Nine Days

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF TONI JORDAN

Toni Jordan was born in Brisbane, Australia, and though she always loved reading as a child, took a keen interest in science during high school and earned a Bachelor of Science at University of Queensland. Jordan held various roles in sales and management, as well as working as a research assistant, molecular biologist, and quality control chemist. Seeking a change, Jordan moved to Melbourne in 1996 and then left the sciences in 2004 and started taking writing classes. In 2008, Jordan published her debut novel *Addition*, a romantic comedy that went on to become an international best-seller and was a favorite of many book clubs, and her next romantic comedy *Fall Girl* in 2010. 2012's *Nine Days* represented a shift away from romantic comedy into historical fiction, inspired by a photograph from World War II of a young woman being lifted up to kiss a soldier on a train. The novel won an Indie Award and was shortlisted for several others. Since then, Jordan has written two more novels and works as a copywriter and creative writing teacher in Melbourne, where she lives with her husband.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

On September 3, 1939, Australian Prime Minister Robert Gordon Menzies announced to his country that as a member of the British Empire, Australia was officially at war with Germany. Following the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, Australia, as a member of the Allied Powers, also declared war on Japan. From 1939 to World War II's end in 1945, over 1 million Australians served in the military, fighting abroad all across Europe, North Africa, and even the Mediterranean. Between February 1942 and November 2943, Japan launched air raids against territories in Northern Australia, though these were far from Melbourne. World War II plays a significant role in *Nine Days*, since characters like Kip and Mac go off to fight in the war, and Jack ultimately dies fighting in North Africa, leaving Connie alone with an unplanned pregnancy.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Toni Jordan built her career as an author writing romantic comedies such as *Fall Girl*, about a con artist who falls in love with her mark, and *Addition*, a romance featuring a woman who is obsessed with counting and numbers. However, *Nine Days* marks her first foray into historical fiction, particularly exploring Melbourne, Australia over a span of 70 years. In doing so, Jordan joins the well-populated ranks of Australian historical fiction authors. Prominent examples of Australia's historical fiction include *The Secret River* by Kate Grenville, which follows a 19th century English criminal exiled to Australia and envisions the conflict over land between indigenous aboriginal and colonizing Europeans; *Picnic at Hanging Rock* by Joan Lindsey, a mysterious story set in 1900 about a group of girls who disappear from a boarding school in Central Victoria; and Richard Flanagan's *The Narrow Road to the Deep North*, winner of 2014's Man Booker prize, which tells the story of an Australian doctor in 1943 who is a prisoner of war and is haunted by a previous love affair with a family member's wife. *Nine Days* traces multiple generations of a family through its narratives, a motif that is similarly used in books like John Steinbeck's *East of Eden* and Gabriel García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. Additionally, many of its characters are heavily impacted by World War II, an event that also plays a significant role in Martha Hall Kelly's *Lilac Girls* and Jamie Ford's *Hotel on the Corner of Bitter and Sweet*.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** Nine Days
- **When Written:** 2011
- **Where Written:** Melbourne, Australia
- **When Published:** 2012
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary
- **Genre:** Novel, Historical Fiction
- **Setting:** Melbourne, Australia
- **Climax:** Connie makes love to Jack in the Hustings' stable
- **Antagonist:**
- **Point of View:** Nine first-person narratives

EXTRA CREDIT

Lightbulb Moment. Toni Jordan hung the photo that inspired *Nine Days* in her office, entranced by the image and hoping she could develop a story out of it. However, according to her, for an entire year she had nothing until the story, the characters, and the way that their lives interconnect came to her all at once, in a single day.

PLOT SUMMARY

In 1939, Kip Westaway, a 14-year-old boy in Melbourne, Australia, rises early in the morning to work for his neighbors, the Hustings. While he takes care of their horse, Charlie, and cleans the stable, Mr. Husting gives Kip a whole **shilling**, but

advises him to keep it a secret between them. Kip's mother, Jean, heavily favors his twin brother, Francis, over him. This is in part because Kip dropped out of school to earn money for their family after their father died and Jean thinks Kip will never amount to anything. In the afternoon, Kip runs an errand to the butcher shop and on his return home meets Annabel, a pretty girl whom he secretly admires. However, Kip is so nervous that they fail to hit it off. After leaving Annabel, Kip is chased home by a local gang of boys, dirtying his clothes so that he has to leave them in the laundry pile. However, when Kip goes back to the laundry to find his shilling, their boarder, Mrs. Keith, sees him holding her underwear, and she is convinced that Kip is a pervert. Kip's sister, Connie, springs to his defense, infuriating the Mrs. Keith, who leaves, threatening the Westaways with financial ruin, leading Connie to take a job at the newspaper at which her father used to work.

In 2001, Stanzi Westaway sits listening to a young client named Violet complain about nothing in particular, though they discuss the anxiety that everyone feels after the 9/11 terrorist attack in America. Stanzi is restless in her job and incredibly cynical about the world. Violet notices Stanzi's father Kip's shilling sitting on her desk. When Stanzi is packing up to leave for the day, she can't find the shilling and thinks that Violet stole it. She calls her sister, Charlotte, who is disappointed in Stanzi for losing it and insists he has to find it. Stanzi goes to Violet's apartment to confront her, only to realize she does not have it. To make matters worse, Violet calls Stanzi fat, deeply hurting her. Stanzi finds the coin back in her office and then goes to speak with her mother, Annabel, talking about her shame and self-contempt, especially because of her weight. She looks at how happy her own parents are and thinks that this curses her and Charlotte, since neither of them will ever be so happy themselves.

In 1940, Jack Husting wakes in his childhood bedroom. He has been away at boarding schools and then working in a remote ranch for the past several years, but he has been home for a visit for six weeks. However, his mother constantly hovers and frets, unsure how to parent a grown man, and there is a notable rift between him and his parents. Through his bedroom window, Jack notices Connie for the first time working in her yard, and he's entranced by her. Even so, that afternoon Mrs. Husting has another young woman and her mother over, hoping to arrange a relationship between Jack and the young woman. Jack is uninterested though, and as soon as they leave he goes to the Westaways to introduce himself to Connie. While Connie does laundry, the two of them talk and get to know each other, connecting over the fact that neither of them tends to sleep at night. Jack asks his mother about Connie that evening when he gets home, but Mrs. Husting imagines Connie will marry her employer, Mr. Ward, before too long, and tries to dissuade him from thinking of her.

In 1990, Charlotte Westaway feels an odd weight in her stomach while she teaches a morning yoga class. The feeling persists, even as she goes to her second job at a naturopathy store, where she bickers with her boyfriend, Craig, whom she thinks is childish and petty. Charlotte leaves the store early and goes home, where she strips naked and holds an **amethyst pendant** over her stomach. When it spins counter-clockwise, she takes this as a sign that she's pregnant. Overwhelmed, Charlotte goes to Stanzi's house, who buys her a real pregnancy test. The test is positive—Charlotte is pregnant. She is unsure of what to do, since she does not have the money for a baby or a career like Stanzi has, and Craig would obviously be a useless father. Charlotte decides that she wants to talk to her mom, Annabel, even though she knows that means she must face Kip as well, who will likely be disappointed by her irresponsibility. Stanzi drives her to their Uncle Frank's house, where their parents are, but before they go inside, Stanzi raises the possibility of an abortion, saying there's no shame in it and millions of women have done it before. Stanzi is unsure, so she uses the rotating amethyst pendant to help her decide to keep the baby.

In 1937, three days after their father died, Francis sneaks into the kitchen, pretending he is a secret spy, and looks at their chair where his father used to sit. As the family eats breakfast the next morning, Jean decides that Connie will drop out of school to work, and she herself will take a job as a housekeeper. Kip asks if he should quit school to work as well, but Jean refuses. However, when Kip goes to school that day, he can't bring himself to go to his classes and decides he is leaving to go find a job. Immediately after school, Francis joins an older gang of boys—Pike, Mac, and Cray—who want him to come with them and help them rob an old woman's house while they do some yard work for her. Francis falls in with them and searches her house for valuables, but before he finds more than a few shillings and a pouch that he sticks down his sock, the old woman kicks the boys out, though doesn't realize she was briefly robbed. The older boys beat up Francis for giving the old woman the few shillings he'd found and leave him behind. After they leave, Francis remembers the pouch in his sock, which he discovers contains an amethyst pendant.

In 1945, Annabel Crouch takes care of her alcoholic, widowed father. They are desperately poor, but they love each other. In the evening, Francis—whom Annabel has been seeing for six months—comes to take her to a dance, and on the way gives her the amethyst pendant as a gift, making up a story about how an old woman gave it to him out of gratitude for charitable work he did for her. They go to the dance and Francis leaves Annabel alone, so she starts dancing with Mac instead. Francis gets upset at this, and Mac nearly fights him until Kip intervenes. Kip and Mac have both recently returned from the war, so they reminisce together until Annabel tells their friends Francis's story about the pendant's origin. Mac knows this is a lie, and Francis is so humiliated that he insults Annabel's

poverty. Kip intervenes and buys the pendant from Francis for a huge sum of money so that he can re-gift it to her himself, and leaves the dance with her.

In 1941, Jean Westaway frets about how she will keep her family together and secretly rages against her husband for dying and leaving her a widow with three children. Jean is late for work, but she finds Connie sitting beneath the tree in their yard, holding her stomach. Connie tells Jean that she's pregnant, and that she'll never see the father again. Although Connie wants to keep the baby, Jean is furious and decides she must have an abortion, and takes her to a woman who owns a dress shop where Jean herself once had an abortion. She leaves Connie with the woman and goes home for a time, thinking about how everything she is doing is for the sake of her children. She returns to the dress shop to retrieve Connie, who has had the procedure, and leads her home. However, on the way, Connie starts heavily bleeding. Jean leaves her sitting on the street to look for help, though she never finds any, and Connie dies.

In 2006, Alec Westaway briefly runs from home while his mother, Charlotte, is talking to him. Alec despises his family, especially Charlotte because of her veganism and strange rejection of technology. However, when he returns home, though Charlotte is furious, Stanzi—now living with them as their second parent, and now fit and a personal trainer—helps him calm down enough to enjoy his grandparents' anniversary dinner. Kip, Annabel, and Uncle Frank arrive to commemorate their family and Kip and Annabel's 50 years of marriage. While Alec is outside fetching Kip's glasses from the car, he finds a hidden photo of Connie, whom he's never met, kissing a soldier on a train. He shows the photo to Kip, who is overwhelmed by it and reveals to Stanzi and Charlotte that Connie did not die of the flu, as they'd told the family, but from complications from an abortion. After Kip, Annabel, and Uncle Frank return to their nursing home, Charlotte realizes Kip left the photo behind and begs Alec to take the photo to him, even though it's already late in the evening. Alec resentfully does so, and on his way sees his friends in a new sports car with pizza and beer. They want Alec to get in so they can go driving and spend the night on the beach drinking. Alec wants to, but feels responsible to Kip, and so ultimately declines even though he thinks this will make him a loser for the rest of his life. After delivering the photo to Kip and Annabel and spending some time with them, Alec returns home. Charlotte is angry at him for taking so long, but hugs him tight, and over her shoulder Kip sees the news on the TV: all his friends in the car died in a drunk driving accident.

In 1941, Connie Westaway sneaks out of the house and meets Jack the night before he leaves for World War II. They talk together for some time until a rainstorm forces them to take shelter in the Hustings' stable. Jack and Connie have sex in the stable, and Connie feels happy and fulfilled for the first time in her life. The next day, Connie and Kip goes to see Jack off at the train station, and Connie brings a camera along. She sees Jack leaning out of the window and leaves Kip behind to go to him. Another soldier hoists her into the air so she can give him one last kiss, a moment which Kip secretly photographs. The train rolls away and Jack is gone. Even though she knows she may never see Jack again, Connie feels grateful for everything in her life.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Kip Westaway – Kip is the narrator of the first chapter. Jean is his mother, and he is also Connie and Francis's brother, Annabel's eventual husband, and Charlotte and Stanzi's father. After Kip's father dies in 1937, he decides he will drop out of school and work for the Hustings to support his family, even though he is a skilled writer and artist. This earns him the ire of Jean, who mistreats him and heavily favors Francis. Kip is secretly in love with Annabel even when he is a young boy, but never has the nerve to tell her, and she does not learn of it until 1945 when she meets him again at a dance shortly after he returns from fighting in World War II. However, Kip was a late entrant in to the war, remaining in Australia to care for Jean until she died, since everyone in Richmond reviled her for pushing Connie to have the abortion which led to her death. Despite Jean's low view of Kip and expectation that he'll never amount to anything, Kip marries Annabel and becomes a renowned professional photographer, taking up the career that Connie never had the chance to pursue because of her early death. Kip has two children with Annabel, Charlotte and Stanzi. Although his grandchildren, Alec and Libby, have no father figure, Kip stands in as a father figure for them so that their lives can still be complete. Aside from his time in the war, Kip spends his entire life in Melbourne, eventually moving to a retirement village to live with Annabel and Francis. As the closest sibling to Connie, he mourns her early death for his entire life.

Stanzi Westaway – Stanzi is the narrator of the second chapter. She is Kip and Annabel's daughter, and Charlotte's twin sister. Stanzi does not enter the story until she is in her early 20s, when Charlotte finds out she is pregnant. Although Stanzi is already cynical and admittedly unhappy by this point, in spite of their pleasant childhood, she has plans to continue her counseling career until she can earn her PhD and become a psychoanalyst. However, after 10 years, Stanzi is still in the same counseling role and hates her job and her clients. She is overweight and filled with self-contempt, imagining that her parents love Charlotte more than her, that Charlotte is more beautiful and successful despite never having a real career of her own. After Stanzi violates the counselor-client relationship by visiting one of her clients, Violet, at her house and accusing her of stealing Kip's special **shilling**, Stanzi realizes that she

needs to quit her job and move on. The last time that Stanzi appears in the story, five years later, she has quit her counseling job, lost weight, and become a personal trainer. She now and co-parents Charlotte's kids, Alec and Libby. When Stanzi speaks with Alec and her parents, she is less cynical and far more positive and appreciative of her family, demonstrating that personal growth and even happiness are achievable for even the sourest individual.

Jack Husting – Jack Husting is the narrator of the third chapter, and Connie's lover. Although Jack grew up next door to the Westaways, he never took notice of Connie throughout his childhood until he was sent away to boarding school and then to work out west on a ranching station. However, when Jack returns to see his parents for a visit, he is immediately enamored with Connie and goes to see her. Although Jack is an adult when he comes home to visit, his mother, Mrs. Husting, does not know how to treat her grown son and tries to hover and dote on him like she would if her were a child, causing consternation for them both and exemplifying the conflict between mother and son as the son transitions from a boy to a man. Although Mrs. Husting wants Jack to marry a different girl, Jack falls in love with Connie, and they have sex in his parents' stable the night before he is sent off to war, leaving Connie pregnant. Although Jack hopes to marry Connie when he returns, he dies fighting in North Africa.

Charlotte Westaway – Charlotte is the narrator of the fourth chapter. She is Stanzi's twin sister, Kip and Annabel's daughter, and Alec and Libby's mother. Sitting opposite Stanzi's cynical realism, Charlotte takes great interest in naturopathic remedies, astrology, and yoga. When she is 24, Charlotte finds out that she is pregnant by her childish boyfriend, Craig. Charlotte knows that Craig will never take on the responsibility of fatherhood, and so is faced with the choice of aborting her pregnancy or keeping it to raise the child alone, forming a modern parallel to Connie's unexpected pregnancy and abortion. However, Charlotte tends to be indecisive, so she makes the decision by praying to the universe and holding the **amethyst pendant** Kip gave her above her stomach to see which way it spins. This leads her to keep the pregnancy, even though unlike Stanzi, Charlotte has no career and no achievements, demonstrating the challenges of single motherhood. She also fears that Kip will think her irresponsible for having sex without protection. When the story revisits Charlotte, she has two children, Alec and Libby, both from different men. To help her parent her children, Stanzi moves in and lives as a second mom, a permanent co-parent to Alec and Libby. Kip performs any fatherly duties that arise, demonstrating that unconventional family structures can function just as well as more traditional ones. However, Alec resents Charlotte's eccentricities and parenting rules until he realizes how fragile life is and how Charlotte will not be in his life forever.

