her mother, father, and brother being wild along with Cordelia, but Grace and Carol fitting into the category of tame. Mr. Banerji and Elaine's father talk about genetic manipulation of produce, sparked by a hypothetical turkey bred to have four drumsticks instead of two drumsticks and two wings, because there is more meat on the drumstick. Mr. Banerji criticizes the thought of fooling with nature, and Elaine agrees—investigating nature and defending oneself against it are one thing, but fooling with it is another. They all finish their meal with a conversation about poisonous snakes. The turkey carcass on their table makes Elaine think of "lost flight."

The wild and tame distinction gestures at Elaine's tendency to seek order in the world. Significantly, she does not categorize herself, although readers have no reason yet to believe that Elaine is particularly capable of standing up for herself. The discussion of genetic modification adds more nuance to the role that science and scientific attitudes have thus far played in the book. In this case, the central distinction is whom should science serve—Elaine's father seems to resent a version of science aimed at bending nature to serve mankind rather than serving ideals of observation and knowledge. The fact that Elaine ends the dinner thinking about turkeys as a symbol of lost flight shows her concerns about her own fettering at the hands of Cordelia.

After Christmas, Elaine gets a job walking Brian Finestein in his baby carriage after school. For an hour or so of walking him, she receives twenty-five cents, which is a lot of money. She really likes Mrs. Finestein, who has pierced ears, wears real fur, and has a vestibule that smells like the baby's ammonia-soaked diapers, as they are sitting in a bucket in the vestibule waiting to be picked up by the diaper company. The idea that someone else could come and do one's laundry intrigues Elaine. The whole set-up of the house blends in Elaine's mind into an image of "ultrasophistication." Mrs. Finestein is like no mother that Elaine has ever seen.

Meeting Mrs. Finestein is critical for Elaine, as she represents both a different class bracket and a different kind of womanhood for Elaine. Especially as this is tied to a paid job, Elaine finally has an opportunity to see a version of a female identity that might be tied to independence, which contrasts sharply with the models she had confronted up until that point.

Elaine wheels Brian out in the carriage and observes how quiet he is, as he never cries and never laughs. She likes him for being silent and uncritical. At first, Elaine likes the job and loves that Mrs. Finestein is willing to pay her in nickels because it seems like more money. She lays the nickels out by year and enjoys looking at the images of king's heads on them. One day, however, Cordelia and the girls catch her out walking Brian. They ask for his name and when she says it is Brian Finestein, Grace and Carol make fun of him for being Jewish, which Elaine had never heard of. She asks her mother later what *Jewish* is, and she says that it is another kind of religion and tells her that "Hitler had killed a lot of the Jews during the war." She starts to feel like he won't be safe with her. She also learns that the family is Jewish, and her mother tells her about Hitler and the Holocaust.

The fact that Elaine wants her payment in nickels can be interpreted in a few different ways—most simply, as a childish desire for "more," but more significantly in relation to this attachment to the king's heads on them, which both show the connection that Canada has to the UK and monarchy and the darkness roiling in her identity at this point (demonstrated by her morbid fascination with the beheading). Meanwhile, the confrontations that Elaine has with Cordelia and the other girls are particularly fraught here, as this is the first occasion where another person is somewhat witness to their bullying, though only a child. They use anti-Semitic terms and reference to the Holocaust as part of their bullying mechanisms, which shows how pervasive those views were even in a country that ostensibly fought the Nazis. However, Elaine is instead fascinated by the idea of another, different religion, which shows her attitude towards religion as a special way of differentiating oneself.

Another day, Elaine goes out walking Brian, thinking that his religion adds another dimension to the image she had of the family—it "adds something extra and heroic." Cordelia, Carol, and Grace catch her again, and Carol asks for a turn walking the baby. When she refuses, Grace says that the Jews killed Christ. Meanwhile, Cordelia tricks Elaine into saying the word "bugger" in relation to men who catch bugs, and even though Elaine does not know the precise meaning of the slur she feels dirty for having betrayed her father. After this day, she decides to quit walking Brian, so he won't be in danger—she has an obscure sense that he is not safe with her, and pictures him winding up in a snowbank or hurtling towards the bridge over the ravine.

The homophobic terms that Cordelia uses in relation to Elaine's father demonstrate the cruelty of this mob mentality and further set up a distinction between Elaine's social world and her familial world, placing her inevitably in conflict with both. This forces Elaine to form an identity and make decisions in this space of conflict and choosing.

Mrs. Finestein forgives Elaine for quitting and gives her an extra nickel, but Elaine still goes home feeling like she has failed her, as well as herself and her father. However, she also spends all of the nickels she earned with this job on candy—licorice whips, jellybeans, fizzy sherbet—that she shares equally as a kind of atonement with her friends. In the moment "just before giving, she feels loved."

At this stage, Elaine is not ready to reject Cordelia and continues to submit to her power out of love—though quitting her job could be seen as an act of subtle resistance, the decision to then purchase and share sweets shows just how deeply love for another person can become embedded in one's mind, to the extent that it results in self-destructive decision-making.

One Saturday, Elaine sits at home watching the icicles and eating the alphabet soup—she used to spell out words with the letters, but now takes no particular interest. Grace calls to ask her to come out and play; she joins reluctantly, because she knows that she will be accused of something if she says no. Her stomach feels "dull as if full of earth," but Elaine's mother notices nothing and just tells her to dress warmly. On the way, Elaine feels translucent, like a hand held over a flashlight. She sees the three girls at the end of the street, looking dark as if cast in shadow. Cordelia criticizes her for coming to them when they had said they would come to her, and when she does not respond she asks her if she is deaf. Elaine throws up in a snowbank when they make fun of her.

Elaine's general apathy and dullness indicates the extent to which this period of extended bullying and suffering has turned her psyche against itself—her unwillingness to seek out confrontation with her friends or to defend herself causes her to lose her sense of self entirely, which is a kind of obliterating violence that confirms that extremity that the novel wants to attribute to a particular kind of (often gendered-feminine) cruelty. When this culminates in real illness, that pattern peaks, especially because it is directly paired with Cordelia's cruel insults. This directly contradicts the notion that words are not violent, as Elaine experiences physical harm at the culmination of emotional abuse.

Elaine ends up going straight home and lying in bed with a fever. She feels safe, wrapped in her illness as if in cotton wool. She starts to get sick more often, and feels relief when she doesn't have to go to school. She just lies in bed and looks at the ceiling light or the doorknob, and sometimes cuts things out of magazines and pastes them into her scrapbooks. The women in these magazines have germ killers or can get rid of their unwanted odors or rough skin.

The magazines that Elaine examines during her period of illness turn the patterns of bullying that Elaine experiences from Cordelia into a problem on a national and international scale, as the magazines say to women in general the kinds of things that Cordelia says to Elaine in particular: you are insufficient, and we can help you be better.

Other women are pictured doing things they aren't supposed to do, like gossiping too much, being sloppy, being bossy, or knitting too much—this proves to Elaine that there will be "no end to imperfection or doing things the wrong way"; even after growing up, no matter how hard one scrubs there will be some spot or imperfection left behind. Nevertheless, she is still somehow happy to cut the imperfect women out and save them in her scrapbook. She listens to the Happy Gang on the radio, but they make her nervous. She doesn't like to think about the passage of time.

However, the magazines seem to provide an inexplicable comfort to Elaine, which indicates that identification can in itself be comforting—just knowing that problems are shared can lessen the burden. At the same time, the other elements of Elaine's convalescent periods make her fixate on the passage of time and make her nervous—she does not like the fake happiness of these social news programs, and she does not like picturing the future, perhaps because she does not know what of her unbearable present will remain, and what will change.

Winter melts away and spring comes. Elaine's parents start pulling weeds in their garden, and Elaine skips rope in Grace's driveway with Carol and Cordelia. They look like girls playing, but Elaine finds the songs that they skip to somehow menacing. Everyone at school starts playing with their marbles again, but now the voices of children in the schoolyard shouting for puries and bowlies sound to Elaine like ghosts or animals caught in a trap.

The difference between the appearances of the girls—as friends innocently playing, and the cruel reality—shows how difficult it can be to read the truth of any situation on the surface. Similarly, Elaine's perspective towards the schoolyard games has totally shifted and become much more pessimistic since the year before; because of the change in her identity and experience, she now perceives the other children as much more melancholic.

When they cross **the wooden bridge** on the way to school, Elaine recalls the jar that Stephen buried and thinks about it shining in secret in the dark underground; she thinks about going and finding the jar herself, and though she knows that it would be impossible to find, she likes to think about things that the others know nothing about. She remembers her **cat's eye marble** when spring comes, and takes it out secretly. She hides it from the girls, and it helps her feel "a sense of control." When she holds it, she can see the way it sees—she can "see people moving like bright animated dolls [...] without feeling anything else about them."

Elaine's own cat's eye marble allows her to see clearly. It symbolizes the importance of clarity and trusting one's own identity, as her secret change in perspective totally changes her attitude even though her situation remains much the same.

This year, Elaine's family waits until very late to leave for the summer. They rent a cabin on the shore of Lake Superior, and Elaine feels relieved. She finds a dead raven in the woods, and seems to think "it's lucky that it can't feel anything." Stephen has developed an interest in butterflies and walks alone in the woods with a journal seeking different butterflies that he can record. Elaine's favorite is the luna moth; Stephen finds one and shows it to her, though he tells her not to touch it as the dust will come off its wings, and it won't be able to fly anymore. Elaine begins to have scary dreams, full of symbols—**the cat's eye**, **the wooden bridge** over the ravine, and nightshade berries. She doesn't dream about Cordelia. Elaine's mother think she is happy.

This summer trip is full of potent symbols, from the dead raven that Elaine envies—which reveals the extent of her self-destructive attitudes—to the luna moth, which represents Elaine's own experience. A delicate touch can totally impede its ability to fly, which is an analogy for the way that Cordelia treats Elaine; on the surface, the words she says are not too extreme, but they decimate Elaine's ability to protect herself and to grow. Elaine's dreams show the extent to which she has internalized the specific negative attitudes of Cordelia—however, she displaces negative thoughts about Cordelia into these symbolic dreams, because she is not prepared to confront her relationship.

PART SIX: CAT'S EYE

Elaine has a cappuccino in Simpson's department store, thinking about how different it looks from her childhood; as Eaton's, it used to be full of bargain clothes and wrenches, but now has become the resplendent home of imported chocolates, gourmet food, and even an espresso counter. Elaine feels overwhelmed in the presence of so much indulgence and is only comforted by the fact that she can see a shoe repair counter, which implies that people still get their shoes cared for instead of throwing them out at the first sign of wear. She thinks about the shoes of her childhood, most of which were brown and matched the pot roast done in the pressure cooker. Everything was sturdier then, from shoes to food. Elaine's mother did most of the cooking back home even though it wasn't her favorite thing; she was generally not fond of housework, though she liked making cakes.

The changes at Simpson's make Elaine feel conflicted, in part because she has to reflect on the contrast to her childhood, noting what has changed with time. The biggest shift here is in one from thrift to luxury. Throughout the novel, Elaine reflects that she misses this bargain mentality that came with wartime and rationing. In this passage, she actually associates this new luxury with flimsiness and things being consistently thrown away.

Down in the steamer trunk in the cellar, they had a whole set of silverware that was never brought up or displayed because it would have had to be polished. Elaine wonders if her mother knew what was happening at the time, and thinks about what she would have done in her position—there weren't the same options back then, and a lot was not said.

Elaine's mother clearly did not thrive under typical gender roles of the time—she liked neither cleaning nor cooking, but had to take on the majority of those responsibilities due to those social trends.

Elaine made a series of paintings of her mother once, a double triptych that she called *Pressure Cooker*. It showed her mother in her bib apron, first in colored pencil, then as a collage of illustrations from the old *Ladies' Home* magazines and finally all white and made of pipe cleaners, "as if she were dissolving." The next image was the same series but went from white to realistic and depicted her mother wearing her slacks, boots, and man's jacket and making chokecherry jam at an outdoor fire, as if it were a materialization. Elaine made the paintings after her mother died, though critics thought it was about the Earth Goddess. Elaine wanted to make her mother timeless, though she knows the paintings "are drenched in time."

When her mother is forced into a gender role that she finds oppressive, she is represented as disappearing—in fact, the imagery matches the way that Elaine felt as a child when she was bullied by Cordelia, which drives home the self-negation inherent in trying to match oneself to someone else's vision. The other image shows a form of liberation, which involves objects and behavior that are not traditionally feminine and show the idiosyncrasies behind individual identity.

On the street, Elaine sees a woman lying on the sidewalk. Although everyone walks around her, Elaine stops. The woman addresses her as "lady" and asks for help. Elaine feels that the word "lady" has been through a lot, having to describe "Noble lady, Dark Lady, she's a real lady, Listen lady, Hey lady watch where you're going," among other things. A passing man dismisses the woman as "only drunk," which annoys Elaine because she sees being that drunk as hell enough. She helps the woman up, and, in a voice of pure neediness and woe, the woman begs Elaine not to leave her all alone. Elaine gives her some money, and the woman says Elaine is "**Our Lady**" and doesn't love her, which Elaine agrees with—her eyes remind her of Cordelia's. Elaine tries to convince herself that she's a good person, but she knows that she is "vengeful, greedy, secretive, and sly."

The interaction that Elaine has with the woman on the street calls up the theme of religion, because the woman refers to Elaine as "our lady," which is both a reference to the Virgin Mary and an often sexist term applied to women, as Elaine thinks about it. Although Elaine decides to help her, this moment makes her think about herself as a vengeful and greedy person—at this point, it is unclear if this inner voice is a manifestation of the internalized bullying from her childhood (a representation of Cordelia) or if there is something else that has happened in Elaine's life by now to make her view herself this way.

When they come back in September, Elaine feels like Cordelia is backing her towards the edge of a cliff. She used to alternate between kindness and malice with periods of indifference, but now has become harsher and more relentless, as though she wants to see how far she can go. Elaine and Carol are in Grade Five, and they have Mrs. Stuart as their teacher, who is Scottish, and whom all the students love. She keeps a bunch of dried heather on her desk, along with hand lotion that she made herself, and in the afternoons she makes herself a cup of tea that smells of something that she pours into it from a silver bottle.

Elaine's relationship with Cordelia has shifted inexplicably for the worse, although it was already fairly extreme—this escalation starts to foreshadow the sense that their relationship will have to reach some kind of breaking or turning point, eventually. Meanwhile, having Mrs. Stuart as a teacher provides Elaine with another model of womanhood, albeit an incongruous one—she mixes keeping soft hands with drinking alcohol at work.

To keep herself sane, Elaine holds onto the **cat's eye.** Cordelia, Grace, and Carol walk ahead and she pictures Cordelia and Grace and Carol disappearing, and thinks about committing suicide with the nightshade berries or Javex from the laundry room. She doesn't want to do those things because she is afraid of them, but she also hears Cordelia's voice in her head telling her to do them and knows that she would do them to please her. She thinks about telling her brother, but is afraid he will make fun of her for being a sissy. She also thinks that he would be "helpless" against the indirectness of girls and their whispering methods.

Elaine starts experiencing severe suicidal ideation, and the fact that she hears Cordelia in her head shows the extent to which she has utterly internalized Cordelia's voice. This kind of internalized malice must necessarily shift Elaine's self-conception, which also bleeds into her fears about telling Stephen about the bullying. These fears have somewhat gendered roots, as Elaine is anxious both that Stephen will not take her situation seriously, and that even if he did, he would be powerless against their methods. She feels somehow that the methods Cordelia uses to mistreat her are difficult to pin down and combat, because of their secrecy and indirect nature.

One day, Elaine is greasing muffin tins with her mother when her mother says vaguely that she does not need to play with the other girls, and that there must be other girls she could play with instead. Elaine looks at her mother and feels miserable; she worries that her mother will tell the other mothers, which would be the worst thing that she could do. She also can't quite imagine it, as her mother is different from other mothers and does not fit in with the idea of them—she is airy and hard to pin down, and does not inhabit a house the way that other mothers do. Other mothers don't skate on the neighborhood rink or walk in the ravine by themselves.

This interaction between Elaine and her mother is eerie, because it indicates that the bullying that Elaine has been undergoing was not as covert as she thought it was. While that secrecy almost justified the bullying by normalizing Cordelia's behavior and making it appear unnoticeable, this interaction indicates that the behavior was actually being deliberately ignored.

Elaine's mother says that when she was little and kids called her names, they used to say "sticks and stones will break my bones but names will never hurt me"; Elaine responds that they don't call her names because they are her friends; she believes this. Her mother tells her she needs to stand up for herself and have a backbone, which makes Elaine think of the easily crumbled backbones of sardines. What's happening to her must be her own fault, for having too little backbone. Her mother then confesses that she feels powerless; instead of responding, Elaine takes the tin of muffins from her and puts them into the oven.

This passage suggests that with age and adulthood does not come wisdom or immediate answers to all problems; Elaine's mother, quite frankly, does not know what to do about her daughter's situation. Instead of comforting her, however, she tries to advise her daughter by minimizing the severity of the problem and telling her to stand up for herself, which shows that she does not fully understand Elaine. This interaction places Elaine in conflict with her mother and with her family in general, as it proves that she cannot trust them for support or protection in a meaningful way—she has to solve her problems herself, but to do so she would have to first acknowledge that this mistreatment is a problem, and not just a sign of friendship.

