

Good Morning, Midnight



INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF JEAN RHYS

Ella Gwendolyn Rees Williams was born in 1890 to a Welsh doctor and a Creole woman of Scots ancestry on the Caribbean island of Dominica (then a British colony). At sixteen she was sent to England, where she studied to be an actress. Williams was ostracized for her Caribbean heritage and accent—she was eventually taken out of school because her instructors deemed her unable to rid herself of the West Indies accent that would prevent her from gaining significant stage roles. She then lived in Britain for nearly a decade, surviving on small acting roles and chorus parts. After having a near-fatal abortion paid for by a former lover, Williams began to write. In 1924, in the midst of a tumultuous marriage, Williams made the acquaintance of the acclaimed English novelist Ford Madox Ford. Ford took her in as both a protégé and mistress, suggesting that she change her name to Jean Rhys and eventually facilitating the publication of her work, which often dealt with her own experiences of alienation as a woman at the hands of unjust lovers and an exclusionary society. The three major novels that Rhys produced during the 1930s—*After Leaving Mr. Mackenzie*, *Voyage in the Dark*, and *Good Morning, Midnight*—were met with mixed critical success. It wasn't until 1966 (after several decades of anonymity marked by two more marriages and an increasingly serious alcohol problem) that Rhys published *Wide Sargasso Sea* and rocketed to literary fame. *Wide Sargasso Sea* remains her most acclaimed work, having garnered her several major literary awards and a place in the canon of postcolonial literature in English. Rhys died in 1979, in Exeter, U.K.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Rhys belonged to what's now known as the Lost Generation, which was made up of people who came into adulthood during World War I. The name itself acknowledges that this generation didn't have a clear trajectory after the war, as many of its members seemed like they were wandering through life without a sense of purpose. The vast majority of the young men in this generation were called to the frontlines of the war, so it's no surprise that many of them returned to everyday life saddled with harrowing trauma—trauma that made it hard for them to simply slip back into their previous lives. What's more, the war made it possible for women to enter the workforce, marking a significant shift in the overall structure of society and the working world, though many women left their jobs after the war was over—yet another thing that possibly created a vacuum of purpose. The generation's name reflects society's

overall disdain for their directionless way of moving through life, but many artists liked the idea of their own untethered societal position. The expatriate author Gertrude Stein (who was a little older than people in the Lost Generation) is credited with coining the term, and Ernest Hemingway popularized it by quoting Stein in the epigraph of his novel *The Sun Also Rises*: “You are all a lost generation.” By printing this in his book, Hemingway effectively embraced the name and the general implication that younger adults in the years after World War I were headed in uncharted directions.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Good Morning, Midnight belongs to a rich literary tradition of semi-autobiographical novels written about Paris in the first half of the 20th century. The most famous of these works were written by expatriates from either the United States or England. Ernest Hemingway, for instance, wrote multiple books about life in Paris, including *The Sun Also Rises* and *A Moveable Feast*—in fact, *A Moveable Feast* even relates an encounter with an important British author living in Paris named Ford Madox Ford. Ford took Jean Rhys (and a number of other promising writers) under his wing when she was in Paris at the beginning of her career. In general, the literature that emerged from Paris between World War I and World War II was characterized by a searching, melancholy attitude and featured protagonists trying to address their troubles by drinking heavily and wandering from bar to bar. In this sense, *Good Morning, Midnight* is something of a precursor to books like James Baldwin's *Giovanni's Room*, which was published in 1956 and continued the modernist tradition of exploring identity, sexuality, and loneliness in the context of post-war Paris. Rhys would go on to write *Wide Sargasso Sea*, an important postcolonial novel with feminist themes—themes that are arguably present in *Good Morning, Midnight*.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** Good Morning, Midnight
- **When Published:** 1939
- **Literary Period:** Modernism
- **Genre:** Modernist, Post-War, Expatriate
- **Setting:** Paris in the 1930s
- **Climax:** René pins Sasha on the bed and attempts to rape her but then stops when she tells him he can take her money.
- **Antagonist:** Memory and sadness
- **Point of View:** First-person

EXTRA CREDIT

Comeback. After the commercial failure of *Good Morning, Midnight*, Jean Rhys completely withdrew from the public and stopped publishing books. Ten years after the novel's publication, the actress Selma Vaz Dias took out advertisements in newspapers in an attempt to track Rhys down because she wanted to buy the rights to *Good Morning, Midnight*. Rhys eagerly accepted, and Dias adapted it into a radio play. More importantly, she encouraged Rhys to keep writing, ultimately resulting in Rhys's most famous novel, [Wide Sargasso Sea](#).



PLOT SUMMARY

Sasha spends her days in a simple **hotel room** in Paris. She's familiar with small, dim rooms like this one, though it's been a while since she last lived in Paris. She was previously living in London and trying to drink herself to death, but a friend couldn't bear to see her in such a depressing state, so she lent her money and urged her to go to Paris, thinking she needed a change.

In Paris, Sasha passes the time going to cafés, drinking, taking sleep medication, and lounging in her room. She often encounters her neighbor in the hall or on the stairs. He's always in a nightgown and is very eager to talk to her, but she finds him unnerving. Her social interactions are limited; she just wanders through the city and wonders what other people think of her. Sitting in bars with a glass of absinthe, she often breaks into tears at unexpected moments. Because of this tendency to cry, she's well acquainted with the many bar bathrooms of Paris, where she escapes to weep while staring at herself in the **mirror**.

One reason Sasha is so prone to bouts of sadness is that she can't stop rehashing painful memories. Not wanting to relive her past life in Paris, she tries to stay busy, making a point to stick to a strict schedule. But she can't help delving into the past when she walks by familiar streets and restaurants, which remind her of the many things she used to do in Paris with her lover, Enno.

One night, a knock sounds on Sasha's door. She opens it to find the man in the nightgown, who smiles and stares at her. When he doesn't say why he knocked, she pushes him and tells him to go away. She sees him in the hall the next morning, and he seems angry about how she treated him the night before.

Despite her efforts to avoid places she used to visit, Sasha goes to a restaurant that she and Enno used to like. As she sits there, she worries that everyone sees her as a crazy "Englishwoman." She's very sensitive to the way the French view British people living in Paris. To make matters worse, she hears somebody refer to her as old. Feeling uncomfortable but not wanting to leave, she thinks back to the last time she returned to London

after living in Paris. Her family was upset at her because she had run off with Enno without a word. But a relative who recently died had left her some money, so she took it and got a room of her own—the room where she decided to drink herself to death.

Pulling herself out of her memories, Sasha leaves the bar and walks home. She meets two Russian men on her way and falls into conversation with them. After a philosophical discussion about the cruelty and difficulty of life, she agrees to meet one of them the next day. When the time comes, however, yet another bad experience in a restaurant—in which she hears somebody speaking disparagingly about her—ruins her mood, so she decides not to meet the Russian. Instead, she returns to her hotel and has a flashback to when she was pregnant and living in Paris. A kind caretaker looked after her during this time, trying to soothe her in the aftermath of giving birth, since Sasha couldn't stop worrying about how she would financially support her new son. She couldn't sleep or breastfeed, but the caretaker treated her well, wrapping her in bandages so her body would show no signs of having given birth. When the bandages came off several weeks later, Sasha's body looked exactly the same as it had before she was pregnant. By this point, though, her baby had died.

In the present, Sasha goes to the Luxembourg Gardens the day after she was supposed to meet the Russian. Funnily enough, she runs into the *other* Russian man, who is clearly fond of her. His name is Delmar, and he's a very kind, pensive man who believes in simply taking life "as it comes." He also senses that Sasha is lonely and says that he, too, used to feel isolated and alone—until, that is, he started forcing himself to be social. Thinking companionship will also do Sasha some good, he arranges to introduce her the following day to a painter friend of his named Serge.

Later, Sasha buys a fancy new hat and goes out for the night. At the last bar she visits, a young man follows her out. She suspects that he's a sex worker who has mistaken her for a rich and gullible woman—someone he could entice into giving him lots of money. But he says he just wants to go somewhere to talk, so she agrees. Over a drink, he explains that he's in trouble, claiming he was part of the Foreign Legion and was stationed in Morocco. Fed up with his military career, though, he escaped and came to Paris. He has only been in the city for one night and is hoping to get a passport so he can travel to London, where he knows people who could help him. Sasha tries to make it clear that she isn't wealthy and that she can't help this young man, whose name is René, but he doesn't seem to believe her. He escorts her back to her hotel at the end of the night, but when he asks to come inside, she refuses to let him in.

The next day, Sasha goes with Delmar to meet Serge, who dances wildly in his apartment full of art. She has a great time but unexpectedly starts crying. She's embarrassed, but Serge assures her that it's very human to cry. Despite their pleasant

and reassuring conversation, though, it soon becomes clear that Serge is mainly interested in getting Sasha to buy one of his paintings—and yet, when she says she doesn't have the money on her at the moment, he says she can have a painting for free. But she insists upon paying him, so they plan to meet later that day so she can give him the cash.

Serge never shows up to their appointment. Instead, Delmar comes and apologizes on behalf of his friend. He takes the money and promises to relay it to Serge, but he also makes it clear that he's jealous because Sasha liked Serge so much. Put off by Delmar's interest in her, Sasha declares that she's leaving Paris sooner than expected.

Sasha once again reminisces about her relationship with Enno. They got married on a whim in London, got drunk that night, and traveled to Amsterdam. They each thought the other had a lot of money, but they were both wrong. Amsterdam was enjoyable, but Enno kept talking about how much better life would be for them once they got to Paris. After a few days, they hastily set off for Paris but ended up getting stranded in Brussels because they had almost no money. Thankfully, Sasha remembered a man she once went out with who lived in Brussels, so she borrowed money from him (enduring an uncomfortable kiss from him as a result).

Once in Paris, Sasha and Enno lived in a hotel and struggled to make money. Sasha discovered that she was pregnant around this time, but she put off telling Enno, who was becoming increasingly irritable and mean. He would often storm out and not come back for a long time; once, he even left for multiple days, and though Sasha hated him for this, she immediately took him back when he returned. After Sasha gave birth and her baby died, Enno found a job as an advertising copywriter and left Paris for the position. Although he said he'd write and send money, Sasha knew it was over.

René comes to visit Sasha at her hotel. He came by earlier and waited for her in her room, but she never showed up. Sasha's angry that he was in her room, since she's worried what other people in the hotel will think about their relationship. Still, she agrees to go out with him. He claims to have met a wealthy American woman and says that he'll be leaving Paris soon. Sasha doesn't believe him, but something about his mood *does* indicate that he has stumbled into a bit of good fortune. Why, then, does he want to see her again? Because he thinks she's good luck—after all, he found the rich American woman shortly after spending time with Sasha.

Over drinks, René tells Sasha all about what it's like to be a sex worker. After many drinks, he becomes more direct about wanting to sleep with her, but she refuses. Still, he senses that she wants to, and she admits that he's right. But she's too afraid to go through with it—she has been hurt before. He empathizes with what it feels like to have “wounds,” showing her an actual scar that runs along his neck. He promises that sleeping with him would be a cathartic experience.

When René takes Sasha back to her hotel, she once again refuses to let him come upstairs. When she's about to open her door in the dark, though, she sees that he has followed her. She throws herself into his arms in the darkness of the hall, ecstatic that he didn't leave—she can't believe how good it feels to experience romantic excitement again. Inside the room, though, her excitement dies. She doesn't want to have sex anymore, but René won't leave. She says she'll scream for help, but they both know she won't because she doesn't want anyone in her hotel to know she has a man in her room. René wrestles her onto the bed and says he's going to hurt her, but she keeps her knees pressed firmly together. She also tells him where she keeps her money, hoping he'll take the cash without raping her—which is exactly what he does. He stands and goes to fetch the money, and as he does so, Sasha closes her eyes and asks him to leave her some spare bills. After a moment, he leaves without another word.

Sasha lies distraught on the bed for several moments before getting up to see if René left her any money. She's surprised to discover that he didn't take anything at all. Suddenly, she fiercely wants him to return to her, so she envisions him walking on the street and tries to will him back to the hotel. She cracks the door, gets naked, and lies on the bed with her arm over her eyes. When she hears the door creak open, she knows instantly who it is: the neighbor in the nightgown. She takes her arm away from her eyes and studies him for a brief moment before grabbing him and pulling him down, saying, “Yes—yes—yes...”



CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Sasha – A British expatriate staying in Paris, Sasha is the protagonist and narrator of *Good Morning, Midnight*. Sad and lonely, she's prone to nostalgia and frequently finds herself rehashing troubling memories—despite her efforts to keep herself from plunging into the past. Her thoughts are often muddled and don't always follow a clear timeline, reflecting her own inability to keep herself from dwelling on old sorrows. To that end, she can't stop remembering the time she spent in Paris with Enno, her former husband. She and Enno got married in London and immediately left the city, eventually making their way to Paris. They thought living in Paris would make their lives better, and though they certainly had fun there, they were strapped for cash and struggled to support themselves. Their poverty put a strain on their relationship, and this tension only grew worse when their son—whom they had after living in Paris for a few months—died shortly after birth. Not long after this tragedy, Enno left Paris for a job, leaving Sasha behind. Haunted by the memory of her former lover and the loss of her son, Sasha returned to London and tried to drink herself to death, but then a friend lent her money and

encouraged her to get out of England, so she went to Paris, where she now wanders and tries in vain to forget about her grief, all while hoping to take on a Parisian persona. As she leads this aimless existence, she meets other expatriates in Paris and goes out drinking with them. She develops a strange relationship with René, a man she suspects is a sex worker trying to con her. However, she enjoys his company, though their relationship sours when René forces himself on her after she invites him into her **room**—an encounter that leaves her feeling even more alone than before.

René – René is a young man whom Sasha meets in Paris. Sasha suspects that he's a sex worker who targets wealthy older women and, because of this suspicion, she doesn't believe what he tells her about his past. He claims that he joined the Foreign Legion (a branch of the French army) and was stationed in Morocco until he decided to run away. He eventually made his way to Paris and now needs help obtaining official travel documents so he can go to England, where he knows people who can help him. He tells this story to Sasha, but Sasha just thinks he's after her money. Nonetheless, she agrees to spend time with him, figuring she has nothing to lose because she's not rich, despite what René seems to think. Once they grow closer, René subtly acknowledges that he's a sex worker, or at least alludes to the fact that he *knows* quite a few male sex workers and is knowledgeable about the trade. And though he talks about various tricks to convince wealthy woman to part with their money, he also talks to Sasha with compassion when discussing what it's like to have been hurt by others. He says he knows what it's like to have "wounds," and he promises that, if he and Sasha made love, he would relieve her of all her sadness and tension. When they embrace in Sasha's **room** later that night, Sasha suddenly changes her mind and asks him to leave, but René turns violent and attempts to rape her. He only stops when she tells him where she keeps her money. After he leaves, though, Sasha discovers that he didn't take any cash—perhaps suggesting that René cared more about her as a person than he cared about money (though this obviously doesn't excuse his violent behavior).

Enno – Enno is Sasha's former lover. He and Sasha got married in London and then traveled through Europe with the intention of settling in Paris. They both assumed that the other had money, but neither of them were all that wealthy. Still, Enno was convinced that he and Sasha would have all kinds of exciting opportunities in Paris, and though it is the case that they managed to support themselves there for a while, he eventually left the city (and, in turn, Sasha) for a job as a copywriter. His departure took place not long after his and Sasha's newborn baby died, meaning that he left Sasha in a period of extreme sadness. Although Enno never actually appears in the novel's present action, his memory haunts Sasha everywhere she goes, especially because she keeps walking by Parisian restaurants or cafés that they used to frequent

together, making it that much harder for her to move on.

Nicolas Delmar – Nicolas Delmar is a Russian man whom Sasha meets in Paris. As she's walking home one night, Delmar and another Russian man call out to her and ask why she's so sad. They then fall into conversation with her and become friendly acquaintances, though Sasha ends up insulting Delmar's friend the following day because she doesn't follow through with their plans to get together in the afternoon. Nonetheless, she runs into Delmar a little later and has a pleasant conversation with him, as he encourages her to make more friends as a way of staving off loneliness and depression. Delmar himself knows what it's like to feel sad and lonely, but he also tries to take life "as it comes"—life is miserable, he believes, but that's not *his* fault, so there's no point in dwelling on his own unhappiness. Sasha likes Delmar's outlook, so she agrees to meet his friend, Serge, whom she likes even more than Delmar. Because Delmar is so fond of her, though, he's a little upset by how much she likes Serge, and though he treats her with kindness, his romantic interest in her calls his intentions into question, as it's unclear if his kindness is genuine and selfless or if he treats her well simply because he wants to sleep with her.

Serge – Serge is an eccentric painter who lives in Paris. Delmar introduces Sasha to him one day as a way of helping her make friends to distract her from her sorrow and loneliness. The three of them have a nice time in Serge's apartment, but Sasha unexpectedly starts crying while watching Serge dance. She feels ridiculous for breaking into tears, but Serge assures her that it's very natural to cry. Sasha feels a strong sense of connection with Serge, but their rapport shifts once they start talking about the prospect of Sasha buying one of his paintings. Suddenly, Serge starts to act very businesslike, and it becomes unclear if he really wanted to befriend Sasha or if he just wanted her to buy his art.

Mr. Blank – Mr. Blank is a British man who owns a clothing store in Paris. Sasha used to work as a greeter at this store and had an embarrassing encounter with Mr. Blank because his awful French accent led to a misunderstanding. Instead of pointing out the root of her own confusion, though, Sasha acquiesced to Mr. Blank's power and asked to go home, ultimately losing her job instead of standing up for herself.