Francis Westaway / Uncle Frank – Francis is the narrator of the fifth chapter. He is Kip and Connie's brother, Jean's son, and Charlotte and Stanzi's uncle. In the week after Francis's father dies, Francis joins a gang for one day, looking for the chance to belong to something. However, when the gang tries and fails to rob an old woman's house, they blame their failure on Francis and beat him up, leaving him behind. Even so, Francis secretly smuggles a valuable **amethyst pendant** he finds under the woman's mattress, which comes to be passed around to other characters throughout the story. The guilt that Francis feels over this incident compels him to be studious and serious so as to take care of his family, but within a year this turns him haughty and arrogant, and he looks down on Connie for her dream of becoming a professional photographer and Kip for dropping out of school. Whereas Kip is artistic, Francis is practical and serious to a fault. When they are of age, rather than fight in the war like Kip, Francis becomes a lawyer and stays in Australia. He dates Annabel for six months and nearly asks her to marry him, giving her the amethyst pendant he stole but making up a noble story about it being a reward for his selfless service. However, when Annabel tells their friends Francis's story about the pendant, his lie is exposed and he is publicly humiliated. He angrily lashes out at Annabel, insulting both her gender and her poverty until Kip intervenes and steals her away. As a result, Francis spends his entire life a bachelor without a wife or children, and spends his last years living in a retirement village with Kip and Annabel.

Annabel Crouch – Annabel is the narrator of the sixth chapter. She is Kip's eventual wife, and Charlotte and Stanzi's mother. Annabel and her widowed father live in poverty in Richmond, not far from the Westaways, though she only knows Francis and never pays much attention to Kip throughout their childhood. While other young women are getting married and moving away, Annabel stays with her alcoholic father to cook, clean, and care for him since he can no longer take care of himself, effectively taking the parent role in their relationship upon herself. While she is stuck in Richmond, Annabel starts dating Francis, one of the few young men not off to war. Although Francis is overly-serious, Annabel thinks he is handsome and respectable. She is thrilled when he gives her an **amethyst pendant**, which he tells her he was gifted as thanks for his noble deeds as a young child. Not realizing that this is a lie, Annabel repeats his story about the pendant in public and exposes Francis as a fraud, humiliating him and prompting him to viciously insult her class and gender. Annabel is wounded and furious, and starts to give the pendant back until Kip intervenes, buys the pendant from Francis, and re-gifts it to Annabel himself. In this moment, Annabel realizes that Kip is both honorable and generous. She falls in love with him, marrying him shortly after her father dies from his alcoholism. Together, Annabel and Kip have Charlotte and Stanzi and two grandchildren, Alec and Libby, and Annabel spends the remainder of her life in a retirement village with Kip and

Francis.

Jean Westaway – Jean is the narrator of the seventh chapter, and Kip, Francis, and Connie's mother. Jean appears to be a sour, mean, and self-centered individual for most of the story, though her own narrative reveals that much of this bitterness and anger stems from the pain of losing her husband and the stress of raising three children as a widow. In particular, Jean's general contempt for Kip comes primarily from the fact that Kip reminds her too much of her dead husband, and even looking at him is painful for her. When Jean discovers that Connie is pregnant, she is angry at her for being so irresponsible and pushes her to have an abortion, though Connie wants to keep the baby even though its father, Jack, has died. However, Jean persists, convincing Connie by telling her that her status as a single mother will not only shame her, but their entire family. Jean takes her daughter to a dress shop that performs illegal abortions out back—and where she herself had an abortion when she was younger. Jean leaves Connie there to have the operation, while Jean reflects that everything she does she does out of love for her children, no matter how harsh it seems. However, when Jean starts to bring Connie home to rest and recover, Connie starts bleeding profusely. Jean leaves her daughter sitting on the street bleeding while she tries vainly to find help, and Connie dies. The whole town eventually discovers what happened, and Jean becomes a hated woman. She dies at home in her bed, unable to even leave the house due to her shame and guilt.

Alec Westaway – Alec is the narrator of the eighth chapter. He is Charlotte's son and Libby's older brother. When Alec is 17, he resents Charlotte for her eccentricity, her strange rules against technology, and her strict parenting. However, he drastically overestimates his own suffering, comparing it to living in Nazi Germany, modeling the often-unjustified ire sons have toward their mothers. Alec is a talented artist and dreams of leaving his family to see the world and never return. However, during Kip and Annabel's anniversary dinner, Alec finds an old hidden photo of Connie only weeks before she died. He is struck by how overcome Kip is to see his sister's photo once again. That evening, after his grandparents leave, Charlotte asks Alec to take the photo to their retirement village, since Kip accidentally left the photo behind. Alec reluctantly agrees, though not without grumbling. On the way there, his friends show up in a fancy car with pizza and bar, trying to convince him to run off to the beach with them for the night. Alec wants to, feeling like this is his only chance to live a normal life, but is torn between the desire to impress his peers and party and his sense of responsibility toward his family. Alec turns them down, feeling like a loser, and brings the photo to his grandparents. When he gets home, Charlotte seems angry at first but then runs to hug him. Alec realizes how small she is compared to him now, and how limited his time is with his mom, seeing it as a precious thing. The fragility of life and relationships is painfully reinforced when he sees his friends' car on the news: all of them died in a drunk driving accident.

Connie Westaway – Connie is the narrator of the ninth and final chapters. She is Kip and Francis's sister, Jean's daughter, and Jack's lover. Although Connie loves art and wants to be a professional photographer, when her father dies she quits school to work and support the family. Since Jean is a poor mother to Kip, Connie steps into a motherly role for him instead, giving him the comfort, protection, and tenderness that he does not receive from Jean. Connie meets Jack when he comes to visit and instantly finds herself attracted to him. The night before he departs for World War II, Connie and Jack meet at night and have sex in his parents' stable. This leaves Connie feeling transformed, and for the first time in her life she knows what it is to desire something and to act on that desire. Weeks later, Connie realizes she is pregnant, though she intends to have the baby and marry Jack when he returns. However, after Jack is killed in North Africa, Connie tells Jean about the pregnancy. Although she still wants to have the baby, since it is the only reminder she has left of Jack, Jean pressures her to have an abortion. Not wanting to shame her family, especially Kip, Connie reluctantly agrees. However, the operation is illegal and so is not done by a medical professional, but an old woman who works at a dress shop. The operation apparently goes awry—on the way home, Connie starts hemorrhaging and tragically bleeds to death sitting in the street.

Craig – Craig is Charlotte's boyfriend when she is 24, and Alec's biological father. Craig is bitter and childish, and Charlotte obviously thinks very little of him. Craig also has an extremely low view of motherhood and parenting, which helps Charlotte to see that if she goes through with their unplanned pregnancy, Craig clearly will not be taking the role of the baby's father.

Libby – Libby is Charlotte's daughter and Alec's younger sister. Alec finds Libby irritating and mostly bickers with her, though toward the end of his narrative he realizes that she is still important to him; as long as Libby is alive, he'll never be alone. Although Libby is present in much of Alec's narrative, she says and does very little, playing a very minor role.

Mac – Mac is one of the gang of bullies who picks on Kip and incites Francis to help them rob the old woman. Although Mac is a gangster as a teenager, when he returns from war he seems entirely changed, and even defends Kip's honor as a soldier against his own sister Jos. Mac's character change suggests that his time as a soldier caused him to mature and grow, suggesting that even the worst individuals can experience personal development and become good people.

Mrs. Husting – Mrs. Husting is Jack's mother. When Jack returns to Richmond as a grown man, Mrs. Husting still wants to treat him like a child and does not know how to respect his boundaries. Although Jack loves Connie, Mrs. Husting tries to

set him up with a girl named Emily, since her father owns a hardware store and the union would benefit their family more. Mrs. Husting also thinks very little of Kip, assuming that he will amount to nothing, demonstrating that one's limited perspective and judgment of a person's character and potential is often inaccurate.

Mr. Husting – Mr. Husting is Jack's father and young Kip's first employer. Mr. Husting generally goes along with whatever his wife, Mrs. Husting, believes is best, and so also does not seem to understand how to respect his son's newfound adulthood. Unlike Mrs. Husting, Mr. Husting is fond of Kip and gives him the **shilling** that reappears throughout the narratives.

Violet – Violet is one of Stanzi's counseling clients. Since Violet is a kleptomaniac with severe "daddy issues," Stanzi assumes that Violet stole her father's **shilling**. However, when Stanzi confronts her, Violet reveals that not only did she steal it, but she only likes having Stanzi as a counselor because Stanzi is fat, and her apparent self-loathing makes Violet (who has an eating disorder) feel better about herself.

Annabel's Father – Annabel's father raised Annabel singlehandedly after his wife died in childbirth. Annabel and her father love each other dearly, but Annabel's father is so grief-stricken that he becomes an alcoholic. As an adult, Annabel must stay in Richmond to care for him, since his addiction leaves him incapacitated much of the time. He dies not long before Annabel marries Kip.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Mrs. Keith – Mrs. Keith is a boarder in the Westaway's house. However, when Mrs. Keith spies Kip playing with her underwear, she screams for so long about Kip being a pervert on the loose and a danger to society that Connie tells her she is no longer welcome in their home.

Mr. Ward – Mr. Ward owns the newspaper at which Connie's father worked, and later employs Connie as a photographer's assistant. Mr. Ward is a widower with children.

Jim Pike – Jim Pike is one of the gang of bullies who picks on Kip and incites Francis to help them rob the old woman.

Cray – Cray is one of the gang of bullies who picks on Kip and incites Francis to help them rob the old woman.

Jos – Jos is Mac's sister, and an old acquaintance of Annabel.

Millie – Millie is an old acquaintance of Annabel.

Emily – Emily is a young woman whom Jack's mother wants him to marry.

Tim – Tim is one of Alec's friends who dies in a car crash.

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.

UNCONVENTIONAL FAMILY STRUCTURE

Nine Days depicts four generations of the Westaway family in Melbourne, Australia between 1937 and 2006, told non-chronologically through nine different days and narrated by nine different family members. Family plays a critical role in each narrative, but although society in the mid-20th century and early-21st century expected that a family would follow the traditional structure of one mother, one father, and several children, the successive generations of the Westaway family rarely fit such a mold. Through the nine different narrations describing a variety of familial structures, the novel demonstrates that despite traditional expectations, families come in different forms, and though sometimes challenging, they can nonetheless be beautiful and loving in their own right.

The family Westaway family's various family structures demonstrate that, though society expects the structure of a traditional, nuclear family to consist of a mother, father, and children, families often don't meet that expectation, either through fateful loss or personal choice. In 1937, Kip, Connie, and Francis Westaway's father dies in a drunken accident, leaving the children and their mother Jean to survive on their own, struggling and adjusting themselves to get by. Similarly, Annabel Crouch, who eventually marries Kip, loses her mother to some unknown ailment before the story begins, leaving her to live alone with only her alcoholic father. Annabel's family, like Kip, Francis, and Connie's, demonstrates that non-traditional family structures may arise from tragic loss. In the 21st century, Charlotte's family lacks a traditional father figure as well, though this is because of her own choice to have her children—rather than abort them—even though she isn't married and knew the babies' fathers weren't viable parental figures, demonstrating that alternative family structures can develop out of personal choices as well. Kip, Annabel, and Alec, Charlotte's son, all receive criticism and mockery from their peers over their non-traditional families, which demonstrates that although their alternative family structures arise from understandable or unavoidable situations, society is still prejudiced against them.

In lieu of the traditionally-accepted nuclear family, Kip, Annabel, and Charlotte's families all adjust themselves to a new structure that allows them to operate effectively, suggesting that even non-traditional families can find ways to function and survive. Kip's family grieves the loss of their father, and his own mother despises him as the second-born of twin boys—he is her least favorite child. Kip and his sister Connie both leave school in order to work and replace the income their father once

provided, demonstrating how their family adjusts to the loss of their paternal provider. Since Kip's mother, especially in her grief, ceases to provide Kip with any motherly affection, Connie (who is several years older than him) steps up as his motherly figure instead. After Kip is attacked by a gang and comes home bloody and bruised, Connie cleans him up and holds him, and Kip reflects, "she's warm and she's Connie and I'd like to sit there forever being held like when I was little," suggesting that Connie is the new anchor of safety and affection in Kip's life. Likewise, before Annabel marries Kip, her father's grief at the loss of her mother drives him to incapacitating alcoholism. With no mother, and a father who cannot even take care of himself, Annabel steps into the parental role, earning the family income, cooking, and caring for her father. Although becoming the stand-in parent of their family costs Annabel many opportunities to date, socialize, and live a normal young person's life, her ability to keep her and her father afloat again demonstrates how a non-traditional family structure may still function when its members adapt and step into different roles. Although, like Annabel's family, Charlotte's family lacks the traditional father role, Charlotte's sister Stanzi moves in to be the effective second parent of their household. Similarly, as a grandfather, Kip goes out of his way to perform the fatherly duties for Alec and his sister Libby, demonstrating that even in lieu of a conventional father figure, other family members may step into the role themselves.

Although often challenging, the positive relationships among family members in *Nine Days* suggest that non-traditional families can be just as loving and functional as a traditional family. Although Kip has a strained relationship with his mother Jean and his brother Francis, he and Connie have a deep and endearing affection for each other that he holds onto, even for the 70 years after her early, tragic death. Their lasting bond is emphasized by the emotions that overwhelm him when Alec finds an old photograph of Connie, demonstrating that love can grow, thrive, and persist even in a non-traditional family. This idea is particularly evident in Alec, who initially resents the non-traditional structure of his family until he reflects on his grandfather's loving and paternal care for him, and realizes that his mother, Charlotte, dearly loves him and won't be in his life forever. The love and appreciation for his family that Alec feels, despite its failure to meet traditional expectations, demonstrates that non-traditional families are every bit as valuable as those that easily fit societal norms. *Nine Days* demonstrates that family has a far broader and more dynamic meaning than society traditionally expects, and ultimately argues that familial bonds can be loving and beautiful in any form.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS, PERSPECTIVE, AND PERSONAL GROWTH

In *Nine Days*, the reader's perception of each character changes constantly as they are viewed from different angles and perspectives. Although initially the reader is inclined to judge characters like Jean, Charlotte, or even a local bully named Mac as one-dimensional, antagonistic characters, as the narrative develops the readers sees that there is more to everyone than first meets the eye. By forcing the reader to continuously shift and develop their perceptions of each character, the narrative argues that despite first impressions, each person has a complex and dynamic personal history, as well as the capacity to change themselves over time.

Through Kip and Stanzi's early narrations, the people around them appear one-dimensional and shallow to the reader, demonstrating how a limited, fixed perspective can cause one to make incomplete judgments of another person's character. In the first chapter, from Kip's isolated perspective, Francis is depicted only as the spoiled, perfectionist brother, doted on by Jean, the cruel and selfish mother. His point of view gives both characters a very shallow characterization, since the reader has no context for what else is happening in the story. Even Kip himself seems rather simple and without ambition—the reader knows quit school two years before, but does not know that it was to earn money for the family after his father's death. This demonstrates that a limited understanding of a person can cause one to see them in a shallow, one-dimensional manner. Similarly, in 2001, Stanzi—who struggles with self-contempt about being overweight—bitterly sees her sister Charlotte as the favored, slim, beautiful sibling. According to Stanzi, Charlotte is the better version of herself, revealing how her own shallow characterization of Charlotte is informed by her view of herself. Stanzi's contempt for Charlotte, rooted partially in her own self-loathing, suggests that one's own projected view of themselves can lead them to make narrow assumptions about another person as well.