Cordelia brings a pocket mirror to school and holds it up to Elaine's face, demanding that she look at herself. Elaine sees her face, but doesn't see anything outside the ordinary—just the dark spots on her lips where she's bitten off the skin. During this time, Her parents host bridge parties, and many people come, filling the house with the alien scent of cigarettes. Elaine lies in bed feeling left out as she listens to the bursts of laughter coming from below. She doesn't understand why this activity is called bridge when it's nothing like a **bridge**. When Mr. Banerji comes, Elaine feels hopeful because she feels that if he can deal with whatever is after him, she can too.

By forcing Elaine to look at herself in the mirror, Cordelia attempts to confuse Elaine about the border between being normal and being abnormal (in contemporary discourse, this is called "gaslighting"). Meanwhile, Elaine is able to attain a sense of future through her identification with Mr. Banerji—she can picture a time in the future where things will have changed for the better in her life, all because of her ability to identify with him.

Soon, Princess Elizabeth comes to visit Toronto on a Royal Visit—the news captivates Elaine, who follows her progress in the papers. She memorizes the route and thinks that she will have a good chance to see her, as the path should pass right by their house on the road with its bulldozed earth and mud mountains. Elaine looks forward to the visit and feels that she is expecting something, although she cannot exactly identify what. She knows that this is the same princess who is supposed to have "defied the bombs in London" and be brave and heroic. In the end, the event is brief and crowded, and Elaine stands with her Union Jack, unable at first to tell which car is the correct one. Elaine finally spots a pale glove waving from the window, and she realizes that what she really wanted was to throw herself in front of the car, but instead she just stands there and does not move.

Elaine builds up grand but vague expectations surrounding the princess's tour because of the associations she has between the princess and the war—Elizabeth symbolizes this ability to withstand severe destruction and come out heroic, the process of turning pain into growth and seeing that suffering has some ultimate benefit or meaning. However, these grand visions are cut short when Elaine spots nothing more than a pale glove and finds herself unable to turn her symbolic identification with the princess into the real ability to leap in front of the car. She is impotent, which ties both to a lack of willpower on her part in this moment and to the underlying knowledge that visions and fantasy often do not match reality.

Miss Stuart, who likes art, has the students do a number of art projects, from seasonal paper cutouts for the windows to group murals with pictures of foreign countries. Elaine particularly likes art projects about foreign people and places, because it helps her think of escape. It doesn't bother her that her teachers at Sunday school have told her that these kinds of people are heathens or starving and need to be converted, fed, and educated, and that Miss Lumley saw them as crafty and treacherous. Miss Stuart presents foreign places as beautiful, sunny, and simply different, and Elaine pictures herself visiting them one day.

For the first time, Elaine experiences the way that she can connect to others and to herself through art—whether it be learning about foreign cultures or her own life, the process of engaging with art allows an escape from her own reality. When it comes to experiencing other cultures, Elaine enjoys learning beautiful new perspectives (which, importantly, contradict the narratives she learns in church, planting the seeds of dissent).

One day, Miss Stuart asks the students to draw what they do after school, and while most students draw skipping ropes and themselves playing with a dog, Elaine feels stuck. She ends up drawing her bed with herself lying in it, and then colors in the night with a black crayon until the whole picture becomes so dark that only the faint outline of her bed and her head on the pillow remain. The picture disappoints and dismays her, as it differs from what the other children have drawn and she feels like it was the wrong thing to draw. She thinks Miss Stuart will dislike it and tell her that she "has more between her ears than that." However, Miss Stuart just asks her why the picture is so dark, and touches her briefly on the shoulder. Elaine feels the touch "glow briefly, like a blown-out match."

The picture that Elaine creates about her own life unearths decidedly unbeautiful themes. Elaine's drawing reveals the darkness dominant in her thoughts—her sense of isolation, loneliness, and the degree to which Cordelia's bullying has begun to shape her identity. However, there is a turning point when she expects to be criticized for the wrongness of her picture and receives support instead. Elaine learns that the thoughts in her head and heart might be understood and accepted through her art, without needing to be beautified or toned down, which helps explain her later career as a painter.

On Valentine's Day, Elaine gets the most cards from boys, though she hides them. Carol has started growing breasts and wearing lipstick, which makes Cordelia jealous because even though she is older she doesn't have any sign of breasts yet. Carol pinches her cheeks to make them red, though when her mother catches her, she calls her cheap and says that she is making a spectacle of herself. Carol later says that she is being beaten by her father with a belt, which is hard for them to reconcile with the image of Mr. Campbell as a man with a soft mustache who calls Grace "Beautiful Brown Eyes" and Cordelia "Miss Lobelia."

At this stage, the passage of time begins to be marked in the girls' bodies and in shifting social attitudes. Elaine starts to receive approval from outside of her circle in the form of these valentines, and this decision to hide them from the other girls shows the beginnings of a rebellion or at least a distancing in her. Cordelia's cruel envy over Carol's changing body reveals some of her own insecurities and potential motivations for lashing out at the other girls, while the experiences that Carol describes further reinforce the difference between how people might seem on the outside and how they experience the world.

Elaine knows that fathers are enigmatic, like Mr. Smeath with his secret life of trains and escapes. Elaine thinks that all fathers except her own are "invisible in the daytime, as daytime is ruled by mothers"—"fathers come home with the darkness," and that there is more to them "than meets the eyes." Carol also shows the girls her (Carol's) mother's contraceptives hidden in a drawer. She lies on her bed and pretends to be sick, and Cordelia says that they have to listen to her heart and pulls up her shirt. She asks Elaine to feel her heart, and Elaine does so even though she doesn't want to; she feels Carol's breast like "a balloon half filled with water," and Cordelia makes fun of Elaine for touching Carol's breast instead of her heart.

Elaine associates mothers and fathers with times of day, or rather with differing social practices, as the day is typically ruled by routines and normalcy, while the night is more eerie and difficult to pin down. Part of the cruelty of the girls and women Elaine knows might, in part, stem from their chafing at the strict daytime expectations placed on their shoulders—unable to live out nuanced selves in the daytime, they lash out secretly at others. The set-up where Elaine is made to feel Carol's breast ties into this, as the whole game is based on shame associated with the developing female body and the sense that it is not normal to touch or embrace it—the girls use roleplaying games in order to act out their own discomfort and shame, and project it onto each other.

Elaine's mother is taken to the hospital all of a sudden when an ambulance comes in the middle of the night, and their father says that it was an accident—Stephen think she had a miscarriage. He was awake when the ambulance arrived because he had stayed up to watch the stars after the city lights had been turned off, and saw flashing lights but no siren. When Elaine wakes up in the morning, she sees a pile of folded sheets and some blood on the mattress, but it has been cleaned up by the time she comes home from school. Elaine's mother is quieter and weaker when she comes home from the hospital, and is expected to rest.

This bitter scene depicting Elaine's mother's miscarriage partially serves to remind us that Elaine herself is merely a child at this point—she misses as much about the life and suffering of her family members as they do of hers. She has to read the event out of the signs left behind, like the sheets and bloody mattress, her mother's exhaustion, and the certainty that Stephen feels about the event.

Sometimes Elaine has to repeat herself before her mother registers that she's speaking, as she appears to have gone off somewhere else or forgotten that Elaine was there. Elaine finds this much more frightening than the blood, and knows that her father is frightened too because he asks the children to help out more. Once her mother gets better, Elaine find a single small knitted sock in her basket. She dreams that her real parents are Mrs. Finestein and Mr. Banerji, and that her mother has had a baby—one of a set of twins, and the other is missing. She also dreams that her house has burned down, and that her parents are "dead but also alive," lying side by side and "sinking into the transparent earth."

Elaine's mother goes through a trauma of her own, which causes her to withdraw into herself. In many ways, this withdrawal mirrors Elaine's own, and thereby reinforces the sense that both of these women can only cope by pulling back from the outside world. Elaine's dreams can be interpreted in various ways, but the recurrent themes are of a reality that doesn't quite match expectations. Something or someone is missing, and catastrophe looms on the horizon. These dreams reflect Elaine's deep unhappiness about her own life, her simultaneous withdrawal from her family in her fantasies about having different parents. and her sense of loss in these dreams about a missing twin child and her parents dying in a housefire.

Elaine goes to a Conversat with her father, Stephen, and his friend Danny. It's like a museum, with lots of visitors and educational displays that include things like chicken embryos and a human brain in a bottle; it looks "like a flabby grey walnut" and Elaine has a hard time believing that she has one in her head. In another room, they get their fingerprints taken, and Danny and Stephen goof around by putting fingerprints on each other's foreheads. They also see a turtle hooked up to a machine with its beating heart exposed. Looking at it makes Elaine think of an eye, or a hand clenching and unclenching; she does not want to stay in the room, but it's too crowded for her to leave. Elaine faints. She realizes that "fainting lets her step out of time, because when you wake up it's later and time has gone on without you."

The trip to Conversat depicts the distance that has been growing between Stephen and Elaine, as he prefers running around with his friend to spending time with her; science, which used to be a space of intimacy for the two of them, has become yet another distancing point. The turtle with its heart openly exposed recalls Mrs. Smeath's bad heart, which Elaine has already been disturbed by. The exposed heart also shows vulnerability, pain, and exposure, as well as the ability to live on, much like Elaine's own situation. However, Elaine feels threatened by this vulnerability—she pictures the heart as an eye, and feels potentially watched by it. However, the fainting is a significant response, as Elaine learns to separate her mind and her body in times of crisis. The fact that she sees this as stepping out of time reinforces the novel's conception of time as something experienced subjectively.

Around this time, Cordelia makes up a new game. Elaine is supposed to picture ten stacks of plates for her ten chances—every time she does something wrong, Cordelia says "crash!" and a stack of plates breaks. One day during recess, Elaine teaches herself to faint on command; she starts doing it every time she feels overwhelmed, but no one can prove that she is doing it on purpose. She becomes known as the girl who faints, and feels a "little blurred and transparent" every time she does it, as though "she doesn't have to pay attention to the things being said to her."

The mysterious game that Cordelia invents to torment Elaine represents the ultimate symbol of her actions: what she seeks is pure power and criticism that does not need any specificity—she can cruelly make the plates crash whenever she wants with no need to attach real thoughts or words. Elaine manages to escape with her fainting game, though this method still involves self-harm and self-destruction. However, it also involves taking control of her own experience of time—if she can step out of her own life, she cannot be touched, at least temporarily.

PART SEVEN: OUR LADY OF PERPETUAL HELP

Back in the present, Elaine buys a slice of pizza and returns to the studio. She tries calling Ben, but he's in Mexico. It's dark outside, so she crawls back into bed. She looks through the phone book, and doesn't find any Campbells, or any other Risleys, or Josef Hrbik, or Cordelia. She remembers earlier on in her relationship to Jon, when she got angry about a woman who walked into his apartment while Elaine was in bed and threw a bag of spaghetti at Elaine and Jon—Elaine didn't yet realize that the woman might have had a key and a reason to come in, so Elaine was furious at the woman instead of upset with Jon. However, Elaine didn't pity her and actually somewhat admired her, for having the courage of her bad manners; at that point, Elaine felt herself to be far from being able to do anything like that.

Elaine still cannot seem to settle in to Toronto, and seems uneasy with spending this much time alone—this shows her tendency to retreat to the past when left to her own devices. She reflects on all of the people who have been important in her life, which suggests that she has integrated them into her own identity to a degree. The specific memories about Jon involve a scene with another woman earlier in that relationship that indicated that he was actually having an affair with Elaine, and already had a girlfriend. The way that Elaine reacted to the woman entering the apartment shows her discomfort with other women and her tendency to trust men instead. Elaine seems to see herself as in competition with other women, which might have its origin in her complex relationship to Cordelia, but may also have deeper social origins. However, Elaine also immediately admires this woman for her freedom and courage, which shows that she has a desire to exhibit that kind of wild emotional behavior and still does not see it as a part of herself.

One time when she goes to dinner at the Smeaths' after church, Elaine overhears Mrs. Smeath and Aunt Mildred talking about her. They insult her and her family, and make it clear that they find them inferior and "heathen." They even discuss the way that the other girls treat her and say that it serves her right and that it's God's punishment. Even though they notice her watching, they do not apologize. Elaine is frozen with hate—but she can't go as far as to hate her friends, so she directs all of her hatred at Mrs. Smeath, because she knew about and approved of the activities that Elaine had thought were secret all of this time. Elaine pictures Mrs. Smeath's bad heart floating in her body like an evil eye and looking at her.

The moment that Elaine overhears this conversation between Mrs. Smeath and Aunt Mildred marks the end in her hopeful relationship to religion. She now has come to see the illusions of love and care as falsehoods designed to make her see herself as all the more abnormal. The version of religion faith shown here is one of endless striving, where a person can try to fit in and follow the rules, but ultimately cannot escape their background. The way that these adult women treat Elaine resembles the way her own friends treat her, with cruelty disguised as helpful gossip, but is all the more unforgivable as the two are adults: it cannot be disguised as mere childhood games that Elaine will escape with age.

Elaine stops singing along to hymns when she goes to church, and she stops praying to God. When Grace notices, she tells Elaine to tell God that she's sorry, and says that that is what she does every night. This surprises Elaine, as she doesn't believe that Grace thinks she has done anything wrong. One day, while walking behind Cordelia, Grace, and Carol, Elaine sees a paper with a picture of the **Virgin Mary** on the ground, and decides to pray to her instead. She picks it up and takes it home, and although the girls tell her not to take trash off the streets, they don't seem to notice that she's brought it with her. Elaine tries to picture what Mary would look like and prays harder and harder to her, squeezing her fists into her eyes until they hurt. She think she sees a face for a second, and then sees a heart that almost looks like her red plastic purse.

Elaine's act of rebellion is not to reject the church outright, but to start praying to the Virgin Mary, who seems to represent a kind of feminine protection that Elaine sorely lacks. Elaine does not believe in rituals designed merely for false apologies—in fact, the apologies that Grace suggests Elaine make to God are reminiscent of the false modesty that the young girls showed earlier in the novel when they pretended to think they were bad at cutting out figures from magazines for their scrapbooks.

One day in the middle of March, Elaine starts laughing with the other girls when Cordelia falls. They were on their way home towards the wooden footbridge, and Cordelia slipped down a hill. Enraged at the laughter, she throws Elaine's knitted hat down the **ravine** and makes her go fetch it. Elaine considers refusing at first, because the girls are not supposed to go down in the ravine, where bad men were reported to have been seen in the past. However, she knows that if she comes home without her hat, she will have to explain herself to her mother. She also fears what Cordelia might do if she refuses—she does not want her to get angry, never speak to her again, or push her off the bridge. Cordelia also tells her that once she has gotten the hat, she should count to a hundred before she's allowed to come back up to the bridge.

This passage contains one of the novel's most significant climaxes. Significantly, the moment is marked by a reversal of roles: Elaine laughs at Cordelia in much the same way that Cordelia always belittles her. This laughter becomes the catalyst for the ultimate power play: Cordelia throwing Elaine's hat down into the ravine, that symbolic place where bad men and dead bodies abound, and demanding that Elaine follow after it. Cordelia does not touch Elaine physically even now, and makes no concrete threats. Nothing actually binds Elaine to the decision to go down to the ravine after her hat, except the secrecy behind their manipulative dynamic and the extent to which Elaine has already internalized Cordelia's authority. Elaine does not have an identity independent of Cordelia at this point—she cannot say no, because she cannot imagine justifying her decision, even if she is able to feel a sense of resentment towards the task.

Looking at her hat, which has landed on the ice, makes Elaine angry—she thinks it's a stupid hat and she's angry that it belongs to her; she never wants to wear it again. Nevertheless, she steps into the creek and is immediately immersed up to her waist in the freezing water. The girls leave while she she's fetching her hat, hence the counting to a hundred. After wading into the icy water, Elaine feels frozen in place in the river and has a hard time moving her feet. She thinks about what Cordelia said once, about the water being made of dissolved dead people. She manages to pull herself to the side but she blacks out in pain from the cold, unable to move until she sees and hears the figure of a woman on the riverbank, who tells her to go home. She thinks it's the **Virgin Mary**.

Immersed in the icy water, Elaine has a near-death experience, both in terms of the risk to her body and the sense she has of being immersed in dead bodies via the cold water. The vision she has of the Virgin Mary frees her and rescues her, though it's unclear to what degree her vision is attached to reality. What is clear, however, is that this vision allows Elaine to separate from Cordelia and to follow orders from someone more connected to her own internal voice—still a projection, but one that has Elaine's better interests in mind.

Elaine finally manages to haul herself out of the **ravine** once the lights are already all out. Nothing hurts anymore, and she feels like she's flying. Once on the lit main path, she sees her mother walking quickly towards her, having not donned her coat or put on a scarf or mittens. She throws her arms around Elaine, who explains that she fell in the river because her hat accidentally fell over the bridge. She lies and says that Cordelia, Grace, and Carol had not been with her, and says that a lady helped her. Elaine stays home from school for a couple of days. She spends the time thinking back on what had happened, remembering Cordelia throwing the hat and her mother running towards her with clarity but feelings fuzzier about the river of dead people and the appearance of the **Virgin Mary**.

In the aftermath of her near-death experience, Elaine returns to her mother and finally manages to break off her toxic relationships. This encounter with her mother is interesting, as the urgency indicates that her mother had already had enough reason to worry about Elaine, though she had not intervened to this point, and as Elaine still defends Cordelia and lies about their presence at the bridge. Even after the ultimate betrayal, Elaine has no interest in publicizing their dynamic. However, she does get lost in her own memories, which are already disappearing, much as they did when the girls buried her alive—in some ways, forgetting seems to be a protective mechanism, a way of stepping out of time to an extent and rewriting the past, though it could also be interpreted as post-traumatic repression.