Mr. Lawson – Mr. Lawson is a man Sasha once dated very briefly. When they parted ways, Mr. Lawson told her to reach out if she ever passed through Brussels, where he lived. Later, Sasha and Enno were stranded in Brussels without any money, so she called on Mr. Lawson for some money. He agreed to give her some cash, but he also leveraged his power in the moment by kissing Sasha on the mouth. She was disgusted, but because she wanted the money, she kissed him back.

The Man in the Nightgown – The man in the nightgown lives in the room next to Sasha's at the hotel in Paris. He's overly interested in her life and always tries to talk to her in the hall.

He even knocks on her door late one night and just stands there smiling at her, but she pushes him away. He's no longer friendly to her after this encounter, keeping track of her comings and goings and calling her a "dirty cow" in French when René visits her room. But after René tries to rape Sasha and then leaves, the man in the nightgown enters her room—despite her distaste for him, she pulls him to the bed.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Lise – Lise is one of Sasha and Enno's friends who spends time with them while they're still together and living in Paris.



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.



SADNESS AND VULNERABILITY

Good Morning, Midnight examines the unpredictable and powerful nature of sadness. By closely following Sasha's emotional fluctuations as she spends a lonely period in Paris, the novel highlights two things: that sadness often has an illogical way of cropping up in even the most unexpected circumstances, and that it can be nearly impossible to withstand these strong surges of sorrow. For instance, Sasha often finds herself in perfectly pleasant, enjoyable situations in which she's having a nice time, but then she suddenly breaks down and starts crying and, in doing so, derails her entire day or evening. As a way of coping with such volatility, she tries to protect herself from her own despair by rigorously planning out her time. She hopes that sticking to a strict schedule will keep her from wallowing in her emotions, but she never successfully builds the "emotional armour" that could insulate her from misery and loneliness. Consequently, she feels quite vulnerable even as she tries to stay busy—in fact, fleeting interactions with other people have the potential to plunge her into despair, so she starts to feel like strangers pose threats to her well-being, as if they're constantly "fling[ing] themselves" at her. The novel thus explores how hard it can be for people to move through the world with sadness hanging over them, since that sadness often creates a kind of vulnerability that makes it quite difficult to do ordinary things. And while the novel doesn't necessarily champion any single way of coping with sorrow, Sasha's failed attempts to outrun her sadness by staying busy subtly suggest that avoiding difficult emotions isn't a particularly effective way of dealing with despair.

There's an implication in the novel that real sadness never truly

goes away, instead remaining deep inside people even in relatively pleasant, care-free moments. A brief conversation with a stranger in a bar, for example, is enough to trigger Sasha's otherwise dormant sorrow, forcing her to retreat to the bathroom so she can get ahold of herself. Once alone, though, she wonders why she started crying—after all, she was having a perfectly nice time, and nothing about the conversation was all that troubling. Faced with the seemingly illogical nature of her own emotional fragility, Sasha acknowledges that her sadness isn't something that will simply disappear just because she's having an enjoyable evening. She recently emerged from a period of deep depression, and though it might *seem* like she has been "saved" or "fished-up" from the depths of sorrow, the truth is that "there always remains something." In other words, intense emotional hardships have a lasting effect on a person's ability to navigate life, and such despair has a tendency to crop up in unexpected ways.

Still, Sasha tries to distract herself from intense emotion, but staying busy only makes her even *more* vulnerable to these overpowering surges of despair. She clings to the importance of having a plan, thinking, "The thing is to have a programme, not to leave anything to chance—no gaps." The idea here is that scheduling her time in the right way will keep her from languishing in sorrow. She fears that a "gap" in her day would give her time to rehash her troubles, so she always thinks about what she'll do next. What she really wants is a sense of control over her emotions. The problem, though, is that the activities she chooses aren't very distracting. When she's not sitting over a drink, she's usually walking to yet another bar, giving her plenty of time to think sad thoughts. For instance, the following is the plan she makes for one of her days in Paris: "Planning it all out. Eating. A movie. Eating again. One drink. A long walk back to the **hotel**. Bed. Liminal. Sleep. Just sleep—no dreams." Although she has created a strict "programme" here, it's unlikely that these activities will keep her from slipping back into despair. Plus, they're unrealistic—it's probably not even *possible* for her to sleep without dreaming. Nonetheless, Sasha maintains the expectation that these activities will protect her from difficult feelings, and this expectation is what makes her so emotionally vulnerable. Operating on the assumption that a simple schedule will keep sadness at bay, it's perhaps unsurprising that inevitable swells of emotion blindsides her.

In a way, Sasha's sadness isn't random or unexpected at all—this feeling is always there, no matter what she does. And she does have good reason to be sad: she not only lost her lover Enno, but also her baby, who died shortly after birth. Sasha carries the weight of these losses everywhere she goes, which is partially why it feels so hard for her to move happily through life. Normal activities are difficult for her because she's always actively trying to avoid her own despair. Her friend Delmar, on the other hand, proposes a different way of approaching life's difficulties, saying that he likes to acknowledge hardship but

then use this as an excuse to “take life just as it comes.” The crucial difference between his and Sasha’s ways of responding to emotional strife is that he doesn’t *avoid* thinking about hardship—he accepts that life is full of pain, whereas Sasha wants to run from this fact. And yet, the novel indicates that it’s not always *possible* to run from sadness, as made clear by Sasha’s repeated bouts of inconsolable grief in situations that are otherwise fun and lighthearted.



IDENTITY AND BELONGING

In *Good Morning, Midnight*, Sasha struggles to be the kind of person she wants to be. She constantly analyzes the way she presents herself to others, usually assuming they think the worst of her. These worries are often tied to her ideas surrounding nationality, as she often feels judged because she’s an English woman living in Paris, worrying that French people see Britons as uptight and uncultured. To be fair, she has good reason to think French people look down on the British, since she once heard a man on the bus say that Britons are like a plague in France. But Sasha also obsesses over her physical appearance, frequently buying clothes or getting her hair cut so she can look young and stylish. However, she still frets that everyone around her sees her as old and tasteless, and though she tells herself things like, “Tomorrow I’ll be pretty again, tomorrow I’ll be happy again,” none of her efforts to change the way she presents herself to the world actually bring her meaningful, lasting contentment. No matter how hard she tries, she can’t seem to shape her identity in a way that feels rewarding. “Please, please, monsieur et madame, mister, missis and miss,” she thinks at one point, “I am trying so hard to be like you.” And yet, she recognizes that her efforts are in vain, since nobody ever seems to care. By accentuating her desperate but failed attempts to fit in, the novel underscores how hard and lonely it can be to live as a stranger in a foreign country. Furthermore, the book demonstrates that relentlessly worrying about fitting in is futile—after all, it’s impossible to control what other people think.

Throughout the novel, Sasha is incredibly aware of the way other people perceive her, and this constant awareness interferes with her ability to relax and live in the moment. She worries about what people think of her in the cafés and restaurants she visits, noting that her entire life feels like “a complicated affair of cafés where they like [her] and cafés where they don’t.” Part of her anxiety about what others think comes from the fact that she *does* encounter people who judge her. For example, when she goes to a nice restaurant that she used to visit with Enno, she feels a sense of “panic” because she thinks everyone is watching her. And though this isn’t actually the case, she later overhears a conversation between two young women and the restaurant’s owner—a conversation in which one of the women looks at her and loudly asks (in

French), “And what the hell is she doing here now?” This statement validates Sasha’s fears about not fitting in, though it’s not immediately clear *why* she would attract such negative attention. She doesn’t know the young women, and all she’s doing is peacefully sitting in a restaurant and having a meal. Until this moment, her self-consciousness was irrational and unfounded, but now her worries that others are judging her seem warranted—and this, of course, makes it that much harder for her to simply go about her life.

To a certain extent, Sasha’s self-consciousness also has to do with her sense of social isolation as a British expatriate living in Paris. She spends a vast amount of energy fretting that Parisians will identify her as British, clearly thinking there’s something embarrassing about her nationality. For example, when she meets two Russian men on the street, she thinks it’s very “tactful[]” that they avoid asking where she’s from—even though she asks them that exact question. The implication here is that they can sense she’s British and, because of this knowledge, don’t want to embarrass her. Sasha herself is very attuned to whether or not the people she meets are French, and she’s desperate to find ways of fitting into Parisian culture, which is partially why she makes such an effort to buy stylish clothes in fancy Parisian stores. She wants to embody the Parisian way of life so badly that she spends multiple hours in a hat shop one evening, allowing the salesperson to talk her into buying a hat she doesn’t even like. This is a clear sign that she’s not necessarily concerned with looking good, but with blending in with other stylish Parisian women, apparently hoping to leave behind her identity as a British expatriate.

Looking at it from another angle, Sasha’s desire to fit in is really just a desire to run from her sorrows, as she assumes that reshaping her identity will make it easier to cope with sadness and loss. When she decides to spend her money on lavish Parisian clothes, for example, she sees it as an opportunity to fundamentally *change* herself: “I must get on with the transformation act,” she thinks. The word “transformation” suggests that she’s interested in altering her entire life, and that she thinks simple things like clothing will help her achieve this profound change. In reality, though, these things are superficial and don’t actually help her escape her own life: no matter what she does, she’s still a British expatriate with a sad past. And even if she *were* able to fully take on a Parisian identity, it’s unlikely she’d feel any different. Plus, it’s quite clear that she’s unable to change herself in such dramatic ways, since—despite her best efforts—people always seem to notice that she doesn’t fit in. Instead of recognizing that her efforts are pointless, though, Sasha can’t stop thinking about achieving some kind of “transformation.” As a result, she spends most of her time in social settings worrying about how others perceive her, effectively taking herself out of the moment and making it that much harder to connect with anyone. The novel therefore implies that fixating so intensely on one’s own identity is not

only futile, but also very lonely and isolating.



MEMORY, LOSS, AND CHANGE

With its many flashbacks and its disorganized timeline, *Good Morning, Midnight* is a novel about memory and its impact on the present. More specifically, the book explores the difficulties of moving on from past hardships. There's nothing particularly troubling about Sasha's *current* circumstances, considering that she has enough money to get by, a place to stay, and no obligations keeping her from enjoying Paris. But she's still miserable because she can't stop delving into painful memories, frequently thinking about her disastrous relationship with Enno—a relationship that led to the birth of their son, who died shortly thereafter. Given her personal history, it's no wonder that she's unhappy, though she exacerbates her own discontent by frequently succumbing to vivid flashbacks, as if she can't firmly ground herself in the present. For Sasha, it seems, her current life is hard to process because she's still working through the loss of her son (and, for that matter, the loss of her true love, Enno). At the same time, she's living through a period of significant societal change, as she and everyone around her adjust to life after World War I. For many, the post-war years were defined by a sense of relative aimlessness, as people celebrated the end of the war but didn't necessarily know what to do next, perhaps because they still carried the trauma of having lived through one of the bloodiest wars in history. Although Sasha isn't all that hung up on World War I, the way her painful memories interfere with her present life aligns with her generation's broader struggle to make sense of their lives in the aftermath of a horrific war. In this way, the novel highlights just how hard it is to move on from a traumatic past, even if nothing (no matter how devastating) will ever stop the world from continuing like normal.

Memory is an ominous and powerful force in the novel, as Sasha frequently succumbs to grief after suddenly remembering something about her past. Even the book's structure emphasizes her inability to ignore her memories. For example, although she tells herself not to walk around Paris while thinking, "Here this happened, here that happened," that's exactly what she ends up doing. When she passes places that she and Enno used to visit in Paris, she often falls headlong into very specific memories of her time in the city with him. These flashbacks happen so abruptly that it's often a bit hard for readers to track the novel's narrative thread, creating a disjointed effect. The disorienting nature of these cascading flashbacks perfectly illustrates Sasha's own powerlessness when it comes to memory; unable to keep these memories locked away in her mind, she finds it difficult to ground herself in the present, and the novel's shifting narrative structure reflects her inability to move on from the past.

Of course, it's *because* Sasha's memories are so heavy and

overpowering that she can't quite leave them behind. She feels as if her memories themselves are a kind of vast, frightening darkness. For her, thinking about the past is like falling into a bottomless pit: "You are walking along a road peacefully," she narrates. "You trip. You fall into blackness. That's the past[.]" According to this viewpoint, the past is like a fathomless darkness that, once entered, is hard to escape. In many ways, it's understandable that Sasha can't escape her memories, since they include the death of her newborn baby—an undoubtedly traumatic event that obviously impacted Sasha in profound ways. But because her baby died and Enno left, it's almost as if this devastating loss never even happened—as if these two people never existed. What's more, the midwife who cared for Sasha expertly wrapped her in bandages after she gave birth, so she doesn't even have any scars from childbirth. In a sense, then, Sasha's memories are the only things she has left from her short-lived time as a mother and a wife. Although these memories are frightening and emotionally debilitating, letting go of them would mean letting go of a piece of herself that she's not ready to part with.

On a broader level, Sasha's struggle to reconcile her painful past with her current life has a lot in common with her generation's attempt to move on from the harrowing experience of World War I. The young adults who lived during and after the war were known as the Lost Generation, largely because many of them were aimless and wayward in the years following the conflict. Like Sasha, the soldiers who survived the war were tasked with remaking their lives after enduring intense trauma. At the same time, the rest of the world went along like normal, undergoing all kinds of change. But for soldiers scarred by their time in battle, moving on from the war would mean leaving behind important, life-altering experiences, even if those experiences were horrifying and terrible. Sasha faces the same dilemma—nothing about her current circumstances aligns with her sorrowful past, and this discrepancy puts her in a tricky position. If she invests herself in the present, she'll have to let go of experiences that were important and formative, but if she clings too tightly to those memories, she'll never be able to fully live in the present. By outlining this problem, the novel shows how hard it is to live with the burden of painful memories, using Sasha's experience to shed light on the wider emotional challenges that the Lost Generation faced after World War I.



MONEY AND MANIPULATION

Good Morning, Midnight illustrates how money can be both powerful *and* utterly meaningless in a person's life. In some ways, money transforms Sasha's life, since there are periods in which she desperately needs cash to support herself. As a result, it's a big deal whenever she's able to track down some money to borrow, since doing so allows her to stop constantly worrying about

how she'll get by. In another sense, though, the money she's so eager to secure inevitably fails to bring her any kind of lasting happiness or purpose in life. Despite her attempts to ward off sadness by buying expensive clothes or making pricey trips to the hairdresser, she always feels disappointed after the rare opportunity to spend lavishly. And yet, her disappointment doesn't stop her from lusting after money when she doesn't have it, as she romanticizes the mere *idea* of wealth. Of course, it's easy to understand why she idealizes money so much, especially considering that everyone around her is obsessed with it, too. In fact, a vast majority of the interactions recounted in the novel have to do with money, and many of these encounters involve someone trying to get money from someone else. Sasha herself shows suspicion toward René because she thinks that all he wants from her is some money. And while this might be the case, he doesn't end up taking any cash from her when he gets the chance. The ambiguity surrounding this aspect of their relationship hints at the complex ways in which money can interfere with human relationships. It's never entirely clear whether or not René wants money from Sasha, and this uncertainty creates an undeniable tension in their relationship. The book therefore suggests not only that money can't buy happiness, but also that it can complicate certain emotional bonds, forcing people to doubt each other in ways that make it harder to forge a genuine connection.

There's a conflation in the book between loneliness or unhappiness and a lack of financial stability. As Sasha walks through the streets one night, she looks at the houses she passes and feels lonely. It makes sense that she feels this way, considering that she *is* alone and walking through a large city at night. However, she blames part of her melancholy on the fact that she doesn't have much money, thinking, "Walking in the night with the dark houses over you like monsters. If you have money and friends, houses are just houses with steps and a front-door—friendly houses [...]" Because she doesn't have money, though, the houses she sees seem ominous and foreboding. The implication is that she feels out of place in the fancier neighborhoods of Paris. She's not wealthy, so she has to stay in dim **hotel rooms**, making the idea of living in a nice house seem unattainable. Cut off from the possibility of leading the life of a Parisian homeowner, she feels even more isolated and alone.

However, Sasha also knows that money won't automatically bring happiness, even if she frequently romanticizes the idea of leading a wealthy, lavish life. When she actually *has* money, she seems perfectly aware that it won't make her happy. For example, when her friend gives her enough money to live comfortably for a short stay in Paris, she only feels exuberant and optimistic for a brief moment, thinking, "Some money to spend and nothing to worry about." She then immediately tells herself to be "careful," noting that she shouldn't get "excited." In

this moment, she seems hesitant to believe that financial stability can address emotional problems—money isn't a quick fix, and she seems well aware of the fact that her sadness could come creeping back at any time, regardless of whether or not she has some cash. And she's right: it isn't long before she ventures onto the streets of Paris and becomes overwhelmed by sorrow. Oddly enough, though, knowing that money can't buy happiness doesn't stop her from romanticizing the life of a rich person, especially when she feels like she doesn't have enough money. When she decides to look for a new hotel room, for instance, she latches onto the idea of renting the nicest room in the establishment. She even thinks that she will "exist on a different plane" if she can get this fancy room, suggesting that she thinks her entire life will change. There is, then, a "grass is greener" mentality at play in the novel, as Sasha acknowledges that money won't create true contentment but *still* yearns for it when she doesn't have it.

Furthermore, the mere idea of money puts a strain on many of the interactions between characters in *Good Morning, Midnight*. Almost everyone Sasha meets either obsesses over protecting their money or tries to manipulate others into giving them cash. For example, Sasha meets a man one day and has a fantastic time with him in a hotel bar, but when she offhandedly mentions that she hasn't eaten in three weeks, he abruptly abandons her, clearly thinking that she's poor and just wants to use him for his money. The entire encounter illustrates the ways in which money can make people deeply suspicious of each other. It also foreshadows the tension that arises between Sasha and René, whom Sasha worries is a sex worker who is only interested in her because he thinks she's rich and gullible. Throughout the novel, it remains unclear whether or not Sasha's suspicion about René is justified, and this uncertainty allows readers to feel the same sense of doubt and mistrust that Sasha herself feels. The ambiguity surrounding their dynamic thus demonstrates both that money can make people suspicious of each other *and* that—unfortunately—there's often good reason for such suspicion.