However, seeing the world through another person's eyes—through Francis, Jean, and Charlotte's narratives—demonstrates that there is far more to an individual beneath the surface than one would initially expect. Francis's story reveals that, immediately after his father's death, Francis is beset with fear over how their family will survive with so little money, and guilt over stealing jewelry from an old woman. Francis's guilt drives his obsession with living a perfect, upright life so that he can become a lawyer and lift his family from their hardships. Although Francis is never portrayed as likable to the reader, his narrative reveals that rather than being nothing more than a spoiled child, he has many complex emotions at play and ultimately wants to help his family. Likewise, while Jean is cruel and callous, her narrative reveals that she is burdened with anger and grief over her husband's death and feels trapped by the task of keeping her family alive, demonstrating that even in spite of great flaws, any individual has more to them than initially appears. Far from the beautiful, successful individual Stanzi sees Charlotte as,

Charlotte's narrative reveals that she, too, is riddled with self-doubt and fear. Although Charlotte, a part-time yoga instructor, is fit and healthy, she feels as if she's done nothing with her life—no college, no career—while Stanzi is a licensed counselor and plans to earn a PhD. Charlotte never thinks ill of Stanzi's weight, but rather is angry at herself for allowing herself to become pregnant by a man she does not even respect. The complex emotions and fears that Charlotte feels go much deeper than Stanzi's simple perception of her as beautiful, perfect, and insufferable. The distinction between Stanzi's perception of Charlotte and Charlotte's perception of herself again demonstrates that there is far more to an individual than one initially perceives or projects onto them.

More than simply demonstrating that there is more to each character than meets the eye, the novel, in its span of 70 years, tracks how several characters change and develop, furthering arguing that every person has the capacity to change over the course of time. 1937, Mac (a schoolyard bully) harasses Kip, beats up Francis, and coerces Francis into stealing an old woman's jewelry. But in 1945, he reappears having just returned from World War II a hero. Although he is still rather abrasive, when he also defends Kip's honor as a soldier—having also just returned from the war—at a local dance, he demonstrates that time and experience have matured him into a decent man. Likewise, though many of his peers in 1939 consider him a "layabout" or a lazy teenager, he returns from the war confident and capable. After marrying Annabel, he even proves himself to be an exceptional father and grandfather, demonstrating his own capacity for change and growth. Likewise, although in 2001 Stanzi is a depressed, overweight counselor who resents Charlotte, when she appears again in 2005 she's transformed herself into a fit personal trainer, and has supportively joined Charlotte's family as the second parent. This shift demonstrates that even for someone as bitter and cynical as Stanzi once was, personal change and positive transformation are possible. Each individual's capacity for change further argues that one should not leap to quick judgments about another person, since their current perceptions of them do not define the course of the life or how they'll be in the future. *Nine Days* demonstrates that each person has their own personal history that is complex, multi-dimensional, and always changing, thus suggesting that one should not be quick to judge another based solely on their limited perception of them.

GENDER, STIGMA, AND SHAME

By depicting several generations of Westaway women over the course of 70 years, *Nine Days* provides a window into changing roles of women in society over the course of the late 20th century, and briefly into the 21st. Although the full scope of the novel traces four generations of women, the main examination of women's changing place in society largely comes through the parallel lives of Connie in the early-20th century and her niece Charlotte in the late-20th and early-21st centuries, as both women are faced with an unexpected pregnancy. Through this main parallel of Connie and Charlotte's lives, the novel argues that although women in the modern era are far more liberated and empowered than they were in Connie's day, some of the same social stigmas and inequities remain.

Connie faces limited prospects and intense social pressures which lead to a catastrophic outcome, demonstrating that women lived harder lives in the early-20th century and were severely limited by gender. Although Connie dreams of becoming a professional photographer, her brother Francis belittles the idea of a female photographer and thinks it's "stupid," demonstrating society's general disregard of women's skills and abilities. When their father dies, Connie is the first child to be pulled out of school because she is a girl, sacrificing her own education and professional goals to support her brothers' educations. Jean believes the only proper future for her is to marry a wealthy man, demonstrating the narrow future afforded to women in the early 20th century. Connie also faces major stigma around her sexuality, demonstrating women's sexual repression in that era as well. When Connie has sex with her lover, a young man named Jack, for the first and only time, she reflects, "All my life I've had nothing I've desired and given up having desires at all." This suggests that, as an unmarried young woman, she has never had the chance to explore her sexual desires because of society's expectations. This stigma around her sexuality is reinforced when, after Jean, Connie's mother, finds out that Connie is pregnant with Jack's child, she calls her own daughter a "slut" and a "loose woman" with "no morals." Since Jack was recently killed in the war, Jean demands that Connie have an abortion—but against her wishes, Connie would rather keep the child. However, since abortion is not a legal practice, they are forced to go to an illicit practitioner behind a dress shop, not a medical professional, and Connie hemorrhages and dies as a result. Connie's abortion and tragic death not only reiterate the repression women and stigmas women face in her time, but also the tragic consequences of those stigmas, since she does not have access to a safe method of dealing with an unexpected pregnancy.

Contrasting with Connie's limited life and tragic death, Charlotte enjoys a comparatively high level of freedom as a woman in the modern world, demonstrating that social conditions have improved drastically for women over the course of the 20th century. Although Charlotte, like Connie, does not have a professional career path, she is still able to support herself and be independent working as a yoga teacher and selling naturopathic medicines. She is also never pressured to marry a man to provide her with stability, demonstrating that she enjoys far more independence and agency than Connie ever did. This is reinforced by the fact that Stanzi is able to

build her professional career as a counselor and later as a physical trainer. Unlike Connie's largely unexplored sexual desire, Charlotte seems free to enjoy her sexuality as she sees fit, largely unburdened by societal expectations. Charlotte keeps a sex toy in her nightstand, suggesting that she is free to enjoy herself and explore her sexuality. This is further emphasized by the fact that her father was unbothered when he found her having sex as a teenager, a stark contrast to how Connie's mother reprimands her for getting pregnant out of wedlock. Charlotte's comparative sexual freedom suggests that women in the late-20th and early-21st centuries live under much less repressive expectations than those in the early-20th century. When Charlotte faces an unexpected pregnancy much like Connie, Stanzi reminds her, "Your body, your choice," meaning that she can either choose to have the baby or to have an abortion at the local hospital, which is a safe and "short operation"—unlike Connie's dangerous amateur abortion in the back of a dress shop. Charlotte's safe and easy access to abortion once again contrasts with the fatally dangerous option available to Connie, once again demonstrating the improved conditions for women in society.

However, despite the markedly better societal conditions that Charlotte enjoys compared to Connie, several sources of shame remain consistent through both their lives, suggesting that although women in the modern era enjoy far more freedom than in the 1930s, some of the same social stigmas and inequities remain. Although Charlotte knows that her father, Kip, won't be angry at her or deride her morals for having sex outside of wedlock, she still fears telling him because she knows he will still see her pregnancy or even an abortion as irresponsible, since she didn't have the foresight to use proper protection. Stanzi knows this too, but points out the inherent sexism of it, saying, "No one talks about [abortion] because of this ancient gender-loaded taboo, that's all. Men aren't judged by the same standards. No one asks a man if a fetus of theirs has been aborted." Furthermore, when Charlotte decides to keep the baby rather than abort it, she is left to care for the child on her own until Stanzi moves in with her to help. The stigma of irresponsibility placed on Charlotte for getting pregnant is not equally directed at the baby's father. Further, the expectation that she will raise the child on her own demonstrates that despite the many way in which women enjoy more freedom now than in the past, some of the same stigmas and inequities remain. The parallel journeys of Connie and Charlotte are at once vastly different in the degree of freedom that Charlotte enjoys, while tragically similar in that they both face the same stigma of unexpected pregnancy and inequity of shouldering the burden or responsibility.

MOTHERS AND SONS

Mothers play a key role throughout *Nine Days*, both as sources of care and affection as well as antagonistic and domineering figures in their children's eyes. By exploring multiple points of view from both sons and mothers, the novel examines the relationship between them from both sides, arguing that although sons often resent their mothers' control over them, mothers are ultimately operating out of a love for their children and desire to provide safety and stability.

Kip, Alec, and Jack all resent their mothers, seeing them as overly controlling and domineering. The points of view illustrate the resentment—justified or unjustified—that sons often have toward their mothers, especially as they are transitioning from childhood to adulthood. Since Kip quits school to work after his father's death, his mother Jean immensely favors his twin brother Francis, who is still in school. She lets Francis sleep later and gives him bacon while denying any meat to Kip, even though Kip starts his work at 4:00 in the morning. Although Francis constantly antagonizes Kip, as soon as Kip confronts him, Jean gets angry with Kip since she feels as if all the family's hopes rest on Francis someday becoming a lawyer. Kip justifiably resents his mother for her unequal treatment, even though he does not know the struggles she herself is going through, demonstrating the sometimes-justified resentment children may hold against their mothers. Jack, Connie's eventual lover, also feels a similar resentment to his own mother, Mrs. Husting. Jack has been away at boarding school and then to work at a ranch in the Australian bush, and is now nearly an adult. Yet when he returns to visit his parents in Melbourne, Mrs. Husting insists on mothering him and trying to control his future, namely by attempting to arrange a marriage—not to Connie—in which Jack has no interest. Although Jack feels some resentment toward his overly-doting mother, it is less because she treats him unfairly and more because she does not yet give him space to be his own individual: "she is unsure how to mother a grown man." Jack's relationship with his mother thus suggests that not all resentment is based in unfair treatment, but sometimes simply in the son's need to stand on his own, without his mother hovering over him. Alec, too, resents his mother Charlotte, though for considerably less justifiable reasons. Charlotte is dedicated to naturopathy and veganism, and forbids many modern conveniences from their home, such as cell phones, video games, or meat products. To Alec, a 16-year-old, these rules (along with an early curfew) seem a great injustice that he even compares to living in "Nazi Germany," and he feels they set him apart from his peers at school. Although Charlotte's rules may seem unnecessary to some, Alec's view of his own suffering is obviously exaggerated, demonstrating that although such resentment from sons towards their mothers seems understandable, it is not always justified.

Jean and Charlotte's narratives reveal that while they are far from being perfect mothers, they are also burdened by a difficult role and ultimately trying to do what is best for their

sons. By adding in their perspective alongside their sons', the novel argues that in spite of their son's resentments, mothers are most often merely doing what they believe to be right. Jean's narrative reveals that although she is deeply flawed—selfish, bitter, controlling—as Kip sees her, much of the anger and ill treatment of him is not truly *about* him. She lashes out at Kip primarily due to the fact that he reminds her so much of her dead husband, which gives rise to her grief and anger over his death. Looking at Kip one day, Jean reflects privately, "I'd never confess it to another living soul but some days I can't bear the sight of that boy. It's a judgment on me." In spite of her mistreatment of Kip, Jean also reveals that she is truly doing what she thinks is best to keep her children alive after her husband's death left her with "three children" and now forces her to "[work] like a slave to feed them." Although Kip and Jean never reconcile within the text, Jean's own painful and difficult situation suggests that in spite of their sons' resentful feelings of unfairness, most mothers are simply doing their flawed best to care for their children. Charlotte, too, is caught in a difficult situation as she raises her son without his father around. But even her decision to keep her pregnancy—Stanzi advises her to have an abortion—demonstrates that she loves her son, in spite of what he thinks of her and her rules. Charlotte's ban of cell phones and meat is based in her belief that her family will be better off without them. When Alec is tempted by his peers to go driving and drinking with them all night, he abstains because of his responsibility to his family and his mom's rules, though this makes him resent her even more. However, when he sees on the news that his friends died in a drunk-driving accident later that night, even Alec realizes that in spite of his resentment towards Charlotte and her bizarre rules, she is ultimately loves him and is only trying to keep him safe. *Nine Days* depicts motherhood as a difficult task. Though the relationships between mothers and sons are often fraught with tension and resentment, their dual perspectives show that most mothers only want what is best for their sons.

THE FAR-REACHING EFFECTS OF WAR

War has a near-constant presence in the context of most of the narratives in the story, though combat is never directly depicted—it is always an event happening somewhere else in the world. Even so, the effects of war are constantly felt, whether through anxiety over imminent conflict, rationing, or the painful loss of loved ones to war. By setting the various narratives in relation to several different wars and observing the impact they have on people even from afar, the novel suggest that war can have great impact even on people far away from the conflict.

In both the lead-up to World War II and to the U.S.'s invasion of Iraq, the threat of war looms over several narratives in the book, even though Australia itself (where the stories are set) is never under threat, suggesting that even the shadow of war can have great impact on individuals. In both Francis and Kip's narratives, fear of World War II causes a general sense of anxiety among Melbourne's citizens. Having just seen the lives lost in World War I, Jean remarks that she'd rather "hide [her sons] in the ceiling space" than see them drafted and sent to combat. Kip senses the anxiety himself, though he notes that every "working boy" is "half afraid war'll happen, half afraid it won't," suggesting that their anxiety is a mixture of fear of combat and anticipation at the chance to leave the drudgery of their lives and see another part of the world. In Stanzi's narrative, taking place in the months after the 9/11 terrorist attacks in the U.S., Stanzi observes that many of her counseling patients are extremely anxious about planes, flying, and the prospect of another large war. One of them, Violet, even admits, "When I see a tower in the distance, I half expect a plane to fly into it," even though Violet also thinks it weird that she should feel anxious about any of it since they are in Australia on the opposite side of the world. Although Australians in Melbourne are not be in close proximity to either World War II or the Iraq War, the fact that both looming conflicts cast such a shadow over several narratives suggests that the threat of war is impactful and anxiety-inducing even for people on the other side of the world.

Similarly, Annabel's narrative heavily features the various tolls that World War II inflicts on each family in their community, even though they are far from the conflict, suggesting that war has costs even for those who are far away from the fighting itself. Even after World War II is resolved, due to strict rationing and many crop-producing countries having been decimated by the Japanese forces, Annabel struggles to even procure enough food for her father and herself to live on. Goods such as butter, pepper, and sugar can only be bought in small quantities at long intervals, and meat is entirely unavailable. Reflecting on how difficult it is to even find food to survive, Annabel reflects, "the war is over and we won. Or so they say." This suggests that even in Australia, untouched by bombs or bullets, conflicts on the other side of the world still come at great daily cost to Australian families. All over their district of Melbourne, parents and families have lost sons and husbands like Jack Husting. When young Annabel attends a town dance with Francis, she observes that even though the war is over, there are "holes in the crowd" and "each of us is thinking about someone we'll never see again. That's what war means." The great loss of life inflicted on Australian families again demonstrates that even for people on the other side of the world from a conflict, war can inflict a heavy toll. The war's constant, indirect presence in the majority of narratives in *Nine Days* ultimately reflects its indirect impact on Australia: although Australia itself is never caught in the crossfire, war's threat and impact are constantly felt.

SYMBOLS

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

THE SHILLING

The shilling is a minor symbol to represent love's power to connect family, friends, and even strangers to one other. The shilling embodies this love connection by being passed between characters and playing a minor role in several of the narratives, forming a common thread that concretely connects them to each other. Mr. Husting takes the coin from Jack and gives it to Kip, who keeps it until he eventually passes it down Stanzi. Stanzi's narrative reflects that, though she'd once imagined that love must strike like lightning, she now thinks it must be more like a simple shilling, passed around between people, carried for years and given away. She believes that like love, if one could trace the "trajectory" of the shilling, they would find connections to both friends and complete strangers—perhaps even on the other side of the world.