Elaine receives a get-well card from Carol, and a rehearsed telephone apology from Cordelia. When she gets back to school, Cordelia accuses her of telling on them because her mother had called all of their mothers, and says that Elaine deserves punishment. However, this time Elaine contradicts her and says that she didn't tell. When Cordelia calls her insolent, she turns around and walks away. She has finally realized that the whole situation was a game, and hears hatred and need in their voices when the girls follow her. She quits Sunday school and refuses to play with any of the girls anymore, even when they try to lure her back with kindness. She makes friends with a girl name Jill, with whom she plays games like Old Maid, and slowly forgets about her old friends.

When Elaine finally walks away from Cordelia, she proves that the nature of these games all along had required her to be complicit: as soon as Elaine refused to harm herself, the girls had no power over her. One of the novel's deepest lessons lies in this moment where Elaine rejects Cordelia, as it demonstrates the degree to which people who victimize desperately need their victims—they desire and need this power over them, but it's a power that they can never fully possess.

PART EIGHT: HALF A FACE

Elaine describes how she used to go into churches to read the inscriptions and seek out statues, especially of the **Virgin Mary**. She never sought the churches out and never entered during services, but would stumble upon them by accident and go in impulsively. She preferred Catholic churches to Protestant, because she loved the shameless extravagance. However, she usually ended up disappointed because they did not live up to her expectations, though she never knew what she was expecting.

Although Elaine seems to have lost the sense of religious faith that she developed as a child, her relationship to churches, and to the Virgin Mary in particular, carries over for the rest of her life. She seems to be drawn to the aesthetics of the church as much as anything else—the extravagant willingness to dedicate everything to the practice of religion. While Elaine herself cannot be consumed by dogma, she seems to have an interest in obsession and in belief, these qualities that can order people's lives and provide comfort.

Elaine remembers going to Mexico with Ben on their first trip together, before she knew that their relationship was going to be long term. Ben went to the market to take pictures, while Elaine ended up walking into a poor and grubby-looking church, where the paintings of the stations of the cross seemed to have been done awkwardly but by someone who really believed. She suddenly saw a **statue of Mary, the Virgin of Lost Things** and ended up sitting in front of her for a long time, until Ben came and found her and asked her what she was doing; she hadn't even realized that she had ended up on the ground.

The Virgin of Lost Things that Elaine finds in Mexico is a particular example of her interest in belief, although instead of placing a lost object in front of the statue the way that the visitors did, Elaine sits herself in front of it, implying that there is a degree to which she still sees herself as a lost thing.

Elaine also thinks about the different phases that her daughters went through—when they were about twelve or thirteen, they took to folding their arms, staring at whoever they were talking to, and saying "*So?*" meaning *So what*. Cordelia did the same thing when she was that age, and Elaine always felt like there was no answer to that question. Cordelia had "made her believe that she was nothing."

Elaine's weakened sense of self traces back to Cordelia, whom Elaine saw echoed in her own children. Even as an adult, Elaine has a hard time protecting her self-worth, and still sees herself as nothing thanks to one toxic friend who pushed her to see herself that way. This suggests that a person can form their identity in relation to the way it is reflected back by other people. In Elaine's case, this means that extended pain and conflict with another person can indelibly shape her own identity.

Time passes, the King dies and is replaced by Queen Elizabeth, who used to be Princess Elizabeth—Elaine feels like her memories of the princess make her uneasy. Cordelia and Grace skip a grade to end up in Grade Eight, whereas Elaine and Carol are only in Grade Six at a new school, which has been built on their side of the **ravine**, so they no longer have to take the school bus or walk over **the collapsing footbridge** on their way home. Elaine forgets the period at her old school, and can no longer remember any of the bullying—not the plates, not **the Virgin** appearing to her in the ravine.

The change in the British royalty remains an important one even for these Canadian students, which shows the long-running influence of the war on their national culture—at the same time, Elaine's relationship to the English monarchy becomes more complicated with time. The changes in her daily routines are drastic in this section—with the end of her relationship to Cordelia comes a change in school, which means that she no longer has to cross the fateful ravine. This symbolizes a positive change for her, as the ravine was associated with death and decay.

Elaine remembers having been friends with Cordelia, Carol, and Grace, but they all seem flattened to her, and "their names are like footnotes or the names of distant cousins"—there is no emotion attached to them; "time is missing." However, no one mentions this missing time to Elaine except her mother, who sometimes mentions that bad time she had. She has a happy life, but feels closed off. Her parents work on their garden, and someone tears down the bridge at the ravine in order to replace it with a concrete bridge. One day, Elaine stands at the hill and watches **the bridge** come down—she has an uneasy feeling, "as if there's something still buried down there or someone still standing on the bridge, left in the air by mistake and unable to get to land"—however, it's obvious to her that there is actually no one.

Although only a year has passed, Elaine forgets her most traumatic memories, which makes it seem that she might move on unscathed from this period in her life. However, she perceives this as missing time, not as an improved and unbroken set of memories, and this missing time messes with her identity. Elaine feels uneasy because unspoken memories have entrenched themselves in her psyche, but she can no longer put words or mental images to them. Most significant is the anxiety she feels around the destruction of the bridge. While she perhaps should feel relief at the destruction of a place full of such bad memories, she instead gets caught up in the sense that something important has been left either buried (this could be the marbles that Stephen buried) or in the air (which might represent the Virgin Mary, or Elaine herself).

Cordelia and Grace graduate, and Carol hangs around near boys and isn't much liked by other girls. Elaine has a boyfriend she seems ambivalent about, and sees her first television set. Eventually, Carol moves away, and Elaine skips Grade Seven and breaks up with her boyfriend. She gets a haircut because she is tired of having long hair and feeling like a child. She reorganizes her room, rediscovering the **cat's eye marble**, the red purse, and some chestnuts. She sees her old photo album but does not remember writing in it. She hides all these things in a trunk in her parents' basement, along with her mother's wedding dress, their collection of ornate silver, bridge tallies, and drawings from her childhood. She inspects the old drawings with distaste, because she thinks they are inept and that she could do much better now.

Time starts to pass more quickly as Elaine moves through school, and it's remarkable how unremarkable *the series of events that she records are: first boyfriend, first television set, and first short haircut. The objects that Elaine finds, both in her room and in the trunk, are significant in that they represent moments of the past that were once very important but do not contain strong residual emotional weight for Elaine. This shows that one of the ways that time passes as layers is through objects that last through time, even if memories do not—for instance, Elaine does not currently access the memories in connection with the marble, and she cannot access the memories of her mother in relation to the items in the trunk—however, those objects exist as a sort of congealed version of the time that passed with them.*

Cordelia's mother calls the day before high school begins; she wants the two girls to walk to school together, as they appear to be studying at the same high school. Elaine agrees, though her mother seems uncertain. When Elaine and Cordelia walk together, Elaine notices the things that have changed about her old friend, such as longer hair with a peroxide streak, and orange lipstick, and nail polish. Looking at Cordelia makes Elaine realizes that she doesn't look like a teenager yet, "just a kid dressed as one," and longs to be older. Cordelia has been held back, supposedly for getting caught drawing graffiti of a bat with a penis on it, so they are in the same grade at Burnham High School. At school, they have announcements every morning followed by Bible reading and prayers. All the girls at school are older and bigger than Elaine, which makes her feel self-conscious.

Although this reunion between Elaine and Cordelia feels like it ought to have some intense tension, the result is decidedly anticlimactic. Although Elaine still seems to regard Cordelia as an authority, in this case on teen womanhood and coolness, their interaction lacks the bullying and power plays of childhood. Furthermore, Cordelia has clearly not been as successful as Elaine, being held back for something inane while Elaine has skipped a grade—the wheels of power between the two appear to be shifting. At the same time, Elaine still pressures herself in comparison with her peers and tends to put herself down as juvenile and underdeveloped, which indicates that this process of internalizing shame is still part of her.

Elaine feels distanced from her emotions, which does make her feel older than some of the other kids. She feels calm, even though teenage years are supposed to be a whirlwind of emotions; sometimes she watches herself cry in the mirror. She sits with Cordelia at lunch, and they call boys "pills" and "creeps," words that don't apply to girls. Cordelia collects photos of celebrities, which she pins to the wall. They go to the record store together after school and try out records, though only Cordelia ever buys them because she has a higher allowance. They listen to Frank Sinatra, whom Cordelia particularly likes.

Elaine seems to be dissociating, which means she has a sort of mental block in place so that she cannot fully experience her feelings. Although this is likely a consequence of her bullying, she does not directly make that connection. Her relationship to Cordelia now seems like a generic female teenage friendship, and the two of them insult boys (implying a divide between the genders) and listen to popular records. The past appears to have been forgotten.

Perdie is in college now, and Mirrie is a senior in high school; they smoke and have developed a strange vocabulary. Cigarettes are "ciggie-poos," eggs are "eggie-poos," breakfast is "brekkers," and a pregnant woman is "preggers." The girls leave Cordelia out, and criticize her. Cordelia, meanwhile, starts shoplifting, which she calls "pinching." She pinches candy and lipstick, and then a pink scarf. Eventually she pinches two horror comics from the drugstore, which the girls read to each other while they are walking home; it gives Elaine nightmares, so she hides the comic she took in Stephen's room.

The world that Cordelia's sisters develop for themselves leaves her out, which sheds some light on Cordelia's childhood behavior—it seems like she treated Elaine much the same way that Cordelia's older sisters treated her. This reveals an underlying theory of identity formation: instead of necessarily rejecting traits in one's bullies, sometimes a person actually takes on *their bully's traits, perhaps as a method of assuming control. Otherwise, Elaine and Cordelia's relationship appears fairly stable at this point, with their main hobbies involving minor bouts of acting out—while one wonders why Cordelia feels the need for theft, it ultimately appears to tie into this anti-social rejection of adults and norms that Elaine also shows at other points in the story.*

One Sunday, Elaine sits with her family while her father draws spruce budworms, and her mother makes sandwiches. Their house has gone through some changes—they have a new radio and a record player, as well as stainless steel silverware. Their father has picked out these new items rather than their mother, who says that "all her taste is in her mouth" and doesn't care how an object looks as long as it's functional. She has taken up ice dancing, tangos, and waltzes, which Elaine finds mortifying, though she is glad that her mother at least practices indoors where no one will see. Elaine's mother "doesn't give a hoot about what other people think about her"; Elaine finds this irresponsible, though she does like the word "hoot." Elaine thinks her mother is more like a nonmother, and wishes that she too could have the luxury of not caring what other people think.

The passage of time has treated Elaine's family well, as represented by their financial success. Their father choosing how to decorate the house marks another way in which this family differs from typical families at the time, as women were expected to be responsible for household areas. Elaine's mother, however, is an idiosyncratic woman, as demonstrated by her unique dancing hobbies and her lack of regard for the opinions of others. Elaine appears to have a conflicted relationship with her mother in this sense, as she both experiences shame and jealousy in regards to her mother—because Elaine does not share this quality of not caring what others think, she has a harder time understanding her mother.

Stephen has a razor now, though he does not shave on the weekends. He studies in ragged clothing but has to dress nicely to go to his "private school for brainy boys." He studies math, and sometimes has friends over to play chess. Elaine brings them cookies on occasion, but is mostly left out. Now, when their father makes statements about the polar ice caps melting and the doomed fate of humanity, Stephen does not seem to care because in the big picture, the human race is just a blip.

Stephen has changed and is growing more distant from Elaine, diving both into his studies and his male friendships—his process of growing into adulthood involves rejecting the family and belittling his father's long-held passions, which reflects a common coming-of-age trend of needing to reject the past in order to move forward.

As an adult, Elaine now knows that her father wanted to be a pilot in the war, but was not allowed to do so, as his work was essential. She knows that he grew up on a farm and did his high school courses by correspondence, that he put himself through university by working in lumber camps and cleaning out rabbit hutches, and that he played country fiddle at square dances and was 22 years old before he first heard an orchestra. Learning these things about her father makes Elaine uncomfortable; she wants him to be just her father as she has always known him. She thinks that "knowing too much about other people puts you in their power" because you are forced to understand their reasons for doing things, and are then weakened.

Elaine resents learning about her father's past because of the vulnerability inherent in doing so. The war influenced him—and, by extension, Elaine's childhood—more than she had realized at the time. His career as a scientist is now implicated with military connotations, as this passage reveals that his research was considered relevant for the war, for inexplicable reasons—this shows the hidden connections between science and violence, a theme often discussed in relation to World War II given the invention of the highly catastrophic atomic bomb.

Elaine learns to make her own clothing in home economics and gets fashion advice next door from Mrs. Finestein. Sometimes she gets stuck doing dishes with Stephen, who condescendingly teaches her about space and time. He makes her a Möbius strip to visualize infinity and tries to convince her that the universe is multi-dimensional, including time, though she has a hard time picturing more than three dimensions. Stephen teaches her about space-time, which is what humans live in and which cannot be separated from space. He says that if you put one identical twin in a high-speed rocket for a week, he would come back to find his brother ten years older than he is himself—Elaine thinks that this is sad. Stephen also says the universe is like an expanding balloon covered in dots, and that if humans could travel fast enough they could go back in time.

The things that Elaine learns in school are a marker of times where girls learned home economics while boys learned more mechanical skills, though these classes do train her for independence—making things, instead of relying on others. Her interaction with Stephen while doing dishes shows that their relationship still has some closeness even though they've been growing apart in recent years. Only when forced to do dishes together do they interact extensively, but Stephen does share his world with Elaine, showing that he has not completely rejected his sister. The information that he shares with her about time will shape her indefinitely, as she did not previously know that time had so many dimensions. The reader already had this information and knew that Elaine would learn it from Stephen eventually, as the novel opened with a scene that follows this one, where Elaine explains this information to Cordelia.

In the summer, Stephen works as a canoeing teacher at a boys' camp, so Elaine travels alone with her parents to Sault Ste. Marie and exchanges letters with Stephen and Cordelia, who seems bored. Stephen ridicules everything he sees, from the camp counselors to the girls they have crushes on, while Cordelia writes in real ink and dots her eyes with little round circles and signs all her letters with thinks like "Yours till the sea wears rubber pants to keep its bottom dry." Elaine feels like she is just "marking time," and is "surly."

This anticlimactic summer marks the end of the section, which has been characterized by little action and an acceleration in the passage of time—the years take fewer pages to cover, and the events that do occur lack drama. In some ways, this testifies to the power of forgetting, as Elaine writes letters with her brother, who mostly neglects her during the year, and with Cordelia, who had bullied her so viciously as a child—she does not hold grudges or seem to perceive the past as part of the present, but instead develops a kind of antsy relationship to the passage of time.

PART NINE: LEPROSY

Charna tells Elaine that the article made front page in Entertainment. It was titled "*CROTCHETY ARTIST STILL HAS POWER TO DISTURB*," and reading it makes Elaine feel old. The article includes three pictures, one of her head, and two of paintings—the first painting was one of Mrs. Smeath, bare-naked and flying in the air with Mr. Smeath attached to her back like an asparagus beetle, the other also of Mrs. Smeath but alone with a paring knife and a potato, unclad from the waist up and the thighs down.

The article Andrea wrote about Elaine after her interview has obvious sexism in it, but Elaine seems more disturbed by the implications of her age—between the words "crochety" and "still," there is a passive aggressive indication of surprise that hints Elaine's time ought to already have passed. The paintings focus on Mrs. Smeath, whom Elaine hated as a child—the fact that she painted these scandalous images of that strict Christian woman indicates a cruelty in Elaine and in her animosity of Mrs. Smeath. Elaine paints Mrs. Smeath as she least would have liked to be seen.

Elaine is described as eminent, and unformidable due to her blue jogging suit, and their conversation is reduced to "deliberately provocative comments." Elaine feels tempted to be deliberately provocative at the opening in order to confirm everyone's deepest suspicions; she considers using Jon's ax-murder special effects, but at the same time knows that she would never do any of these things. She just finds it comforting to think about, because it distances her from the whole affair and reduces it to a prank. She hopes Cordelia will see the article, and thinks of the only picture she ever made of Cordelia, called *Half a Face*. Only half her face is visible, and she seems scared of Elaine. Elaine fears Cordelia—she fears being Cordelia, and feels that "somewhere along the line they changed places, though she has forgotten when."

Elaine's desire to act out shows her distaste for social norms—she wants to act out at her opening, but specifically to undermine people's expectations of her. However, Elaine's biggest rebellions remain fantasies; she wants to act wild, but it appears that the only true outlet for those feelings is her art. It's also important that part of her motivation to act out is to take these events less seriously—she wants distance and seems to fear earnestness, perhaps because she does not fully see these social rituals as real, or because she does not see herself as real or good enough. Her reflections on Cordelia are telling, as she believes that she has somehow switched places with Cordelia. Though there is no evidence of this in the girls' childhood narrative, it illuminates one of the novel's key themes about identity, and about how instead of arguing for a black and white narrative of good and evil, this novel reveals the ways that cruelty can breed cruelty in others, and that people can come to take on traits of the people they clash with because of the intensity of those relationships.

Elaine enters Grade 10 and gets her period, which makes her into one of the "knowing" who gets to sit out volleyball games and go to the nurse's office for aspirin. She starts shaving her legs, not because there's much there, but because the practice makes her feel good; while she does so, Stephen stands outside the bathroom and teases her for taking so long. At school she is silent and watchful and does her homework, which makes her a good student. Cordelia, on the other hand, is raucous, plucks her eyebrows, and paints her nails Fire and Ice. She always loses her homework and comes up with intricate swear words like *great flaming blue-eyed bald-headed Jesus*, and their teachers wonder why the two of them are friends.