SYMBOLS

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



HOTEL ROOMS

Sasha's romanticized perception of the hotel rooms she stays in throughout the novel—both in the present and the past—symbolizes her failed attempts to find happiness by seeking out change. When she returns to Paris after a long absence, she books a room in a perfectly suitable hotel, but it isn't long before she decides she needs a nicer, brighter room in a more luxurious establishment. Then, when

the receptionist at the new hotel tells her about a particularly nice room, she feels as if her entire life will change for the better if she's able to live there (even though she can't afford it). When it becomes clear that she won't be able to stay in this room, though, she returns to her original hotel and realizes that "all rooms are the same," since they're just places to "hide" from the terrors of the outside world. The fact that she romanticized the light-filled room so much but then completely gave up her search for a new hotel reveals her "grass is greener" mentality, indicating that she frequently yearns for new living arrangements but never manages to find a place that resolves her unhappiness.



BATHROOM MIRRORS

Sasha's tendency to retreat to the bathroom in restaurants or bars and cry in front of the mirror represents her morbid obsession with her own unhappiness. Not only does she remove herself from public settings so she can fully indulge her emotional breakdowns, but she also watches herself cry, noting the way she looks in these moments of sorrow. Her interest in her own face as she weeps aligns with her inability to stop thinking about her discontent, as she constantly ponders the nature of her sorrow instead of simply trying to live in the moment and enjoy her life. Rather than taking life "as it comes" (as Delmar encourages her to do), she incessantly analyzes the things that make her sad, thinking about what it feels like to lose herself in deep pits of emotion. Furthermore, her habit of crying in front of mirrors also relates to her self-consciousness about her appearance, since she spends a lot of her time and energy worrying about how other people perceive her. Consequently, she often tries to hide behind new hairstyles or clothes, desperately trying to mask her sorrow. By openly weeping in front of the mirror, then, she allows herself a rare moment of emotional honesty—a moment in which she doesn't have to hide her unhappiness. The mirrors themselves thus come to represent her strange and private relationship with her own emotions.





QUOTES


Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the W. W. Norton & Company edition of *Good Morning, Midnight* published in 1999.

Part One Quotes

“ I stayed there, staring at myself in the glass. What do I want to cry about?...On the contrary, it's when I am quite sane like this, when I have had a couple of extra drinks and am quite sane, that I realize how lucky I am. Saved, rescued, fished-up, half-drowned, out of the deep, dark river, dry clothes, hair shampooed and set. Nobody would know I had ever been in it. Except, of course, that there always remains something. Yes, there always remains something....

Related Characters: Sasha (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 10


Explanation and Analysis

Sasha thinks these thoughts while staring at herself in the mirror of a bar's bathroom. She has just randomly broken into tears while having a pleasant, untroubling conversation with a young couple. As she thinks about the nature of her sadness, the passage introduces readers to her emotional vulnerability.

In some ways, she's completely baffled by her own sadness, asking, "What do I want to cry about?" She even feels rather optimistic about her life in this moment, as she claims to recognize "how lucky" she is. After all, she recently underwent a deep depression but was able to pull herself out of sadness—at least, that's what she tells herself. But the mere fact that she unexpectedly started crying while having a nice conversation suggests that she *hasn't* emerged from her depressive period. Rather, she has held onto the sadness and knows, when it comes down to it, that there will "always remain[] something" of her sorrow, regardless of her current circumstances.

“ I tell him I will let him have the passport in the afternoon and he gives my hat a gloomy, disapproving look. I don't blame him. It shouts 'Anglaise', my hat. And my dress extinguishes me. And then this damned old fur coat slung on top of everything else—the last idiocy, the last incongruity.

Related Characters: Sasha (speaker)

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 14-15

Explanation and Analysis

As Sasha is leaving her hotel one day, the receptionist tells her that he needs to look at her passport at some point for the hotel's records. Sasha doesn't want to reveal her nationality, so she feels self-conscious about showing the receptionist her passport. When she puts off having to show it to him, she thinks she picks up on some hostility, as he throws her hat a "gloomy, disapproving look." According to Sasha, her hat yells out "Anglaise"—the French word for an English woman.

Her interaction with the receptionist then causes her to critically review her entire outfit: not only is her hat unbearably British, but so are her dress and her fur coat. Suddenly, she second-guesses the entire way she presents herself to the world, and all of this insecurity is based on a single glance from the receptionist. Given that such a fleeting interaction can make her so self-conscious, it becomes clear that Sasha is overly attuned to the way other people perceive her—so attuned, it seems, that she has trouble simply living life on her own terms.

☛ Twelve o'clock on a fine autumn day, and nothing to worry about. Some money to spend and nothing to worry about.

But careful, careful! Don't get excited. You know what happens when you get excited and exalted, don't you?...Yes....And then, you know how you collapse like a pricked balloon, don't you? Having no staying power....Yes, exactly.... So, no excitement. This is going to be a quiet, sane fortnight. Not too much drinking, avoidance of certain cafés, of certain streets, of certain spots, and everything will go off beautifully.

The thing is to have a programme, not to leave anything to chance—no gaps.

Related Characters: Sasha (speaker)

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 15

Explanation and Analysis

Sasha speaks sternly to herself as a way of making sure she doesn't become too happy or relaxed. Telling herself not to get "excited" is a defense mechanism against the onslaught of emotion she often experiences. It's almost as if she thinks she's tempting fate by saying, "Some money to spend and nothing to worry about." After all, she knows quite well that money doesn't bring happiness, and she also knows that she has quite a lot to worry about, since her sorrowful past


often crops up in unexpected moments.

To avoid getting blindsided by sadness, Sasha decides that sticking to a plan (or "programme") will keep her busy and, thus, prevent her from wallowing in her emotions. Ironically, though, this tactic is probably the reason she often finds herself weeping in unexpected moments: distracting herself from her emotions isn't the same thing as addressing them, and even she knows that there "always remains something" of her depressing past. As a result, it's impossible to outrun her sorrow, and trying to do so just makes it all the more likely that her surges of emotion will take her by surprise.

☛ Paris is looking very nice tonight....You are looking very nice tonight, my beautiful, my darling, and oh what a bitch you can be! But you didn't kill me after all, did you? And they couldn't kill me either....

Just about here we waited for a couple of hours to see Anatole France's funeral pass, because, Enno said, we mustn't let such a great literary figure disappear without paying him the tribute of a last salute.

Related Characters: Sasha (speaker), Enno

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 16

Explanation and Analysis



Sasha has recently returned to Paris after leaving the city in a period of deep depression. Now that she's back, she feels capable of appreciating its beauty and is happy to reacquaint herself with the various landmarks she used to know so well. Part of her excitement might have to do with the fact that living in London was extremely dreary for her (she tried to drink herself to death in England). What's interesting, though, is the tension between her excitement to be back and her knowledge that she was very unhappy the last time she was in Paris. Although she and Enno romanticized Paris when they first got married (assuming that all their problems would disappear once they reached the city), Sasha now knows that simply changing locations isn't a good way to address unhappiness.

At the same time, though, Sasha seems genuinely enthralled to have returned, and though she has already told herself not to dwell on the memories she made the last time she lived here, she immediately falls into a flashback about watching the funeral procession of Anatole France (a famous writer) with Enno—a clear sign that she will have

trouble keeping the past at bay while visiting Paris, which is such an emotionally charged place for her.

Well, let's argue this out, Mr Blank. You, who represent Society, have the right to pay me four hundred francs a month. That's my market value, for I am an inefficient member of Society, slow in the uptake, uncertain, slightly damaged in the fray, there's no denying it. So you have the right to pay me four hundred francs a month, to lodge me in a small, dark room, to clothe me shabbily, to harass me with worry and monotony and unsatisfied longings till you get me to the point when I blush at a look, cry at a word. We can't all be happy, we can't all be rich, we can't all be lucky—and it would be so much less fun if we were. Isn't it so, Mr Blank? [...] Let's say that you have this mystical right to cut my legs off. But the right to ridicule me afterwards because I am a cripple—no, that I think you haven't got.

Related Characters: Sasha (speaker), Mr. Blank

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 29



Explanation and Analysis

After Mr. Blank ridicules Sasha because she wasn't able to deliver his letter to the cashier in the dress store, Sasha rails against him in her mind. The only reason she didn't know what to do with the letter was that Mr. Blank mispronounced the French word for "cashier." The fact that he treats her like she's unintelligent prompts her to think about the nature of their working relationship. She concedes that she isn't the best worker, admitting that she's "slow in the uptake." In fact, she even allows that Mr. Blank has the right to create rather poor working conditions by "harass[ing her] with worry and monotony" or by putting her in a "small, dark room."

The fact that Sasha is willing to put up with that kind of treatment hints at her lacking sense of self-worth. Indeed, the only thing she won't stand for is the idea of Mr. Blank belittling her for a mistake she didn't even make. She *does* put up with such treatment, though, considering that she only delivers this monologue in her own head. Sasha fails to actually stand up for herself and, in that way, demonstrates her tendency to accept mistreatment and scorn.

Walking in the night with the dark houses over you, like monsters. If you have money and friends, houses are just houses with steps and a front-door—friendly houses where the door opens and somebody meets you, smiling. If you are quite secure and your roots are well struck in, they know. They stand back respectfully, waiting for the poor devil without any friends and without any money. Then they step forward, the waiting houses, to frown and crush. No hospitable doors, no lit windows, just frowning darkness. Frowning and leering and sneering, the houses, one after another.

Related Characters: Sasha (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 32

Explanation and Analysis


As Sasha walks back to her hotel at night, she feels as if the houses she passes have a sad, threatening look to them. According to her, houses look ominous when a person doesn't have any money or friends. The implication here is that Sasha feels out of place as she passes these beautiful homes. Although the houses might otherwise feel warm and inviting, she sees them as nothing but reminders of the fact that she has nothing: she doesn't have enough money to buy her own house, and she doesn't have friends to invite her to theirs. As a result, she feels like a complete outsider.

What's more, the houses emphasize the fact that Sasha is an expatriate living in a foreign country. Her roots, in other words, aren't "well struck in," meaning that she feels disconnected to everything and everyone around her. This sense of disconnection makes the surrounding world seem like it's "frowning and leering" at her, turning her entire environment into a lonely and scary place.

I listen anxiously to this conversation. Suddenly I feel that I must have number 219, with bath—number 219, with rose-coloured curtains, carpet and bath. I shall exist on a different plane at once if I can get this room, if only for a couple of nights. It will be an omen. Who says you can't escape from your fate? I'll escape from mine, into room number 219. Just try me, just give me a chance.

Related Characters: Sasha (speaker)

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 37

Explanation and Analysis

After waking up one morning and deciding that her current hotel is too cheap and depressing, Sasha decides to find a new place to stay. She goes to another hotel and asks for the room with the best light, and the receptionist agrees to show it to her. Although Sasha knows she can't afford the room, she agrees to take a look, but she then overhears the bellhop whispering that the room is actually unavailable—and suddenly, Sasha wants the room more than anything. When she lists the features of the room—the bath, the “rose-coloured curtains,” the lush carpet—it becomes clear that she has gotten wrapped up in the luxury of it all.



What's more, Sasha makes the misguided assumption that living an expensive existence will completely change her entire life. She thinks she will “exist on a different plane” if only she can stay in a fancy room. By making such an assumption, she fails to recognize that wealth and luxury are often quite superficial. They won't do anything to alter her overall unhappiness, but her excitement suggests that it's hard to think in this rational way when faced with the fantasy of leading a lavish new life.

☝ I am not at all sad as I walk back to the hotel. When I remember how one well-directed ‘Oh, my God,’ lays me out flat in London, I can only marvel at the effect this place has on me. I expect it is because the drink is so much better.

[...]

Just then two men come up from behind and walk along on either side of me. One of them says: ‘Pourquoi êtes-vous si triste?’

Related Characters: Sasha (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 45

Explanation and Analysis


On her way back from a bar after hearing someone refer to her as old, Sasha marvels that she isn't actually very sad about how her life is going in Paris. She's especially surprised because she knows that, when living in London, a few wrong words could really ruin her entire mood. Once again, she romanticizes Paris by thinking that her relative happiness has to do with the city itself. The mere fact that

she thinks so extensively about her mood hints at her inability to stop worrying about whether or not she's happy.

Humorously enough, though, it seems Sasha has tricked herself into think she's happier than she actually is, considering that the two men who approach her on the street ask her (in French) why she's so sad—a question indicating that she looks quite glum as she walks through Paris, the city that she wants to believe improves her happiness and helps ward off sadness. In reality, it seems, Sasha is most likely just as sad as she would be in London, even if she's hesitant to admit this to herself.

☝ These people all fling themselves at me. Because I am uneasy and sad they all fling themselves at me larger than life.

Related Characters: Sasha (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 49

Explanation and Analysis



Sitting in a restaurant by herself, Sasha has trouble ignoring the other diners. Her main concern is that they might say or do something that will cause her to emotionally unravel—an understandable worry, considering that her entire day or evening often gets ruined by a simple, fleeting interaction. As a result, she feels as if strangers pose a very real and imminent threat to her emotional well-being. It's as if they “fling themselves” at her, constantly intruding on her ability to simply enjoy her life and find happiness.

Sasha recognizes that part of why she feels threatened by strangers is that she's “uneasy and sad.” The implication here is that she wouldn't find other people so intimidating if she were happy. Instead, she would just go about her life without thinking about what other people might say or do. But because she's sad, she feels especially vulnerable, as if sorrow makes people even more susceptible to unpleasant feelings.

☝ And five weeks afterwards there I am, with not one line, not one wrinkle, not one crease.

And there he is, lying with a ticket tied round his wrist because he died in a hospital. And there I am looking down at him, without one line, without one wrinkle, without one crease....

Related Characters: Sasha (speaker), Enno

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 61

Explanation and Analysis

After Sasha gives birth, her caretaker wraps her in tight bandages and promises that her body will heal so well that nobody will ever even know she was pregnant. The caretaker is right: five weeks after going into labor, Sasha doesn't have a single "line" or "wrinkle." But she also doesn't have a baby, since her son died while she was recuperating. In a way, then, the fact that Sasha's body shows no signs of having given birth just adds to the trauma of losing her son. Of course, birth scars would constantly remind her that she gave birth to a child and that the child died, but at least they would serve as a way to memorialize her son. As it stands, it's as if nothing ever even happened. Her baby is dead, and even Enno—the child's father—is no longer in her life. Consequently, her lack of birth scars actually *adds* to her sense of loss, ultimately disconnecting her from a very formative (though traumatic) moment in her life—a disconnect that makes it that much harder for her to mourn her loss.

☞ He says: 'For me, you see, I look at life like this: If someone had come to me and asked me if I wished to be born I think I should have answered No. I'm sure I should have answered No. But no one asked me. I am here not through my will. Most things that happen to me—they are not my will either. And so that's what I say to myself all the time: "You didn't ask to be born, you didn't make the world as it is, you didn't make yourself as you are. Why torment yourself? Why not take life just as it comes? [...]'

Related Characters: Nicolas Delmar (speaker), Sasha

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 64

Explanation and Analysis

Delmar outlines his outlook on life and despair, telling Sasha that he tries not to dwell on tragedy or hardship. The reason he's able to avoid thinking too much about the depressing aspects of life, he says, is that he knows such matters are out of his hands. He takes a somewhat pessimistic approach to life, since, if it were up to him, he would rather not have

been born. But there's nothing he can do to change the fact that he *was* born. Similarly, he believes that "most things that happen" to him are also out of his control. Life is difficult and unfair, and Delmar doesn't think there's much he can do to change that.

Delmar's outlook might sound depressing, but his lack of personal agency actually feels freeing to him—without the power to change the world (or even his own life), he doesn't have to pretend that he's in control, so he can sit back and take life "as it comes." Sasha, on the other hand, is always thinking about whether or not she's happy. She worries constantly about her emotions, and her worry takes her out of the moment. Delmar, for his part, does the opposite: he accepts that life is sad and, as a result, is more likely to find peace in the occasional moments of happiness that come his way.

☞ 'Do you know what I feel about you? I think you are very lonely. I know, because for a long time I was lonely myself. I hated people, I didn't want to see anyone. And then one day I thought: "No, this isn't the way." And now I go about a lot. I force myself to. I have a lot of friends; I'm never alone. Now I'm much happier.'

Related Characters: Nicolas Delmar (speaker), Sasha

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 66

Explanation and Analysis

Delmar speaks these words to Sasha after talking about his overall life philosophy. It makes sense that he goes out with friends as a way of fighting off sadness and loneliness, considering that he's against the idea of wallowing in emotion. For him, it's important to take life "as it comes," which is why he's unlikely to sit around by himself and focus on his sadness. Instead, he's inclined to go out with others and forge connections—after all, human relationships are often a source of strength and happiness in life.

In contrast, Sasha largely stays in her hotel room or goes out to cafés and restaurants by herself, leading a very lonely existence that gives her plenty of time to fixate on her own unhappiness. By encouraging her to step outside of her isolated lifestyle, then, Delmar gives Sasha a new way to avoid loneliness and sorrow. His eventual romantic overtures, however, throw into question whether or not he

really wanted to help Sasha, or if he just wanted to convince her to spend more time with him.



Part Two Quotes

☝ I have an irresistible longing for a long, strong drink to make me forget that once again I have given damnable human beings the right to pity me and laugh at me.

I say in a loud, aggressive voice: 'Go out and get a bottle of brandy,' take money out of my bag and offer it to him.

This is where he starts getting hold of me, Serge. He doesn't accept the money or refuse it—he ignores it. He blots out what I have said and the way I said it. He ignores it as if it had never been, and I know that, for him, it has never been.