THE AMETHYST PENDANT

The amethyst pendant is a minor symbol to represent love's power to connect people across time, place, and family, functioning in exactly the same way as the **shilling**. Like the shilling, the pendant surfaces throughout multiple narratives, forming a common, concrete thread between them and reflecting the love that each character shows to another when they gift it to them. After Francis steals the pendant from an old woman as a young teenager, he sells it to Kip, who eventually gifts it to Annabel. Annabel, in turn, gives the pendant to Charlotte as a memento of her love. In this sense, the pendant serves as an intergenerational connection among the Westaway family members, regardless of the different circumstances they experience in their respective time periods.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Text Publishing edition of *Nine Days* published in 2013.

Chapter 1: Kip Quotes

❝ All I know is every working boy in Richmond is waiting and watching. Half afraid war'll happen, half afraid it won't."

Related Characters: Kip Westaway (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 12

Explanation and Analysis

While Kip eats breakfast with his family as a teenager, they talk of Hitler and the possibility of war. Kip hasn't kept up with the news since he left school, but he still waits to see whether war will break out. The fact that the shadowy threat of war looms even over Australia, far from the combat in Europe, demonstrates just how far-reaching the effects of war can be. Just the possibility of a coming conflict is enough to cause fear and anxiety for people on the other side of the world, since they know that they will certainly feel its effects, even if they do not see the violence themselves. For young men like Kip, impoverished working boys without many prospects for their future, the war represents a dangerous threat but also the chance to leave Australia and see new territory, new people, and have an adventure of sorts. Ironically, then, while the war poses a threat to Kip's safety, it also offers the possibility of freedom, the chance to leave his poverty and home behind and test his courage on distant shores.

❝ She sits beside me and slides an arm around my shoulders and she's warm and she's Connie and I'd like to sit there forever being held like when I was little but I know I'd blub so instead I say it's nothing.

Related Characters: Kip Westaway (speaker), Jean Westaway, Connie Westaway

Related Themes:

Page Number: 22

Explanation and Analysis

After Kip is attacked by a gang of bullies on the way home from the butcher shop, he arrives back at his house bruised, muddy, and scraped up. Connie meets and comforts him, and Kip is glad that she was the first one to find him. Kip and Connie's family has an unconventional structure, in part due to the loss of their father and in part because Jean is not a compassionate or tender mother, especially to Kip. Since Kip lacks both a father figure and a nurturing mother figure, Connie)who is several years older than him) effectively takes on the motherly role for Kip herself, even though neither of them name it as such. As Kip recognizes, Connie

represents safety, warmth, and security, and his memory of being held by her evokes the image of a child nestled in his mother's lap. Although the Westaway family is unconventionally structured, Connie provides the warmth and affection Kip craves, demonstrating that in such a family, individuals may change roles and adapt themselves to meet other's needs.

Chapter 2: Stanzi Quotes

"Sometimes, [...] when I see a tower in the distance, I half expect to see a plane fly into it."

Related Characters: Violet (speaker), Stanzi Westaway

Related Themes:

Page Number: 35

Explanation and Analysis

In the opening passage of Stanzi's narrative, her client, Violet, confesses to dwelling on the recent terror attacks, and Stanzi notes that many of her clients are reporting increased anxiety and trouble sleeping. Violet's statement is a clear reference to the 9/11 terrorist attacks in the U.S., which establishes that the narrative takes place sometime in the subsequent weeks after September 11, 2001. Once again, although Australia is far away from any attacks, and although the potential looming war will likely have no direct impact on Australians, the shadow of war and news of such devastation have a notable impact on the mental health of Australian citizens. Even half a century after World War II is resolved, the anxiety and fear that Stanzi's parents and grandparents felt about war still persists. This suggests that war's far-reaching effects, especially the fear and anxiety that it creates, remain consistent throughout time and generations. The fear that civilians felt in 1937 is much the same fear that civilians feel in 2001.

I have struggled through an entire packet of cream biscuits I didn't like when I could have had cake. Sacrifice, without any reason or benefit. Ife is too short for cream biscuits. I could be trapped in a collapsing skyscraper tomorrow and it would have all been a tragic waste of calories.

Related Characters: Stanzi Westaway (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 40

Explanation and Analysis

Stanzi tries to stop herself from overeating by buying cream biscuits she doesn't enjoy, but eats all of them anyway, prompting the realization that sacrificing her enjoyment was not worth it. Stanzi's idea that sacrificing today for potential—but not guaranteed—benefit sometime in the future is not worth it (since the future itself is uncertain) precedes her own character development later in the novel. In Stanzi's narrative, though she is a counselor with a professional career ahead of her, she is profoundly unhappy and filled with cynicism and self-contempt, but pursuing her career with the limply-held belief that it might pay off someday in the future. Her realization about biscuits thus marks a turning point, since by the end of the day she has already decided to quit her job. When she is next seen in Alec's narrative, five years later, Stanzi has lost weight, become a personal trainer, and shed her prior cynicism so that she can enjoy her family and her life from day to day, thus indicating that she has acted on her decision to stop making miserable sacrifices for an unknown future, and made the most of her current situation instead. In doing so, she has progressed from the person she used to be and improved her health, career prospects, and relationships in the process.

They cannot keep the anger in, the women: they drink too much, they shoplift, they sleep with their doubles partners, they scream at their children, the pay someone to take a knife to their eyes or breast or stomach. The turn the anger inward and develop a depression so deep they cannot get out of bed.

Related Characters: Stanzi Westaway (speaker), Kip Westaway , Jean Westaway

Related Themes:

Page Number: 41

Explanation and Analysis

Stanzi recognizes that most of her clients, who are primarily middle-class white women, possess an inexplicable, undirected rage toward the world and their lives for not turning out how they expected. Although they did what they believed they were supposed to do, they are not pretty, famous, desired, or wealthy enough, causing them to act out or develop psychological disorders. Stanzi's condemnation of her patients is also a condemnation of herself, since she

struggles with her own compulsive overeating that causes her to loath herself. Such undirected rage is also very evident in Jean, which stems from the fact that Jean feels wronged by her husband, who died and left her on her own with three children. Jean's rage causes her to become narcissistic and to lash out at her own children, especially Kip, in an expression of her own inner pain. Once again, this inexplicable anger, present through generations, forms a connection between members of the Westaway family, and demonstrates that although the world changes much between 1940 and 2000, many situations and behaviors remain the same.

❝ Maybe lightning isn't the best analogy for love. Maybe love is more like a coin: moving between people all around us, all the time, linking people within families and on the other side of the world, across oceans.

Related Characters: Stanzi Westaway (speaker), Annabel Crouch , Kip Westaway

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 41

Explanation and Analysis

While Stanzi visits with her mother, Annabel, she thinks about how unfair it is to come from such loving parents with their happy marriage, since "lightning" cannot strike twice in the same family and it's unlikely that she will ever find such love—that is, until she considers that love may be softer and quieter, like a shilling. This passage establishes the symbolism of Kip's shilling as a representation of love's connecting power and the way it forms bridges between individuals and generations, sometimes even between strangers. In the same way that the shilling passes from one individual to the next, forming a common thread in their narratives and connecting them to one another, so each person's love for the next threads their stories together, uniting them, so that each person's life and decisions impacts one another's. This symbolic statement also applies to the amethyst pendant that appears later in the story, since it functions in the same manner, providing a common thread between stories and representing the same connective power of love.

Chapter 3: Jack Quotes

❝ I can imagine [Mrs. Husting's] face close to the keyhole. She's been pacing up and down the hall for the best part of ten minutes. She's imagining what she might be disturbing. She is unsure how to mother a grown man.

Related Characters: Jack Husting (speaker), Mrs. Husting

Related Themes:

Page Number: 59

Explanation and Analysis

While Jack is home visiting from working on a ranch out west, he realizes that neither he nor his parents know how to interact with each other now that he is a grown man. When he does not emerge from his room early enough to suit his mother, Mrs. Husting, she frets and paces. Jack and Mrs. Husting's relationship embodies the conflict between mother and son, particularly as the son enters his adulthood and grows into a man. Mrs. Husting's consternation at how to interact with her son, specifically when he does not meet her expectations, demonstrates the difficulty many mothers encounter when they find themselves wishing that their son was still the small boy he once was and still hers to protect. Mrs. Husting is unsure, unable, or unwilling to let go in order to let Jack be his own man and make his own decisions—and perhaps his own mistakes. Likewise, Jack demonstrates the difficulty of setting one's own boundaries with their overbearing parents and of staking out one's own adulthood within the limits of their personal agency and power. As it stands, with Mrs. Husting trying to mother Jack like he is a child and Jack reacting by hiding in his room, the tense situation of their relationship seems unsustainable, and one—or ideally both—of them will inevitably have to compromise.

❝ "A girl photographer." [Francis] raises his arms and pulls on the clothesline, which explains its condition. "That's stupid."

Related Characters: Francis Westaway / Uncle Frank (speaker), Connie Westaway, Jack Husting

Related Themes:

Page Number: 81

Explanation and Analysis

The first time that Jack has a real conversation with

Connie—he went to the backyard with her on the pretense of fixing her clothesline—he listens with interest as she tells him about her dream of becoming a professional photographer, but Francis emerges from behind the corner of the house and pronounces it a "stupid" dream. Although the encounter occurs in Jack's narrative, it reveals far more about Francis than anyone else. In addition to Francis's arrogance and other despicable character traits, he is also generally bigoted toward women and other groups he views as inferior to himself. Francis not only finds photography to be a foolish pursuit, but the idea of a woman doing it completely implausible, which implies that he likely finds the idea of women in any professional capacity implausible. Francis's pulling on the clothesline, which would interfere with Connie's work doing laundry, suggests that he not only thinks that his sister and other women should not be professionals, he even intends to impede their progress toward becoming such and gaining the freedom and liberation that comes with a professional career and financial independence.

❝ Although even then, Mum says, Kip will never make anything of himself, ("that's plain"), and if we have to send boys to fight overseas—here she gives me a nervous glance—"it's layabout boys with no responsibilities, the Kip Westaways of the world, who ought to be going."

Related Characters: Mrs. Husting (speaker), Kip Westaway , Jack Husting

Related Themes:

Page Number: 84

Explanation and Analysis

When Jack asks his mother what she thinks of the Westaway family, she reveals that she thinks very little of Kip in particular, and believes his kind ought to be the ones sent to their death in the war. Mrs. Husting's statement is grim and quite damning, since it expresses her belief that lives like Kip's are ultimately worth less than other human lives and suitable to be thrown away. This is particularly cruel considering that Kip demonstrates tremendous responsibility at a young age, earning a portion of his family's income after his father passes away. The nervous glance she gives to Jack suggests that she knows what she is saying is an awful thing, and yet she says so anyway. Mrs. Husting's opinion that the less valuable lives should be the ones sacrificed in war not only suggests that she believes Kip will never amount to anything and never produce anything of value, but that people like her son, whose life she obviously values more, should be spared from service and duty by the sacrifice of other people's sons. In all, Mrs. Husting professes what is likely a commonly-held, but lamentable view that fighting, service, and sacrifice may be fit for other people's children—the wretched and worthless—but not her darling son.

Chapter 4: Charlotte Quotes

❝ I remember as a child spending ages every morning choosing which shoes I would wear and then worrying all day about the poor ones left behind in the cupboard, about how dejected they must feel having been passed over. Forsaken.

Related Characters: Charlotte Westaway (speaker), Craig

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 92

Explanation and Analysis

As a brief aside while she considers the cruelty of the world, Charlotte remembers her shoe-choosing dilemma from her childhood. Although it is has no significant bearing on the story, Charlotte's memory encapsulates the dominating facets of her character; she is overwhelmingly (almost neurotically) compassionate, which then causes her to be indecisive. This combination of traits appears in many of Charlotte's interactions and decisions, such as when she tries to reason with her childish boyfriend, Craig, or when she needs to decide whether to keep her pregnancy or abort it. In both cases, Charlotte finds herself unable to decide and thus leaves things up to fate, by blaming Craig's behavior on his astrological sign and by swinging her amethyst pendant to let "the universe" decide whether or not she should keep the baby. Charlotte's reliance on astrology and spiritualism to cope with her excessive compassion and crippling indecision suggests that her naturopathic, spiritualist lifestyle at least partially stems from her own character flaws.

❝ "It's not easy, raising children. It's an enormous commitment. The most important job in the world."

[Craig] rolls his eyes. "It's not curing smallpox. It means you've fucked someone."

Related Characters: Craig, Charlotte Westaway (speaker), Connie Westaway

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 100

Explanation and Analysis

After Charlotte deals with a fretting mother at the naturopathy shop where she works with her boyfriend, Craig, she and Craig discuss the concept of parenting children, of which Craig is utterly dismissive. At this point, Charlotte senses but does not yet know for sure that she is pregnant. In his single scene in the entire story, Craig completely disqualifies himself from being considered a capable father, which thus suggests that Charlotte will have to raise their child as a single mother if she chooses to have it. This raises the stakes of her pregnancy and means that her choice to keep it will demand even greater struggle and commitment as a mother. Beyond simply proving that he would be a useless father, Craig embodies the modern dismissive attitude toward children and motherhood made possible by easy access to birth control and abortion. In Connie's day, when contraception and abortion were not readily available and publicly acceptable, motherhood seemed a natural, inevitable, and beautiful part of life. Although Charlotte stills views motherhood this way, the ease of birth control makes selfish individuals like Craig see motherhood and parenting as an accidental, unfortunate side effect of sex. Although motherhood may still be a beautiful thing, for irresponsible, self-centered people, easy access to contraception and abortion seems to only reinforce their dismissiveness of motherhood, women, and the responsibility of raising children.

❝ It'd be different if Stanzi was pregnant. Stanzi's going places. She has a degree. That dingy little office next to the dentist, that's temporary. She's only working as a counselor until she saves up enough to do her PhD. She's going to be a psychoanalyst, the philosophical, Freudian type, unpicking people's fears from the inside. She has a proper career plan.

Related Characters: Charlotte Westaway (speaker), Stanzi Westaway

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 106

Explanation and Analysis

While Charlotte frets about her unexpected pregnancy and the hard future ahead of her if she decides to keep the baby, she considers how much more successful Stanzi's life is than hers, and how much easier things could be if she was like her sister. Charlotte's glowing opinion of Stanzi and her future potential are particularly significant after hearing what Stanzi thinks of herself in her narrative in Chapter 2. Although Stanzi still had not started her PhD at that point, she is nevertheless a professional counselor with a career ahead of her, yet she is filled with self-loathing and considers how much healthier and more beautiful Charlotte is than herself. The disparity between both sisters' views of each other and themselves, each assuming the other has the better, more put-together life, demonstrates how inadequate one's view of another person can be from their fixed perspective. This is especially dangerous when one uses that limited perspective to compare themselves against other people, since both Charlotte and Stanzi compare themselves against an idealized version of their twin sister, which in turn causes them to think less of themselves.

Chapter 5: Francis Quotes

❝ I've got one second to make up my mind and all I can think about is Dad but then I think about Kip walking out of school and I'm not walking away from anything so I run after them and I jump on too.

Related Characters: Francis Westaway / Uncle Frank (speaker), Kip Westaway , Cray, Jim Pike, Mac

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 133

Explanation and Analysis

Days after his father dies, Francis is pulled into Pike's gang to help them burglarize an old woman's house. The other boys show Francis how to jump a tram so they don't have to pay the ticket price, and as it pulls away, he has to decide if he will make the jump and join them or walk away. The inner dilemma that Francis experiences about joining the other boys and stepping into the life of a criminal or walking away from the opportunity suggests that, although Francis knows jumping the tram and joining them is morally wrong, their gang also offers him an opportunity to belong, to be a part of something. For Francis, having just lost his father and knowing that Kip is quitting school, leaving him there alone, this need to belong to something proves a powerful draw

and suggests that Francis fears being alone in the world, fatherless and brotherless. This fear of being alone, of being left out, carries with him even after he swears to become a responsible adult, evident in the way that he obsesses over his reputation and the way others perceive him as a young man.