Elaine relishes aging at this point, because it lets her fit in with other girls and expectations that society holds for women, like shaving and having periods. Meanwhile, Elaine and Cordelia only grow closer even as on the surface they appear to become increasingly different.

On the way home from school, Elaine and Cordelia sing witty parodies of popular songs and make snowballs that they throw at passing cars, though they also once hit a woman by mistake. They start making fun of Grace Smeath and her family, calling them the "Lump-lump Family." Cordelia remembers all sorts of details about them, like the fact that they had rationed newspaper, and Elaine happily plays along into the game of making fun of the Smeaths through savage jokes.

Cordelia does not seem to fit in at school and likes to antagonize others, but Elaine plays along now that the targets are things like religion, passing cars, and the Smeaths. This shows how insidious this kind of bullying is, and how easy it is to build an "us" versus "them" mentality—Elaine plays along with these insulting stories about the Smeaths, mostly targeted around their class background (as seen through the rationed toilet paper), despite her own history of bullying.

They also break into the cemetery and smoke cigarettes. Elaine tells lies about Mrs. Smeath, claiming that she is a vampire and that Elaine herself is one too. Cordelia feels uncomfortable about these lies but can't keep up with Elaine, so she just calls her silly. However, Elaine keeps up the ruse, saying that she has been dead for years and that she won't suck Cordelia's blood because she is her friend. Eventually, they have to run out of the cemetery to avoid being locked in. Cordelia wants to point to the "Lump-lump Family cars," but Elaine tires of this game—instead, she privately relishes what she sees as her triumph over Cordelia; she is stronger than Cordelia now.

This us-versus-them dynamic culminates in a chilling moment where Elaine turns this savage attitude against Cordelia, by pretending that she is a vampire and making Cordelia feel uncomfortable and left out. While the joke itself is not explicitly cruel, it resembles Cordelia's early cruelty, as it's meant to create a destabilizing effect on the other person and establish authority. In fact, Elaine wants to triumph over and dominate Cordelia, which is identical to what Cordelia had been to her. In this sense, the two are more similar than different, which starts to erase the sense of special cruelty to Cordelia's actions, and reveals it to be scarier by normalizing it.

In Grade 11, Elaine has finally started to catch up to the girls in her class in terms of height. She has become known for her mean mouth, which she only uses when provoked—she makes short, devasting comments directed mostly at girls. The girls in her class fear her, but also respect her—on the surface, Elaine makes more friends because of her meanness, because people want to protect themselves against her. Boys don't draw her attention as much, except Stephen, and the two of them exchange verbal meanness with each other as a kind of a game.

Elaine becomes mean in Grade 11, both at home and at school, which marks the completion of her trading roles with Cordelia. Meanness becomes a form of self-protection—paradoxically, the more negative energy Elaine puts out into the world, the more friends she has, at least on the surface. This shows how many relationships can be built on a foundation of fear rather than trust, and how especially female cruelty focuses on words rather than deeds. A "mean mouth" defines Elaine, rather than something more tangible that can be traced back to her.

Elaine's father says that her sharp tongue will get her in trouble, but it doesn't effectively tone her down because Elaine likes crossing the line of the socially acceptable and feeling like she is taking some kind of risk. She mostly uses her mean mouth on Cordelia—she insults the guys that Cordelia likes, and makes her feel stupid. Meanwhile, they start to learn about the Blitz and World War II in history class; Elaine feels amazed that she's studying a period of history that she lived through. She draws during class, though she has trouble drawing hands.

Elaine's justification for her meanness focuses on crossing lines and taking risks, which speaks to the sense of discomfort she continues to feel with social norms. She targets Cordelia most of all, allegedly her best friend, which reinforces the theme of complex and fraught female relationships. At the same time, the girls start to study World War II, which they all lived through, revealing how rapidly national crisis can become part of myth and history through the establishment of distance, facts, and narrative. At the same time, Elaine seems disinterested in that history, preferring to take refuge in art, which is more of distraction for her at this stage.

Elaine starts dating boys, which was not a conscious plan of hers and just sort of happens; the relationships are completely effortless—they want to escape adults and other boys, and she wants to escape and other girls, so she finds it a good fit. Elaine feels like she understands boys and understands how they think about women—she believes they are fearful about their bodies and about being laughed at or ridiculed, and that leads to them lashing out at women. Elaine does not hold their negative words about women against them, because she doesn't think that the use of those words means that they dislike real girls—they are a pure manifestation of these fears.

Elaine manifests the classics "not like other girls" attitude in high school, as she becomes welcomed by boys with ease. Elaine perceives insecurity in the bravado of boys, who are expected to act certain ways by everyone around them, and respond by lashing out at women. They actually resemble Elaine, in some ways, with this tendency to lash out as a means of protecting against ridicule or vulnerability. This understanding of male sexism that Elaine develops sets the tone for some of her difficulties with dogmatic feminism later on; she does not believe that men hate women, but rather that men have an image of women created in their heads out of their fears, and they hate this image.

Furthermore, Elaine does not think any of these words (like "stunned broad" and "bitch") apply to her at all, only to the kinds of girls who walk through high school halls trying to be seductive and ignoring the existence of those words. The way to get around them is to walk in the spaces between them and to evade them, like walking through walls. Even when her parents express concern about her, Elaine dismisses them; she's growing into her independence. Although Elaine seems to see all of these boys as similar and does not fall in love, she enjoys their bodies and the process of getting to know them at movie theaters or after school dances.

Despite her understanding of male sexism, Elaine herself has clearly internalized some sexist ideas, as she also believes that other girls deserve the insults thrown at them, because they try to fit in. This criticism reveals her belief that conformity deserves ridicule and that only nonconformity can be regarded as true or safe.

A girl around Elaine's age is found murdered in **the ravine**—it's not the spot where Elaine nearly drowned, but another branch of the same ravine. It makes the front page of all the newspapers, because these kinds of things are not supposed to happen in this part of Toronto, where people leave their doors unlocked at night. This girl is found near her bicycle, and she has been molested, which is a word that the teenage girls already know. Photos of the girl are published from when she was younger and alive, and they already begin to take on a quality of being haunted—it's a look of vanished time. She wears clothing much like the clothing that Elaine owns, and it doesn't seem right to Elaine that someone can be murdered on just a normal day in their everyday clothing.

When this girl is found in the ravine, it is the manifestation of years of threats and rumors turned to reality, and it is a cold shock on the narrative—those childhood stories about the dead, the trick Cordelia played on Elaine with her hat, and every other story about the ravine underpin this story. This girl could have easily been Elaine or any of her friends. Elaine has a hard time thinking about this girl, both because of the temporal and gendered nature of the issue. Photos of her contain all the potential she was supposed to have, potential Elaine shares since the two share similar clothing and behavior.

Although Elaine had dismissed the notion of bad men in **the ravine**, this event forces her to reflect on the issue; part of her thinks that there was something shameful in the girl being murdered, as no one wants to talk about her. Elaine also vaguely remembers having a doll with white fur on the border of her skirt, whom she used to be afraid of—she hasn't thought about this doll in years.

Elaine also sees shame in this murder, which recalls her own childhood experience of being secretly bullied—Elaine has a tendency to blame the victim borne in her own experience of victimhood, even if she cannot remember it. At the same time, this murdered girl makes her think of the doll she asked for at Christmas years before, which she ended up hating because of its fakeness and sexist body—this shows that even forgotten events can remain in the back of one's mind as influences.

Stephen interrupts Elaine and Cordelia while they sit doing physics homework, and makes fun of Cordelia for not understanding what he calls "kiddie physics." At this point, Cordelia has been trying to date boys for a while, but something about her makes them uneasy. She talks to them like grown-ups do by asking leading questions and laughs like someone she might have heard on the radio. Meanwhile, the Earle Grey Players (an acting troupe) come to their school to put on *Macbeth*, and Cordelia gets the part of serving woman. Despite her excitement, she messes up on opening night by replacing one of the props: a rotting cabbage that was supposed to splat down as a fake version of Macbeth's head, but instead bounces away.

Cordelia has a difficult time being taken seriously, which shows a role reversal from earlier in the novel. She comes across more as a buffoon than a tyrant now, with even her successes—like her part in the play—turning into farcical failures. Cordelia exemplifies a desire to play a role, as symbolized by her passion for the theater; what this novel implies is that the more one strives to fill a role perfectly, the more elusive that job becomes.

Time passes, and Elaine and Cordelia enter Grade 13. As the oldest people in school now, they get to look down on the incoming students. They are finally old enough to take biology, where Elaine and Cordelia partner up. They are supposed to dissect frogs and worms in their class, but Elaine dissects Cordelia's for her because she has too much fear and aversion. Elaine loves biology, and enjoys memorizing all of the different parts of the circulatory systems of different animals. What they learn in class does not quench Elaine's interest in the subject, so she also goes and draws images from slides she finds at the zoology building. When Dr. Banerji sees her at it, he compliments her; he has a wife now.

Elaine's love of biology recalls her childhood games with Stephen, where her curiosity about the world and lack of squeamishness directed her actions. However, Elaine's tastes have been validated with age, as she is now required to do dissections, whereas the reaction of feminine disgust holds Cordelia back. Even here, the overlap between art and science begins to emerge, as Elaine translates her interest in biology into making these drawings. Dr. Banerji's rise in life to being settled and having a wife maps Elaine's, which makes sense as the two of them are parallels in this novel. It indicates that exclusion does not need to be permanent, and that social trends can change.

One night, Cordelia comes to Elaine's house for help with her biology homework and stays for dinner. At dinner, Elaine's father talks about the daily extinction of species, the poisoning of rivers, and inevitable epidemics in front of Cordelia, who finds it strange. At Cordelia's house, dinners are always either "slapdash" (when her father is absent), or extremely formal (when her father is present). Cordelia seems afraid of her father, and incapable of engaging with any of his banter.

Elaine's father is consistently interested in natural catastrophes. However, Cordelia's discomfort suggests that thinking about catastrophe on a global scale is not normal, which differentiates natural disasters from the war—whereas war becomes part of national narratives and integrated into positive social rituals (like school classes, being thrifty, and adoring the monarchy), natural disasters are meant to be disregarded, perhaps because they do not fall in the scope of things that humans can control. This passage also sheds light on Cordelia's family life, which is defined by her fearsome father. Cordelia's uncharacteristic meekness in his presence contrasts with both the bully child Cordelia and the cool thieving teenager. These variations in her identity show that people are often not what they seem, and people who lack authority in one area sometimes try even harder to reclaim it in others.

Elaine has intense dreams. Sometimes she dreams about boys—but sometimes she dreams that she's trapped in an iron lung and can't breathe. She dreams that she's wearing a fur collar in front of her mirror, and that someone she can't see stands behind her. She dreams of finding a plastic purse hidden in a trunk somewhere, with some kind of **treasure** inside it. She dreams of being given a head wrapped in cloth, which she doesn't want to unwrap.

Elaine's dreams recall traumas of her childhood that she has repressed, such as the iron lung she used to picture Cordelia in, the fur collar that her doll wore, the plastic purse with the cat's eye marble stashed inside, and the head from Cordelia's play. Some of these images, the head in particular, are from the more recent period in her life and her friendship with Cordelia, where she has allegedly moved past from the cruel conflicts of their past. These dreams show that the conflict bubbles under the surface, and that even if Elaine has consciously repressed her negative memories of Cordelia, she continues to form new negative associations. Most of these symbols share one thing in common: disguise or hiding. Something has been wrapped up or hidden away, and this disguises the true identity of whatever lies beneath the surface. This sense of burial or disguise defines Elaine's sense of identity, as her personal identity is hidden under layers of social roles and expectations, both large scale and on a personal level.

Cordelia tells Elaine that she used to take extreme actions to fake sick and skip school, like eating mercury from a thermometer. Eventually, Cordelia explains why she always used to dig holes: she wanted somewhere all hers where she wouldn't be bugged. She describes hoping that being still and out of the way she would be safe—particularly from her father. She says Elaine was her only friend at the time, which makes Elaine feel sick—though she can't quite identify why. While Cordelia is talking, Elaine suddenly sees "a flash of her nine-year-old face taking shape" beneath her current one, and feels a wave of shame and sickness and guilt. She doesn't want to know where these feelings come from or what happened in the past, so she changes the subject to silly jokes. When she closes her eyes, "she sees a square of darkness and purple flowers."

The person that Cordelia describes here is effectively Elaine—faking ill to escape scenarios she did not feel safe in, staying still in order to protect herself from an authority figure—but this clashes with the version of Cordelia that was visible during this same time period. Cordelia translated her own victimhood into victimizing Elaine, and Elaine cannot cope with this knowledge. The deepest revelation here is that all of those cruelties stemmed from a chain of cruelty, beginning here with Cordelia's father. Complex relationships are infectious, and cruelty spreads like a virus. Given especially that one cannot entirely escape the past, as proven by Elaine's highly symbolic memories of nightshade and being buried, it seems hopeless to try to cut off these chains of cruelty.

Elaine starts avoiding Cordelia, though she doesn't fully understand why. Cordelia often waits for her and they walk home together anyway, but their conversations falter. Cordelia starts failing tests, and Elaine no longer helps her with her homework. Cordelia has trouble concentrating and often changes the subject in the middle of a sentence; she has also started slipping up on grooming. Eventually, she changes schools. Her family moves, and they grow distant. Meanwhile, Elaine takes her exams. The exams are done in summer in the hot gymnasium, and several girls faint. Elaine expects to do well on the biology exams, because she can draw anything. In the middle of the botany exam, she realizes that she wants to be a painter, though she does not identify why. Her life has just changed "instantaneously" and "soundlessly," and she continues with the exam as if nothing had happened.

Elaine starts excluding Cordelia soon after unearthing some bad memories from their childhood, which indicates that this exclusion is a form of punishing Cordelia. Cordelia ends up failing accordingly, which shows how essential their friendship and Elaine's forgiveness have been for her. However, Elaine has no problem moving on, showing that her tendency in the face of pain is still to forget—forgetting or repressing the past allows her to avoid pain. That Elaine realizes her desire to be an artist during her botany, or plant biology, exam shows her path as a direct rejection of her family—biology is her father's realm, or the realm she shared with Stephen, and to realize her aspirations to be a painter during this exam shows a desire to leave the familial sphere. This revelation also directly links science and art—she chooses art as part of her engagement with science, because even her success in science pushes her into the realm of art, which dissolves the boundaries between the disciplines.

After exams, Cordelia calls Elaine and says that she wants to see her. When Elaine arrives at her new house, she sees Cordelia looking like a wreck, with greasy hair and an unkempt appearance. Cordelia pulls a case of doughnuts out of the fridge and lights a cigarette. They make small talk, and Cordelia reveals that she has been avoiding studying and does not plan to go to university. Elaine tells her that she has to do something with her life, but Cordelia just asks why and does not seem to be joking. She has no interest in any academic subjects.

In this parting encounter between Elaine and Cordelia, it seems that Cordelia has completely fallen in the world. Their positions are totally reversed, and Elaine has all of the power that she once lacked over Cordelia.

Though Cordelia wants to revisit nostalgic memories, like the cabbage or the fact that they used to throw snowballs at old ladies and sing songs, Elaine feels like looking backwards puts her into danger. She also feels a hardness and resentment towards Cordelia, as though all of her problems and miseries were self-generated and with a little willpower she could escape her current situation. She leaves abruptly, despite Cordelia's obvious need of her, and looks back to see her blurry silhouette in the window.

Negative feelings arise for Elaine when Cordelia brings up the past, which shows how differently the two of them remember their friendship. Elaine's cruelty in this instance stems from withholding—she knows that Cordelia needs something from her, and she refuses to provide it. In this novel, absence and inaction tend to cut deeper than action, as the closed door or the receding figure becomes a space where one can project negative emotion or self-judgment without end. The Cordelia of this moment needs presence and support, but Elaine will not provide it.

PART TEN: LIFE DRAWING

Elaine, older now, thinks about diseases of the memory—like forgetfulness of nouns or numbers, or losing the present. She wonders which one of them will afflict her later, and is certain that one of them will. For years, she had wanted to be older, and now she is. She sits in the Quasi drinking red wine and thinking about Cordelia—she believes her name may have doomed her. Elaine's own name was the same name as her mother's best friend, which was a trend at the time.

Elaine is fascinated with forgetfulness and frames it as something that will belong to her future, but she has already been inflicted with trauma-induced forgetting, which adds a layer to these anxieties. Elaine thinks about her and Cordelia's names and wonders if those have affected their respective fates, which points to her weak faith in free will; rather than implying that humans can take charge of their fates, this novel constantly looks for places where those fates might have been externally determined, or at least influenced.

Jon arrives late to dinner with Elaine, and they flirt a little. When they discuss their jobs, they realize that "there's not much time left, for [them] to become what [they] once intended," because "potential has a shelf life." During the meal, Elaine remembers back to their relationship. They fought viciously—she used to throw things at him in fits of rage, like a glass ashtray, shoes and handbags, and even a portable television set. Their relationship was volatile, reckless, and almost lethal, but Elaine now looks back with a certain amount of fondness—though she doesn't want to reveal her sentimentality to him. He has separated from his wife, who left him, though he says that he might share some of the blame. Elaine can't help but forgive him; she thinks that forgiving men is easier than forgiving women. After dinner, they part ways but talk about potentially getting a drink later.