Related Characters: Sasha (speaker), Serge, Nicolas Delmar

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 94

Explanation and Analysis

When Delmar brings Sasha to Serge's apartment, she has a great time until she unexpectedly starts crying. Fortunately for her, though, Serge and Delmar are extremely understanding. Serge is particularly attentive to her, telling her that it's quite natural to cry and that she should do so if she wants, because she's among friends. However, Sasha reacts negatively to Serge's kindness, suddenly feeling embarrassed—and then angry—about letting her new acquaintances see her in such an emotionally vulnerable state. As such, she lashes out at Serge in an attempt to drive him away.

Above all, Sasha's attempt to alienate herself from Serge suggests that she's not used to experiencing compassion or kindness. Instead, she assumes that everyone always thinks poorly of her, which is why she thinks that she has given Serge and Delmar the "right to pity [her] and laugh at [her]." But Serge continues to show her kindness by refusing to react to her outburst, and his willingness to ignore her in this way endears him to Sasha, who isn't accustomed to such empathy.

☝ All his charm and ease of manner have gone. He looks anxious and surly. I say awkwardly: 'I don't think it at all too much. But I haven't got the money...'

Before I can get any further he bursts into a shout of laughter, 'What did I tell you?' he says to Delmar.

'But have it, take it, all the same. I like you. I'll give it you as a present.'

'No, no. All I meant was that I can't pay you now.'

'Oh, that's all right. You can send me the money from London. I'll tell you what you can do for me—you can find some other idiots who'll buy my pictures.'

Related Characters: Sasha, Serge (speaker), Nicolas Delmar

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 100

Explanation and Analysis



When Sasha says she'd like to buy one of Serge's paintings, he responds somewhat condescendingly. Although he showed her what seemed like genuine kindness and compassion when she started crying earlier, he now acts as if the entire purpose of Delmar bringing her to the apartment was so he (Serge) could sell her a painting. The fact that he says "What did I tell you" to Delmar when Sasha says she doesn't have the money implies that he and Delmar have already talked about getting Sasha to purchase some art. Suddenly, then, it's no longer clear if Delmar and Serge really want to be friends with Sasha or if they have ulterior motives.

At the same time, though, Serge's willingness to give Sasha a painting as a "present" complicates things, making it even harder to discern what, exactly, his intentions are when it comes to his new relationship with Sasha. Once more, then, Sasha finds herself in a situation in which it's difficult to determine if people are trying to take advantage of her or are actually interested in cultivating a relationship.

☝ I only came in here to inquire the way to the nearest cinema. I am a respectable woman, une femme convenable, on her way to the nearest cinema. Faites comme les autres—that's been my motto all my life. Faites comme les autres, damn you.

And a lot he cares—I could have spared myself the trouble. But this is my attitude to life. Please, please, monsieur et madame, mister, missis and miss, I am trying so hard to be like you. I know I don't succeed, but look how hard I try.

Related Characters: Sasha (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 106

Explanation and Analysis



In an attempt to impress her waiter one evening, Sasha asks him to tell her how to get to the nearest movie theater. However, she wasn't necessarily planning on going to the movies in the first place. Rather, she just wants to look like *une femme convenable*—a “decent woman.” She's self-conscious because she's dining alone, so she tries hard to *faire comme les autres*—to “do as others do.” The idea here is that she desperately wants to fit in amongst other Parisians, since she feels embarrassed by the fact that she's British.

At the same time, though, Sasha recognizes that the waiter doesn't care what she does. She “could have spared [her]self the trouble” of pretending to behave in a certain way, since the waiter isn't actually concerned with the way she lives her life. It's somewhat odd that she's capable of acknowledging the waiter's indifference, since she spends so much of her energy attempting to impress others and trying desperately to blend in. But her acknowledgment of the waiter's apathy doesn't do anything to change her self-consciousness: she knows it doesn't matter to anybody else, but she still wants to be seen as a decent, respectable Parisian woman. And, as a result, she's willing to go to great, exhausting lengths to behave as such.

Part Three Quotes

☹️ I haven't any money. He hasn't any either. We both thought the other had money. But people are doing crazy things all over the place. The war is over. No more war—never, never, never. *Après la guerre*, there'll be a good time everywhere....And not to go back to London. It isn't so fine, what I have to go back to in London.

Related Characters: Sasha (speaker), Enno

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 114

Explanation and Analysis


Around the time Sasha and Enno get married, they both move through life with excessive optimism. Despite their initial assumptions, neither of them have much money, but this lack of financial stability doesn't bother them—at least,

not yet. They will later find that it's hard to stay optimistic and happy while constantly struggling to survive, but for now they're simply happy to be young and in love.

To add to their rosy outlook, the end of World War I has made many young people giddy with excitement. Sasha touches on this widespread delight by quoting a song called “*Après la guerre*” (“After the War”), which became popular in 1918 because of its hopeful sentiment that, after the war, there would be “a good time everywhere.” Despite all of this hopefulness, though, it's easy to pick up on the fact that Sasha and Enno aren't being very realistic about the future. After all, Sasha sets unrealistic expectations by saying, “No more war—never, never, never.” Given her unswerving optimism, it's unsurprising that she later feels deeply disappointed by the crushing reality of life's hardships and sorrows.

☹️ I am tuned up to top pitch. Everything is smooth, soft and tender. Making love. The colours of the pictures. The sunsets. Tender, north colours when the sun sets—pink, mauve, green and blue. And the wind very fresh and cold and the lights in the canals like gold caterpillars and the seagulls swooping over the water. Tuned up to top pitch. Everything tender and melancholy—as life is sometimes, just for one moment....

Related Characters: Sasha (speaker), Enno

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 117

Explanation and Analysis

Here, Sasha describes what it feels like to be a newlywed. As she and Enno enjoy the first days of their marriage, Sasha experiences an easy, idyllic happiness—the kind of happiness that makes everything feel “smooth, soft and tender.” When she and Enno visit a museum, the colors of the art they see look especially vibrant and lush.

Because the *vast* majority of *Good Morning, Midnight* focuses on things like sadness, insecurity, and painful memories, it's significant that the days following Sasha's marriage are full of such rich happiness. In a way, this passage shows readers that Sasha is capable of experiencing joy. And yet, she also says that everything feels “tender and melancholy.” The word “melancholy” refers to a feeling of meditative sadness, so the fact that Sasha experiences it during a period of great joy suggests that she's never fully detached from her feelings of sorrow—after all, she believes that, when it

comes to sadness, there “always remains something.”

“‘I want very much to go back to Paris,’ Enno would say. ‘It has no reason, no sense. But all the same I want to go back there. Certain houses, certain streets....No sense, no reason. Just this nostalgia[...].’

Suddenly I am in a fever of anxiety to get there. Let’s be on our way, let’s be on our way....Why shouldn’t we get as far as Brussels? All right, we’ll get as far as Brussels; might be something doing in Brussels.

But the fifteen pounds have gone. We raise every penny we can. We sell most of our clothes.

My beautiful life in front of me, opening out like a fan in my hand....

Related Characters: Enno, Sasha (speaker)

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 117-118

Explanation and Analysis

Shortly after Sasha and Enno get married and travel to Amsterdam, Enno talks about wanting to go to Paris, saying that a deep sense of “nostalgia” is pulling him back to the city. Even though he and Sasha were just in a state of complete bliss, they suddenly decide that they have to get to Paris as quickly as possible. Sasha therefore goes from feeling like she’s “tuned up to top pitch” (because of her happiness) to feeling like she has to change her current situation. In other words, she doesn’t let herself simply enjoy her happiness, instead fixating on the idea that life in Paris will be even *better* than life in Amsterdam.

The pace of the language in this section hints at Sasha’s irrationally feverish need to go to Paris. The repetition of the phrase “let’s be on our way” creates a feeling of urgency, as does the repetition of “Brussels” in the following sentences: “Why shouldn’t we get as far as Brussels? All right, we’ll get as far as Brussels; might be something doing in Brussels.” The rapid-fire nature of these repetitions infuses the entire section with a manic quality, as Sasha latches onto the idea of going to Paris and suddenly can think of nothing else.

Unfortunately for Sasha, though, chasing a romanticized idea of happiness by rushing off to Paris doesn’t go particularly well. Whereas her and Enno’s time in Amsterdam was joyful and relaxed, now reality comes crashing down on them as they realize they don’t have

enough money. All at once, then, Sasha’s “beautiful life” as a newlywed gets a bit more complicated, indicating that adopting a “grass is greener” mentality is a good way to run into disappointment.

“‘I’ve got some money,’ he says. ‘My God, isn’t it hot? Peel me an orange.’

‘I’m very thirsty’ he says. ‘Peel me an orange.’

Now is the time to say ‘Peel it yourself’, now is the time to say ‘Go to hell’, now is the time to say ‘I won’t be treated like this’. But much too strong—the room, the street, the thing in myself, oh, much too strong....I peel the orange, put it on a plate and give it to him.

Related Characters: Enno, Sasha (speaker), Mr. Blank

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 129

Explanation and Analysis

After leaving Sasha for many days while she’s pregnant, Enno waltzes back into their hotel in Paris and acts as if nothing happened. He even seems happy, since he has apparently managed to borrow some money. Despite the fact that he left his pregnant wife alone for so long that she assumed he was gone forever, he doesn’t try to make amends or apologize.

Enno’s inconsiderate behavior aligns with the way seemingly *everyone* treats Sasha throughout the novel. Nobody in her life, it seems, can be fully trusted. And yet, she never stands up for herself. In the same way that she holds herself back from telling Enno to “go to hell,” she failed to deliver the angry monologue she thought up when Mr. Blank unfairly treated her like she was unintelligent. Considering that she’s unable—or unwilling—to advocate for herself, then, it’s unsurprising that Sasha sees other people as threats when she ventures out into the world. In a sense, her passive response to personal conflict puts her at the mercy of everyone she meets.

☹☹ 'Lise, don't cry.'


'Non, non, j'en ai assez.'

I also start to cry. No, life is too sad; it's quite impossible.

Sitting in front of the flamme bleue, arms round each other's waists, crying. No, life is too sad....My tears fall on her thick hair, which always smells so nice.

Enno, coming in with another bottle of Asti spumante, says: 'Oh, my God, this is gay,' and laughs loudly. Lise and I look at each other and start laughing too. Soon we are all rolling, helpless with laughter. It's too much, I can't any more, it's too much....

Related Characters: Sasha, Lise (speaker), Enno

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 134



Explanation and Analysis

When Sasha and her friend Lise drink together one night, Lise unexpectedly starts crying about how hard her life is. She says she wishes there would be another war and that she'd get killed in it. Her outburst puts Sasha in the unique position of having to console somebody who has just abruptly broken into tears—a role reversal for her, since she's usually the one crying. And because she's used to crying, she's not all that good at comforting Lise. For example, when Lise says that she's had enough of life (which is what she means when she says "*j'en ai assez*"), Sasha starts crying, too, and then they sit around the stove and hold each other while weeping.

Although Sasha fails to console Lise in the traditional sense, her reaction is actually quite compassionate. If people were to react to Sasha's crying by shedding some tears themselves, it's quite likely that Sasha would feel a little better. What's more, Enno's sarcastic remark about the scene being happy and uplifting cuts the tension in the room, helping both Sasha and Lise step back from their sorrow and find some humor in the situation. In turn, the novel implies that sometimes sorrow and joy aren't so distinct from each other, since human emotions are complex and often wrapped up in one another.

☹☹ Just the sensation of spending, that's the point. I'll look at bracelets studded with artificial jewels, red, green and blue, necklaces of imitation pearls, cigarette-cases, jewelled tortoisés....And when I have had a couple of drinks I shan't know whether it's yesterday, today or tomorrow.

Related Characters: Sasha (speaker), Enno

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 145

Explanation and Analysis

After her baby dies and Enno leaves her, Sasha manages to borrow some money from family members in England. She then focuses all of her attention on buying jewelry and other items in an attempt to distract herself from her pain. All she's interested in is the mere "sensation of spending," admitting that the feeling of buying something is the entire "point" of shopping. For her, the "point" isn't to obtain things she needs—or even *wants*—but simply to experience what it's like to spend money.

However, there are other moments in the novel that suggest such behavior doesn't truly alleviate unhappiness. For instance, when Sasha buys a new hat to fit in with the new Parisian styles, it doesn't bring her any kind of lasting satisfaction. All the same, though, she makes a concerted effort to shop away her troubles, and the fact that she knows this won't work only emphasizes how desperate she is to distract herself from her sorrow.

Part Four Quotes

☹☹ He takes my hand in his and looks at my ring, his eyes narrowing.

'No good,' I say. 'Only worth about fifty francs—if that.'

'What, your hand?'

'You weren't looking at my hand, you were looking at my ring.'

'Oh, how suspicious she is, this woman! It's extraordinary. But you will come this evening, won't you?'

Related Characters: Sasha, René (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 152

Explanation and Analysis

When René comes to Sasha's hotel one evening, she agrees to meet him for dinner and drinks later that night. Happy that she has accepted his invitation, he grabs her hand and studies it, but it's unclear if he's looking at her fingers or zeroing in on her ring—an important distinction, since Sasha already suspects that he's trying to con her. But when she accuses him of thinking about stealing her ring, he responds in a way that makes it hard to determine whether or not he's


telling the truth. He explicitly notes that Sasha is “suspicious.” The mere fact that he acknowledges this aloud makes him quite hard to read: it’s unclear if he actually thinks Sasha’s being ridiculous or if he comments on her suspicion as a way of disarming her.

It is exactly this kind of ambiguity that makes their interactions so hard to categorize or define. At times, it might seem as if Sasha is being overly protective of herself, while at other times it might seem quite clear that René is planning to take advantage of her. The lack of clarity here reflects what Sasha herself feels as she tries to determine René’s intentions.

☞ ‘Oh no, not yet, not yet. When I ask her for something it’ll be something. But one mustn’t do that too quickly, of course. She must be ready....She’s nearly ready. I think perhaps tomorrow she’ll be ready.’

He looks straight into my eyes all the time he is talking, with that air of someone defying you.

Related Characters: René, Sasha (speaker)

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 155

Explanation and Analysis

As Sasha talks to René over drinks, he tells her that he met a rich American woman who’s willing to help him with whatever he needs. What he explains is the exact kind of arrangement that Sasha originally thought he was after with *her*. And yet, he’s still going out with Sasha and even asks for some money, so Sasha asks why he hasn’t been able to get any money from his American suitor. It’s perhaps surprising how honestly René responds, as he doesn’t hide the fact that he’s only interested in this woman because she’s rich. He also doesn’t hide that he’s actively manipulating her, trying to get her to a point at which she won’t refuse him anything.

On the one hand, René’s honesty here possibly suggests that he genuinely likes Sasha, wants to be open with her, and has no intention of conning her. On the other hand, though, he’s basically fessing up to the exact kind of behavior Sasha feared he might try to pull on her. It’s also quite possible that he’s making the American woman up, meaning that he possibly *is* pulling this stunt on Sasha. Once again, then, their relational dynamic remains extremely ambiguous, effectively putting readers in the same state of uncertainty

that Sasha herself experiences in her interactions with René.

☞ ‘Then what are you afraid of? Tell me. I’m interested. Of men, of love?...What, still?...Impossible.’

You are walking along a road peacefully. You trip. You fall into blackness. That’s the past—or perhaps the future. And you know that there is no past, no future, there is only this blackness, changing faintly, slowly, but always the same.

Related Characters: René, Sasha (speaker)

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 172

Explanation and Analysis

After Sasha admits to René that she wants to have sex with him but is too afraid to go through with it, René wants to know what, exactly, she’s afraid of. But Sasha doesn’t answer right away. Instead, she experiences something of a blackout, as if she’s “walking along a road peacefully” and then trips into a vast and endless pit of “blackness.” The idea that this darkness is the “past” makes a certain amount of sense, since René has just asked what Sasha is afraid of—thinking about an answer to this question, Sasha plunges into her past, which is full of reasons to be afraid of someone like René. After all, she has been hurt by men before, so she has good reason to be weary of letting yet another man get close to her. But Sasha also thinks of the darkness as the future, and then she loses herself to the “blackness” altogether.

This moment is very abstract, so there isn’t a single way to understand what, exactly, Sasha means. Suffice it to say, René’s question about fear causes Sasha to enter a somewhat dissociative state. This illustrates just how overpowering and disorienting her conversation with René has become, perhaps because he’s pushing her to open up to him in ways she isn’t ready for.

☞ I have my arms round him and I begin to laugh, because I am so happy. I stand there hugging him, so terribly happy. Now everything is in my arms on this dark landing—love, youth, spring, happiness, everything I thought I’d lost. I was a fool, wasn’t I? to think all that was finished for me. How could it be finished?

Related Characters: Sasha (speaker), René

Related Themes:**Related Symbols:****Page Number:** 177**Explanation and Analysis**

Coming home from drinks with René, Sasha tells him he can't come into her room. They part ways, but then René appears in the dark hall as Sasha is trying to open her door. Instead of feeling afraid, she feels ecstatic that he's there. As she embraces him, she has no more hesitations about becoming intimate with him. As a result, she feels free and

happy, realizing that she's still capable of experiencing things like "love, youth, spring, happiness" and "everything" she thought she had "lost."

The fact that Sasha thought these emotions were "lost" to her suggests that she isolated herself so much from the outside world that she felt completely disconnected from things like joy and human intimacy. In other words, she retreated into her own sadness, and now that she has emerged from that sadness, she experiences a rush of elation. Unfortunately for her, though, her elation won't last, since it has more to do with her own emotional struggles than with her relationship with René, whom she doesn't even trust.



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

Sasha's **room** in Paris reminds her of the past. It has been five days since she returned to the city, and in that time she has established a daily routine that brings her comfort—except, that is, when something unexpectedly upsets her. Last night, for instance, she was drinking at a bar and fell into conversation with the couple sitting next to her, and though her conversation with the beautiful young woman and her American boyfriend was perfectly pleasant, she suddenly broke into tears.