> If I get out of this alive, I will shoulder the responsibility for this family. I will work hard at school. I will be the most serious, most studious, most hard-working boy and I'll do whatever Ma says and I'll never do another naughty thing, not ever, not if I live to be a hundred.

Related Characters: Francis Westaway / Uncle Frank (speaker), Jean Westaway

Page Number: 141

Explanation and Analysis

When it seems that Francis is about to be caught trying to rob an old woman, he privately swears he will be honest and studious for the rest of his life if he escapes. Although Francis's promise to be a better boy sounds like a child's frantic gesture, it explains the perfectionism and haughtiness he displays in later years. Although to others, Francis seems simply arrogant, this instance and his promise reveals that his obsessive perfectionism and overwhelming sense of personal responsibility—both of which contribute to his arrogance and seriousness—are driven at least partially by guilt over his crime. Although this broadens the reader's understanding of Francis and furthers the thematic argument that individuals are never so simple as they seem from a limited, fixed perspective, it does not necessarily garner any more sympathy for Francis's plight or demeanor. If anything, this brief crime makes his later haughtiness and projection of perfection seem all the more hypocritical, since he is hiding and trying to atone for a past crime, an immature and foolish action.

Chapter 6: Annabel Quotes

> I've put so little [money] aside it's hardly worth hiding. A few coppers to get us through the week. Next week will have to worry about itself. At least it's November now, heating up fast. I only need enough wood for cooking. It was different when I was in the munitions factory, before the men came home and we girls got our marching orders [...] That's the cold fact about the war: me and Dad never had it so good.

Related Characters: Annabel Crouch (speaker), Annabel's Father

Related Themes:

Page Number: 150

Explanation and Analysis

When Annabel's father asks if she has any spare money so he can buy more alcohol, she lies and tells him she doesn't, though she hardly has any to hide as it is. Annabel's wistful reflection of the years during the war, when she was able to have a factory job since all the able men were fighting overseas, brings up an interesting point about World War II's effect on women. Although parents lost sons to the war and men had to leave their homes to fight, for women, the war presented the chance for them to play a more active role in society, keeping the factories running in the men's absence, making far more money, and thereby experiencing more financial independence. Among the great ironies of the war, then, is that it offered women a brief period of liberation and personal agency far beyond anything they'd experienced previously. While this unfortunately lasted only as long as the men were away, Annabel and the other woman gained a small glimpse of the social position women occupy in their own children's time, when women are free to have professional careers, be financially and socially independent, and enjoy many of the same freedoms as men.

> "I couldn't go while Ma was alive." Kip looks Jos square in the face when he says it. "After Connie died, after the inquest and having it in all the newspapers. Having our business picked over by strangers. Most of the women in Richmond would cross the street when they saw Ma coming. Got so she wouldn't go out the front gate and then so she wouldn't get out of bed. I couldn't leave her."

Related Characters: Kip Westaway (speaker), Francis Westaway / Uncle Frank, Annabel Crouch , Connie Westaway, Jean Westaway, Jos

Related Themes:

Page Number: 150

Explanation and Analysis

While accompanying Francis to a dance, Annabel sees Kip again, who explains to Jos why he was so late joining the war and speaks about Connie's abortion and death, and the public scandal and shame it brought their family. This

moment not only provides the first major hint at Connie's fate—thus far the reader knows she died early, but does not know why. It also represents the first major convergence of Kip, Francis, and Annabel, all major characters, and is the first appearance of Kip as a grown man. Kip's frank honesty and open demeanor immediately contrast with Francis's self-consciousness and preoccupation with how others perceive him. Although Annabel was previously interested in Francis, Kip's frankness makes him appear far more self-confident and in control, and his twin brother appears weak and submissive by comparison. Since the only previous time the story depicts Kip interacting with Annabel is when he is young and so nervous that he lets her walk away, Kip's character growth is especially pronounced. Since he is wearing his soldier's uniform, recently returned from war, the narrative thus suggests that that growth is in large part due to his combat experience, which also sets him apart from Francis and suggests that it was a transformative and growing experience.

Chapter 7: Jean Quotes

❝ Kip has that set on his face that reminds me of his father, that wistful look. I'd never confess it to another living soul but some days I can't bear the sight of that boy. It's a judgment on me.

Related Characters: Jean Westaway (speaker), Kip Westaway

Related Themes:

Page Number: 177

Explanation and Analysis

Jean admits only to herself that part of the reason she is often so angry and bitter at Kip is because he reminds her of her dead husband, whom she is furious at for dying and leaving her alone with three children for whom she must provide. While it certainly does not absolve Jean's favoritism of Francis and mistreatment of Kip, by giving the reader a window into Jean's inner pain and anger, the narrative develops a fuller picture of Jean, transforming her from a one-dimensional, cartoonish villain to a woman struggling under the pain of loss and the heavy burden of motherhood. This deeper understanding of Jean's character is critical to the thematic relationship between mothers and sons, suggesting that although sons like Kip may justifiably see their mothers as oppressive, over-bearing, or spiteful, their mothers are tasked with the immensely difficult task of caring for children on top of their own personal pains and frustrations. By depicting Jean and motherhood in this way, the narrative gently suggests that although sons may or may not be wrong about their mothers, they should still be gracious and understand the great difficulty that motherhood can be.

❝ A husband and three littlies. The best days of my life. The reason women are put on the earth. There's still hope for [Connie], to have a husband and children the right way, keeping them and not giving them up.

Related Characters: Jean Westaway (speaker), Connie Westaway

Related Themes:

Page Number: 185

Explanation and Analysis

Although Jean pushes Connie to have an abortion though Connie would rather keep her unplanned pregnancy and face the stigma of single motherhood, and although Jean feels trapped herself as a single mother, she still considers motherhood to be the greatest aspiration for women, the happiest and most fulfilling end they can achieve. This positive view of motherhood despite all of Jean's complaining and rage suggests that she still loves her children, even though she rarely shows them any form of affection. It is not the idea of having children that Jean seems to oppose, but the difficulty of having them in the wrong circumstances. As a single mother herself, though she does not bear the social stigma of becoming pregnant out of wedlock, Jean knows firsthand the difficulty of raising children without the help of a husband or partner. This further suggests that, although Jean often seems selfish and nearly forces the abortion on Connie against her will, beneath it all, Jean seems to be doing what she thinks is best for her children.

❝ That first quickening, you never forget it. The first time you feel it, a cross between a squirming and a kicking, and you realize there's another whole body enclosed within yours, and it's made out of your very own flesh. While there's a child of yours alive in the world, you never really die. They're a part of your body living on without you.

Related Characters: Jean Westaway (speaker), Alec

Westaway, Connie Westaway

Related Themes:

Page Number: 194

Explanation and Analysis

While Connie is having a dangerous, amateur abortion performed behind a dress shop, Jean returns home to do some chores and reflect, thinking back to the first time she was pregnant and felt another life moving around inside her. In spite of Jean's anger and seeming disdain for her own children, her narrative once again demonstrates that she *does* value motherhood, despite the burden it places on her shoulders. Jean's reflection that children and family keep you from ever passing out of the world closely parallels Alec's later reflection that as long as he has his family, he will never truly be alone. Both of these realizations suggest that family, regardless of what structure or shape it may take, is the most important thing a person can have, the greatest gift and most valuable asset. For both characters, who each tend to be self-centered and disregard others, this is an important observation to make, as it helps them both to de-center themselves and consider the full value of their family members, even when they anger them or don't meet their expectations.

Chapter 8: Alec Quotes

❝ From what [Kip] says, it seems like all kinds of stupid things had to be kept secret back then. When he says that his sister didn't die from the flu, Stanzi just nods. Charlotte gets on her high horse about *ridiculous sexist taboos* and *lies* and *nothing to be ashamed of.* Grandma [Annabel] smiles. *You can't imagine what it was like back then*, she says. *So much pain, all covered over.*

Related Characters: Alec Westaway (speaker), Jack Husting, Annabel Crouch , Stanzi Westaway, Charlotte Westaway, Connie Westaway, Kip Westaway

Related Themes:

Page Number: 216

Explanation and Analysis

After Alec finds a photo of Connie kissing Jack and shows it to his grandfather, Kip, Kip explains to the family that Connie did not die from the flu like he'd told them, but from an abortion. Alec and Charlotte's reaction to this news provides the most overt critique in the story against old notions of abortion, and gendered stigmas, clearly arguing that the "ridiculous sexist taboos" of those days were absurd, and that society has a much less regressive attitude toward women in the modern age. Annabel's response provides the appropriate counter to such anger: the world was simply different then, and much pain and injustice were swept under the rug. Annabel's response is particularly poignant in that she makes no effort to rationalize or justify the sexist and regressive viewpoints of the past, but she does recognize that it was a different world then, with different cultural forces, expectations, and social mores. Annabel's measured response thus seems to represent the position of the author herself.

❝ "Alec. You must know this. People disappear. They just go puff. Thin air. Every time you see someone, you never know if you're seeing them for the last time. Drink them in, Alec. Kiss them. It's very important."

Related Characters: Kip Westaway (speaker), Connie Westaway, Alec Westaway

Related Themes:

Page Number: 218

Explanation and Analysis

As Alec's grandparents are getting ready to leave, Alec finds Kip standing next to the tree in the yard, the last place he ever saw Connie alive. Kip takes Alec's face in his hands and implores him to love the people around him, since they could be gone at any moment. Kip's life has been defined by loss, as he watched his father, sister, and mother die in succession, suggesting through the process that the people one loves can be taken from them at any moment. This has made Kip grateful for each day, especially each day that he is able to spend with a loved one. This message of gratitude is particularly important for Alec to hear, since Alec tends to disregard his family and be preoccupied with his own feelings and frustrations. Kip's encouragement to love and value the people around him in each moment that he has with them is thus an important step in Alec coming to understand how much his family truly means, and that he should love them regardless of faults or frustrations.

When me and Libby were little, Grandpa [Kip] was in charge of all the dad stuff. He took photos of us, hundreds of them. He still has them over at their apartment at the retirement village. He was the one who taught us to play poker and took us to the football.

Related Characters: Alec Westaway (speaker), Libby, Kip Westaway

Related Themes:

Page Number: 218

Explanation and Analysis

Alec recalls how, in lieu of a conventional father figure, Kip stepped up to fulfill the fatherly duties, even when it required him to take time away from his own work. Although Alec previously lamented the fact that neither he nor Libby truly knows their fathers, his remembrance of Kip operating as their effective father figure suggests that he now appreciates his grandfather's love just as well. Although unconventional, and in Alec's eyes perhaps not ideal, Kip's role as Alec and Libby's father figure demonstrates that in an unconventional family structure, individuals can adapt and take on new roles and responsibilities to fulfill other family members physical or emotional needs. Although Kip is their grandfather and not their father, Alec and Libby still are able to have a fatherly figure in their lives to provide the sort of paternal guidance and affirmation that their mother may not know how to give. Furthermore, the love that Kip obviously has for his family, and Alec's stated love for Kip, suggest that although unconventional, their family is no less loving or valuable.

Chapter 9: Connie Quotes

It seems that all my life I've had nothing I've desired and I've given up having desires at all. Now I know what it feels like to want and I'll give anything to have it.

Related Characters: Connie Westaway (speaker), Charlotte Westaway, Jack Husting

Related Themes:

Page Number: 238

Explanation and Analysis

As Connie and Kip start to have sex in the the Husting's stable at night, Connie realizes that for the first time in her life, she knows what true desire feels like. Connie's realization that she has kept herself from desire for her whole life until this point suggests that she has been burdened by societal expectations as a young unmarried woman, and by the responsibilities of helping to maintain her family in the absence of her deceased father. As a young woman in the 1940s, she has never been encouraged or permitted to have any sort of desire, especially sexual desire, since her contemporary society views such passions outside of marriage as immoral and shameful. She has learned to never want, because she has never been encouraged or allowed to have anything beyond what she already has. Connie's repressed sexuality greatly contrasts with Charlotte, who only one generation later freely sleeps with multiple boyfriends and faces no significant stigma or shame from society, demonstrating her own sexual freedom. The contrast between Connie and Charlotte's experience of their sexualities illustrates just how far society has come in its view of women and their place in society, and how much more accepting it has become of female sexuality, within or without the traditional confines of marriage.

The secret to happiness is to be grateful. I think about Ma [Jean], widowed with three children, and Nan who was a slave all her life, first in domestic service and then to Pop, then back to the ironing factory when she was widowed. I have a wonderful job. I have my mother and Francis, and I have Kip my darling Kip.

And here is the most wonderful thing of all. I have had one night with the man of my heart and, just this once, I have had something that I wanted.

Related Characters: Connie Westaway (speaker), Kip Westaway , Francis Westaway / Uncle Frank, Jean Westaway, Jack Husting

Related Themes:

Page Number: 245

Explanation and Analysis

After Jack has shipped off to war, Connie reflects on her own life and realizes that she is grateful to be alive, and is happy in spite of life's many hardships. As the final narrator in the story, Connie ends with a realistic yet hopeful note. On one hand she recognizes that as a woman, her role in society is limited, and her mother and grandmother (never mentioned before now) had even harder lives than she will. Even so, in spite of society's repression and sexism and prejudice toward women, Connie realizes she can still be

grateful and happy with what she has and the people she loves. This is an important note to end on, since after dealing with societal stigmas around womanhood and abortion, the pain of motherhood, and the loss of family, the novel could easily leave the reader feeling rather morose.

However, although the story examines many aspects of pain, familial conflict, and social ills, it encourages the reader to appreciate each day for what it is, and the love that is available to them in each moment.

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.

CHAPTER 1: KIP

Kip wakes, not wanting to get up for the day, which seems a bad omen. Across the room he can see Ma, Jean, in the other bed, huddled under blankets and Kip's old clothes. He shares a bed with Francis, who snores loudly and does not have to wake up for an extra two hours, so Kip is supposed to creep quietly out of bed so as not to "disturb his geniousness." Despite the chill of the morning, Kip climbs out of bed, quickly dresses, and tiptoes his way outside to Rowena Parade, into the lane, around the corner, and to the Hustings', where Kip is a working boy.

Francis's apparent privilege—sleeping an extra two hours, undisturbed—immediately sets up the disparity between he and Kip. Additionally, compared with Francis and his "geniousness," Kip is immediately established as a blue-collar worker and therefore somewhat of an everyman figure. This will reflect their relationship dynamic throughout their childhood, though people's low opinions of Kip do not reflect his actual intelligence.

Kip finds the Hustings' horse, Charlie, in his stable, scratches him affectionately for a bit, and feeds him an old apple he found in the lane, though Kip takes a bite first as his "union dues." Kip sweeps out the stable and shovels the manure before brushing Charlie's coat down until he shines. Mr. Husting emerges from the back of the house, greets Kip, and ruffles his hair, which Kip allows even though he's 14. Seeing how nice Charlie looks, Mr. Husting gives Kip a whole **shilling**, which seems like a huge sum of money to the boy, and he knows he'll have to work out a way to hide it from Francis.

Kip's excitement at receiving a whole shilling suggests that he and his family are poor, and he is unused to having money for himself. The shilling functions as a symbolic connection between families and individuals over generations. As a symbol, the shilling loosely represents the love between them, particularly in the way that it bonds individuals from different backgrounds and histories to each other.

Mrs. Husting leans out an upstairs window. Kip greets her and compliments her shawl, but Mrs. Husting obviously despises Kip, calling him lazy and a "layabout." When Mrs. Husting asks her husband if he just gave Kip money even though they already pay his wage to his mother, Mr. Husting lies and swears he did not. Before returning inside, Mrs. Husting briefly mentions dinner plans for the evening on account of Jack, their son, having just returned home—Kip has been cleaning their yard all week in preparation. Mr. Husting asks Kip to keep the shilling a secret just between them, and Kip shakes on it.