Elaine's relationship with Jon has many layers, as the two have a conflict-laden past that they still have to overcome. In part, this speaks to the passage of time, which tends to soften conflict through forgetting. It also speaks to the way that relationships like this can define one's life, and lead to attachment and even a truly corrupted relationship. In this case, Elaine's gender biases seem to be the largest factor for her ability to forgive Jon, as she seems to see men's bad behavior as almost inevitable, and therefore beyond criticism. The other factor is her own mortality, revealed in her anxieties about no longer having potential—perhaps she has produced the great artworks that she is meant to produce—and leads to her desire to see Jon again, which foreshadows the potential rekindling of their relationship. Sometimes, as this implies, one revisits the past in order to stave off the future.

Elaine walks along Queen thinking about a picture she painted called *Falling Women*, which she thinks of as a painting about men although there were no men in the painting. She saw men as unintentional harm, like sharp rocks—you could fall on them, but there was no point blaming them. She feels like that must have been the source of the term fallen women, just women "who had fallen onto men and hurt themselves"—the "suggestion of downward motion," but without any particular "will" behind it. These were not "pushed women," but accidentally fallen. In this painting, three women are depicted falling as though accidentally off a **bridge**, with their skirts open to the wind, onto the men lying unseen below.

Elaine's Falling Women *painting reinforces her perspective on gender, which focuses most interest and blame on women. While she lets men off the hook because they effectively can't help their dangerous natures, she does not forgive them in doing so—she objectifies them as rocks to be fallen upon. Women, on the other hand, are both victims and culprits in Elaine's view, and ultimately define humanity. While she could be accused of victim-blaming by implying that women hurt themselves on men, there's also a sense in which she takes all credit away from men—women are endowed with freedom and the agency to act, even if it comes with deadly risks. In the painting itself, she calls up her own past by painting three women, who could very well portray Cordelia, Grace, and Carol. In doing so, she turns her own aggressors into the victims of a sordid fate, and ultimately uses her art to address this element of her past.*

Elaine stares at a nearly naked woman in her Life Drawing class, whom she attempts to draw. She has never seen a naked woman before, because even in locker rooms girls kept their clothing on. She's trying to draw her with charcoal and fluidity of line, but something about looking at the woman's body under fluorescent lights scares here—she finds the folds and wrinkles in her body off-putting, because she is not beautiful, and Elaine fears turning into that.

Elaine's initial immersion into art involves both another situation where she feels like she has to learn from an authority figure, and also focuses on gendered relationships. She is exposed to the female body for the first time, which she finds off-putting for its discrepancies to what she considers beautiful. The implication here is that reality often falls short of art or other abstractions, and her job as an artist is to learn to translate reality into something new.

Elaine takes the class Tuesdays at Toronto College of Art, taught by Mr. Hrbik, who admitted her to the class despite her mediocre portfolio. Elaine had tried to paint without any instruction, because she knew she just had to start in order to pursue this new dream of hers, but the results were not impressive—in the end, the drawings she made for biology helped her more. Mr. Hrbik teaches the class to draw the body as it is, not as something beautiful—not as a corpse. He also tells Elaine to save her pieces even when she is dissatisfied with them, because she will be able to look at them later and see how far she has come. He also tries to encourage her by saying she is an "unfinished woman, but here you will be finished."

Mr. Hrbik straddles the line between supportive and critical, uplifting and creepy. He calls Elaine an unfinished woman, which has threatening tones, especially in English where "to finish" someone can also mean to kill them. In art, there appears to be a fine line between sexuality and death, both of which are major themes in the novel. Elaine should be suspicious of Mr. Hrbik's patronizing tone, as it is a common sexism for male teachers to treat their students that way—however, as usual, she does not take a typical perspective and still seems to respect him, which may speak to her own lower self-image.

Elaine studies Art and Archeology at the University of Toronto, because the program was a sanctioned way to study art and she won a scholarship. They start with the classical period, and she has to memorize different column names—she looks forward to moving into the medieval and Renaissance periods, because she's come to see classical art as bleached-out and broken. Her parents doubt her choice to study art, because it seems impractical—Elaine's mother said it was fine if that was what she really wanted to do but doubted her ability to make a living, and both her parents felt more comfortable with the possibility of archeology than art. One of her mother's friends told Elaine that art was something you could always do at home, in your spare time.

Elaine's parents provide a common perspective on art, which is that artistic professions do not have strong prospects—this, Elaine finds less off-putting, as part of the draw to art is to escape her family.

All but one of the students in Elaine's course are women, whereas all but one of the professors are men. Elaine feels ill-at-ease among the wealthier, better-dressed girls that do study alongside her. She thinks that they would judge her Life Drawing class as pretentious, but she sees it as her real life. She starts wearing all black, which Babs and Marjorie (older women in Life Drawing) tease her for. Mrs. Finestein tells Elaine's mother that she looks like an Italian widow and is letting herself go; Elaine agrees.

Rather than an idealized world of creators striving to achieve some kind of transcendent communication, Elaine sees wealthy girls whom she feels left out by. Elaine also changes her looks to match her artistic calling; by wearing all black and letting go of femininity, she shows her distaste both for conventionality and for womanhood. Elaine's rise to independence involves rejecting social norms, though in a familiar way. In other words, one form of conformity is replaced by another.

Elaine drinks beer in a beer parlor with other students from Life Drawing—they can only obtain entrance to the nicer "Ladies and Escorts" section if a girl accompanies them. The boys, among them Jon, tease the other absent girls for being lady painters, and say "if you're bad, you're a lady painter. Otherwise you're just a painter." Elaine has stopped going out on dates in the normal way, as she sees it as somehow no longer a serious thing to do—and she has received fewer invitations since she started wearing black turtlenecks. These boys are rowdy—they want to go to New York, they speak disparagingly of their girlfriends, and they idealize contemporary art. Elaine feels privileged to be among them; she wants to be accepted, and she thinks that "she can see them clearly" because she expects nothing of them.

Elaine appears to feel at home among the boys in her class, in part because they also seem to reject society and show a comforting egotism. Elaine does not mind their sexism, either because she still does not fully identify with other women, or because her weak self-image makes her prone to accepting the criticism of others. These boys build an identity out of negativity, which is what one typically does when one lacks success—without actual power, as this book constantly reminds us, one can acquire power by putting down others. Their attitude recalls that of the young Cordelia, but it does not bother Elaine as she is included in their midst—in many ways, Elaine has grown to take on the traits of her then-bully, and the differences between them melt away.

The boys like to make fun of Mr. Hrbik for his Eastern European origins and refugee status. They call him Uncle Joe, and everyone knows that he was shunted around between four different countries during the war because of the upheaval, although this is not something he has talked about. The boys hate the drawing class and see Mr. Hrbik as a "throwback," whereas Elaine feels a combination of sorrow and admiration. They only take Life Drawing because it is a requirement and all believe that Action Painting is where the important developments are happening.

Mr. Hrbik becomes a victim for the boys as well as an image of interest for Elaine for the same reason: his relationship to the war. As he came west as an Eastern European refugee, he becomes both more and less worthy of respect depending on one's perspective, which speaks to the nuanced influence of the war. For the boys, he is a fossil, a relic of the past, and an unwelcome reminder of their mortality and the whims of fate. For Elaine, however, he represents more romantic notions, made more profound by the life and death scale that the war brought in.

One night, Susie, another Life Drawing student, joins the group in the Ladies and Escorts room. She also wears black turtlenecks, but she does her eye make-up heavily like Cleopatra and has full hips. Elaine has derisive opinions about her, because she sees Susie as just a silly girl playing around in art school because she was too dumb to get into university. Susie seems to have special knowledge about Mr. Hrbik, which makes it clear that she's been having an affair with him.

The fact that Mr. Hrbik seems to be having an affair with one of his young students, Susie, should disturb Elaine—instead, she seems jealous of Susie and judges her femininity. In general, Elaine reads femininity as a nefarious disguise, a mode of entrapment, perhaps because she sees women as at risk of violence—either receiving it, or enacting it on others. Woman are figures of power and risk, and they often function as mirrors for Elaine: when she does not like what she sees, she lashes out at the other woman.

February has arrived, and Elaine's classes have moved beyond the medieval period. In her daytime classes, Elaine pesters the other girls by talking about the dirtier aspects of Jesus and **Mary**, like breast-feeding and changing diapers. She likes it when she can get under the skin of the other girls, because she thinks that it shows that she isn't like them. She considers her daytime life only one of her lives, whereas her nighttime life is her real life. At night, she observes Susie and Mr. Hrbik. Susie is two years older than Elaine at 21 and lives in a bachelorette apartment rather than with her parents. She often stays after class or shows up early, and thinks that she is subtle with her glances towards Mr. Hrbik. However, the affair becomes obvious to everyone in class, and the male painters judge Susie negatively.

Elaine does not seem particularly attached to the things she learns in class, in part because dividing the history of art into periods like this can distance one from it. Instead, she prefers facts that she can use to get under people's skin—in this case, discussing the human elements of Jesus and Mary, which disturb others because they turn the sacred into something profane. Elaine mostly likes to disgust girls because she does not want to be the same as them, which she has felt for years. Instead, she seeks out the approval of her older male teacher, an authority figure she can sexualize.

Elaine doesn't find the idea of their love affair funny the way her older classmates Babs and Marjorie do, because she sees Susie as in control, leading Mr. Hrbik to his besotted fate. Once Susie realizes that everyone already knows, she becomes bolder in demonstrating her affections and starts referring to Mr. Hrbik as Josef and talking about him more often. Elaine feels like Mr. Hrbik must need rescuing or protecting, because she has yet to learn that men who are admirable in some ways might actually be bad in others.

Elaine seems to feel left out of Mr. Hrbik's affair with Susie and continues to judge her for it. Elaine trusts men implicitly, while she doubts women; in part, she respects Mr. Hrbik for his legitimate artistic authority, whereas Susie has proven nothing to her. However, their objective skills or merit have nothing to do with Elaine's real opinion, which has its source in her automatic assumptions that women are vile and men need protecting.

Though Elaine still lives at home, she moves into the cellar, where she puts up theater posters of *Waiting for Godot* and *No Exit*. Her mother finds the theater posters gloomy, but Elaine knows better. Her father finds her talent for drawing impressive but wasted, as she could have dedicated herself to an impressive botany career. He has become melancholic, as Mr. Banerji returned to India after failing to get promoted. Elaine's father see this as a betrayal from the department, because Mr. Banerji was more than qualified and was clearly being discriminated against. Elaine's mother comments on her lack of appetite whenever she emerges for a meal, and her father peppers her with more morose anecdotes about strange insects and diseases.

At this juncture in Elaine's life, her relationship with her family is defined by mild conflict—she wants to create spaces for herself that they cannot understand, so that she can have some distance while still living with them. Her choice to be an artist is the major difference between Elaine and her father, as it seems to be a firm rejection of his scientific career. The family's dinner table conversations feel like a piece of frozen time in some ways, as Elaine's father continues to ruminate on natural catastrophe and Elaine's mother shows vague concern for her daughter.

In the spring, Stephen gets arrested for trespassing on a military testing site while trying to chase a butterfly. He had been studying astrophysics in California, which Elaine has a hard time picturing, and he does not fit in well with the beautiful tanned people who wear sports clothing and go to the beach. Stephen prefers to wear sweaters with worn holes and forgets to get his hair cut, and on this particular day he had gone out with his binoculars and his butterfly book and apparently not been bothered to think twice about chasing some exotic butterflies over a chain link fence. The men at the site have a hard time believing that Stephen is not some kind of spy, but eventually he gets bailed out. Elaine only hears about this from her parents; although Stephen sometimes still writes her letters, they arrive with neither greeting nor signature, as though he had been writing one long unfolding letter the entire time.

Stephen has made some progress, having abandoned the familial context, but he also seems to not cope well with society. Between his bizarre clothing choices, reading habits, and the anecdote about the butterfly, it appears that Stephen exists in his own world, with little space for family and even less for the other people around him. His disregard of others puts him in danger, in particular on the military base, and this implies that society and social institutions are inherently dangerous. When someone does not watch out, conform, or pay attention, they can be at the mercy of breaking rules that they did not know existed: there is no easy way to just live for oneself.

Stephen and Elaine communicate via letters, which talk about both the banal and more profound elements of his studies. He is hard at work trying to understand the nature of the universe, and tells Elaine that he hopes she is staying out of trouble. Elaine starts to think that he might be more careless and ignorant than brave, as she had always thought before. She pictures him sitting in a tree in California, writing to her but not actually knowing who he is writing to, because she believes that she has changed beyond recognition. She also wonders how he might have changed, because she pictures him as the same brother she grew up with, even though she knows that this cannot be true. She wishes that he would be more careful, because he is out in the open in the world, surrounded by strangers.

Although Elaine and Stephen stay in touch, their relationship seems impersonal. In particular, Stephen does not show much interest in Elaine's life—he wants to solve grand scientific problems that get to the core of existence. Rather than seeming in awe of her brother's ambitions, Elaine starts to worry about him—she pictures him as being somewhat frozen in time, and also worries that the world won't be gentle with him. This shows some amount of maturity on her part, as well as her own sense of aging—Elaine sees her own life as in motion and her identity as in flux, which leads her to wonder more about the lives and identities of others.

Elaine meets Mr. Hrbik at a French restaurant, where they dine on wine and eat snails. During her individual evaluation with him back in May, he had seduced her after complimenting her progress. She found the process foreign, dangerous, and potentially degrading, but she decided to follow him to his apartment anyway. He lived in a relatively poor neighborhood, and kept his hand on her back as they walked up the stairs together. When he kissed her, Elaine felt awkward because she was afraid that someone might see them out the window. She finally had sex with him, which she found less bloody and painful than she had expected.

The narrative jumps to a point where Elaine and Mr. Hrbik are on a date before going back and explaining how they got to that point. This fragmentation makes the affair feel sudden, though it had been foreshadowed for a while. There's a huge dissonance in Elaine's description of the relationship, as on one level she describes something quite unpleasant, and on another she describes herself falling in love with him.

All summer, Mr. Hrbik ended up buying Elaine nice meals and asking her not to leave him. Elaine thinks that she might have found his lines comical if they were said by another man, but because she has fallen in love with Josef she finds it sweet—she has fallen in love with his need. Meanwhile, Elaine moves into her own apartment and gets a job at the Swiss Chalet. She lives with two of her coworkers.

Elaine ultimately bases her love in her sense of Mr. Hrbik's need of her—he is the first character to have really needed her and shown it in a way that is not directly aggressive, unlike Cordelia.

As their relationship develops, Elaine and Mr. Hrbik keep it hidden from Susie, who seems to suspect something and feel heartbroken. Susie tracks Elaine down at her job and wants to talk to Elaine, who does not have much time. When Josef talks about Susie, he describes her as though she were a problem child. Susie wants to get married, though Mr. Hrbik does not agree. Elaine also doesn't desire marriage; she would rather dedicate herself to her painting, and sees herself dying her hair, wearing outlandish clothing, traveling, and possibly drinking. Elaine worries a little bit about pregnancy, because contraceptives aren't allowed for unmarried women, but it does not deter her.

Elaine continues to see herself as in competition with Susie as she dates Mr. Hrbik, and although it's an easy form of manipulation for one person to pit two against each other, Elaine lets herself fall for it. The question of marriage does divide the two women, as Elaine reveals that her anti-conforming tendencies extend this far. Elaine wants to make decisions for herself, whether those regarding travel, style, or work, and for a woman at that time, marriage often hindered the freedom of these decisions.

In her free time, Elaine paints furniture. Josef (as she now calls him) does not want to talk about the war or escaping during the revolution. He does tell her his dreams, which involve women covered in cellophane, walking along balconies dressed in shrouds, and lying face-down in bathtubs. He tells Elaine he has no country and that she is his country now; she realizes she is miserable.

The war continues to haunt their relationship, even though Mr. Hrbik does not want to discuss it, which hints that it has some kind of romantic appeal for Elaine, perhaps due to its monumental nature. Instead, he describes his dreams, which all appear to be morose and sexist—like the women wrapped in cellophane, as if they were objects for sale. The moment where he declares that she is his countries alienates Elaine the most, because it appears that he needs her too desperately, much like Cordelia had.

Cordelia has run away from home. She finds Elaine at Murray's, looking gaunt and distinguished. Elaine wears her work uniform and feels insecure; she feels tired and disheveled. Cordelia is working at the Stratford Shakespearean Festival, and though it does not impress her parents, she seems happy. Cordelia tries to get Elaine to remember events from their past, but Elaine does not want to remember. Elaine remembers her wise mouth and thinking that she was wise, but she now believes that she was not wise then and has only just become wise. She has a hard time believing in the distant past, and sees herself reflected like a mirror in Cordelia's sunglasses. She attends *The Tempest* on Cordelia's invitation, but cannot spot her in the crowd.

Elaine and Cordelia anticlimactically reunite for the first time in years. Cordelia's life does seem to have improved, as she has developed a sense of purpose around her art, but this just serves to enhance the parallels between her and Elaine. Elaine clearly uses Cordelia as a mirror for her own emotions and success, as she is quick to judge her own disheveled state when looking at Cordelia, and she ends up not wanting to connect with her because she does not like to think of the past. Their history remains close to the surface when they see each other, and it disturbs Elaine—at this stage in her life, she seems to want to believe that the future can erase the past and she can have freedom and control. However, Elaine no longer appears to take Cordelia seriously, and even though she attends this play, it's clear that Cordelia's power over her has waned when Cordelia completely fades to the background.

In August, Josef starts changing Elaine's style. He picks clothing and hairstyles for her, and they go on a date at the Park Plaza Hotel Roof Garden. He tells her that he once shot a man, and asks if she would "do anything for him." She says no. She wonders if he talks about her with Susie the way he discusses Susie with her. Around this time, Jon appears at the Swiss Chalet, where Elaine works. He has a summer job filling in potholes with the Works Department. He asks her for a beer later, and they walk home together. Elaine cries, and they end up kissing and sleeping together that night.