The beautiful young woman tried to comfort Sasha by saying that she, too, gets sad sometimes, though she usually tries not to cry in public settings. Sasha, for her part, claimed she was just crying because she happened to have remembered something from her past, and then she removed herself to weep in the bathroom, where she stared at herself in the **mirror**.

Looking at herself in the **mirror**, Sasha asked herself why she was crying. She felt pretty good before breaking down. She'd had a few drinks and was even able to recognize that she's actually quite lucky—after all, she'd recently emerged from the depths of sorrow, but nobody would ever be able to tell such a thing by just looking at her. At the same time, though, she knew that certain kinds of sorrow always stay tucked inside a person.

The beginning of Good Morning, Midnight establishes Sasha's emotional vulnerability. The fact that her room in Paris reminds her of the past suggests that she's haunted by certain memories—memories she hopes to block out by staying busy. For Sasha, sticking to a predictable routine is a way of avoiding sadness. And yet, she seems incapable of fully escaping her sorrow, considering that it rears its head so unexpectedly when she's in the middle of a nice conversation. It's not yet clear why she's sad, then, but it is clear that she can't just ignore her emotions by distracting herself.



Although Sasha doesn't articulate exactly what set her off, she suggests that her memories are powerful enough to completely destabilize her in even the most unexpected circumstances. Given that she started crying while talking to a young couple, it's possible that they reminded her of something from her own romantic past, perhaps suggesting that she's nostalgic about a previous relationship.



Sasha is caught off guard by her own sadness. It's not that something specific overwhelmed her in this moment—rather, a general sense of sorrow seems to have descended on her, which is why it doesn't matter that she was having a pleasant time. Nothing she can do, she realizes, will protect her from these surges of feeling, meaning that she's completely vulnerable to her own emotions. She has undergone a terrible bout of depression and, as a result, will always feel a certain level of sorrow.



These days, Sasha is a bit of a machine, always trying to avoid thinking about the past. Nonetheless, she sits in her **hotel room** and reflects on her return to Paris. She was previously living in London and drinking heavily, but then her friend lent her money and encouraged her to leave, saying that she couldn't bear to see Sasha in such a sorrowful state. According to this friend, Sasha needed a change, so she went to Paris with borrowed money. Now she sits in her hotel room and has trouble sleeping—despite the luminal she takes to calm her nerves.

Lying awake, Sasha turns on the light. She thinks there are bugs crawling up and down the wall, but when she looks closer, she realizes they're just little black specks of dirt. Hoping to ease into sleep, she takes luminal and turns out the light, falling into a nightmare in which she's in a London train station and has no choice but to follow signs that say: "This Way to the Exhibition." At one point, a short man in a white nightgown screams, "Murder, murder, murder," as blood pours from a wound in his face.

When Sasha wakes in the morning, she can hear the man in the next room fumbling around. She often encounters him in the hall, and he's always wearing either a white or blue nightgown. He greets her every time they pass, but she doesn't like him and has trouble envisioning him in regular clothes, viewing him as a ghost of the hotel.

On her way out of the hotel that morning, the receptionist informs Sasha that he needs to take a look at her passport for the hotel's records. Embarrassed that she's British, she wishes she had taken on her husband's nationality. But she knows that everything about her makes it clear that she's British—her hat and coat, for example, both make it quite obvious where she's from.

Sasha's friend wanted to cheer her up, but simply giving her money to go to Paris doesn't do very much to make her happy. After all, changing scenery isn't a surefire way to improve a person's mood. In fact, it doesn't really seem like anything has changed in Sasha's life, since she wallows in her emotions just like she did in London, staying in her room and taking strong sleeping drugs. To make matters worse, she clearly associates Paris with many sad memories, so her return to the city is unlikely to do anything but exacerbate her discontent.



Sasha leads a very bleak existence in her dark hotel room. In fact, there's not much separation between her waking life and her bad dreams, since there's a certain nightmarish quality to her consciousness. One moment, she's awake and staring at the wall with intense paranoia; the next, she's asleep and dreaming of a wounded man screaming "murder." Needless to say, there's nothing uplifting about her state of mind, regardless of whether she's awake or asleep.



The fact that the man living next to Sasha wears a nightgown further blurs the line between her waking life and the world of her dreams, since she just woke up from a nightmare in which a man in a nightgown screamed "murder" and bled from his face. More than anything, this strange overlap suggests that Sasha is drifting through her own life and is hardly able to distinguish her bleak existence from her bad dreams, creating a surreal and emotionally muddled feeling in the novel.



Sasha's discomfort surrounding her nationality indicates that she's not particularly comfortable with her own identity. What's more, her idea that the receptionist probably already knows her nationality suggests that she feels exposed, as if she has no control over the way other people perceive her—which is, to a certain extent, true.



Instead of dwelling on how other people perceive her, Sasha leaves the hotel and focuses on trying to stay in good spirits. This means sticking to her schedule for the day, which is the best way to fight off sorrow: she can't leave anything to chance and has to be very careful about getting too excited. If she lets her guard down, everything could go to ruin, so she has to make sure she doesn't drink too much or visit certain places in the city—places with sad memories attached to them.

In some respects, Sasha's attempt to focus on her daily activities instead of obsessing over how people like the hotel receptionist view her could be read as positive, since it means investing herself in the present rather than dwelling on the past. However, Sasha clings tightly to her daily routine as a way of ignoring deep emotions. Therefore, her engagement with the present is little more than a defense mechanism that helps her repress troubling memories—memories that will undoubtedly creep up to haunt her at some point (as evidenced by her unexpected crying jag while talking to a young couple in a bar).



The next night, Sasha admires Paris while walking home from a movie. She addresses the city directly, saying that, although it looks so gorgeous, it can also be cruel and nasty. All the same, it didn't end up killing her last time, though she thought it might. And as she thinks this way, she suddenly finds herself rehashing a memory of standing on this very street corner with Enno and watching a famous writer's funeral go by. As she walks, she thinks about all the things she and Enno used to do together in Paris, hearing an old, nostalgic song play on a loop in her head. Its lyrics go, "Here this happened, here that happened..."

It doesn't take long before Sasha starts thinking about the past, even though she has made such an effort to invest herself in the present. Her inability to keep memories about Enno—a past lover—at bay illustrates why coming to Paris probably wasn't such a good idea. The city itself is wrapped up in her memories, meaning that she can hardly go anywhere without thinking about what she and Enno used to do in those very places.



Sasha remembers working at a dress shop when she last lived in Paris. Her job was to stand at the front of the shop and greet customers, directing them to the appropriate saleswoman. One day, the store's owner—a British man named Mr. Blank—came to check in on his business. Sasha was overwhelmed when he spoke to her, nervously answering his questions and feeling as if she'd failed to impress him, especially because he thought for some reason that she spoke three languages (English, French, and German), when in reality she only spoke English and French. Mr. Blank seemed to disapprove when it became clear that she wasn't as worldly as he thought.

Sasha's interaction with Mr. Blank spotlights her insecurity, as she worries about the kind of person he thinks she is. Because she works in a fancy dress shop, she feels a certain pressure to be refined, cultured, and worldly. When it becomes clear that she doesn't speak three languages, then, she feels embarrassed and inadequate. On another note, the mere fact that Sasha spends time thinking about this memory illustrates that she's incapable of stopping herself from delving into the past.



Later in the day, Mr. Blank called Sasha into his office and asked her to bring a letter to the "kise." She eagerly took the letter and left the room, but then she didn't know what to do; she had no idea what a "kise" was. She went around the entire building, asking her coworkers for help before returning to Mr. Blank and admitting she couldn't find the person he wanted to send the letter to. Mr. Blank was astonished that she didn't know how to find the cashier—*la caisse* in French. He berated her for being stupid, causing her to cry and run to the fitting rooms.

In this scene, Sasha wants to please Mr. Blank so badly that she fails to stand up for herself. The only reason she's unable to deliver his letter is because he has a terrible French accent and mispronounces the French word for "cashier." Instead of asking him to speak more clearly, though, she immediately takes the letter, and when he later calls her stupid, she keeps herself from noting that he's the one who made an error. Her hesitancy to stand her ground spotlights her overall insecurity, indicating that she's terrified of failing to live up to other people's expectations.



After crying, Sasha returned to Mr. Blank's office and asked to go home because she wasn't feeling well. She wanted to yell at him for acting like he had the right to diminish her. He might have the right to pay her a meager wage and demand work out of her, but he didn't have the right to belittle her. Instead, though, she just asked to go home, and he dismissively waved her off. And that was the end of Sasha's job at the dress shop. She has had other odd jobs, but none that lasted long.

Still walking back from the movies, Sasha feels lonely. The houses she passes just make her feel even more alone. If she had lots of money and friends, these houses would seem normal and inviting. Because she's on her own, though, they seem unwelcoming and depressing. When she gets back to the hotel, she sees shoes outside the door of the man in the nightgown—they look like the shoes of a traveling salesman, leading Sasha to wonder what her neighbor would look like as a salesperson going about in regular, everyday clothes.

Back at the hotel, Sasha looks out the window and watches a woman in the building across the street doing her makeup. They make eye contact for a moment, and then Sasha realizes that if she watches this woman, the woman might watch *her*, so she looks away. Later, a knock sounds on the door—it's the man in the nightgown. He hovers there with a dopey smile, and when Sasha asks what he wants, he says, "Nothing." Annoyed and a little creeped out, Sasha pushes him backwards and closes the door.

In the morning, Sasha wakes up hating her hotel, which she thinks smells like a dirty bathhouse. Hoping to find something more cheerful, she goes to another hotel and asks for their **room** with the most natural sunlight. The receptionist agrees to show her their best room, and though Sasha knows she can't really afford it, she goes along for the tour. On the way upstairs, the bellhop mutters to the receptionist, telling her that the room she's about to show Sasha is still occupied. Suddenly, Sasha wants the room more than anything in the world—if she gets this room, she feels, she'll finally escape her sorrow. But then the receptionist brings her to a different room, which is too dark.

Again, Sasha's insecurity keeps her from standing up for herself. She clearly recognizes that Mr. Blank has treated her unfairly, but she can't bring herself to point this out. There is also an imbalanced power dynamic at play here, which could be exacerbated by the fact that Sasha is a woman and Mr. Blank is a man. Mr. Blank treats her like a small child instead of like a professional.



Sasha feels as if loneliness and a lack of financial stability are defining features of her life. If she just had some money and some friends, she thinks, she'd have an entirely different experience in life. Even the way she looks at houses would change, perhaps because the houses wouldn't seem so unattainable to her—as it stands, though, Sasha most likely feels as if these houses belong to rich people with big, loving families. She, on the other hand, is living on borrowed money and doesn't have many people to keep her company in Paris, so the surrounding world seems cruel and even a bit threatening, emphasizing her loneliness.



Although she spends her time thinking about how other people present themselves to the world, Sasha worries that other people will think about her in the same way. She doesn't look away from the woman in the window to give this stranger privacy, but because she's afraid about the stranger turning the same scrutiny on her as an act of revenge—a clear sign that she's very sensitive to the way other people perceive her. It is perhaps because of this sensitivity that she finds the man in the nightgown so disconcerting, since he's constantly butting into her life in unsettling ways.



Again, Sasha conflates wealth and luxury with happiness. She knows she can't afford the light-filled room, but she still wants to flirt with the idea of renting it. Then, when she hears that she really can't have it because it's still occupied, she wants it all the more, suggesting that there's something enticing about things that are unattainable. The entire ordeal implies that Sasha has a "grass is greener" mentality that makes her yearn for whatever she doesn't have. Even though it's highly unlikely that a luxurious room would get rid of her sadness, she desperately pines for it.



Sasha declines the **room** and goes back to her own hotel, which she now appreciates much more. All rooms, she realizes, are basically the same, so why bother getting a new one? A room is merely somewhere to hide from the horrors of the world.

Making her way up the stairs, Sasha passes the man in the nightgown. He says nothing to her, clearly angry about how she treated him the night before. But Sasha doesn't care if he dislikes her—they can easily avoid each other if they both put their mind to it.

Sasha goes to a restaurant that she and an ex-lover used to frequent. She doesn't think it's such a bad idea to go here, despite the fact that it's a place from her past. When she sits down, though, two men and a woman walk by her, and she hears them refer to her as old. She can't believe they would say such a thing, now worrying that she looks like a crazy Englishwoman adrift in Paris. Infuriated, she stares at one of the men, who notices her glare and awkwardly turns away—a response that, according to Sasha, indicates that he's not French.

The last time Sasha came home from Paris, her family was angry because they thought she had died. They hadn't heard anything from her and didn't even know her address in Paris. Nonetheless, one of her relatives had left her a small amount of money, which was to be doled out in small increments. The rest of her family clearly disapproved of this arrangement, which led Sasha to believe that the relative decided to give her the money as a way of annoying everyone else. With her inheritance, she found a place to live in London, shut herself inside, and rarely went out. In fact, she decided to drink herself to death. Try as she might, though, she never quite succeeded.

Although Sasha was adamant about renting an expensive room in another hotel, it now seems that her desire has passed, suggesting that materialistic concerns are often quite fleeting. For a moment, it felt to Sasha like getting a new room would change her entire life, but all she needed was to remember that something so insignificant could never fully alleviate her deep emotional troubles.



As if the man in the nightgown didn't already seem like an ominous presence in the hotel (Sasha even thought of him as a ghost of sorts), he now outwardly resents Sasha for pushing him away from her door the night before. But Sasha doesn't care if he feels insulted, since she has no problem with the idea of avoiding him—after all, she's clearly very adept at avoiding people, since she has so much practice shutting herself into her room and spending her time alone.



Yet again, Sasha is concerned with the way other people perceive her. Now, though, she actually has reason to believe that others are judging her, since these strangers disparagingly refer to her as old. Considering that she's already somewhat paranoid about people talking about her, it's unsurprising that overhearing a stranger talk about her in this way would deeply upset her and cause her to fret about her appearance. The entire experience also triggers her insecurities about her nationality. Interestingly enough, she turns her insecurities on the strangers themselves, judging them because they're not French—a response that illustrates the cyclical nature of this kind of judgment: the strangers judge Sasha, and because this makes her feel insecure, she spitefully judges them back.



Having had her feelings hurt by the strangers who called her old, Sasha plunges headlong into memory, rehashing the last time she returned to England from Paris. In this flashback, it becomes clear that Sasha actually comes from a well-off family. However, she's apparently not on good terms with them, so she doesn't have access to their money (other than the money she inherited from a distant relative). Still, though, it seems her relative poverty is somewhat self-made, suggesting that she has made a conscious decision to live her own life instead of conforming to her family's expectations. As a result, she doesn't have much of a support network. She does, at least, have her independence, though this doesn't seem to comfort her in moments of sorrow.



Sasha now walks home from the restaurant where she was called old. In spite of everything, she's in a fine mood. In England, just a few wrong words can ruin her entire day, but in Paris she feels more resilient—though maybe this is just because she's a little drunk. All the same, she's about to go to another bar when two men stop her on the street and ask why she's so sad. She insists that she isn't sad, then tries to guess where they're from, discovering that they're Russians. The men, for their part, "tactfully" avoid guessing Sasha's nationality.

The Russians take Sasha to a bar, where she insists that she's not sad and that she's rich enough to live a comfortable life. Eventually, conversation turns to the topic of human cruelty, and though Sasha thinks people are always cruel and terrible to one another, the handsome Russian disagrees: everyone has their own problems, and these problems cause them to behave the way they do, so Sasha shouldn't write everybody off as "cruel." Sasha and the handsome Russian agree to meet the following day, and then she goes back to her hotel, where she falls asleep fantasizing about dyeing her hair.

The next day, Sasha goes to yet another restaurant she used to frequent. She regrets this decision as soon as she sits down, knowing that the host has recognized her. Looking around, she starts to feel uncomfortable about what everyone else might do—even the slightest thing, she knows, could ruin her entire day. And yet, the other diners simply focus on their food, making it easy to tune them out. But then two young women come into the restaurant and talk to the host. At a certain point, they turn around and stare at Sasha, and then one of them asks, "*Et qu'est-ce qu'elle fout ici, maintenant?*" ("And what the hell is she doing here now?")

Sasha stares back at the young women. The language the woman used was inappropriate for the restaurant's upscale atmosphere, causing everyone to cast disapproving looks in their direction. But her comment also made everyone look at Sasha, who now feels ashamed. She knows the other diners can sense that she's British, which brings her great embarrassment. British people in Paris, she once heard a French person say, are like a plague. On the verge of tears, Sasha distracts herself by trying to decide what color she should dye her hair. When she finishes her meal, she walks by the young women without saying anything, wishing all the while she had the courage to tell them off.

Sasha has strange ways of looking at her own sadness. As she walks home from the restaurant, she seemingly convinces herself that she's not as sensitive or emotionally vulnerable as she was in England—yet it's clear that she still gets hung up on fleeting interactions that have the power to ruin her entire day or evening. In fact, even the two Russian strangers she encounters can tell that she's sad. The fact that Sasha thinks she's more resilient than she was before implies that she wants to be hopeful and optimistic, even if it's obvious that she's just as depressed as she was in England.



It makes sense that the idea of human cruelty would be on Sasha's mind, since she's so sensitive to the things people say about her (as evidenced by her reaction to a group of strangers calling her old). Whereas she resents the people who mistreat her, the handsome Russian man tries to empathize with people who are cruel to him. Everyone, he believes, is suffering, which means that everyone deserves a little compassion—even if they're unkind themselves.



Once more, Sasha is paranoid about what others will think of her. Unfortunately for her, though, her paranoia is justified by the woman's mean-spirited question about why she's in the restaurant. It's unclear what about Sasha's presence is so bothersome to this woman. But the ambiguity here simply reflects the way Sasha herself feels: she doesn't know why she attracts such hostility—all she knows is that her worst fears have been confirmed, as she's forced to sit in public and deal with other people judging her.