Mrs. Husting's reaction to Kip and immediate suspicion suggests that he has a poor reputation around Richmond, particularly for being a lazy child. This seems odd, since Kip is obviously up hours before anyone else to work. Mr. Husting seems to recognize Kip's value, perhaps recognizing that his poor reputation is undeserved. However, the fact that Mr. Husting wants to keep the shilling a secret suggests that he does not dare challenge his wife.

Kip wonders if his reputation as "chief layabout and squanderer of opportunities" in Richmond, their district of Melbourne, is a result of him being born seven minutes after Francis. If they were switched, maybe he'd be in school still. Even so, Kip enjoys working, and there is much he doesn't miss about school.

Kip's blaming of fate—being the second-born twin—will be paralleled by Charlotte, his daughter, in her own narrative. She leaves several major decisions up to "the universe," or to chance, suggesting that some behaviors are repeated through generations.

With the morning past, Kip returns home for breakfast next door. When Connie asks him if he washed his hands, Francis remarks that he's always dirty and should be made to eat in the alley, "as befits his station." However, Connie checks his hands, pronounces them perfectly clean even though they are not, and kisses Kip on the head. When Kip makes a snide remark to Francis, Jean appears behind him and chews him out. Connie takes bacon out to cook Kip for breakfast, but Jean stops her and says the meat is only for Francis and Mrs. Keith, even though Kip has been working since 4:00 in the morning. She'll only allow a little bread for Kip. Connie protests, but obeys.

Jean obviously favors Francis in the extreme, immediately depicting both her and Francis as shallow two-dimensional antagonists through Kip's narrative, even though the inner pain of each of them will later be explored. As his older sister, Connie seems to offer the tenderness and affection that Kip never receives from Jean, demonstrating how in an unconventional family, members may move around to occupy different roles to help the family to function

As Kip eats bread and Francis eats bacon, Jean bemoans the fact that Kip is not as perfect as his twin brother. In Jean's eyes, Francis will become a lawyer someday and is thus the only hope for their family, since Connie and Kip both had to drop out of school when their father died and they had to take Mrs. Keith in as a boarder. They speak of Hitler and possibility of war. Jean says that she'd rather hide her sons "in the ceiling" than see them off to war. Francis speaks authoritatively about the communist threat in Russia, but Connie dismisses him. Kip hasn't kept up with such news since his father died, back when he used to read the newspaper, but he knows that all the working boys in Richmond are waiting for the war, too, "half afraid war'll happen, half afraid it won't."

Again, Jean very obviously favors Francis and is heavily prejudiced toward Kip, though her own narrative will explain why her prejudice toward her younger son is motivated partially by her own pain, demonstrating to the reader that individuals are far more complex and dynamic than the initial impression they give off. The threat of war and shadow of Hitler's aggression—dating the narrative to the late 1930s—even reaches Australia, causing anxiety, though Australia is far too remote to be in any immediate danger. This demonstrates just how far-reaching the effects of war can be.

Trying to lighten the mood, Kip tells Jean that the Hustings will set him up in their antique shop soon—Francis dismissively calls it a "junk shop"—but Jean is uninterested, and disparages Mrs. Husting instead. Jean starts bemoaning their family's "bad luck" and lamenting her own suffering and all her children know she'll go on for a long time, and strike any of them who dare to interrupt her.

Yet again, through Kip's narration, Jean is depicted as a thoroughly wretched figure who cares more for her own suffering than her son's wellbeing or future. This shallow—though not entirely inaccurate—understanding of Jean again demonstrates the limitations of a single perspective, especially when that perspective comes from a son approaching adulthood.

In the afternoon, Connie sends Kip to the butcher to fetch the shopping. While he waits for the butcher to prep the meat, he daydreams about himself becoming a butcher someday and admires the red of the blood against the blue and white tiles. Kip passes the bar on the way home and hears everyone talk about the war and the "plot against the working man." As he continues on, parcels of meat under his arm, Kip hears Annabel's voice drifting down the lane. His heart jumps and he tries to hide from her, but she spots him and introduces herself. He already knows who she is. She's beautiful. Every boy in Richmond knows who she is.

Kip's daydreaming of becoming a butcher suggests that his aspirations do not reach very high. From the reader's limited perspective thus far, this paints Kip as an uneducated, perhaps unintelligent boy, though certainly imaginative. However, later narratives prove this is nowhere near true, yet again demonstrating the limitations of a single perspective and the complexity of each individual person, thus suggesting that it is unwise to judge a person by such a limited understanding of them.

Annabel tells Kip she knows Francis from dancing class at school, though Kip seems quite different from his brother. She asks why Kip is not in school anymore, since she heard he won several prizes for English composition and art, but Kip says he'd had enough of school already. Annabel thinks this a shame. Although he was nervous, Kip thinks he's doing pretty well talking to Annabel, until she smiles at him and he's so overcome that he forgets how to swallow and nearly faints. Annabel asks if he's walking back to Rowena Parade, and when Kip realizes that she wants to walk home with him, he panics and says he's going somewhere else.

Annabel's recognition of Kip's academic achievements provides the first major hint that although Kip is regarded as a "layabout," he is quite intelligent and creative, and his exit from school was a result of life circumstances rather than lack of ability. This demonstrates the manner in which an individual may find themselves in less than ideal circumstances, not as a result bad character, but rather misfortune and difficult or painful life events.

Annabel leaves and Kip makes his way home, kicking himself and thinking of all the clever things he could've said to her. Distracted, Kip nearly walks into the "four stooges," the town bullies: Mac, Cray, Pike, and a kid he doesn't know. Kip feels that their reckoning has finally come; he feels like d'Artagnan. The boys mock Kip for crying when he quit school after losing his father, who got drunk and hit his head. Two of the boys grab him by the arms while they talk, and one kicks him hard in the back of the calf. Kip yawns to cover the pain, and has a brief flashback of the last time his father left for work: Kip's nose was so deep in a book he didn't even wave goodbye, and that evening Jean was in hysterics and his father's body was laid out in the kitchen.

Kip's thought of d'Artagnan, from The Three Musketeers, *as well as his guilt-ridden memory of not saying goodbye to his father because he was too consumed by a book, once again suggest that Kip is very intelligent and literate in spite of his low station. The bullies' taunts about Kip's father not only help to partially reveal the way that he died, but also showcases the cruel treatment to which Kip is subject. However, Mac, seen here as a despicable bully, will resurface many years later as an honorable young man, demonstrating an individual's capacity for change.*

Kip jests that the two boys are cuddling him real tight, which jars them just long enough for him to slip their grip and run down the street, scooping up his meat parcels as he goes. The boys chase after Kip, but he imagines that he's a professional sprinter who's outrunning the "Nazi hordes." He turns a corner, slips, and crashes hard, but is immediately up again. He makes it home, locking the gate behind him. Connie steps out of the house and finds him bloody and the parcels filthy, but she puts an arm around him and comforts him. To Kip, she feels warm and safe. Connie helps Kip clean the scrapes on his legs, chatting about nothing to distract him.

Once again, Connie's warm reassurance and tenderness suggest that in Kip's life, she occupies far more of a mothering role than Jean ever does. This demonstrates the manner in which an unconventional family structure—caused by the loss of their father—may cause individual members to occupy new roles: Kip as a working provider, and Connie as a mothering figure.

Before she can finish, Kip grows impatient and says he needs to go back to work at the Hustings. Connie tells him to at least take his shorts and shirt off so can wash the mud out before it stains, and he changes into another pair and ventures back out. While Kip is doing his work at the Hustings however, he reaches his hand in his pocket and realizes that he's left his **shilling** in his other shorts, and he doesn't trust Francis not to steal it. He'd wanted to use it to take Annabel to the "Glaciarium" with him, though this desire to go skating with her will cause his "so-called life to hit the skids."

Kip's immediate assumption that Francis will steal his shilling suggests that Kip knows him to be of poor character, despite Jean's belief that Francis is a perfect child. This difference of opinion once again demonstrating that a single individual's limited perspective of a person cannot possible perceive or understand every facet of their character. Kip's desire to take Annabel on a date with his shilling foreshadows their eventual romance, though they will have to wait years before it will begin.

Kip gets home early in the evening and sneaks to the laundry trough in the yard. While he's fishing around for his shorts and **shilling**, he pulls out a huge pair of women's underwear, belonging to Mrs. Keith. They're so large they look like a parachute. He tosses them in the air and they land down on his face. Just as they do, a light switches on in the house and Kip hears Mrs. Keith let out a loud, long scream.

Although foolish, Kip's description of how Mrs. Keith's underwear lands on his face suggests that he is not a pervert—as she will accuse him of being—but instead simply overly-imaginative and rather thoughtless, again demonstrating the limitations of a single perspective.

Kip and Francis listen from the hall as Mrs. Keith is in hysterics in the kitchen, as she has been for a long time. Connie and Jean are there trying to calm her down, but Mrs. Keith has convinced herself that Kip is a vile pervert who'll be a predator when he grows up. Francis unsympathetically whispers that if Kip does grow up to be a predator, at least their family will make the papers. Kip can hear Jean refuse to defend him, which confuses him, since he's her son. However, Connie berates Mrs. Keith and calls her a "cow" for saying such wretched things about her brother. Jean begs Mrs. Keith to stay while Connie tells her "good riddance."

Once again, by refusing to defend Kip, Jean refuses to be the mother that Kip needs her to be, demonstrating why Connie has effectively taken the role upon herself. This is reinforced when Connie steps in to defend her brother against Mrs. Keith's absurd charge of perversion, offering Kip the motherly protection that ought to have come from Jean. Once again, this suggests that in an unconventional family structure, individuals may adapt and change roles as needed.

Kip and Francis sneak back to their room. Through the door they can hear Mrs. Keith stomping around as she packs her belongings. After she's gone, Kip sees Jean and Connie in the kitchen. Jean is furious at Connie for being so rude to Mrs. Keith, and thinks that without the money Francis will have to quit school too. However, Connie insists that instead, she'll go get herself a job at the newspaper where their father worked, though Jean is doubtful.

Jean's lack of confidence in and support of Kip seems also to extend to Connie, as evidenced by her noted doubt that Connie will be able to find herself a job outside the home. Once again, through Kip's eyes, this suggests that Jean is a very poor mother indeed, only extending love and support to Francis, the favored child.

CHAPTER 2: STANZI

Stanzi sits in her office, in a counseling session with a young rich woman with "daddy issues," who's having an affair with a man decades older than her, has kleptomania, and is suffering with an eating disorder. The client, Violet, kicks her shoes off and walks barefoot around the room, while Stanzi looks at one of the couches in her office and thinks about how expensive it was—she could've saved her money and taken a trip to the Maldives and met an exotic masseuse instead of buying that couch. She bought the couch 10 years before, when she'd moved into this office; she'd planned on having her PhD by now.

Stanzi's role as a counselor and her contemplation of the vacation she could have had rather than the couch immediately establishes her as an unsatisfied professional. The fact that she is a female counselor sitting an office with a couch and considering a PhD, suggests that this narrative takes place decades in the future, in an era when women are afforded many more opportunities than those afforded to Connie or Jean.

Stanzi's mind wanders again to the Maldives, but she forces herself to focus on her session. Violet talks about having lunch with her father and the latest in her string of stepmoms. She asks Stanzi about her own father, which catches Stanzi off-guard, but she tells Violet that he's a good man, funny, and worked as a professional photographer. Violet is uninterested, though, and reveals that she's started stealing things again. Stanzi recognizes this is not necessarily a setback, since behavioral problems often need to be tackled indirectly. Confronting them can make them worse, like the manner in which deciding to diet often leads to an immediate weight gain.

Stanzi's consideration of dieting and weight gain as a way to think of Violet's own problematic behaviors hints that Stanzi struggle with her own body image to some degree. Violet's utter disinterest to a personal question that she herself asked suggests that she is narcissistic. However, Stanzi shows this same behavior when she cannot even focus on her client, instead imagining herself on vacation again, suggesting that such self-centeredness is common to some degree.

Staring out the window, Violet remarks that whenever she looks at a tower, she "half expect[s] to see a plane fly into it." Stanzi understands the feeling and reflects on how tense everyone has been in the weeks since the terrorist attack. Lots of her clients have increased anxiety and difficulty sleeping. Violet finds this slightly absurd, since the attacks happened in the U.S., on the other side of the world. No one in Australia has the right to feel anxious about it, she believes. Stanzi surmises that perhaps Violet's renewed kleptomania has something to do with the looming threat of war, but Violet believes America isn't stupid enough to start another war since the world in the 21st century is too enlightened to allow another big war to happen. Even if America *does* start a war, it can't take more than six weeks.

The plane flying into the tower is an obvious reference to the 9/11 terrorist attack in New York City, dating the narrative as occurring in the weeks following, sometime in the fall of 2001. Like the threat of World War II in other parts of the narrative, the general anxiety of Stanzi's clients in Australia over an attack and potential war that will not effect them again demonstrates that even the ominous shadow of war can have far-reaching effects. Violet's confidence that America would not be "stupid" enough to start another war, and certainly not a long one, is ironic, is likely a sarcastic nod to the author's own low opinion of the subsequent and long wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.

As Violet traipses around the room, she notices a **shilling** sitting on Stanzi's otherwise bare desk. Stanzi remarks that it's her father's prized possession, it reminds him of "silver linings." She's supposed to take it to a framer after work. Stanzi tries to make some meaningful headway with Violet for the rest of their hour, but Violet simply rambles about nothing until their time is up. Violet slips her shoes on and leaves, saying that she feels better after their session as she always does, but Stanzi does not know why Violet is even there, or why she herself is there, and every counseling session for months has made Stanzi feel like she is a student in school, waiting for the bell to ring so she can go home.

The shilling forms a connection to Kip's preceding narrative, suggesting that Kip is Stanzi's father and offering context for why the story has shifted to center on her character. Violet's seeming disinterest in therapy contrasts with her statement that she always feels better after her session with Stanzi seems absurd, and suggests that at least to Stanzi, her own work seems somewhat futile and meaningless, which explains why she has the sense of waiting for each day to be over, like a child in school.

Stanzi writes up her notes and feels hungry as she always does after speaking with Violet. She bought the kind of biscuits that she hates, hoping that it would force her to eat them less frequently, but she realizes she's eaten all of them already. She should have just eaten cake instead; at least she'd have enjoyed it instead of sacrificing flavor "without any reason or benefit."

The biscuits form a momentary symbol for Stanzi's growing view of life itself—why sacrifice pleasure in the moment for possible gain in the future, when that gain is not itself guaranteed? For Stanzi, working in a job she doesn't like to save money for some unknown future, this seems a particularly apt question.

The day has been productive, though, filled with therapy sessions with middle-class white women filled with the inexplicable rage that although they've behaved themselves, they are not as pretty or rich or happy as they thought they deserved to be. So they have affairs or plastic surgery or curse their children, and when they complain about their lives they can preface every narcissistic statement with "my counselor says" so that their problems and self-centeredness sound legitimate. As Stanzi packs her things to leave, she realizes the **shilling** is missing.

Stanzi's bitter observations about her clients and their undirected, inexplicable rage makes a dire statement about modern life, suggesting that the middle class is narcissistic at its core. Now that people in Stanzi's demographic are not struggling to survive as Kip's family did, there appears to a sense of pointlessness to life that makes people mean and self-centered.

Stanzi calls Charlotte from her car to ask what year the **shilling** was. Charlotte is too wary of cell phone radiation to own her own phone, so Stanzi has to call the "hippy" shop where Charlotte works. Charlotte is immediately suspicious of Stanzi's question, and Stanzi breaks and tells her that her kleptomaniac patient must have stolen it. When Charlotte hears her name is Violet, she announces that the woman should change her name—Violet is "bad feng shui"—and then all her problems would be solved. Charlotte asks if maybe Stanzi just knocked the coin onto the floor, and Stanzi is quietly furious that her twin sister could consider her so clumsy and unaware of her own body. While she is furious at Charlotte, she becomes furious at everything in her life, such as her car, which always seems so "tiny and mean."