It appears that part of Josef's interest in Elaine comes from a desire to control her or have power over her: he wants to make her into the woman that he wants to be with, which is a version of love that involves projecting one's own image onto the other person. Elaine, however, does not feel consumed by him and is able to tell him that she would not do anything for him, though she still seems passive in this relationship. Time is intertwined here, as readers already know that Elaine and Jon's relationship will lead to marriage and eventual divorce. This creates a tension between the sense of what choices one is free to make, and what things are inevitable—changing the timeline like this makes certain decisions feel inevitable, as though freedom itself were an illusion.

PART ELEVEN: FALLING WOMEN

Back in the present, Elaine walks drunkenly by a monument to the South African War, and wonders if anybody living still remembers that war or if anyone passing by in their cars ever actually looks at the statues. She also sees several flags on display at the Parliament building: the Union Jack, the new national flag, and the old flag she could never draw, which has been demoted to the flag of the province. She passes a church and several shops, which reminds her of how dilapidated these buildings used to be. When she thinks of Josef, she feels like she understands his melancholy—she feels like she would have been frantic if either of her daughters had started a relationship with a man fifteen years older. When she thinks about her daughters, she wants to buy them a gift, but also does not know anymore what they would like.

Elaine observes how fragments of the past do not necessarily mean anything if they go unnoticed, and that even great events like wars will eventually be forgotten. However, she does still observe the importance of the Union Jack, which means that the connection between Canada and the UK has yet to disappear. She also tends to notice churches, even though they remain in the background for her at this point, and any evidence of how much Toronto has gentrified, though she doesn't necessarily see this transformation as progress. Thinking about Josef now that she is older helps her to understand him, though she also now understands the problematic nature of their relationship—thinking as a mother changes her perspective, though she also does not seem to be that connected with her daughters and their desires.

Elaine looks at a display of silk scarves when a girl interrupts her, whom she assumes to be Cordelia. However, it is a young Middle Eastern woman, who convinces her to donate some money for her family. She does not specify where she is from, but she tells Elaine that her people are being killed, and Elaine knows that she could come from any number of countries. She has been made to suffer by a war, the war that killed Stephen. In the end, Elaine does give her the money, and the woman tells her that God will bless her. Elaine walks away and thinks about the scale of global suffering, and the fact that every day "there are more outstretched hands" and no end to the amount of need in the world.

Elaine still perceives any interruption by a woman to be Cordelia, which reveals the influence the latter still has on her. This stranger represents the darker side of ongoing conflicts, and the novel reminds readers of the human costs of wars. It also is revealed here that Stephen is not only dead, but has been killed—this is glossed over in the narrative at this moment, but is a shocking reveal for the reader. In many ways, the novel refuses to let its climactic events be climactic, instead focusing on the long-term impact that they have on someone's life. Instead, Elaine reflects on suffering on a global scale, and seems to have an extremely pessimistic view about the state of the world—the contrast between Toronto's upward development that has been described so far and this description of global poverty is poignant.

Elaine leaves her job at the Swiss Chalet at the end of summer and moves back in her parents' cellar. She knows that financially she has to, though she feels that both her parents' house and school are hazardous places because her life is multiple and she feels fragmented—rather than feeling lethargic, she feels alert now, but it's an adrenaline borne of having to maintain multiple deceptions.

Because Elaine has to move back home, she starts feeling like her life and her identity are fragmented. These are emotions somewhat typical of coming-of-age stories, but exaggerated in Elaine's case, in part due to her traumatic relationship to Cordelia—she has already divided the past from the present, and now separates different areas of her life and keeps them apart from each other.

Elaine has continued to pursue a relationship with both Josef and Jon, and fallen in love with both of them. She keeps the two secret from each other, and from her parents. Josef offers her a certain amount of stability combined with fear—he tells her stories of how women are treated as property in his country, and that men are allowed to shoot women if they catch them with another man. Jon, on the other hand, offers a sense of youthful escape and mischief; the life that they have together is counter-normative and more playful. When she visits his house, he has painted the walls in one of the rooms pitch black and though he often lives alone, he also sporadically shares the apartment with itinerant friends of his who are between jobs.

Elaine loves both men, because they symbolize different things for her—whereas her relationship with Josef has a push and pull of authority that recalls her dynamic with Cordelia, Jon represents a refreshing escape from all of that.

Jon takes pride in his messy home and his art, which should capture "pure painting." He is a very productive painter and changes out the paintings on his wall almost on a weekly basis, but they tend to be swift frenzies of colors that represent nothing more than process. However, his art is the only place that Jon is interested in purity. In his home, he resents housekeeping in a "protest against all mothers." Elaine feels like she can't clean his apartment lest he regard her as a maternal figure. Although Jon does not see women as "helpless flowers" or "shapes to be arranged" the way that Josef does, he categorizes them as smart or stupid. He considers Elaine "smarter than most," which flatters her but also makes her feel dismissed.

Jon comes to symbolize a relationship to art that Elaine ultimately rejects, which is of art as a pure state of being that rejects social norms—in his case, it involves a typical masculine rejection of doing household work, as well as a sense that art is something totally pure. Jon still puts women into boxes, just like Cordelia had, but he sorts Elaine into the superior box—at the same time as feeling flattered, Elaine feels dismissed by him for two reasons: any categorization of her as a woman bothers her, and boxing off people with labels tends to incite her hostility. Elaine's yearning towards individuality shines through, and her instinctive sense that these modes of categorizing others have more to do with power dynamics than they do with a true judgement about the world.

Josef starts to feel suspicious and asks Elaine where she has been when she is not around him, but she does not feel guilty because he has always been able to have a duplicitous relationship with Susie behind the scenes. One day, Susie randomly calls Elaine and asks her to come over. She says that something is wrong and she needs help, but that she can't tell Elaine anything over the phone. Elaine takes an hour to walk there. When she gets there, she has to ask the superintendent for Susie's apartment number and for help getting the door unlocked, which he does only reluctantly after Elaine says that it's an emergency.

Although Josef has no real claim over Elaine as they lack a formal relationship, he shows how easily one falls into normative conventions when in relationships by feeling so possessive over her.

Inside the apartment, the drapes are drawn and there is a weird smell. The furniture seems normal, but Elaine sees a dark carpet on the footprint. She looks for Susie and finds her lying in blood on her bed. At the sight of her, Elaine feels like she has been abandoned; she also feels sick and has to throw up in the bathroom, where she washes her hands in the blood-spattered sink. Fortunately, Susie does still seem to be alive so she has the superintendent call an ambulance; Susie has had a makeshift abortion. Even though Elaine knows that she would have done the same in Susie's place, she feels a vengeful sense of satisfaction.

Elaine's bias against Susie almost has deadly consequences. Susie has had an illegal abortion, which nearly takes her life, and only has Elaine as her primary contact. This shows how lopsided their relationship is, as Elaine dislikes Susie strongly, but Susie does not seem to share her suspicion if she trusts Elaine in this situation. Instead of feeling pity for Susie after identifying with her, Elaine translates her sense of identification with Susie into feelings of vengeance, as though she had won some kind of competition. This shows the depth of her own internal cruelty, much of which has sprung out of these gendered biases against women that she still carries.

Although Susie does not want her to tell Josef, Elaine does so anyway. When he finds out, and says he will never get over his guilt. He becomes melancholy and no longer wants to go out for dinner or have sex. Elaine starts slowly to feel contempt for Josef, to use her mean mouth on him, and to make excuses for avoiding dates with him. When he waylays her outside the museum once to tell her that he has plans to leave Toronto forever, Elaine just tells him that it's good and walks away from him. She does not dream about him. Instead, she dreams about Susie, but half-transformed into Cordelia—in her dream, Susie skips rope and licks a popsicle, and looking at her Elaine knows that she has done something wrong.

Josef, unsurprisingly, reacts to the event with melancholy, which means that he is making the crisis about himself, instead of Susie. Elaine ends things with Josef in the same manner that she ended her relationship with Cordelia: by walking away. Elaine seems to follow a pattern of intense emotional involvement with someone that culminates in her abandoning them, which relates to her sense of individuality and her asociality. However, Elaine does seem to be plugged into a social sense of morality that bleeds into her dreams, as she identifies Susie with Cordelia. This shows her sense of guilt for abandoning both women, though this guilt transforms instantly into Elaine's old sense of self-hatred, which manifests in believing that she has done something wrong.

Now only dating Jon, Elaine feels more virtuous because she is no longer hiding anything from him, although he has no reason to suspect that anything has changed in their relationship. She feels that she is in love with him, and continues to go over to his apartment and act like they are a couple although they have established nothing explicit between them. They go to parties where artists smoke pot and Elaine tries to avoid seeing Jon flirt with other girls—he is open about this, saying that sexual possessiveness is a bourgeois concept because nobody owns anybody. Jon no longer paints his energetic swirls and instead paints straight lines or perfect circles in flat colors, the point of which are to make your eyes hurt when you look at them.

Elaine's relationship with Jon does not display particularly unique qualities, except for the newfound lack of secrecy. In general, this novel places a heavy emphasis on secrecy and on the division between what happens in public and in private: the two differ even in the most private relationships, and a sense of secrecy or asociality adds emotional intensity to a situation that is otherwise identical. Secrecy creates situations of power. In their relationship, Jon continues to show a tendency towards inane masculine rejections of conventional norms, all of which result in his access to free relationships with women and pretentious abstract art.

Elaine resumes her lifestyle of school in the daytime, though the subject matter has shifted towards chiaroscuro and more violent biblical images. Elaine does not like these shadowy pictures of naked women and strange fruits that seem served up to her—she prefers the earlier styles of artistic clarity and oil paints. She experiments with artistic styles, and practices in secret—she likes detail, egg tempera, and painting recognizable objects; she knows that Jon would call her work illustration. She also comes to like the effects of glass and, inspired by work like Van Eyck's *The Arnolfini* Marriage, starts including objects with reflective surfaces where she can hide alternate figures or perspectives. Elaine knows that her artistic taste is out of fashion and hides her work from other people.

Elaine continues to go to school and begins to develop her own style. While she dislikes these Renaissance images for their religiosity and depictions of women, she does start to develop her own artistic style by using old egg-based paints. The fact that she is drawn to mirrors and reflective surfaces shows that one of her main interests is this theme of reflection, which relates to the question of reality: what is real, and how does one perceive reality?

Elaine takes another night course on Wednesday nights which is taught by a Yugoslavian—the subject is Advertising Art, and most of the students are from the Commercial division of the Arts College. Her teacher had done a famous rendering of pork and beans that Elaine remembers from the wartime period of her childhood, when they frequently ate pork and beans. After she graduates, she can't get any work that she wants so she starts doing mock-ups for companies and rents her own apartment with a real bed. Although Jon makes fun of her for her decorating tastes, he prefers to stay at her apartment as opposed to his own.

In her own work, Elaine is drawn to these depictions of contemporary objects, in part because of the commercial art that she studies—she learns from an artist who works in advertising, and this reveals much contemporary art is funded and supported in the commercial realm. There is never pure art, as artists have to make a living; older generations of artists made religious work because they were supported by the church, while contemporary artists make work influenced by commercialism because funding exists there.

Elaine's parents move up north—her father returns to research, and her mother misses the garden but clears out the house. Elaine does not miss her parents, as she is still relieved to no longer be living with them, and relishes the opportunity to eat junk food and be responsible for her own messes. Elaine designs book covers during the day and paints in secret at night. Her parents sent postcards, as does Stephen—his become taciturn and come from various locations, from Nevada to Bolivia to New York. Elaine can only guess as to what motivations drive his travels, and finds out through one of these postcards first that he got married to a woman named Annette and then, some years later, that they had gotten divorced.

Elaine's parents finally return to an environment more like where they spent their summers, which fully allows Elaine to live in the freedom of adulthood. Elaine's life seems to be a balance of her daytime work and art, as she does not make enough money to self-sustain from her art; the fact that she paints so much anyway shows the depth of her dedication to her craft. She has grown only more distant from Stephen, as represented by his few and taciturn postcards from all over the world. Far from the closeness of their childhood, it seems that their adult relationship is characterized by the bare bones of information exchange.

Stephen and Elaine communicate in this manner for some time, until one day he gives a lecture in Toronto on Unified Field Theory. Elaine attends, along with a large crowd of fans—she understands little, though it is clear that his work is well-respected. At the introduction to the talk, he talks about time. He says that when we gaze at the night sky, we are looking at fragments of the past, both because the stars as we see them are echoes of events that we saw lightyears ago and because everything down here is a fossil of the chaotic and explosive moments at the creation of the universe. Elaine is unable to follow the talk after that, but she watches the slideshows full of photos of galaxies and different charts, and finds Stephen afterwards so they can talk during the reception.

When Stephen finally returns to Toronto, he does so in the capacity of a respected professor, and his talk echoes the topics he taught Elaine about during her childhood: time and space. From what Elaine understands of his theory, the present is composed of pieces of the past, as all light comes from distant stars and all of reality is a relic of the Big Bang.

It becomes clear that Stephen does not share Elaine's memories of their childhood—that he sang "Coming in on a Wing and a Prayer," played war, and buried marbles. Elaine wonders if those marbles are still there, all these years later, or if someone found them when they built **the new bridge**. Stephen continues to keep the secrets of the past, which reassures Elaine that he is the same person underneath the physical changes of aging. She considers paying to have a star named after him for his birthday, because she thinks he might find it amusing, but she also wonders if they concept of "birthday" still has any meaning for him.

When the two siblings speak after the talk, it becomes clear that the significant images from their childhood that have so defined Elaine's thinking are relatively inconsequential for Stephen. He does not remember the songs he sang or the marbles, which have been recurring images at every stage of Elaine's life. However, she finds something comforting in his secrecy, as it reminds her of his privacy in their childhood. In this case, it's difficult to discern what is a sign of his consistent character and what is a record of the innate differences between people. Two people will always conflict over their perspectives on what is important, and this creates a profound difference between even close relatives. Elaine clearly still loves her brother and thinks of his birthday, but it also appears that she sees him as somehow having transcended time and convention.

Jon has moved on from painting geometrical shapes and now does pictures that resemble commercial illustrations, and instead of discussing purity talks about the necessity of "using common cultural sign systems to reflect the iconic banality of our times." Elaine thinks that she could give him advice on his work because of her actual experience in the commercial realm, but knows that her advice would be unwelcome. He starts staying over more and painting at her apartment, because his is full of American draft dodgers who are disappointed to find that Toronto is not just a pacifist version of the United States

Jon's art has come to resemble Elaine's, which shows the weakness of his prior relationship to art. Furthermore, his lack of desire to ask her for advice also shows that he continues to have this gendered expectation that female artists have nothing to share with him. He has a strong ego that withstands all evidence of his own weakness, from his changing opinions to his lack of success. His social milieu has expanded to other typical non-conformers in the form of these American draft dodgers, who have a principled anti-war sentiment but also seem to have national beliefs given their disappointments about Toronto.

Elaine does his Jon's laundry now, and on Sundays they sleep in late and go on long walks holding hands. One day, she discovers that she is pregnant—though she fears telling Jon, she does not have an abortion. She lies on the floor of her apartment and her body feels numb and inert; she feels as though she is "at the center of nothingness, of a black square that is totally empty," and feels like she is expanding into space. She wakes up in the middle of the night and doesn't remember where she is; she feels like is back in her childhood home, and though she knows that it has been sold, she feels like she might have been left behind there.

Over time, the relationship between Elaine and Jon has become more domestic, and it appears normal until her pregnancy. Elaine's pregnancy triggers massive dissociation, and the images she describes resemble her description of being buried when she was a child. It seems that pregnancy has a similar connotation of self-negation for Elaine, and it sets her off into the past. Although a child usually symbolizes futurity, it makes Elaine think of the past, perhaps to a degree because having a child inevitably reminds her of when she was a child.

Elaine starts painting objects from her childhood, like a toaster and the wringer, as well as a glass jar of nightshade. She knows that these must be memories because most of those objects do not exist anymore, but they have a clarity to them that does not match with the quality of memories. Although Elaine does not picture herself directly in relation to them, these objects do come with a sense of anxiety. She starts biting her fingers again, and feels like her body is full of time. She paints Mrs. Smeath numerous times. When she looks at the images of Mrs. Smeath, Elaine has the sense that Mrs. Smeath knows that everything that has happened to Elaine is her own fault, because there is something wrong with her—however, Mrs. Smeath won't tell her what it is. Sometimes, she has to turn the paintings of Mrs. Smeath to face the wall.

This orientation towards the past manifests in her work, as she paints significant items from the period where she was being bullied by Cordelia—all of which are chapter names of the novel. Although Elaine does not explicitly remember these objects, they do come from defining moments, which shows that even though she has repressed these events, the past remains close at hand. She even begins self-harming again, by biting her fingers like she used to. The most important figure she paints is Mrs. Smeath, the adult witness to her bullying, whom she hated so fiercely as a child. Mrs. Smeath makes Elaine feel young and badly behaved—she reminds her of the worst of social conventions, both religious and class-based, and reminds her that she once did not fit into those conventional spaces. Instead of blaming the spaces, Elaine blamed and continues to blame herself, which reinforces the theme of how an identity can be built in situations of conflict.