As a way of distracting herself from her extreme embarrassment, Sasha thinks about her appearance. By pondering what color she should dye her hair, she tries to escape her insecurity, once again turning to superficial matters in the hopes that they will change her life (or at least profoundly alter the way she moves through the world). In the end, though, it's highly unlikely that changing her physical appearance will make it easier for her to deal with interactions like the one she has in the restaurant with the young women.



Outside the restaurant, Sasha tries to focus on her plan for the day. But she can't stop thinking about what happened in the restaurant. She tries to figure out what prompted the comment. Like her, the two young women were English. They probably thought, then, that they were the only English people who knew about that restaurant. Seeing Sasha, though, they were surprised to realize that older British women already know about the establishment (which has actually been popular among English travelers for at least 15 years). Either way, Sasha thinks about the comment and combines it with the remark about her age from the night before, so that it reads: What the hell is she doing here, this old woman?

It's time for Sasha to meet the handsome Russian man from the night before, but she doesn't feel like going. She feels sorry for not going, knowing that the Russian might say something to comfort her and make her feel less sad, but she can't muster the will to actually meet him. Going back to her hotel, she decides to have her hair dyed tomorrow.

In her **hotel room**, Sasha lies down and plunges into a flashback about the last time she lived in Paris. She was pregnant, and she had to make a concerted effort to go up and down the stairs. There was a kind caretaker watching over her, always telling her that everything would work out. When she gave birth, this woman comforted her, especially after she finished labor and was in a nightmarish state of mind. Sasha couldn't stop thinking about money, wondering how she would possibly support her new baby boy. She worried so much, in fact, that she couldn't sleep. She stopped producing breast milk. Her mouth went dry. And all the while, she fretted about money and how to care for her new son.

In the days after Sasha gave birth, the caretaker wrapped her in bandages, promising to make her look exactly like she did before getting pregnant. She lay like that for a week. To distract herself, sometimes she'd pick up her baby and admire him—he was always tightly swaddled (just like her), and he never cried. Then, five weeks after giving birth, she took the bandages off. Her skin was perfectly smooth—so smooth, in fact, that nobody would ever know she had been pregnant. But her baby boy lay next to her with a tag hanging off his wrist; he died while she was recovering.

Insecurities surrounding her nationality once again creep into Sasha's mind. Now, though, these thoughts help make sense of the young woman's mean-spirited remark, as Sasha realizes that the woman probably took pride in having found a beautiful, authentic French restaurant as an English expatriate. But after seeing Sasha, the young woman must have felt disappointed because she saw that the restaurant wasn't quite as unknown to tourists as she originally thought. By thinking these thoughts, Sasha makes it easier to cope with the young woman's cruel comment. However, she still can't stop torturing herself by combining this experience with the other unfortunate interaction that recently happened to her, ultimately demonstrating that her insecurities are capable of overwhelming her even when she knows she shouldn't take so much offense.



Instead of seeking out companionship, Sasha wallows in her own sadness, isolating herself from the rest of the world. She knows that seeing the handsome Russian man might make her feel better, but she indulges her own loneliness by deciding to stay in for the night. There's a certain amount of self-sabotage to this decision, hinting that Sasha purposefully opens herself up to sadness, perhaps enjoying—on some level, at least—the feeling of gloominess.



Not only does Sasha decide to stay in the hotel instead of meeting the Russian man (who she knows would probably make her feel happier), but she also allows herself to think about the past—despite the fact that she knows these memories have a terrible effect on her. As she thinks about the past, it's revealed that she had a son. And though it's not yet clear what happened to the boy, it seems likely that whatever came of him is at the root of Sasha's sadness, considering that he's clearly not part of Sasha's current life.



The death of Sasha's son helps explain why she has such a hard time finding happiness: she's still recovering from a devastating loss. In fact, she may never fully recover, which is why sadness hangs over her at all times. To add to her heartbreak, the fact that her body doesn't even look like she gave birth makes it even harder for her to cope with her feelings of loss—it's as if she never even had a baby, meaning that her sadness is really the only thing she has left of her son.



Sasha goes to the hairdresser's and gets her hair dyed. She thought she wouldn't be able to stop thinking about her new hair, but now that it's a different color, she almost completely forgets about the new style. Instead, she fantasizes about buying a new hat. As she sits in Luxembourg Gardens thinking about getting a new hat, one of the Russian men she met two days ago walks by. He remarks that Sasha was supposed to meet his friend, and she says she wasn't feeling well.

Sasha and the Russian man—who introduces himself as Nicolas Delmar—fall into conversation. He philosophically talks about the nature of life, saying that if somebody had asked him if he wanted to be born, he would have said no. However, he obviously had no choice in the matter, so he tries to “take life just as it comes.” He suggests that Sasha do the same, noting that she shouldn't “torment” herself. She isn't rich or powerful, he says, and this means she isn't one of the “guilty” ones in life, so she might as well let herself be as happy as possible. Delmar, for his part, doesn't want to be rich or powerful—as long as he's not “guilty” in this way, he can feel okay about trying to simply be happy.

Sasha can't decide if she likes Delmar. He's kind and sad, and though she might normally admire such things, it seems strange to her that he's so young but already so glum. Still, she goes with him to a café, where they order drinks even though it's clear to Sasha that Delmar doesn't really like to have alcohol. Over their drinks, he says that she seems very lonely—he knows because *he* used to be lonely, too. But then he forced himself to go out more. Now he has many friends and is practically never alone, which has made him a lot happier. Hoping the same might happen for Sasha, he offers to introduce her to his friends, making plans to take her to meet a painter the following day.

That afternoon, Sasha goes to a hat store, where she spends hours trying on different hats. She doesn't like any of them, but the saleswoman is kind and attentive, assuring her that all of the most stylish hats are hard to pull off these days—but the saleswoman also insists that Sasha looks great in them. Hoping to please this woman, Sasha agrees to buy whichever hat the saleswoman advises her to buy. By the time she leaves, she feels grounded and happy.

Changing her appearance doesn't make Sasha happier. Instead of changing the way she feels or the way she thinks of herself, her new hair color simply fades from the forefront of her mind, which is why she fixates on the idea of buying a new hat. She thus goes from one superficial concern to the next, clearly understanding that changing her appearance won't do anything to make her happy but ignoring this fact as a way of distracting herself from her sadness.



Whereas Sasha obsesses over her own discontent, Delmar tries not to dwell on sorrow, especially if he can't do anything to change his circumstances. His approach implies that the only people who should fixate on their own unhappiness are those who actually deserve that unhappiness—and the people who deserve such discontent are wealthy and greedy. In a way, then, Sasha's relative poverty is a gift of sorts, since—according to Delmar—it gives her license to stop taking life so seriously by simply accepting that the world is difficult and that there's nothing to do but take life “as it comes.”



Delmar recognizes that Sasha's unhappiness probably has to do with her intense loneliness. And he's not wrong: even Sasha acknowledged the night before that going to meet Delmar's friend probably would have made her feel better, but instead she stayed in and felt sad. The implication, then, is that it's harder to feel depressed when surrounded by friendly people.



Once again, Sasha tries to find happiness in superficial things. She doesn't even like the hats she tries on in the store, but that's not the point—rather, the point of shopping is to help her forget about her sadness by focusing on her appearance, though it's clear that whatever joy she derives from this experience won't last long.



Sasha feels relatively good about herself as she goes from bar to bar that night in her new hat. Although she wants to avoid a place called the Dôme, she ends up going there for a drink. When she leaves, a young man follows her outside and asks—in a lightly accented voice—if he can speak with her. He’s incredibly handsome, and Sasha can’t help but find herself drawn to him. And yet, she realizes that he seems nervous and a little overeager. He must, then, be a male sex worker hoping to entice an older, wealthy woman.

The very idea that the young man would go after Sasha offends her, since she doesn’t want to be seen as a rich and over the hill. After everything she’s done to look nice—the hat, the hair dye—she can’t believe that the only person attracted to her is a sex worker. Infuriated, she wants to tell him off, but then she decides to string him along for a while. She will make it seem like she’s interested and then, at the last minute, tell him to “go to hell.”

Sasha and the young man—whose name is René—go to a bar. Over glasses of brandy, René gives her his spiel, claiming that he *has* to talk to her because he’s desperate to unburden himself of his troubles. Sasha still wants to string him along, but something about his earnestness is endearing, and she realizes it won’t be all that easy for her to muster up the courage to deceive him. She wants to know what, exactly, his troubles are. He tells her that he’s French-Canadian and that he joined the Foreign Legion, which stationed him in Morocco. After three years of hating his life there, he escaped the military and made his way to Paris. He has only been in the city for one night.

Sasha believes very little of what René has just told her. She says that she doesn’t even believe he’s French-Canadian, instead thinking he might be Spanish or Spanish-American. Either way, she decides to leave, but he begs her to stay, so she tells him that she doesn’t have any money—she doesn’t know what he wants from her, exactly, but surely he wants to get some money out their interaction. He’ll therefore be disappointed to learn that she can’t help him, even if he thinks she’s rich because of her old fur coat or her new hat. Still, he insists that he doesn’t want money. What he wants is to go somewhere to be alone with her, somewhere she can take him in her arms and comfort him.

Sasha is suspicious of anyone who seems overly interested in her, especially if that person is young, attractive, and eager to talk to her. It remains unclear whether or not she’s correct that this young man is a sex worker, and the ambiguity surrounding his intentions helps readers experience the same kind of suspicion that Sasha herself feels.



Perhaps because Sasha has been emotionally wounded before, she has certain defense mechanism to protect her from heartbreak. As a result, she assumes that the young man is a sex worker intending to con her. And though she might actually be correct about his intentions, the mere fact that she is so suspicious indicates that she has trouble embracing people and letting them into her life.



It’s unclear whether or not René is telling the truth about his past. Either way, though, Sasha is drawn to him, despite her hesitancy to let people into her life. In turn, the novel illustrates that it’s actually quite difficult to be a loner who never lets anyone in—or, on the flipside, that it’s difficult to protect oneself against malicious strangers.



Sasha’s defensiveness kicks in when she tries to leave René behind. However, he appeals to her loneliness by saying that all he wants is to spend an intimate, comforting moment with her in private. Of course, this is exactly what he would say if he were a sex worker hoping to get money out of Sasha, since that way he would be able to charge her for his time. But it’s also possible that he genuinely wants to make an emotional connection with her, and this possibility will most likely be enough to keep her interested—after all, as an emotionally vulnerable person, it would make sense for her to gravitate toward other vulnerable people.



If Sasha won't go somewhere private to physically embrace René, then perhaps she can help him get some legal documentation. If he had a passport, he'd be able to go to London, where he could contact friends and get some help. Sasha doesn't understand why he thinks she could possibly help him get a passport, but she agrees to go to another bar with him. As they link arms and walk through the street, she relaxes into the situation—he's clearly after money, but since she doesn't have any, there's no harm in having a good time with him.

Under the lights of the next bar they enter, Sasha studies René. He doesn't look like a "gigolo," she decides, but that doesn't mean he isn't one. He compliments Sasha and speaks adoringly to her, but she keeps deflecting these subtle advances, thinking that he must be kicking himself for latching onto her—he'll clearly have to start this entire process over with some new mark. Recognizing that he might actually be in a bit of trouble, she decides to help him by telling him which bars might have rich, stylish women who would fall for his flirtations.

When Sasha mentions that she hates her hotel and wants to get a studio, René becomes very interested. He even says he knows the perfect place for her and could help her make the deal. When Sasha asks how he knows of a good studio if he only got to Paris the night before, he brushes off the question. Still, she doesn't care. She has nothing to lose, so she keeps chatting with him.

René later escorts Sasha home in a taxi, which she allows him to pay for, thinking that she's giving him a lesson about sizing people up. In the future, she thinks, he'll have to be more careful about the assumptions he makes. When they arrive, he wants to come upstairs, but Sasha doesn't let him. Eventually, he gives up and leaves. Late that night, a hotel employee bangs on Sasha's door and tells her to come downstairs because there's a man on the telephone for her. By the time she gets there, though, the man has hung up. She decides to stay in bed for the entirety of the next day.

Sasha opens herself up to René on the pretense that, because she doesn't have much money, there's no way he can hurt her. What she overlooks, though, is the fact that he could hurt her in other ways. She most likely ignores such possibilities because she yearns for genuine human connection, thus underlining how important it is for people to feel emotionally bonded to others.



Even as René compliments her, Sasha feels insecure and full of self-doubt. Instead of accepting his flattery, she assumes he's lying—all he wants, she thinks, is to somehow dupe her into giving him a lot of money. And it's quite possible that she's right about his intentions, making their dynamic complex, as Sasha has to balance her suspicion with her desire to forge a genuine connection.



René's comment about helping Sasha secure a studio apartment is a red flag, because it suggests that he's not actually as new to the city as he claimed he was. How, after all, would he know about an open apartment if he arrived in Paris just one day ago? The comment also hints that he's eager to help Sasha make some kind of monetary transaction, reinforcing her suspicion that he just wants to con her and take her money. And yet, she decides to keep spending time with him—a clear sign that she yearns for an attractive and attentive man's company.



In the last couple days, Sasha has had two experiences in which strangers judged her just by looking at her. First, there were the men who called her "old," and then there was the woman who acted like Sasha didn't belong in a fancy French restaurant. Given how much these experiences hurt Sasha, it makes sense that she likes the idea of teaching René a lesson about making assumptions about others—if he really is a sex worker, it seems he has assumed that she's a wealthy older woman whose only chance to spend time with an attractive young man is by paying for his time.



PART TWO

When the following afternoon rolls around, Sasha finds herself preparing to meet Delmar. Together, they go to visit a painter named Serge, but on their way, Sasha has a flashback to a period she spent living in a hotel in Paris and sleeping for the vast majority of the time. She hardly ate anything during this time, going for three weeks without having anything more than a coffee and a croissant in the mornings. She fantasized about killing herself, but she kept putting it off—she had already paid for her **room** through the month, so she figured she might as well stick around.

When Sasha wasn't sleeping, she would usually walk around Paris. One day, a man came up to her and asked if she'd like to have a drink. While they sipped absinthe, he read her a letter he'd received from a lover. The letter was full of flattering compliments, but it ended with a request for the man to send money so the lover could buy new shoes. The man suspected that the woman just needed to give money, but he also hated the idea of her having to make do with insufficient shoes. Sasha helped him analyze the letter, and as they did this, they kept drinking. Finally, he invited her to the place he was staying.

As soon as they got outside, Sasha realized how drunk she was. She fell over, and her new companion jokingly suggested that she'd been dancing too much. "Ah," he said, "what will happen to this after-war generation?" Everyone in Sasha's generation, he implied, was only interested in having fun. But Sasha told him the real reason she was so drunk: she hadn't eaten in three weeks. Perturbed, the man jumped into a taxi, slammed the door, and sped away.

Again, Sasha loses herself in memories of her tumultuous past. Her flashback helps readers make sense of her deep sense of sadness; in fact, her current unhappiness seems relatively insignificant compared to the period she rehashes in this moment. Readers learn that she went through a suicidal period during which she barely ate anything.



The man in this story is unsure whether or not his lover's interest in him is genuine or if she just wants some money. His suspicion resembles the dilemma Sasha faced in her interactions with René, since she couldn't determine if René's intention was to con her or to connect with her. In this way, the novel is full of strange, ambiguous relationships in which each partner's motivations remain unclear.



The man's comment about what will become of the "after-war generation" reveals the way many people viewed the adults in Sasha's generation, which was known as the Lost Generation. In the years after World War I, there was a pervasive sense of aimlessness, as people tried to piece together their lives in the aftermath of one of history's most violent and deadly wars. For many, this meant drinking heavily and wandering through cities like Paris, so it makes sense that Sasha's new acquaintance asks aloud what will become of people like Sasha. More importantly, though, he suddenly worries that she wants to squeeze money out of him, since she has just revealed that she hasn't eaten in three weeks. Once again, then, the novel illustrates the ways in which money can come between people, infusing relationships with suspicion and tension.



Back in the present, Sasha and Delmar enter Serge's apartment. Serge puts on some music and dances with an African-style mask while Sasha watches. They discuss art and the different Parisian clubs that they like, and then Sasha unexpectedly breaks into tears. She apologizes, saying she doesn't know what's wrong with her, but Serge encourages her to cry—why hold back? She is, after all, among friends. She asks for a drink, so he gives her the last splash of liquor in his apartment. Swallowing it down, she becomes aggravated by the idea that she has let Serge and Delmar see her cry, so she barks at Serge, telling him to go out and get her some brandy. Instead of playing into her animosity, though, he ignores her and makes some tea.

After some pleasant conversation, Serge announces that he has to meet a friend. He says that Delmar and Sasha should stay, since he'll only be gone an hour. And then, on his way out, he says something to Delmar in Russian. As soon as he's gone, Delmar comes over to Sasha and kisses her, saying that he was heartbroken to see her cry. Deflecting his romantic attention, she gives him a friendly kiss and then asks what Serge said before leaving. She learns that he told Delmar that Sasha didn't have to buy a painting if she didn't want to. But Sasha insists that she wants one, so Delmar sets them up so she can look at them. Taking in their vivid colors, she experiences a sort of happiness that feels like a "miracle."

When Serge returns, Sasha says she wants to buy one of the paintings. As they talk about the price, she notices that his tone is no longer open and warm—instead, he speaks in a matter-of-fact, businesslike voice. She informs him that she doesn't have the money on her, and he immediately turns to Delmar and says, "What did I tell you?" But then he agrees to let her have the painting, saying that she can send him the money when she gets back to London, even though she assures him that she just needs to go home and get it. They eventually arrange to meet later that day, though he also says that she doesn't really need to pay him; she just needs to help him find "some other idiots" to buy his work.