Stanzi's narrative immediately depicts Charlotte as a loon, a crazy woman interested in naturopathy, feng shui, and obsessed with avoiding the many toxic ills of modern life. As with each of the nine major characters, Stanzi's individual perception of her sister proves to be incomplete, again demonstrating that people are far more complex than others often understand them to be. Meanwhile, Stanzi's fury at everything in her life being so "tiny and mean" suggests that her resentment towards her sister is tied in with her resentment towards herself and the entire world.

Charlotte realizes that Stanzi intends to just buy another coin, and though Stanzi can't see what's wrong with it, especially since shillings are so common, Charlotte is deeply disappointed and demands that Stanzi go find the real **shilling**. As Stanzi hangs up, she thinks about the web of satellites that carry messages among all the cell phones and people in the world, and how much work and ingenuity that system took to create. Yet all of the messages must be utterly pointless and banal: what's for dinner, what's on TV, and so on. She thinks about the supposed psychic connection between twins as well, and though Charlotte's shown a weird ability to predict or feel Stanzi's exact pains from long distances before, Stanzi still believes it's all rubbish.

Stanzi demonstrates an overwhelming level of cynicism, mixing the general feeling of frustration and anger that life is not more fulfilling that her client's feel with a certain level of social awareness. This cynicism in 2001 is important for establishing her as a depressed, morose character. When she surfaces again in Alec's narrative in 2006, her transformation into a far more positive, healthy individual is obvious. Stanzi's cynical realism is a foil for Charlotte's fanciful naturopathy and belief in a spiritual universe.

Stanzi goes to the address in Violet's file to ask for the **shilling**. If she doesn't find it, she'll know her parents will figure out she lost it, be disappointed in her, and wish that they'd given in to Charlotte instead. Before she enters the apartment building, Stanzi eats a candy bar, and then catches the open door from a pizza delivery man so she doesn't have to ring up to Violet's apartment. She follows the pizza man all the way up to Violet's apartment—Stanzi's starving—though Violet and pizza don't seem to fit together. A fit man in his early forties—too young to be Violet's husband or lover—opens the door to take the pizza, and Stanzi enters, introducing herself as Violet's friend.

Stanzi's assumption that her parents will wish they'd given the shilling to Charlotte is written to sound unreasonable to the reader, suggesting a certain level of self-doubt and self-loathing that Stanzi harbors toward herself. Once again, this self-contempt is important in establishing Stanzi in 2001 as an overwhelmingly sad and negative person, in order to demonstrate her eventual growth into a healthy, positive individual.

Stanzi tells the man her name—revealing that Stanzi is short for Constance—which he seems to recognize, and the man tells her he is Violet's father. Violet arrives, taking a slice of pizza as she walks in the door, but is surprised to see Stanzi there. Stanzi tells Violet about the missing **shilling** and asks if it might've fallen into Violet's purse, but Violet's reaction tells her that she has it all wrong. It must still be in her office somewhere; Charlotte was right. Violet's father assures his daughter that he'll buy her anything she wants, but questions if Stanzi is actually worth anything as a counselor. Violet insists that talking to Stanzi makes her feel better, seeming gracious until she reveals that it reminds her no matter how off her life feels, at least she's "not fat" like Stanzi. Stanzi is petrified and feels "bulbous." Violet walks her out.

Stanzi's revelation that her full name is Constance implies that she is named after Connie, Kip's beloved sister, creating yet another connection between them. However, Stanzi's character has yet to resemble anything close to Connie's warmth, tenderness, and protective instinct, suggesting that Stanzi's character has serious development ahead of her in order to live up to the name. Though hinted at throughout the chapter, Violet's insult is the first outright confirmation that Stanzi is seriously overweight, and that her weight is a point of personal shame for her.

Stanzi sits with her Mum, Annabel, late in the night in their kitchen, heartbroken. She returned to her office and found the **shilling** buried in the carpet—though kneeling down was quite difficult and painful for her. In Annabel's kitchen she sees a picture of herself and Charlotte when they were younger—she was thinner, though not as thin as Charlotte, and Charlotte wore Annabel's **amethyst pendant**. Annabel hovers, asking Stanzi if she wants something to eat, anything at all. Stanzi just sits and looks at Annabel though, thinking about how beautiful she is, how Annabel's life was one easy ride, raised by a "saint of a man" who loved her until he died and she married Stanzi's Dad, Kip.

Stanzi's self-loathing is exacerbated by the fact that Charlotte was right—she'd merely knocked the shilling on the floor. In light of Stanzi's pain, her narrative depicts every other person as somehow more successful than herself—Charlotte is thin and healthy, her parents are beautiful and found love. Though more positive, this again will demonstrate the unreality of such a narrow, two-dimensional understanding of the other people in her life, suggesting that people are often more complex and dynamic than they may appear to others. The amethyst pendant works symbolically in the same manner as the shilling, representing love's power to connect individuals across generations and families.

Kip emerges from his bedroom in his pajamas, greets Stanzi warmly, and hugs and kisses her. He kisses everyone, no matter how well or little he knows them. He wants to stay and chat, too, but Annabel insists he goes back to bed and leave them to their privacy. He relents, and bids his "beautiful girls" goodnight, but Stanzi says everyone else is beautiful, but she's not. Kip tells her she looks just like Connie, beautiful, there are just no photos of her around to prove it. Kip goes back to bed, and Annabel listens while Stanzi laments the way she looks and feels being overweight. Annabel surmises that someone was mean to her earlier in the day, and Stanzi tells her she's right, though it was no one who mattered.

Kip's eventual marriage to Annabel and fathering of two children in itself proves that Jean and Mrs. Husting's opinions of him so long ago were wrong—he succeeded in life, married his love, and had a family. Kip's eventual success in spite of his elders' doubts demonstrates that individuals have far more potential than they or their peers may perceive them to possess. For Stanzi, this suggestion implies that she, too, may have a brighter future someday than her current unhappy state.

Annabel offers to go sort it out, since Stanzi is still her child even if she's 35, but Stanzi waves her off the idea. Thinking about her parents and how happy they are and how easy their love is, she thinks it must be a curse; neither she nor Charlotte can ever live up to that example. Stanzi does not even love herself enough to love anyone else at this point. Holding the **shilling** in her hand, Stanzi thinks that perhaps love is something like the coin, passed around all over the world, drawing connections among friends and family and strangers. As she is thinking this thought, though, she is struck by the fact that by visiting Violet's home, she's made a major violation of their professional relationship. She needs to quit her job—immediately.

Stanzi's observation establishes the shilling as a symbol for love's connecting power, and foreshadows the manner in which that shilling will interconnect several more stories as they are revealed. Stanzi's belief that her parents' happy marriage is a curse once again reveals the limitations of her perspective, since Kip and Annabel offered Stanzi and Charlotte a far more stable and loving childhood than either of them experienced, and such stability and love seems a gift rather than a curse.

CHAPTER 3: JACK

Jack Husting wakes in his childhood bedroom. The bed is too small for him, his body presses against its iron frame, but although Mum, Mrs. Husting, and Dad, Mr. Husting, have a shop full of furniture, they have not replaced it with any suitably large for a grown man since he's been back. The room feels small. Mrs. Husting is "unsure how to mother a grown man" as she tentatively calls to Jack through the door. She's concerned that he is sleeping so late, and asks him to come to church with her, but Jack refuses. He stands and looks out the small window across the poor, broken-down homes in Richmond. It's not just the room that's too small, it's the entire place, and Jack wonders why people don't leave. Only a few hours' train ride away, there is clean, open air.

Jack's relationship with his mother embodies the conflict between mothers and sons, particularly as the son grows into a man and the mother struggles with the idea that she can no longer protect and hover over him as she once did. Mrs. Husting's refusal to provide her son with furniture that fits his adult stature suggests that she does not want him to be anything more than the little boy she once had, since then she could continue to mother him, smother him, and keep him around. Jack, meanwhile, finds that he has not only outgrown his bed, but Richmond itself.

Through the window, Jack can see Connie Westaway, whom he knew in school but not well. He watches, entranced, as she does her chores in their little yard, tending their garden of potatoes and beans. As she sweeps the yard with the broom she pauses, stands the broom up straight in front of her at arm's length, gives it a curtsy, and begins dancing with it. Jack is enchanted by the way she moves and the joy in her step. Even though the window is closed, he imagines he can hear music accompanying her footsteps. He even sways to it himself. However, Connie stops. Mrs. Westaway has come out of the house and is scolding her. As Connie walks inside, Mrs. Husting opens the door, saying she thought he'd fallen back asleep and was dreaming. Jack thinks that perhaps he was.

Connie's apparent joy, even in a poor family and poor neighborhood, and living under such a harsh woman as Jean, suggests that an individual can find happiness and joy even in painful and dire circumstances. The joy Connie's happiness brings to Jack suggests that his own daily life is usually rather joyless, without whatever spark that allows Connie to dance happily with a broom. This is reinforced by Jack's wondering if perhaps the beautiful sight was a dream, though a good one.

Having spent the last several years in several different boarding schools, Jack feels as if he's had many different parents and many different homes. Between his time boarding and then working on a ranching station out west, he and his parents have both changed. The people here seem as unfamiliar to him as any, different than when he'd left. Mr. Husting is frailer and Mrs. Husting's eyes are weaker. Although it's they who sent him west to work in the first place, now that he's back visiting they don't want him to leave; they don't want to become old "without family around." Especially with so many men off to war, it's difficult to find hands to run the shop.

The changes that Jack observes in his parents and in himself again nod to the fact that individuals grow over time. In the same way that Mrs. Husting only views Kip as a "layabout" and lazy child, ignoring the depth and complexity of his character, she also imagines that Jack will be the same little boy he was as a child, denying that his character will change, develop, and deepen. The observation that many men have already gone off to war establishes that Jack's story takes place in the early years of World War II.

The morning passes as Jack does menial chores, but by the afternoon Mrs. Husting has been hovering so long that he decides to walk into town for a bit of reprieve. In the streets, Jack hears the buzz of old men and women talking about the war, fretting about whether it will really kick up. Although most young men were anxious to go off and have their adventure, Jack wasn't. He's already seen men die, killed in accidents with livestock and machinery at the station, or from drunken stupidity or violence. He's nearly died himself several times. He understands why boys stuck in their hometown feel such a draw to fight in Europe, but he doesn't share it. Even so, a couple of old men harass Jack in the street for not having gone off to war yet, accusing him of being a coward.

Jack's reticence to go off to war, in part because he has already seen other territories and had his adventures, suggests that many young men enlisted not for their sense of duty—or at least not entirely—but for the offering of adventure, of seeing new places and testing their courage. Additionally, Jack's experience with violence and death, which puts him off the "adventure" of it all, suggests that many of the young men racing off to war possess a certain naiveté about the reality of the death, danger, and suffering that comes with combat.

When Jack gets home, Mrs. Husting tells him to clean up and shave. Though she's never done that in the six weeks he's been home, Jack complies. When he finishes, he finds his parents sitting in their living room with an attractive girl named Emily and her mother. Jack considers leaving through the front door, but instead begrudgingly sits next to Emily. Her father owns the hardware store down the street, though he only has one arm because of the Great War so his daughters work the shop. They all make small talk about hardware, washing machines, and pleasantries, and eat cake that Mrs. Husting has brought out. Although Mrs. Husting constantly references Jack, she does most of the talking while Jack sits unenthused. When Emily and her mother leave, Jack's parents imagine together how whoever marries that girl will likely have the run of her father's shop as well.

Despite Jack's resentment of Mrs. Husting's overbearing presence, he is oddly compliant with her as well, suggesting that some part of him still recognizes himself as a child in front of his mother. Additionally, Jack's thought of running through the front door belies a certain level of immaturity, but also suggests that he is wary of any attempts to be arranged into a marriage, regardless of how attractive Emily is. Jack's parents seem less interested in Jack's feelings than in the advantages his marriage to Emily would confer, demonstrating that marriage in this era tended to be more of a social convention than a representation of love.

An hour later, Jack wears his best jacket and knocks on the Westaway's front door, met by Kip and Francis. The boys look similar, but their demeanors are strikingly different. If Jack weren't six years older than them, he imagines that he could've been easy friends with Kip, though Francis's haughtiness would've earned him a quick beating from the other boys at the boarding schools.

Jack's observations about Kip and Francis imply that, having seen some of the world himself, Kip seems destined to do alright, while Francis's expectation that the world will recognize his greatness—encouraged by Jean—will inevitably lead to misery, and will not take him anywhere.

Jack has a bag of lemons with him that he claims are extras from his parent's tree, sent from Mrs. Husting. Kip sees that its only a pretense to meet Connie, and remarks that those lemons must've cost Jack a full shilling at the market. Even so, Connie is grateful, and asks Jack if he'd come help her fix a washing line in the yard, on account of his height. He goes with her to the yard, fixes the line, and they talk as he helps her fold laundry. Connie knows that Jack goes walking every night while the rest of Richmond is asleep; she sees him from the window. Connie remarks that she'd do the same if she were a man, and explore the different world that night creates.

Connie's wish that she could walk around Richmond at night like Jack, but cannot since she is a woman, suggests that she is hindered by her gender from living how she would ultimately like to live. This establishes the narrow role afforded to women in that era, which will contrast against Stanzi and Charlotte's relative freedom in the modern world and argue that women enjoy far more freedoms in the modern era than in the early-20th century, even if certain stigmas still persist.

Connie tells Jack about her job helping Mr. Ward at the newspaper with his photography. She loves photos and the way that they trap a moment in time. She states that she'll be a photographer herself someday, at which Francis snorts, revealing that he and Kip are hiding nearby, listening. Francis plainly states that the idea of a female photographer is "stupid" and that art and pictures themselves seem a waste of time, especially compared to lawyering, which he wants to do. Jack and Kip talk about horses for a while, until Jack realizes the sun is setting and he needs to get home. Connie thanks him for the lemons, and as he leaves, Kip is still smirking to think that Jack paid a whole shilling just to meet his sister.

Francis's utter disregard for the idea of a female photographer once again casts a negative light on his character, presenting him as haughty, selfish, and even bigoted. Once again, Connie dreams of doing work that is not normally afforded to women in her day, demonstrating the constraints she feels her gender places on her in daily life. These limitations will fortunately not be such a hindrance to Charlotte and especially not to Stanzi, who has multiple professional careers as an adult.

When Jack gets home, he asks Mrs. Husting about the Westaways and how they've fared since their father died. Mrs. Husting finds them respectable enough for a Catholic family, but disapproves of Connie working for an older, wealthier man, and imagines that perhaps she intends to marry him in spite of the age difference. She feels Connie should know her place. Mrs. Husting thinks very little of Kip, even though he works for Mr. Husting, and thinks that boys like Kip are the ones that ought to be sent off to war, for he'll never make anything of himself anyway. When Jack goes up to his room, he finds that his mother fastened a curtain tight over his bedroom window while he was away.

Mrs. Husting's general disregard for both Connie and Kip not only demonstrates the prejudice many hold toward poverty in her day, but also the apparent thinness of her own character. The implication of her belief that Kip ought to go to war is that boys like Kip are fit to be cannon fodder. In Mrs. Husting's eyes, young men without much potential have lives with little value, so sacrificing them will not be such a loss. The curtain fastened over Jack's window implies that Mrs. Husting wants to control Jack by keeping him from watching and pursuing Connie.

That evening Jack goes walking again, and sees Connie's light on in her window as he passes her house. He imagines her future as a photographer, or perhaps as Mr. Ward the newspaperman's young wife. He thinks of Emily's father and his one arm, forced to let his children help him do everything, and considers that he'd rather be killed outright than return from war less than whole. Although Emily is obviously a good woman, he still can only think of Connie folding laundry, dancing in the yard, and "ready to take her husband's hand and begin her big adventure."