Time skips ahead, and Elaine is walking Sarah in her stroller. She is over two now, so she can walk, but the stroller allows for faster movement and also provides a space for Elaine to hang her grocery bags, which she sees as part of the tricks that she has learned as a mother that she did not have to know before. She lives with Jon as a family (they married because of the pregnancy), and dresses in mini-skirts. Elaine is still adjusting to changes in her body and in society—she can't keep up with new vocabulary and feels like she is no longer young, now that she will be thirty in a couple of years.

This two year jump is the largest gap in time up until this point, and it both starts to indicate that the narrative is nearing its end, in that gaps in time prevent a sense of building up to a climax, and also implies that the experience of early motherhood was not particularly essential to Elaine. As she reveals, the first two years felt like living in a fog, which indicates that her identity as a mother does not feel like her central identity.

Elaine takes care of Sarah with a fierce love as well as frequent irritation and feels like she is finally coming back into the world after a year of living in a fog. Jon also loves Sarah, which surprises Elaine and which she feels grateful for. He had wanted them to go to Niagara Falls for their honeymoon, which he saw as a sort of a joke—however, this offended Elaine because with the child growing inside her, she had felt that whatever was happening between them could not be characterized as a joke. Right after the marriage, Elaine felt relieved and full of adoration—she wanted things to stay exactly as they were and wanted Jon to stay hers but knew that he could not.

Elaine's relationship to Jon seems to be souring, in part because he treats their relationship with humor that she does not share. Playing socially conventional roles, like having children and getting married, seems like a joke to him, whereas it's serious for her. Elaine also starts to get a sense of her own mortality in this moment, as she approaches thirty, and begins to thematize her own inevitable death in that sense of aging.

Jon and Elaine start have intense fights, which involve throwing things at each other. At the crux of their conflict is that their relationship was borne of the desire to run away from the grown-ups, and yet they have become the grown-ups. Jon works as a supervisor part-time at a co-op graphics studio, and Elaine works part-time as well so they can manage to pay the rent. Jon has given up painting, and makes constructions instead, out of any object he finds. He also decorates the house whimsically and makes the toilet seat sing "Jingle Bells" whenever it is lifted, for Sarah's benefit. Whenever he is around, he makes toys for her and plays with her—but he is not always around. In the first year after Sarah's birth, Elaine mostly quit painting and did freelance work whenever she had the energy.

The conflicts between Jon and Elaine are shockingly violent and a complete disruption from the sort of conflicts that Elaine was involved with in the past, which centered on emotional manipulation, secrecy, and withholding, instead of anger and physical aggression. It appears that they are both uncomfortable with playing adults, even though they also know they have to play those roles. Jon's relationship to art seems to have become more material with his constructions: this turns the entire world into a playground, because anything can be art, and anything can be made into a toy. Elaine does not seem able to balance her motherhood and her art, and is drained of energy—being a mother is a job in itself, and drains her of energy.

Elaine goes to a feminist meeting about anger against men, where she feels like she's on shaky ground. The women who attend come from various different circles, though all artistic—they are dancers, writers, editors, and painters like Elaine. Elaine had not been in an all-female space since health class in school, when they learned about menstruation. In this meeting, women express anger at various things that control their lives and render them unequal to men—whether it be the clothing they are expected to wear, shaving their legs, or wearing lipstick—because all of these things indicate that there is something wrong with the way they are.

Elaine's decision to go to this feminist meaning implies that she was open towards feminism, which could be surprising given her tendency to describe men as blameless. This aligns with her open-mindedness, but that same tendency to avoid dogmatism makes it difficult for her to integrate into this feminist space. Elaine also reflects on how much femininity focuses on convincing women that they need to correct something about themselves via cosmetic products or changes in their behavior, which connects to the bullying Elaine experienced from Cordelia.

Many of the women in this room have suffered from serious violence at the hands of men, whether rape, physical abuse, discrimination, or dismissal. On the one hand, Elaine believes all these stories and knows that the world is full of sinister men who prey on women, earn more money for doing less work, and pass all the housework onto women. On the other hand, she has chosen to live with a man. She has a family with a man, and she feels nervous that she does not fit into the sisterhood. Though no one says anything explicit to her, she feels that her choice to live with a man is regarded as an invitation for any bad thing that might happen to her. Elaine feels like she is standing outside a closed door while decisions are being made for her.

The discussions in Elaine's feminist group highlight just how grave misogynistic violence and cruelty can be. It's particularly important to note Elaine's observation that she never spends time in all-female spaces, which is a partial explanation of her distrust of sisterhood. Although Elaine and the novel acknowledge and condemn sexist violence, and do seem to lay a lot of pressure on the patriarchy, the conclusions remain undogmatic in that Elaine does not want to reject men entirely. She feels uncomfortable being asked to take sides or throw away her family, but she feels that this decision makes her vulnerable to criticism.

At home, Elaine paints at night while Sarah sleeps. She paints the **Virgin Mary** as a lioness, fierce and protective, and as an exhausted housewife in a painting called *Our Lady of Perpetual Help*. Jon looks down on her paintings, because he sees them as irrelevant; however, Elaine sees a certain kind of freedom in that, because if what she paints doesn't matter, then she can paint whatever she likes. They slam doors and throw things at each other when they fight, and though Elaine throws more dangerous objects at him, she usually misses. Jon starts making art where he smashes things and glues the pieces back together. He dismisses her anger when they fight as being "because she's a woman." Elaine responds by saying she is not angry because she is a woman, but because Jon is an "asshole."

Elaine's relationship to art becomes more clear, as she uses art to process the gender and power-based themes that have plagued her for years. This image of Mary shows that religion remains important to her, while emphasizing the power and pressure that women face in domestic roles, from motherhood to being a wife. Elaine reclaims oppressive images in her Mary paintings and turns them on their head to show an empowering side to them. She seems not to care about whether her paintings are taken seriously, which indicates that her motivation is not explicitly to influence others, but rather to let out something inside her. Jon reveals his own internalized sexism when he dismisses her as a woman, though Elaine seems to have grown—instead of taking his criticism on authority, she recognizes him for a jerk and is able to recognize her own anger.

Elaine joins a group of women in her feminist meetings to put on a group art show. There are four participants: Carolyn, who calls herself a fabric artist and whose work includes patchwork quilts with objects like condoms stuffed with unused tampons, Jody, who works with sawn-apart store mannequins that she glues together in disturbed poses, Zillah, who is blond and does what she calls *Lintscapes*, which are made of the fuzz from drier filters and which she turns into beautiful multilayered textured compositions, and Elaine. They have the show in a defunct supermarket, which they spend three days cleaning and rearranging. They offer gallon jugs of Canadian wine, cheddar cheese, and Ritz crackers at their opening and a surprising number of people show up. A journalist who comes to document the opening jokes that the girls should "burn a few bras" for him while he's taking their pictures.

This art show reveals that Elaine can get along with other women, despite her previous doubts and experiences, and it also provides more perspective on what art can mean to women. The three women that Elaine works with all focus on different kinds of material art, where they repurpose objects to create aesthetics and messages. Though they all have different styles and resources, the common theme is to juxtapose domestic materials, like lint, with the artistic theme. It shows that even things like shopping, sex, and laundry have artistic potential, and that daily lives can be made the vehicle for profound messages. It's clear that their audience has them typecast as feminists in what is meant to be a derogatory way, but that only serves to make their sexist views seem small.

Elaine comes early to the opening and looks at all of their work on display, which makes her feel that her own work is weak and far too decorative and pretty—she sees herself as having failed to make a statement and as having remained peripheral. Most of the people who attend their show are women, and Elaine realizes that she has no close female friends. This makes her think of Cordelia, whom she has not seen for years. Jon has not arrived at the opening despite having promised to attend, so Elaine considers flirting with someone. Jody introduces Elaine to her mother, who views the work on display with mild disapproval—though she did like Elaine's painting *Deadly Nightshade*—and reminds Elaine of her own mother.

Elaine continues to feel marginal even at her own exhibition, because she does not trust the strength of her work or her relationships. She is still haunted by Cordelia, which shows the indelible mark that relationship left on her. Interestingly, meeting another mother who disapproves of her work leads her to think about her own mother, which also indicates that many of Elaine's internalized expectations about the important relationships in her life have a sense of conflict at their center

Many of the paintings that Elaine chose for the opening are of Mrs. Smeath, portrayed in one lying on the sofa wrapped in an afghan with a rubber plant behind her, in another (called *Leprosy*) as sitting in front of a mirror with half of her face peeling off, and in yet another set of four (*White Gift*) wrapped in white tissue and then slowly unwrapped with her rotting heart and the text "The Kingdom of God is Within You." Elaine does not fully understand why she hates Mrs. Smeath so much.

These images of Mrs. Smeath draw on several of the themes that caused Elaine the most distress and pain as a child. She highlights memorable objects like the rubber plant, as well as themes of deception and hypocrisy as forms of corruption through the rotting face and the damaged heart being given as a gift.

A woman comes up and confronts Elaine in anger—she thinks at first that it is Grace Smeath, but it is just another religious woman offended by her art style. She throws an ink bottle at *White Gift*, which does not bother Elaine because she knows it will be easy to remove from the varnished painting. This event makes a splash in the newspaper article written about the event, and Carolyn advertises the show from then on with the words "abrasive," "aggressive," and "shrill" that had been used to describe them.

The confrontation with this angry woman, whom Elaine first takes as a vision from the past, shows how much conflict can be embedded in art. This woman clearly took the art personally, as an insult to a certain kind of matronly motherhood and religious belief. However, the scandal ends up benefitting Elaine, which is a recurring motif in the novel—explicit attempts to sabotage someone can play to their benefit. The women are still typecast in a sexist manner by the media, but they show that embracing stigma can be empowering when they claim for themselves the same words that were wielded against them.

Elaine visits an institution where Cordelia's parents have placed her because she tried to commit suicide. Cordelia had called her on the phone and mentioned seeing her in the newspaper, but when Elaine suggested that they meet up, Cordelia said that she was not allowed to leave the institution. Elaine has a hard time recognizing her, as she has put on some weight and is moving more slowly and speaking with a thickness in her voice. They go out to lunch, and Elaine has to pay because Cordelia is not allowed to have any money. They order coffee and pastries and discuss the tranquilizers that Cordelia has been put on, as well as the details of her suicide attempt.

This reveal of Cordelia's institutionalization is one of the novel's biggest turns, as it shows the complete reversal of their fortunes. Although her decline has been tracked and even foreshadowed for most of the novel, the fact that Cordelia attempted suicide shows depths to her psyche and to her pain that clash with the image of her as a torturing child. Cordelia has been brought down, kept on drugs, and trapped in a situation that clearly makes her unhappy.

Cordelia has seemed to have lost her idea of herself, and she asks Elaine to help break her out—when she refuses, Cordelia does not seem surprised. Although Elaine speaks to her gently, she feels a seething anger with Cordelia for asking this of her; she wants to rub her face in the snow or twist her arm. Cordelia accuses Elaine of always having hated her, and when Elaine denies this, Cordelia says she will manage to escape anyway. Back home, Elaine dreams of Cordelia falling from a cliff or **bridge** making a snow angel in the empty air and ends up sending her a note that is returned to sender; presumably, Cordelia escaped on her own. Elaine dreams of a mannequin statue holding something draped in white cloth under its arm: Cordelia's head.

Elaine does not appear to bear much sympathy for Cordelia and refuses to help her, proving inaction to the pinnacle of cruelty in the novel. Elaine and Cordelia serve as mirrors for each other, and they disturb the reader's natural desire to designate allegiances with a protagonist and against an antagonist. Elaine's dreams are highly symbolic, and they recall images both from her childhood, in the snow angel, and her art—these images carry a sense of danger and risk, and they represent the calm before the storm—the moment before the body hits the awaiting cliffs or before the cloth has been lifted to reveal the skull. Deception and secrecy are key images here, as is the sense of painful anticipation.

PART TWELVE: ONE WING

Elaine goes to 4-D Diner, a new and fake version of the diners of her childhood. It reminds her of Sunnysides but done up as a museum, and feels like they could have included wax versions of her and Cordelia drinking milkshakes and looking bored. She hasn't seen Cordelia since she said goodbye to her at the door of the rest home, but she has heard Cordelia talking to her ever since. Elaine orders coffee and pie and watches young people enjoying the quaintness of the past—she thinks the past was not quaint when it was "the shape her life was squeezed into," and only "becomes so with the passage of time." Elaine picks up the gifts she had bought her family on the way, which included fountain pens, only recently back in fashion. Elaine reflects on all the old objects that must exist somewhere in limbo, just waiting for re-entry into usage.

Visiting this retro-style diner makes Elaine reflect on her own past, because it contains aesthetic elements of the past, even if the place itself is new. The way she describes the past makes it seem that the passage of time often declaws the past—that is, it takes things that were dangerous, painful, or traumatic and lets them fade in intensity. It becomes clear that Elaine has not seen Cordelia in decades, as their last encounter occurred when Sarah was still young. Elaine's obsession with Cordelia relates to the transformation she underwent from victim to enactor of cruelty. Elaine reflects on other elements of her past and seems to see time as something of a cycle, where old objects or people occur.

Elaine walks past Josef's old apartment and wonders what became of him. He made a film once that seemed to be about Elaine and Susie, but Elaine feels like she can't blame him because she was unfair to him; she does not regret her unfairness, because she sees unfairness as one of the only defenses that young women have, because they are "walking in the dark on the edge of high cliffs thinking themselves invulnerable." She also does not begrudge him developing his own versions of the past, because made a painting called *Life Drawing* about him and Jon—both naked and painting a model, who has a **marble-like** sphere of bluish glass for a head.

Josef also used his art to process his relationships with Elaine and Susie. Their relationship had strong gendered elements, but Elaine has concluded that her own unfairness and cruelty towards him was therefore justified. Elaine transmuted both Josef and Jon into her Life Drawing *painting, and she seems to have also included a reflection of herself in the form of this model whose head is the cat's eye marble. When she carried the marble as a child, she used to see herself as one with it, and able to see through it somehow. This painting symbolizes her sense of being objectified by these two men and used for their art and egos, but it also represents her ability, as an artist, to do the same to them.*

Elaine meets Jon at the roof bar of the Park Plaza Hotel, where she used to go with Josef. They don't speak much at dinner, unlike at lunch, because they both already know why they are there. In the elevator on the way down, Elaine catches sight of herself in "the dark glass obscured by time"; she could be any age. They go home together and sleep together with the lights off, for the comfort of it. Elaine does not feel she is being disloyal to Ben, only loyal to something that predates him; she also knows she will never do it again. She invites Jon to the opening, but he does not want to go.

Timelines converge when Elaine meets Jon at the Park Plaza hotel; in some ways, he's come to embody both her past with Josef and her past with him. Likewise, Elaine sees herself as caught in the past when she sees her reflection in the mirror. This final physical connection between Jon and Elaine triggers her memories about the end of their relationship, which involved deep conflict, jealousy, and hypocrisy.

The narrative skips back to earlier in their relationship, when Elaine realized that Jon was having affairs. She collects evidence, but does not confront him at once. Jon confronts her about her previous relationship with Josef, and they fight. Elaine starts to get sick more often and paint less. She does tend to Sarah, but does not manage to do anything else because she feels like a failure and like she would be unable to live up to any of the suggestions made by her feminist circle friends.

Jon displayed some serious sexism when he got jealous of Josef but continued to have his own affairs. However, this conflict unburies Elaine's tendency towards self-destructive ideation. Rather than either conforming to narratives from her feminist circle and blaming Jon for being a man or even assigning blame to him on a more personal level, Elaine retreats into herself and feels responsible for his behavior.

Elaine lies alone in her bedroom and "feels nothingness wash over her," and thinks that whatever is wrong with her is her fault. She thinks she has done something wrong, "something so huge that she can't see it." She feels like she might as well be dead. One night, when Jon does not come home, she hears a voice and cuts herself with an Exacto knife; Jon finds her in her blood, but she claims it was an accident. She feels cleansed; she feels like "she heard the treasured secret voice of a nine-year-old child."

The sense that Elaine is nothing and that she has done something so wrong that she cannot identify it come straight from Cordelia's bullying—Elaine cannot shake this identity buried in shame and guilt, and proves how insidious these depressed self-negating attitudes can be. This culminates in a suicide attempt, which terrifyingly restores Elaine's sense of self—she cuts herself with a knife used usually for art, which makes a connection between the suicide attempt and her creative tendencies. She also hears Cordelia's voice egging her on, though she has not seen her recently—this suicide attempt completes the mirrored relationship between these two women, connected in darkness.

Elaine decides to leave Toronto after the snow melts, because she feels like it is the city that is killing her as much as Jon. She takes Sarah, and writes a note to leave him, then makes a peanut butter sandwich and calls a taxi. Jon comes home before the taxi arrives, but says that he can't stop her when she says that she's going to Vancouver, so she gets in the car and moves to Vancouver. She sees herself as being good at leaving, because "the trick is to close oneself off and not look back."

Elaine does decide to act after her climactic suicide attempt, but she acts by abandoning Jon in the same way she abandoned Josef, and Cordelia before him. Her tendency to avoid confrontation might come from her internalized sense of nothingness, as she tends to avoid making dramatic decisions—she is able to leave others because of her ability to forget the past, which she sees as closing herself off, and move forward.

Elaine finds Vancouver both worse and better than she expected, and changes her opinion day to day. She freelances and refinishes furniture for an antiques dealer. She sees a therapist but stops going when it seems like he just wants to ask if she has orgasms. She shows her art sometimes in group showings of women artists, but feels like she is too privileged to fit in. She envies their conviction, but does not share it. Elaine also makes several women friends who are also single mothers—the relationships are not close, because they avoid each other's "deeper wounds," but they complain together, and it reminds Elaine of the friendship between Babs and Marjorie in her Life Drawing class

Elaine takes steps to rebuild her life independently, which includes art, parenthood, and female friendships. The start of her time in Vancouver is described in a very condensed manner, in large part because it seems to lack conflict and with that, depth—she is able to build a career as well as relationships with other women, which had always eluded her, by keeping those relationships shallow. They resemble Babs and Marjorie, who always put others down, but they also resemble her relationship to Cordelia as a teenager.