Once more, Sasha gets blindsided by her own sorrow. There's nothing particularly sad about her interaction with Serge and Delmar—in fact, she's having a great time when she starts crying, proving that sadness is often quite unpredictable and inescapable. Her impulse to lash out at Serge suggests that she's uncomfortable showing her emotional vulnerability to others. Embarrassed to have revealed her sadness, she tries to push Serge away by behaving rudely toward him. Fortunately for her, though, he seems to see past her defense mechanism and, as a result, doesn't take offense.



Although both Serge and Delmar treat Sasha quite well, their behavior in this scene subtly suggests that they have ulterior motives. Part of Delmar's kindness toward Sasha, for instance, probably has to do with the fact that he's interested in her romantically and wants to use his time alone with her to become intimate. And although Serge says that Sasha doesn't have to buy any of his paintings, the mere fact that he thinks to say such a thing implies that he originally intended to sell her something. Nonetheless, Sasha doesn't become suspicious of her new friends, instead relaxing into the moment and allowing herself to feel happy—a sign that she's quite eager to simply take life "as it comes" (to borrow Delmar's expression).



The shift in Serge's demeanor suggests that he's more interested in selling his art than making a genuine connection with Sasha. Although he tells her that she doesn't have to pay him, his comment about finding "other idiots" to buy his work implies that he originally saw Sasha as a foolish and possibly wealthy woman whom he could convince to spend lots of money on his paintings. Once again, then, money-related matters infuse potentially rewarding relationships with a strange tension, as characters either try to manipulate each other or try to protect themselves from getting manipulated.



That evening, Sasha waits for Serge, but he never shows up. Instead, Delmar arrives and apologizes on behalf of his friend. He went to Serge's apartment, but Serge was nowhere to be found. Delmar thinks Serge is crazy, so he doesn't understand why Sasha liked him so much—in fact, he's *disappointed* to hear that Sasha liked the painter. He then asks if he can see Sasha again, but Sasha says she's very busy and that she's leaving Paris the following week. Nonetheless, she agrees when Delmar asks if he can see her to the train station.

Once Sasha returns to her hotel, she feels bad that Delmar has spent so much money buying her drinks. But then she realizes that Delmar might get a cut of the money she paid for the painting—or perhaps he'll never give it to Serge at all.

Sasha goes to a bar and feels as if the staff is watching and judging her. To seem cultured and respectable, she leaves the waiter a big tip and asks him for directions to the nearest movie theater, though she senses that this doesn't impress him. He doesn't care what she does, and yet she can't help herself from constantly thinking about how other people perceive her.

Sasha is drunk by the time she arrives at the movie theater. Later, she makes her way to the nearest bar and has yet another drink. Then, back at the hotel, she receives a letter from Serge in which he apologizes for not meeting her the night before. He also says that Delmar gave him the money and that he'll try to accompany Delmar to the train station to see her off, but Sasha doubts he'll really be there. Sitting in the dark hotel, Sasha stares at the painting and feels as if her **room** brings back too many memories, reminding her of every other room she has ever stayed in.

Delmar introduced Sasha to Serge in the first place because he wanted to help her meet interesting people who would help her feel happy. However, he now reveals that he doesn't actually like that Sasha was fond of Serge. His intentions, then, start to seem a little hazy: did he actually want to make Sasha happy, or did he only want it to seem like he cared about her contentment? Given his romantic advance toward her earlier that day, it now seems that he has always had his own best interests in mind, hoping to endear himself to Sasha by introducing her to his friends. Again, then, Sasha has reason to be suspicious of a new acquaintance, whose intentions aren't very straightforward.



Once more, Sasha suspects that Delmar isn't as compassionate and kind as he first seemed. Given that she's quite lonely in Paris, it's undoubtedly upsetting for her to have to constantly second-guess whether or not her new acquaintances have her best interests in mind.



All Sasha wants is to fit in while living in Paris, but achieving this seems to elude her. She even goes out of her way to do things for the sole purpose of impressing people like the waiter in this bar. She thinks ceaselessly about how others perceive her, but she also knows that nobody actually cares what she does—a very lonely, isolating predicament.



The fact that Delmar actually brought Serge the money gives Sasha reason to have a little faith in her new acquaintances—maybe they weren't just trying to use her to their own ends. And yet, Sasha seems too sad in this moment to care that Delmar followed through with what he said he was going to do. Instead of feeling glad about this, she feels just as alone and depressed as before.



PART THREE

Sasha loses herself in memories of her relationship with Enno. They once stayed in a small **room** crowded by furniture. Time passed slowly, and Sasha remembers hearing life in Amsterdam go by out the window as clocks ticked in the room. She didn't particularly like that, but she consoled herself by remembering that, at the very least, she had escaped London. Neither she nor Enno had much money, though they both thought the other did when they first got together. Nonetheless, it didn't matter that they weren't rich—the war was over, and everyone was just looking to have a good time.

Sasha's family didn't approve of her relationship with Enno, nor did they think it was a wise idea to run off with him to Amsterdam. But Sasha didn't care, instead getting excited about the idea of going to Paris someday soon with Enno. Once they got to Paris, they'd be able to live the lavish life they used to lead when they first got together, before each of them ran out of money.

Enno and Sasha got married in London at a town hall, then went to a bar. Enno called the entire marriage process “idiotic,” and when Sasha asked if he'd ever leave her, he simply told her to act happy. He was a journalist, but he also made his living by playing music, so they went to his friend's apartment and got drunk with other musicians, singing songs all afternoon and night. Sasha was still drunk when they boarded a train for Amsterdam.

Sasha loses herself in her memory of Amsterdam. Her and Enno's **room** there is clean and nice. They pass the time drinking champagne and talking about Paris. All the while, Enno tells Sasha not to worry about money or think too much about love. When they go to a museum, everything looks especially beautiful to Sasha because she feels intoxicated by spending time with Enno—making love so much has brought a certain vibrancy to life. And no matter what they do, they talk about Paris, fixating on it so much that Sasha longs more than anything to be there, so they leave Amsterdam at once.

The narrative timeline can be hard to track in Good Morning, Midnight, since Sasha often falls abruptly into long flashbacks. In this section, for instance, she completely immerses herself in the past, and it's not exactly clear what sparked her deep reminiscence. All the same, readers finally get some information about her history with Enno, whose memory haunts so much of her present life. It quickly becomes clear that they were often worried about money—a concern that is still very real for Sasha. And yet, they apparently didn't care too much about finances, instead sustaining themselves on new love and the promise of a fresh start in the aftermath of World War I.



Sasha and Enno romanticized the idea of Paris, viewing the city as a place that would solve all of their problems—including their financial worries. However, they didn't seem to have any kind of plan for how they would support themselves when they actually reached Paris. In a sense, then, their time in the city—and perhaps their entire relationship—was doomed from the start.



Again, the structure of Good Morning, Midnight is often disjointed, ultimately reflecting the strange way that memory often works. For instance, the beginning of Sasha's flashback began when she and Enno were in Amsterdam, but now it goes back even further to explain the events that led them to the city in the first place. The narrative thus takes on a layered quality, as details arise in the same random patterns as they would in an actual memory. On another note, it becomes clear that Enno isn't necessarily all that kind, since he has no problem calling his and Sasha's marriage ceremony “idiotic”—yet another indication that their relationship might not last.



Sasha is smitten with Enno—so smitten, in fact, that everything about her life seems better when she's with him. Enno, on the other hand, is less enthusiastic. The fact that he tells her not to think so much about love implies that he doesn't want her to get hung up on their relationship. Despite the obvious red flags in their marriage, though, Sasha appears unwilling (or unable) to recognize the cracks in their bond. Her ignorance therefore suggests that it's often easier to lose oneself in the fantasy of happiness than actually deal with problems or misgivings.



On their way to Paris, Sasha and Enno stop in Brussels. Their **hotel room** is hot and loud, and they hardly have any money left. Enno tells Sasha that he knows how he could get some money. Instructing her not to leave the room, he goes out without telling her his plan. But while he's gone, Sasha remembers that she knows a man in Brussels named Mr. Lawson, so she arranges to meet him. They went on a date a while ago, and he gave her his address and asked her to get in touch if she ever came through Brussels. He hardly remembers this encounter, but he's polite enough to hear her out as she explains that she and Enno are essentially stuck in Brussels on their way to Paris.

Mr. Lawson gives Sasha the money and turns to leave. But then he comes back and kisses her on the lips. She hates him deeply in this moment, but she still kisses him back. He then smiles, says goodbye, and takes his leave.

Back at the hotel, Enno admits that he wasn't able to get any money. When Sasha says that she *did* manage to get some cash, he's suspicious, wanting to know who she borrowed the money from. She lies and says she knows a woman who lives in Brussels, but when Enno starts asking questions about her, Sasha tells him to shut up. She starts to cry, at which point Enno tells her to stop, but she just tells him to shut up again.

Sasha is in the bathroom at the train station the next time she cries. Having just thrown up, she worries she might be pregnant, but she pulls herself together and joins Enno on the platform. They then make their way to Calais, France, where Enno knows a man who has promised to lend them money. Sasha feels awkward, since it's clear that this man's wife doesn't want him to lend out their money—in fact, it's actually *her* money, but he monopolizes it and decides how it gets spent. Sasha feels bad about taking money from the woman, but Enno has no qualms about it. Having secured the funds, then, they finally make it to Paris.

For all of Enno and Sasha's optimism about how their lives will improve once they reach Paris, reality still comes crashing down on them: without money, they won't be able to survive, let alone reach Paris. When Sasha calls on Mr. Lawson for money, she behaves like one of the many people in the novel who show interest in someone else just because they want some money. Though she doesn't necessarily manipulate him, it's obvious that she only cares about his wealth.



Because Mr. Lawson can see that Sasha wants his money, he realizes that he's in a position of power. In a way, Sasha realizes the same thing when she first meets René and decides to string him along because she believes he's after money (which she doesn't actually have). The difference, though, is that Mr. Lawson exploits his power in a disgusting and manipulative way by kissing Sasha, whom he knows feels obligated to kiss him back, whereas Sasha only tricks René as a way of playfully teaching him a lesson about sizing people up.



Enno is jealous that Sasha was able to secure some cash, perhaps intuiting that she went on a date with another man in order to borrow the funds. The fight they have is yet another indication that their relationship isn't quite as strong as Sasha would like to think, as it's apparently founded on jealousy, secrecy, and suspicion.



Again, the topic of money puts a strain on yet another relationship in the novel, as Enno's friend uses his wife's money in a way that causes her to resent him. Sasha recognizes that they have a strained dynamic and that it's not right for the man to dole out his wife's money however he pleases, but Enno doesn't seem to care—a sign that they have different values, which doesn't bode well for their marriage.



As soon as the train arrives in Paris, Enno tells Sasha to wait in a café because he needs to talk to some people. He leaves her sitting there for more than three hours. He finally returns with a tall man. Right away, Sasha can tell from Enno's face that he has managed to borrow money from the man. All of a sudden, she feels incredibly happy, as Enno explains that he was able to secure a **room** for them. Clearly in good spirits, he buys Sasha a rose, making her feel deeply enchanted by the fact that she's in Paris with her new husband.

At last, Sasha and Enno feel the sense of elation and excitement they dreamed about before reaching Paris. The problem, however, is that their happiness is directly tied to the fact that Enno was able to borrow money. As soon as this money runs out, though, it seems likely that their bliss will quickly fade.



Later that night, after paying in advance for an entire month at the hotel, Sasha and Enno wake up to see bugs crawling all over the wall. The hotel won't give them their money back, so they have to move to another **room** while that one gets fumigated. Upon returning to the original room, Sasha spends her days lounging in the room and trying to ignore the strong smell of chemicals. She also starts teaching English on the side, and though this brings in some money, Enno resents her for it. In fact, Enno grows increasingly meanspirited, telling Sasha that she doesn't know how to make love and that she's boring. He storms out after saying this and doesn't come back for multiple days.

Sasha and Enno's happiness doesn't last long at all, possibly because Enno most had to spend the majority of their borrowed money all at once by paying in advance for the hotel. They don't have to worry about where they'll live for the next month, but they also don't have much left to sustain themselves, which is why Sasha starts teaching English. The fact that their financial hurdles quickly throw them into misery suggests their bond is very weak.



Sasha waits for Enno to come back. She's sure by now that she's pregnant, but she hasn't told him. Eventually, Sasha accepts that Enno isn't going to return—and then he suddenly comes back. He's in a great mood, telling her that he managed to get some money and asking her to peel him an orange. She knows she should tell him to peel it himself; she should yell at him and turn him away. But she doesn't do any of this, instead just peeling the orange and watching as he brings out two thousand francs.

By this point, it's evident that Enno's mood is directly tied to whether or not he has any money. And yet, his happiness about getting cash never lasts long, serving as a good reminder that money can't buy happiness (though the book also implies that living in poverty does make it harder to be happy).



Life in Paris smooths out for Sasha and Enno. Sasha doesn't mind staying in the stuffy, bug-filled **room**, and Enno gets excited about the possibility of writing for a tea company's new advertising campaign. What's more, Sasha and Enno have friends who come and go, like an embroiderer-turned-singer named Lise—a kind, meek French woman of whom Sasha is quite fond.

Although Good Morning, Midnight illustrates that wealth doesn't lead to legitimate happiness, it also acknowledges that having money can make everyday life easier to bear. Whenever Enno has money, his mood is vastly better, meaning that his and Sasha's relationship benefits from his financial stability. On the flipside, though, Sasha's lingering sadness during periods of financial stability makes it clear that money doesn't provide an assured path to happiness.



While eating dinner in the **hotel room** one night, Lise unexpectedly says that she wishes there'd be another war and that she'd get killed in it—she has nobody in her life, and her most recent show has come to an end and now she'll have to go back to her life as an embroiderer. Sasha tries to console her but ultimately starts crying, too, at which point Enno comes in, makes a sarcastic comment about how happy and uplifting the scene is, and starts laughing. After a moment, Lise and Sasha start laughing, too, and then none of them can stop.

Although the novel explores the powerful and overwhelming nature of sadness, it also subtly implies that there's a strange absurdity to human misery. Like Sasha herself, Lise is deeply depressed, but they're both capable of laughing at their own sorrow when Enno jokes about how gloomy they're acting. There is, then, a sense of catharsis in this scene, as Sasha cuts loose, finds some enjoyment in her own sadness, and connects with her friend Lise over their shared unhappiness.



It's winter now, and Sasha's baby is due soon. And yet, she rarely worries about the future—she doesn't think about how she'll support the baby financially, though she knows that it might be difficult to do so. If Enno gets hired by the tea company, he'll have to leave Paris for the job. Luckily, though, the hotelkeeper will help take care of Sasha while he's gone and will help her get to the *sage femme* (midwife) when the time comes.

Sasha is surprisingly optimistic during her pregnancy, keeping herself from worrying too much about what will happen when she gives birth. And yet, it's quite likely that her optimism is actually just a defense mechanism—she clearly senses that Enno might leave her on her own with the baby, but she chooses not to dwell on this knowledge because it's so upsetting.



The *sage femme* (midwife) is very comforting, but nothing can console Sasha because her baby has died. She tries not to think about anything at all, wanting to just watch branches move against the sky. Still, she keeps thinking about how her baby was dressed when he died. Back in her hotel, she calls God "cruel," and then Enno declares that he can't sit there in the **room** anymore—he needs to get out, so he leaves. Not much later, Enno leaves Paris for good, and though he promises to write and send money, Sasha knows their relationship is over. She's not sure if they ever truly loved each other—all she knows is that after he leaves, she starts to fall apart.

It's bad enough that Enno leaves Sasha after she gives birth, but it's even worse that he does so after the death of their baby. Even if Sasha didn't love him, it would make sense that she starts to fall apart when he leaves—after all, she has lost everything and now faces the challenge of putting her life back together on her own.



In the following weeks, Sasha drifts through Paris and writes to England asking for money. As she waits for funds, she starts eating at a local convent that serves food to women like her who need support. It's all very depressing, but she manages to get the money she asked for, so at least she can get some new clothes. She plans out her days, organizing them around what she wants to buy—a dress, some gloves, perfume, lipstick. What really matters to her is the actual act of spending money, which, along with drinking, helps her forget everything else in her life.

Once again, Sasha turns to money and material items to address her emotional troubles. Because this entire section is a flashback, though, readers know that nothing she does—no amount of shopping—will address her sadness, since she's still depressed in the novel's present action.



PART FOUR

No longer reminiscing about her past, Sasha receives a note from René. He stopped by the hotel to see her, but she wasn't there. He has, he says, had a stroke of luck and will be leaving Paris in the next couple days. When Sasha gets upstairs, the man in the nightgown calls her a dirty cow, but she has no idea why he's so upset. Then, once she's inside her **room**, a knock sounds on the door. It's René. He tells her that he stopped by earlier, and that the receptionist let him wait in Sasha's room. Sasha realizes that the man in the nightgown probably thought she had called for a "gigolo," which must have been why he was so rude to her in the hall.

Sasha wishes René hadn't come to her hotel. He playfully hints at wanting to sleep with her, but she shows her annoyance that he has showed up at her hotel, so he quickly switches subjects, telling her that he met a rich American woman. He explains that he enticed the woman and convinced her to lend him money. And Sasha, he says, played an important role in his success—she is, he says, a "luck-bringer," which is why he wanted to see her before leaving Paris. He takes her hand in his and stares at it, and Sasha assumes he's sizing up her ring, which she tells him is worth nothing. But he claims he was just looking at her hand.

Sasha agrees to meet René later that night. When he leaves the hotel, she feels unexpectedly giddy and excited but then forces herself to slow down. She even decides to not wear any new clothes or do anything to change her appearance. She has a total of 1,600 francs left and decides to take 250 along with her—enough for dinner and drinks, but also enough to pay for a taxi if she needs to quickly get away from René in the event that he turns mean.

Sasha intentionally arrives late to meet René. She doesn't see him anywhere but isn't perturbed—for some reason, she can tell he's somewhere nearby. She sends the waiter to the back terrace, and surely enough, he returns with René, who is cold from sitting outside and mildly annoyed that Sasha was late. He has already had a few drinks, but he and Sasha order another round, and he admits that he won't have enough money to pay for anything after he settles the bar tab. Sasha asks why he hasn't gotten any money from the American woman yet, and he says it's too early to ask her for anything. He'll soon be able to borrow money from her, but "she must be ready" before he asks.

The man in the nightgown intrudes once more on Sasha's life, this time judging her because he thinks she has hired a sex worker. Of course, her sex life doesn't affect him, but he doesn't hesitate to let her know that he disapproves of her actions. And yet, she didn't hire a sex worker—René just showed up on his own. No matter what Sasha does, then, she seemingly can't avoid getting judged by other people, which is most likely why she cares so much about how she presents herself to the world.



René's intentions are still unclear, as it's hard to determine if he legitimately wants to spend time with Sasha or if he's hoping to get something out of her. His story about the American woman reveals that he is the type to con wealthy women (just as Sasha suspected). However, it's possible that he's just telling her this story as a way of getting Sasha to put her guard down. The ambiguity surrounding his motivations muddles their entire relational dynamic, making it nearly impossible to know if they have a genuine connection or if he's just out to deceive her.



Sasha is suspicious of René because his intentions are unclear. Unable to tell whether or not he's trying to dupe her, she devises an exit strategy that she can use in the event that he mistreats her. And yet, she also seems quite excited to spend time with him, suggesting that she's starved for human connection and, as a result, is willing to open herself up to some risk.



When René says that the American woman "must be ready" before he asks for money, it becomes clear that he has a very methodical way of squeezing money out of people. At the same time, though, it's also possible that the American woman doesn't exist, and that he made her up simply to put Sasha off her guard. Either way, Sasha has good reason to be suspicious of René, though the fact that she doesn't leave suggests that she has decided to see how things progress from here.



In a taxi on the way to dinner, René asks Sasha to give him money before they arrive at the restaurant so he can pay for dinner. She obliges and gives him 200 francs. At the restaurant, René eats ravenously while Sasha hardly touches her food. Although Sasha thinks René invented the American woman, something seems to have made him confident and happy. He keeps talking about London, saying he'll be there in a couple days and asking Sasha about life in the city. He also speaks candidly about what he's heard from male sex workers in London, saying that the city is a "gold-mine" because Englishwomen love foreign men. Many of these men, René explains, are gay, but the Englishwomen don't care and pay them handsomely.

Sasha tries to get René to see that he's too optimistic about his prospects in London, but he insists that she's just skeptical because she's a woman—after all, he says, England is a difficult place for women. But Sasha knows René will have his own hardships in London, especially since he'll face difficulties in England's racist society, though nothing she says will dampen his enthusiasm. Instead of listening to her sober advice, he goes on at length about the tricks of sex work, and Sasha starts to genuinely enjoy herself as they talk loudly about lewd matters.

Sasha briefly worries that the waiter is judging them for talking so openly about sex, but she doesn't care—she's having a great time. But then René tells her that he asked the waiter if there was a nearby hotel that he and Sasha could visit after dinner, and Sasha becomes angry and embarrassed. She tries once again to tell him that there'll never be anything between them, but he just says it's a pity she won't give him a chance. He then tells her that she doesn't need to be frightened of him, since he'd never do anything to hurt her. He's not wicked like some other young men.

At one point in their conversation, Sasha calls herself a *cérébrale* (a "cerebral"), but René disagrees—he actually thought she was rather stupid. When she shows offense, he quickly explains that he doesn't think she's unintelligent, it's just that she seems to "feel better than [she] think[s]." A real *cérébrale*, René believes, doesn't like men. She also doesn't like women, instead only liking herself and her own thoughts.

By this point, Sasha has fully given herself over to René. She doesn't actually trust him, but she's not protecting herself from him, either, since she willingly gives him 200 francs even though she suspects he's after her money. The fact that she resigns herself to giving him cash suggests that she just wants to spend some time with him, regardless of whether or not he's trying to con her—a sign that she yearns for nearly any kind of human connection.



Sasha and René's conversation touches on the various ways in which society discriminates against and disenfranchises people. René notes that England is a sexist place, and his comment leads Sasha to think about how her home country is also quite racist. The implication here is that René is a person of color, and that he will face racist discrimination in England. In a way, then, Paris is framed as somewhat of a safe haven for both Sasha and René—a place where they can live without constantly facing discrimination. At the same time, though, Sasha constantly thinks about her national identity and feels as if people hold it against her in Paris, so it's not necessarily the case that she feels free to be whomever she wants in France. Perhaps realizing that living in Paris hasn't improved her life very much, she recognizes that René is romanticizing London in the same way that she and Enno romanticized Paris, since he makes the unrealistic assumption that all his problems will go away once he moves.



René's desire to sleep with Sasha could mean that he's genuinely interested in her in a romantic way. On the other hand, it could also mean that he's a sex worker who wants to have sex with her so he can later demand money from her. Perhaps sensing that she's worried about the latter possibility, he tries to put her at ease by saying that she doesn't need to be afraid of him. However, it remains unclear whether or not this is actually true, thus infusing their relationship with a disconcerting sense of uncertainty.



René has just told Sasha that he's not mean like other young men, but now he calls her stupid. Of course, he doesn't necessarily mean that she's unintelligent, but it's still not a particularly nice thing to say, perhaps suggesting that he isn't as harmless as he'd like her to think.



Sasha tires of her conversation with René and suddenly wants to leave the restaurant. She tells him that she's going to see an exhibition and that he can come if he wants, though what she really hopes is that he'll leave her alone. But he accompanies her, and by the time they get to the museum, they end up not going inside. Instead, they go to yet another bar, where they plan to have a final "goodbye" drink.

In the bar, Sasha tells a story about working for a rich couple in Paris. She lived in their enormous house, and as she describes it, René interjects that he, too, stayed in that house. They realize they're talking about the same place, causing Sasha to wonder about René's actual life story. Although it's entertaining to talk about this overlap in their lives, it doesn't make Sasha feel closer to René. To the contrary, it makes her suspicious. She excuses herself and goes to the bathroom. It's very familiar to her—yet another Parisian bathroom in which she has cried. She wonders if the **mirror** recognizes her and, if so, what it thinks about how she has changed.

Returning to the table, Sasha orders another drink, though René tells her not to because he doesn't want her to get drunk and cry. She ignores him, but he tells her to finish the drink quickly so they can go to her hotel. When she protests, he asks what's keeping her from having sex with him. Doesn't she want to? She admits that she does but that she's afraid. He then wants to know why—does she think he'll kill her and steal her beautiful ring, or perhaps kill her just because he likes to do "bad things"? If so, he assures her that he doesn't want to do bad things to her. He just wants to lie in her embrace.

René presses Sasha to tell him why she's afraid. She privately notes that, if she really thought he'd kill her, she'd be all the more likely to go with him. Finally, she tells him that she's afraid of all men. In fact, she's afraid of women, too. She's afraid of *everyone*, since all humans are like wicked "hyenas." She would have killed herself a long time ago, she says, if only she had the courage. Having spoken about her fears, Sasha feels plunged into darkness. It's not until a moment later that she pulls herself together and realizes she's still sitting in the bar across from René, a sex worker who looks quite sad.

There's a restless quality to Sasha and René's time together, as they wander from place to place. Despite their roaming, though, they really just do the same thing over and over: drink. Their listlessness aligns with the lifestyle many people led in the 1920s and 30s, as the members of the Lost Generation felt wayward and rudderless as they made their way through Paris in the aftermath of World War I.



Again, Sasha has good reason to be suspicious of René. It's clear that he's not telling the truth about his past, since he originally said he was new to Paris but now reveals that he used to stay in a mansion in the city. Because his stories don't add up, Sasha remembers her initial reluctance to spend time with him, which is why she removes herself to the bathroom. Once in the bathroom, though, her mind wanders from René, once more returning to her sad thoughts about her past. It seems that nothing is capable of distracting her from her sorrowful memories for very long.



When Sasha admits that she wants to have sex with René, it becomes a little easier to understand why she has decided to put herself at risk by spending time with a man she doesn't fully trust: she yearns for human connection, comfort, and sensuality. Considering that she spends so much time alone and depressed, it's not particularly surprising that she wants to experience some intimacy. The problem, though, is that she won't let herself put down her guard—and for good reason, too, since René seems dishonest. The question thus becomes whether she wants safety or intimacy more—a terrible decision to make.



Although René seems dishonest, Sasha actually opens up to him in this moment. Their relationship is quite strained by the fact that she's suspicious of him, but they still manage to have an emotionally intimate conversation in which Sasha finally articulates her anxieties about interacting with other people. It's not just that she's afraid of someone like René, but that she's weary of everyone she meets. Considering that the entire novel is made up of encounters with strangers that send Sasha into bouts of misery, it's clear that she's telling the truth about her feelings of fear and vulnerability.



Speaking softly, René says that he has many wounds. He lifts his head and shows Sasha a scar that traverses his throat. There are many others, he says. Sasha says that she, too, has been wounded, and he validates this sentiment—he can tell that she’s been hurt. And then he says again that he wants to have sex with her. She refuses once again, prompting him to ask what happened in her life that hurt her so badly. But she can’t answer this question because it wasn’t just one thing that hurt her, but an accumulation of many things. All he knows, though, is that he could relieve her of all her pain. After making love, he assures her, she would feel changed. But she holds her ground.

René and Sasha connect over their shared pain in this scene, as René gets Sasha to open up about her sad past. However, there’s a difference between their pain: whereas Sasha refers to emotional hardships, René talks about physical traumas. Of course, the fact that they’ve experienced different kinds of hardship doesn’t mean they can’t relate to each other, but René’s focus on physicality suggests that he might not fully understand Sasha’s hesitancy to have sex with him. He promises that having sex would help her relax, but he fails to recognize that what would really make her feel better is a genuine sense of companionship—companionship that goes beyond physical pleasure.



Sasha has a brief flashback to lounging in a **room** with a previous lover—a lover who mistreated her and often brought home other women. She then comes back to reality. She’s in a taxi with René, who whistles a pleasant tune until they reach her hotel, at which point they say goodnight and part ways. But then, as she walks in the dark to find her door, she sees the glowing ember of a cigarette hovering in the blackness, and she can sense that it’s René: he has come back for her. Without thinking, she throws herself into his arms.

When Sasha realizes that René has come back for her, she abandons all her hesitations about becoming intimate with him. Her flashback in the taxi might have something to do with her decision to embrace him: unlike the indifferent lover from her flashback, René is actually interested in Sasha and actively pursues her. Flattered by his interest, she goes to him without further thought.



Hugging René, Sasha feels profoundly happy. She can’t believe she thought she was finished with love. She’d thought feelings of youthfulness and happiness had left her forever, but now she feels reenergized and in touch with her emotions. She and René go into her **room**, where they passionately kiss. But as soon as they’re fully inside, she can tell that the spell has been broken. Now she feels uncomfortable and removed, wondering if anybody else in the hotel heard them in the hall. Everything is wrong, so she pulls away and makes some drinks.

Sasha is eager to feel young and in love again, but she soon realizes that these feelings won’t automatically develop just because she’s in the embrace of an attractive young man. She yearns for intimacy and human connection, but this yearning doesn’t fully overshadow her fear of letting people into her life. After all, she has been hurt before, making it hard for her to open up to a stranger (especially a stranger like René, whose motivations seem dubious and potentially threatening).



Her drink tastes terrible, but Sasha drinks it anyway. She wants René to say something soothing and nice, but he just looks at her. He slides his hand under her dress and lets it rest on her knee, and suddenly she feels quite drunk—so drunk, in fact, that she starts getting angry, especially when René suggests that she has been playing with him all along. He thinks she always knew they would sleep together but just acted like they wouldn’t. Resenting his implication that she’s “easy,” she asks him to leave, but he refuses.

Sasha’s relationship with René begins to sour in this scene, as René accuses her of leading him on. Interestingly enough, Sasha has spent the entirety of their relationship trying to figure out René’s motivations, and now it emerges that René has been doing the same thing: he has been trying to discern whether or not she wants to have sex with him.



Again, Sasha asks René to leave. The intensity of their conversation escalates, as he thinks it's ridiculous that she wants him gone. He even says she'll have to call someone to force him out. She would have no shame in calling out for help, she says, but then she realizes she doesn't want the people in her hotel to know he's in her **room**. He seems to realize the same thing and tauntingly tells her to cry for help. He also gets angrier each time she asks him to leave, accusing her of kissing him one moment and banishing him the next. He advances on her as she writhes against his strength, but he manages to get her onto the bed.

Sasha keeps her knees pressed firmly together. Her dress is ripped in the back, and René has pinned her by the arms. And yet, she remains determined not to make a sound. She tries to tell herself that the entire ordeal is actually rather funny, though she also realizes that René looks quite mean. Still pinning her, he tells her about a method he learned to get women to submit to him when they don't want to. She asks if he learned this method in Morocco, but he says it's unnecessary there: a group of four men can overpower a woman and then take turns doing whatever they want to her.

René tells Sasha that he's going to hurt her and that it's her fault. He asks if she understands, and though she's in pain, she says she does. She then tells him where she keeps her money and urges him to take it. He lets go of her and goes to the cash. As he looks it over, she asks him to take the 1,000 francs but to leave the smaller bills for her—otherwise, she'll have nothing. She then tells him she's not upset; she understands that everyone has to make their living. And as she says these things, she feels as if it isn't really her who's talking. Refusing to look at him as he takes the money, part of her briefly wishes he would stay or at least say goodbye, but then he leaves.

Sasha huddles on the bed and cries after René leaves, chastising herself for everything that has happened. Her entire stay in Paris has felt pitiful and ridiculous. She stares at the painting she bought from Serge and feels as if its subject—a lonesome guitar player—is looking back at her with a “mocking” expression. She also thinks about how the man in the nightgown probably heard her entire exchange with René. He's probably *still* listening and hearing her cry, so she stops herself.

Throughout the novel, there have been a number of red flags about René, since Sasha has been unable to pin down whether or not he's dangerous. It now becomes clear that he is, indeed, dangerous, since he refuses to leave forces himself on Sasha. What's especially tragic about this development is that René was one of the only people in the novel who could have helped Sasha stave off her loneliness and sorrow. If he had turned out to be kind and attentive, she would now have somebody to become emotionally (and maybe physically) intimate with. As it stands, though, he turns against her, ultimately validating her fears about other people and their malicious intentions.



Sasha's determination to stay quiet highlights her fear of being judged by others. Although René is trying to rape her, she cares more about preserving her image as a respectable person in the hotel than she cares about saving herself. And though the fact that René is trying to rape her has no reflection on who she is as a person, she still refuses to call out for help—a tragic illustration of just how afraid she is of what other people will think about her.



The fact that René stops trying to rape Sasha when she tells him where her money is suggests that he's primarily interested in stealing her cash. However, his attempt to rape her in the first place also indicates that he wanted sex, so it remains somewhat unclear what his motivations were when it comes to his relationship with Sasha. He didn't exclusively want her money, but he also clearly wasn't interested in her in an emotional or romantic way, otherwise he obviously wouldn't have tried to rape her.



Alone again, Sasha blames herself for her horrific encounter with René. Although it's not her fault that René tried to rape her, she has trouble accepting her innocence, perhaps because she has a tendency to think the worst of herself. Instead of recognizing that she is the victim in this situation, she beats herself up about what happened. What's more, she worries about what the man in the nightgown will think, despite the fact that she doesn't even like him—yet another illustration of how much she cares about what others think.



Sasha gets up to see if René left her any money at all, though she doubts he would have. She's surprised, then, to find that he didn't take anything. She pours a whiskey and raises a toast, thinking, "Here's to you, gigolo, chic gigolo..." Thinking about how she's not used to such kindness, she keeps drinking until she's extremely drunk. Then she starts trying to will René to come back. He can't be far from the hotel—she can even picture him walking on the street, so she tries to communicate with him in her mind, calling him back to the **room**.

Desperately wanting René to return, Sasha unlatches the door. She envisions him walking toward the hotel. In anticipation, she takes off her clothes and gets into bed. She can feel him coming up the stairs. Then the door budges. She shields her eyes as he comes inside. And as he makes his way to the bed, she lies completely still. As he gets closer, though, she knows it's not René, but the man in the nightgown. Her only question is whether he's in the blue or the white gown, so she takes her arm from her eyes and looks: it's the white gown. They make silent eye contact, and though Sasha feels herself hating him, she wraps her arms around him and pulls him to the bed.

The ending of Good Morning, Midnight is emotionally complex. Sasha has every reason to hate René, considering that he tried to rape her. But when she discovers that he didn't take any of her money, she feels a strong fondness for him. However, his decision not to take her money doesn't change the fact that he behaved quite violently, though it does make it even harder to discern what, exactly, his intentions were regarding his relationship with Sasha. There's quite a bit of ambiguity surrounding his interest in Sasha, as readers are left to decide for themselves what René wanted out of their interactions. It's possible that he originally wanted to con her out of her money but then felt sorry for mistreating her so decided not to rob her. It's also possible that he wasn't interested in money at all and instead genuinely wanted to become intimate with her, eventually losing his temper when she refused.



Left in a state of extreme emotional vulnerability, Sasha is eager for any kind of human connection, even if this means embracing the man in the nightgown. The novel's bleak ending thus highlights her desperate need for intimacy—a need that drives her into the arms of a man she despises, essentially illustrating the power of sorrow and loneliness to eclipse everything else in life.





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