Eventually, Jon comes to visit as a move towards reconciliation, and Elaine's parents also come to visit because they miss Sarah. Stephen continues to send postcards and a stuffed dinosaur for Sarah, as well as a water pistol, a counting book, and a plastic mobile of the solar system. Suddenly, Elaine's art starts to sell—two galleries represent her, and she travels and wears black.

Elaine also has improved relationships with her parents, who visit her, as well as her brother, who sends gifts and doesn't visit. He wants to share his life with Sarah, as he gifts science-related toys for her. Elaine also starts to live her dream, selling her art, traveling, and dressing as she had imagined in her fantasies. The most significant element of this part of the narrative is how quickly it is told, as though Elaine has decreasing interest in her own life as she ages and becomes happier—conflict occupies and defines her, and these conflict-free years fade together.

Elaine has tentative and rushed affairs with men that she meets periodically, but there are long intervals between these encounters because she finds it difficult to balance relationships with her life as a single parent to Sarah. One day, Elaine meets Ben at the supermarket. She finds him simple and romantic, and he takes her to Mexico and seems delighted with her. They end up combining their households, and Elaine enjoys how oddly conventional her life has become. Ben is ten years older than her and has already been divorced once and has a grown son. They have a daughter together, Anne, and Ben builds an ordinary and good life with Elaine—he sees her as a little fragile but ultimately takes care of her and helps take care of the business end of her art. While she enjoys her life in Vancouver, she feels like she can't look back.

Elaine's relationship with Ben contrasts with every relationship she has described thus far in that it seems to lack conflict and drama. She seems much more content in this relationship and in the life she has built with him and their daughters in Vancouver. In many ways, this peaceful relationship is about contentment, compromise, and forgetting the past. Elaine has to divide the periods of her life to feel stable, because her past is rife with intensity and instability. While she is able to do this, it hints at repression—she has to further fragment her life to fit into her present, because the past and present do not form a coherent narrative.

PART THIRTEEN: PICOSECONDS

Elaine wakes late in Jon's apartment, dresses in a cerise jogging suit, and reads the paper to kill time. She thinks of the gallery as something to get through without disaster. When she leaves the apartment, she takes the route that used to be her route home from school and sees all the houses that have existed since her childhood, and wonders what time period they belong to—their own, or hers. She watches girls playing on the streets, and even though they wear blue jeans, she thinks they aren't nearly as loud or as rowdy as when she was younger; she wonders if it's because of her presence, because the presence of an adult has some power.

Elaine's thoughts about the gallery cement the sense that the public side of her art career is not important to her—she creates art not as a lead-up to these social events, but out of some other internal drive. The more time Elaine spends in Toronto, the more she seems to blend the past and present together and draw comparisons between the two. She is particularly interested in the buildings, which have stood since her time, and the young girls, who serve as a mirror for her own childhood. She wonders if her presence has quieted the girls, because she has such distinct memories of the secret cruelties of youth. People behave differently depending on their contexts and who is watching, and there is a whole universe of cruelty that girls would not undertake publicly, which Elaine cannot forget about.

Stephen died five years ago, and Elaine tries to think of it as a natural disaster rather than a murder—he was killed on an airplane held by a group of terrorists, shot after being held hostage en route to give a talk in Frankfurt. She knows that he had a window seat and that he had been traveling with his briefcase that carried a talk on the probable composition of the universe, because there were passerby whose accounts Elaine heard later.

This revelation about Stephen's death comes as a real shock to the narrative. Elaine has only foreshadowed it very sparely across the novel, and now she tells the story in a relatively emotionally neutral, matter-of-fact tone, which reflects her ability to move on from trauma. Elaine has pieced together this narrative from the other people who were kept on the plane and from her own narrative reconstructions, and it shows how important building a coherent story can be to process trauma.

The hostages had been given very little to eat, except weird sandwiches, and water four hours before. The women and children had already been allowed off of the plane, and the men remaining on the plane had their passports confiscated. A new man entered the plane and made Stephen stand up, and Elaine pictures to herself what it might have been like. She knows that he was made to exit the plane, and that he was killed immediately after that. Elaine had to identify his body; now, when she thinks of him, she thinks about how she will grow older and he will not, just like the story about the twin who goes into space that he had told her all those years ago.

Stephen's death brings in the theme of war and catastrophe, and helps illustrate the distinctions between the two—his death is actually caused by an ongoing war, which means that it's manmade and could have been prevented. Elaine prefers to characterize it as a natural disaster, as that removes human agents as well as a sense of predictability or blame. Natural catastrophes are consuming, but that can be easier to process than wars, which are supposed to center on values and have some kind of meaning ascribed to them. In the end, Elaine processes the death using a story Stephen had told her about a twin sent out into space, who gets frozen in time while his sibling ages on earth—it shows a perspective on death detached from any religious or mystical speculation on the afterlife, and focused on the fact that upon death, a person is frozen, while their friends and family must continue to live and age.

Their parents never recover from Stephen's death. Elaine's father grows thinner and stiller, and he eventually dies of natural causes—her mother follows a year later. Before Elaine's mother dies of a slow illness, Elaine visits to help her in the house. She sneaks in frozen TV dinners and takes her mother to movies and Chinese restaurants to try to break her out of her routine. Elaine's mother is put on stronger and stronger painkillers, and she usually wants to talk about Stephen.

The narrative focuses on other tragedies after the death of Stephen in the form of Elaine's parents' deterioration and eventual death. Elaine's father just fades out of the narrative, which suggests the distance that had grown between them at the end of his life, but she does have the opportunity to connect with her mother again.

One day, Elaine's mother brings up the "bad time" in Elaine's childhood, which Elaine has completely repressed. She wants forgiveness that Elaine cannot give. On another day, she feels stronger so they go through the house in order to clean it. They sort garbage in the cellar, and then move on to the old steamer trunk, where Elaine finds her old drawings, photo album, and the red purse. Her mother reminds her of when they gave her the photo album along with the camera for her ninth birthday, and she looks at an old picture of Grace Smeath wreathed in flowers. When she looks into the red purse and finds the **marble** still inside, she "sees her life entire."

Elaine's mother knew about the bullying, which she still downplays as a "bad time," and in doing so she reveals that the situation was never as secret as Elaine had imagined it to be. At the same time, Elaine still cannot connect with her mother about this, because here silence is a form of betrayal. Elaine's mother's inaction enabled the bullying to continue, making silence a form of cruelty in itself. Their spring cleaning triggers Elaine's repressed memories, as she sees old objects like the photo album and the marble. This marble had always been associated with a certain amount of clarity of thought, and seeing it again forces Elaine directly back into the past, as it is a relic of the past itself. Finding the marble indicates how difficult it can be to escape the past, especially in the form of traumatic memories.

In the present, Elaine walks towards the location where her old school was. It has been replaced by a new school, cleaner, without separate doors for boys and girls. She feels tired and "locked in"; she wants to be released, to no longer stand still, to not "be nine years old forever."

Elaine's reflections at the school elaborate on the novel's main conflict, which is being trapped by the past. Though the school stands as evidence that times have changed, that gender equality is closer, and that the neighborhood has improved, it still holds the ghosts of Elaine's childhood. The fact that Elaine cannot escape her memories makes her feel as though she hasn't aged, which shows that time exists on multiple platforms—there is the literal passage of time, which is linear, as well as the subjective experience of time, impacted by memory.

PART FOURTEEN: UNIFIED FIELD THEORY

Elaine puts on a new black dress and gets ready for her opening. She arrives an hour early, drinks wine alone and walks through the gallery, remembering the first show she ever put on. At this opening, they're serving fancy cheeses and grapes that make Elaine think about the dying field workers in California who would have picked them—she thinks "knowing too much means that you can't eat anything without tasting death." Elaine remembers their Ritz crackers and the unprofessional mimeo-made catalogues from her first show.

The gallery opening initially proceeds with strong images, like Elaine's black dress and the wine and cheese, but immediately starts reflecting on more serious themes in terms of the exploitation of workers in California. The exploited labor is part of the history, or the past of the wine, and Elaine's choice to reflect on it shows how difficult it can be to cope with a present that is immersed in the past.

Elaine looks at the paintings in chronological order: the early paintings characterized by Charna as female symbolism, the paintings of Jon and Josef, Mrs. Smeath. She tries to see her childhood self in Mrs. Smeath's eyes, and recognizes the paintings as an act of vengeance. She knows that Mrs. Smeath must have seen her as some hopeless "ragamuffin" with "feckless" parents, and took her in anyway, but she has chosen vengeance over mercy in her portrayal of Mrs. Smeath. At the same time, she knows that an eye for an eye leads to only more blindness.

Elaine looks back her own work and tries to escape her own perspective, at first thinking about how others characterize her work—often more ideologically than Elaine herself would—and then thinking about Mrs. Smeath specifically. By shifting her perspective in this way, Elaine can have empathy for this woman, and see her not as cruel but as almost kind. Though she sees her own portrayals as cruel and vengeful and knows that this vengeance is ultimately more destructive than good, this does not resolve the roots of her resentment. In the end, Elaine does seem to believe that cruelty is bad and breeds only more cruelty in others, but she does not come to a clear resolution, as she clearly needed to use her art to process the traumas of the past.

Elaine looks at a painting called *Picoseconds* she did of a landscape with her parents making lunch over a fire with their car in the background. Underneath the landscape, she painted the logos from old gas pumps—calling into question the reality of the landscape. Her next painting is called *Three Muses*; she painted Mrs. Finestein, Miss Stuart, and Mr. Banerji—not as they were to themselves, but as they inspired her.

These two paintings interact with people from Elaine's past in different ways. In the first, she deals with the landscape where her parents were always the most comfortable, which was when they journeyed for her father's research; however, her inclusion of these logos also makes that comfortable reality seem more like a fantasy of a time gone by. In her other painting, she also deals with shifts in perspective, as she painted her adult role models in a way that matched her childhood symbolization. In general, both of these paintings focus more on positive aspects of her past, and show that Elaine's identity is built out of more than just conflict and cruelty—she also remembers her positive role models.

Elaine then looks at *One Wing*, the painting she made for her brother after his death—a triptych with a luna moth and World War II airplane flanking a man falling from the sky, holding a child's wooden sword. The fourth painting, **Cat's Eye**, is a self-portrait that represents half her head in the foreground, and three small figures in winter clothing walking in a mirror behind.

In One Wing, *Elaine ties together different themes about her brother, from his childhood relationship to the war to his love of science. He falls much like women do, and this shows Elaine's uncertainty as to whom to blame for his death. Her painting of herself, using the symbol of the cat's eye marble (which both grounds her and lets her see clearly), ends up showing her obscured with her childhood friends, Cordelia, Grace, and Carol reflected in the mirror. It shows how fragmented her identity became because of this conflict, and how much of her psyche stayed trapped in that winter afternoon when she nearly drowned.*

The last picture, *Unified Field Theory*, shows a woman dressed in black on a **bridge**—the **Virgin of Lost Things**, holding an **oversized cat's eye marble** in her hands. Under the bridge, there looks to be galaxies of color—but there are roots and beetles; this is underground. Elaine drinks more wine, and feels tempted to burn her paintings—she cannot control them or tell them what to mean, and feels like "she is what is left over."

The final painting Elaine describes unifies the novel's symbols around the space where Elaine nearly died. Elaine's painting combines symbols of rescue and clarity; the marbles represent a hidden beauty and the potential for secrets to be treasures, not just traumas, while the bridge is can be both a space of connection and of the risk of falling. The Virgin Mary is also significant, as she is both a savior and an aggrieved woman. Through these symbols, Elaine adds depth to the narrative of her life. Hope and despair can be symbolized in one image, and the passage of time leads to an accumulation of meaning rather than clarification. This leads Elaine to want to destroy her art, because the meaning her paintings take on will go far beyond her life. In the end, she sees her art as the most important distillation of her experiences, which makes her feel redundant or even useless.

Charna introduces Elaine to the people who arrive for the opening—although she feels drunk and uncomfortable, Elaine just pictures Cordelia arriving. Different women compliment her work as summing up an era, and Elaine tries to survive the evening. Cordelia does not come, and Elaine feels strange when she heads home alone. She goes back in a taxi and remembers her brother once saying "*Cordelia has a tendency to exist.*" She decides to make herself some coffee and leave the city early the next day, because there is just "too much old time there." She also thinks that one should "never pray for justice, because you might get some." She drinks her coffee and cries, feeling like she's causing a scene, although no one is watching. She thinks "*You're dead, Cordelia*," and then hears or thinks the response "No I'm not." To that, she repeats "*Yes you are. You're dead. Lie down.*"

Elaine's experience at the opening shows her continued discomfort in public spaces, as she does not like to be told what her work means. She also feels haunted by Cordelia, who never shows, and this is ultimately the novel's grand anticlimax. In many ways, it felt as though the novel must be leading up to a reunion, as the flashbacks followed a linear and fairly Cordelia-centric path. Elaine wants to abandon Toronto, because she hopes that leaving the sites of the past will help her escape "old time," though that seems unlikely. She sees Cordelia's abandonment of her as somehow just, Elaine's punishment perhaps for having cruelly abandoned Cordelia in the past. The closest she comes to a reunion with Cordelia is the drunken insistence that she is dead, though she imagines Cordelia's voice talking back to her. This ambiguity on whether Cordelia is dead or alive hinges on Elaine's memories. To some extent, it doesn't matter whether Cordelia is alive, because she will die eventually—what matters are the scars she has left behind, and the second life she lives haunting Elaine.

PART FIFTEEN: BRIDGE

Elaine wakes hungover still in her black dress, having already slept until noon. The day feels empty to her, "as if there is nothing more to come." She walks down the street away from the demolished school, thinking about how she always feels disliked on these streets. She heads to the **bridge**, rebuilt in concrete—but, to her, it's the same bridge. She thinks of the buried **marbles**, and recalls that she used to think that if she jumped over the bridge it would feel more like diving than falling, and that if she died that way it would feel "soft." She sees a smashed pumpkin below and remembers falling into the water, hearing the voice—she knows that it didn't actually happen, and that "there was only darkness and silence."

Elaine revisits the bridge, which weighs on her reflections on the past. The bridge represents how a symbolic image of connection, suspension, and danger can still exist, even if the bridge itself was rebuilt. The bridge represents the space where something beautiful was buried—the marbles—while it also represents the burial of Elaine's traumatic memories of being bullied and falling into the water.

Elaine hears someone behind her, and imagines it to be Cordelia, looking at her "defiantly" in her old snow jacket, recognizing Elaine's wrongdoing. Elaine recognizes that she is the person with the power now and worries that if Cordelia stays there any longer she will freeze to death and get left behind in "the wrong time." Elaine reaches out to Cordelia and tells her, "It's all right [...] You can go home now." When Elaine turns around, though, all she sees is a middle-aged runner with a dog. Elaine feels like there is "nothing more" in this landscape for her. Even if it isn't completely barren, it's just "filled with whatever it is by itself, when [she's] not looking."

In this moment, the depth of Elaine's fantasy makes it almost appear that Cordelia will make a final showing before the novel ends. Elaine's perspective is that she has fully taken over Cordelia's role—she has the power, whether through age or experience. Instead, she tries to make peace with this illusion of Cordelia and send her home. Even though it turns out not to be Cordelia, Elaine arrives at a sense of resolution with this moment—it seems that she is able to let go of the past by acknowledging that it happened and has passed, instead of just forgetting. She needs to come to terms with the continued existence of all the spaces of her childhood, which continue to remain, if transformed.

On the plane home, Elaine sees two elderly women on a trip together. Elaine realizes that what she misses with Cordelia is "not something that's gone," but a future "that will never happen"—Elaine and Cordelia as "old women giggling over their tea." That night, there is no moon, and she sees a sky full of stars that are not eternal as once thought," and also are not located where humanity once thought they were. The stars are "echoes" of events that took place millions of years ago. She thinks even if it's "old light," at least "it's enough to see by."

In these concluding thoughts, Elaine reflects primarily on time and on relationships. It becomes clear that part of her fixation on the past is that it is all she has of the future that she might have imagined with Cordelia, where the two of them would have grown old together. She feels she has lost that future, and thus holds on more strongly to the past. When Elaine looks at the stars, she reflects first on uncertainty—the stars used to represent eternity, but that has now been disproven, and they also are not located where humanity once thought there were. The stars are the ultimate representation of the way the past bleeds into the present, as their light has traveled for millennia—at the same time, the final note of the novel is optimistic. Even evidence of a past that distant and the simple certainty of death still provide guidance.

HOW TO CITE

To cite this LitChart:

MLA

Kelso, Emaline. "*Cat's Eye.*" *LitCharts*. LitCharts LLC, 2 Mar 2019. Web. 21 Apr 2020.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Kelso, Emaline. "*Cat's Eye.*" LitCharts LLC, March 2, 2019. Retrieved April 21, 2020. https://www.litcharts.com/lit/cat-s-eye.

To cite any of the quotes from *Cat's Eye* covered in the Quotes section of this LitChart:

MLA

Atwood, Margaret. Cat's Eye. Anchor Books. 1998.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Atwood, Margaret. Cat's Eye. New York: Anchor Books. 1998.