Unlike Francis, Jack can imagine Connie as a photographer, suggesting that he does not believe that she as a woman should be so limited by her gendered place in society. Jack's belief that it's better to be killed than spend life missing a part of oneself suggests he also believes it would be better not to live than to marry Emily and live without Connie, the woman he loves.

The first night Jack was back in his parent's house, he stayed up late in the night talking with Mr. Husting. When his dad wanted to go to sleep, Jack pulled out a **shilling** and told Mr. Husting he'd flipped for it, but Mr. Husting snatched it out of the air and went to bed. That was Jack's "lucky shilling."

The recollection of his first night home serves to connect Jack to the symbolic shilling as well, implying that his lucky shilling is the same one Mr. Husting gives to Kip, and thus representing his connection to Kip's family. This connection, then, implies that Jack may develop a relationship with Connie, after all.

CHAPTER 4: CHARLOTTE

As Charlotte is teaching a morning yoga class to corporate workers, she feels an extra weight in her abdomen, which she'd also noticed the night before. As she looks at her students, she hopes this morning yoga will make them kinder in their daily work, though the one time she admitted this hope to Stanzi, Stanzi plainly doubted it. After yoga, her body feels more aligned, but the foreign weight is still there. She walks to the tram station, noticing a seagull with a piece of fishing line wrapped around its leg, nearly severing its foot. This causes her to reflect that "We humans fuck everything up." Charlotte knows the bird is crippled but also knows she can do nothing about it, and the powerlessness of it all makes her want to cry. But as she rides the tram through a park, she feels as if the park smiles at her.

Especially compared to Stanzi and her general cynicism, Charlotte is characterized immediately as eccentric, but overwhelmingly compassionate, especially toward animals or people whom society has mistreated. Her hope that morning yoga will improve the behavior of businesspeople—the epitome of mainstream "society"—also suggests that she tends towards optimism, even unrealistically. Although this narrative takes place years before Stanzi's, Charlotte's fitness and general awareness of her body again set her apart from her sister, making them as different from each other as Kip is to Francis.

Charlotte goes to her other job at a shop selling naturopathic remedies, where she sees Craig already there, opening for the day. Craig's appearance and demeanor seem immediately childish to her. He pouts, bitter that Charlotte did not show up at the bar last night to watch his band play, even when she says she needed a quiet night. In her head, Charlotte thinks this hardly matters. Craig's band plays in bars every week and its hardly an event—the bar only pays the band $10, a meal, and some beer. But all the other band member's girlfriends come every night. Charlotte wants to calm him down, rub his shoulders and maybe burn some oil. She tries to kiss Craig, but he ignores her. Charlotte shrugs, blaming his behavior on the fact that he is a Scorpio.

Charlotte's relationship with a man she obviously thinks quite little of also suggests that she is not one to proactively make decisions or make the most of her life. This is reinforced by her easy dismissal of Craig and his poor behavior, especially since she blames his astrological sign for it. Rather than seeking to change Craig's mind or demand that he behave like a mature adult, Charlotte simply blames fate and goes about her day, apparently unhindered by Craig's irritation but also passively accepting of it.

While Craig and Charlotte are sorting invoices and deliveries, a wealthy woman comes into the store, pushing her young daughter in a stroller. Craig tells Charlotte that she needs to handle this one; Craig knows all about naturopathy and even how to treat women's menstrual issues, but he cannot handle children. The woman says that her daughter keeps getting colds and needs something to strengthen her immune system. Charlotte tries to speak to the little girl, whom she finds out is also named Charlotte, but the girl does not respond. The woman is embarrassed, unsure of whether to yell at her child and appear domineering or let it slide and appear weak.

Craig's refusal to have anything to do with children suggests that he would make a poor father if ever the time came. Meanwhile, the wealthy woman's consternation suggests that she feels inadequate to some degree as a mother, plagued by the difficult role. Although social conditions for women are better than in Jean's day, the difficulties the wealthy woman feels as a mother will parallel many of the pressures that Jean feels herself, half a century earlier.

After the woman tells Charlotte that her daughter is named after Charlotte Bronte—though she doesn't seem to confidently know which books Bronte wrote—Charlotte reveals that she was named after her father's best friend Charlie. The woman asks if her daughter needs a tonic, but Charlotte tells her that judging by the girl's itchy nose, she just needs less wheat and dairy in her diet, and explains about the chemicals used in modern food production. The woman remarks that it seems so difficult to raise a child in the modern world, especially since her daughter will only eat cheese sticks and junk food. When Charlotte gives the woman a box of organic cereal, the woman asks if there's a toy in the box.

Although the wealthy woman seems to want to help her daughter and decries the effects of modern food, by asking if the organic cereal box has a toy in it, she reveals that she is still beholden to modern conveniences. Although the wealthy woman does not struggle with poverty and simply keeping her children alive, as Jean did, she still struggles with the pressure of motherhood and knowing how to best care for her child, suggesting that many of the pressures that women feel are timeless, present from era to era.

When the woman leaves with the box of cereal, Craig criticizes Charlotte for spending so much time with her and only selling one item. Craig criticizes the woman, too, for being part of the "bourgeois," and thinks she'll probably just throw away what she bought, anyway. However, Charlotte has sympathy for her as a mother. When she says that motherhood is "the most important job in the world," Craig flatly disagrees. In his mind, having children is just the consequence of sex, and children are only a way for the middle-class to "clone themselves, desperate to feed their own ego." Charlotte disagrees, especially since it's spring and the "time for rebirth." She decides she feels ill, tells Craig to man the shop on his own, and leaves, figuring he'll be annoyed but get over it by tomorrow.

Charlotte's spending so much time with one person to sell a single small item suggests that she values people over money. Craig's cynicism completely defies Charlotte's optimism, further suggesting that they make a terrible couple together and have an unfulfilling relationship. Furthermore, Craig seems to see no possible value at all in motherhood or raising children, cynically viewing it as an egoistic move or useless consequence of sex. This attitude once again suggesting that he would make a pitiful, inadequate father if ever the circumstances should arise.

Charlotte goes home, lights a candle and incense, and strips naked to look at herself in the mirror. She reflects that the "female body is the source of all life," and she's grateful that hers is healthy and able. She opens her underwear drawer and pulls out an **amethyst pendant** that her mother, Annabel, gave her for her 18th birthday. Stanzi opted to receive cash instead. Charlottes presses the pendant to her heart, then holds it above the incense. She prays "a few words to the universe" and know that it hears her. Then she lies naked on the floor, on her back, and hangs the pendant from her fist above her belly. When it spins slowly counter-clockwise, Charlotte knows she is pregnant.

The amethyst pendant functions in the same symbolic role as the shilling, representing the manner in which love connects different people through generations to each other, often in ways they do not realize. Charlotte's prayers to the universe and use of a pendant to determine whether she is pregnant are written to seem somewhat unbelievable, again characterizing Charlotte as compassionate and optimistic, spiritual to a near fault.

After Charlotte realizes she's pregnant, she goes to Stanzi for support, though so far her sister is mostly cynical and less confident in the **pendant**'s predictive power. At Stanzi's house, they drink wine from a matching set of wineglasses, not mason jars. Charlotte is willing to take an actual pregnancy test like Stanzi wants her to, but she knows what she knows. Stanzi begs Charlotte to tell her that the dad is anyone besides "that complete moron Craig" but Charlotte knows it is him, and tries weakly to defend his honor by claiming he's still young, even though he's 24 like they are. Although Stanzi is so flippantly cynical, Charlotte knows it only means her sisters trusts her strength and knows she will survive this; she is not in real trouble.

The revelation that Charlotte and Stanzi are both 24 dates this narrative as occurring nine years before Stanzi's. Charlotte's unexpected pregnancy and ensuing crisis of how to handle it sets her up as a generational parallel to Connie, who will also be struck with an unexpected pregnancy. The parallel between them serves to illustrate both the similarities of shame and stigma thrust upon women, as well as the differences in access to safe abortion and social support.

Stanzi makes a quick run to the pharmacy for a pregnancy test while Charlotte sits on the floor and tries to meditate. Instead, she thinks of what's growing inside her at this moment. It would seem easier if she were like Stanzi, with a college degree and a career path laid out, her own rented flat. Instead, she has "two casual jobs, no qualifications, no money," and she lives in a dirty share house.

In spite of Stanzi's stated belief that Charlotte's life seems put together, Charlotte inner dilemma reveals that she feels the same way about Stanzi, thus suggesting that one's perception of another person often does not account for that person's inner pain, fears, or self-doubts.

Stanzi returns shortly with the pregnancy test and Charlotte takes it in the bathroom to pee on the stick. Stanzi looks at the result. The **pendant** was right. Charlotte feels an overwhelming desire to talk to Annabel and decides that they will drive to see her right away, until she realizes that means she will have to face Kip as well.

Charlotte's apparent fear of facing her father suggests that she expects him to react negatively in some way. Although Charlotte enjoys much more freedom as a woman than Connie did, the stigma and fear of an unwanted pregnancy apparently remain.

Kip has been an excellent father all throughout Charlotte's life, gentle and kind. The only time she's ever seen him angry was when he walked in on her having sex with a boy in year twelve. Kip was fine with it, even grinned at his accidental intrusion, until he realized they were not using a condom, at which point he became immediately furious and chased the boy out of the house with a golf club. Charlotte knew her dad thought she was stupid and irresponsible in that moment, and she was crushed. Now, she fears he'll feel the same way again.

The sexual freedom that Kip affords his own daughter, even when she still lives in his house, contrasts with the shame and stigma Connie will face over having had sex with Jack. The parallel suggests that women in Charlotte's era, the late-20th century, enjoy a far greater latitude of freedom and empowerment than women possessed in the Connie's era, only half a century prior.

Kip and Annabel are having dinner with Uncle Frank, who lives in the same house in which they grew up. Outside, Stanzi and Charlotte sit in Stanzi's car while Charlotte decides if she will go in. Charlotte struggles to picture Kip and Frank living in this old house together, back when Richmond was a slum, when their father died drunkenly falling off a tram and their sister died of the flu. Stanzi reminds Charlotte that she doesn't have to have the baby. The hospital is open, it's a quick operation, and millions of women have done it before her even though they never talk about it. While Stanzi speaks, Charlotte tries to picture a life with Craig and cannot, and laments the fact that she's achieved nothing in her life so far, settling for teaching yoga to people she doesn't like and spending evenings in bars listening to music she hates.

Stanzi's casual mention of abortion and reassurance that it is a safe and easy process suggests that women in the modern era have much better access to contraception and healthcare than women in previous generations. Once again, the safety and comparative acceptance of abortion in their day will contrast with the risk and tremendous stigma that abortion comes with in Connie's era. Although abortion still seems stigmatized as a mark of irresponsibility, it is nowhere near as persecuted, and the relative ease of access to it again suggests that women enjoy much greater freedom in the modern era.

Stanzi continues to ramble until Charlotte tells her to "shut up." Charlotte thinks about the money it takes to raise a baby (money she doesn't have), how she'd hate to move back in with her parents, and about all the impossible challenges of parenthood. Then, gathering her courage, she decides they're going inside. They knock at the door and call out. Uncle Frank opens the door and immediately exclaims that there must be some emergency, since they never visit. Frank rambles incessantly about nothing in particular while Stanzi and Charlotte sit down. Kip and Annabel sit up, and Annabel asks if Charlotte has come to visit because she broke up with Craig.

Charlotte's regret that she has not accomplished anything with her life sharply contradicts Stanzi's apparent perception of her as beautiful and the favorite child, again suggesting that individuals are rarely so two-dimensional or simple as others tend to perceive. This is again illustrated by Kip and Francis's fate. While Jean and Mrs. Husting assumed Kip would amount to nothing, he has a family, while Francis, the favored child, is an old bachelor who lives alone.

Charlotte loses her nerve and steps out to the backyard and the lane beside the house to breathe. She knows that Kip would probably rather live here, but he sold his half of the house to Uncle Frank to buy a house in the suburbs where he could raise a family. Charlotte realizes how many sacrifices her father made for his family. She is still torn by the decision of what to do about her pregnancy. With no incense and no candles, Charlotte unhooks the **pendant** from around her neck, sits on the ground, pulls the band of her skirt down to expose her stomach, and asks the universe what she should do about the baby. She hangs the pendant down and it begins to spin.

Kip is depicted as an exceptional father and an all-around successful human being despite his hard upbringing and Jean's assumptions that he would never be worth anything. Charlotte's use of the pendant and "the universe" to make her decisions suggests that she is cripplingly indecisive and lacks the self-confidence to make and stick with her own decisions. This again defies the collected self-confidence that Stanzi later perceives her to have.

CHAPTER 5: FRANCIS

In the middle of the night, Francis imagines himself to be Lamont Cranston, a well-trained spy, as he sneaks out of his shared room with Kip. He creeps down the hallway, imagining he's crawling down the stone corridor of an enemy fortress, until he sees the kitchen and the cakes on the table. Friends and neighbors have been sending cakes to their house nonstop for the three days since the funeral. All they have to eat are cakes. Francis walks into the kitchen and sees the chair where his father used to sit. He crawls under the table and remembers how he and Kip used to hide under there together and poke at their father's ankles until he dragged them out giggling. Now 13 years old, he can barely fit under the table alone. He wishes his father's legs were still there in front of him.

Francis's childish imagining contradicts the haughty seriousness he exhibits during Kip and Jack's narratives, which suggests that how an individual acts in one part of their life does not define their character or behavior throughout their life—all people have the ability to change over time, for better or worse. The mention of the funeral three days before sets the tone for Francis's narrative and establishes it as taking place one to two years before Kip and Jean's narratives, placing it in the late 1930s.

In the morning, everyone rises before Francis and he finds them all sitting at the table, as if it were a normal day. His father would be leaving for work about this time. Jean tells him to sit down and eat some cake before they "drown" in it. Jean can tell that Francis wants to speak. She badgers him until he manages to ask what they'll do for money. Kip is enraged, since their father has not even been dead a week yet, but Jean hits both of them hard. She announces that she'll take a job as a housemaid, and Connie will quit art school so she can tend to their new boarder, Mrs. Keith. Kip asks if they all shouldn't quit school to work, but Jean stubbornly refuses and claims it wouldn't be "respectable."

It's worth pointing out that although Jean will not allow Kip to quit school to work as well, Connie is automatically pulled out of art school. Although Connie admits in Jack's narrative that she wants a professional career as a photographer, she is forced to give it up. This disparity suggests that, in this era, women are expected to put their own hopes or aspirations aside for the sake of men, and thus given far less freedom or agency by society.

Francis knows this will be the hardest day, harder than the funeral even, since it will be his first day back to school and he'll have to face the sympathy of his classmates and teachers. Jean tells Francis that Kip already left for school, and he races out the door to try to keep up. Instead of catching Kip, Francis runs into Pike, Cray, and Mac. They have a bad reputation and are all much bigger than Francis, but Pike puts an arm around him before he can escape. Francis expects he'll be beaten up, but instead Pike tells him that they want him to run with their gang, they've got a job they could use him for, a plan that involves doing yard work for old ladies. Francis agrees, and Pike tells him they'll meet again right after school, and warns Francis not to tell anyone else about this.

Although Francis knows that these boys carry a bad reputation, and thus whatever plan they want him to join in will likely by criminal, he expresses little hesitation or reservation about agreeing to it. This suggests that Francis, at least in this period of his life, is morally weak, which certainly contradicts the image of the perfect model civilian that he'll later project. Once again, this demonstrates how a single, limited perspective cannot take in all of a person's history or character, as well as demonstrating Francis's eventual capacity to change himself.

Francis leaves them and proudly imagines himself as part of the "toughest gang in Richmond," wielding power over others rather than being beaten up. He goes to find Kip before school starts, finding him sitting alone on the floor in the library. Kip talks about how the coroner slit their father's coat up the back to get his body into for the funeral, and about how guilty he feels that on the last morning their father was alive, he didn't say goodbye to him because he was busy reading a book. When the school bell rings for their first class, Francis tells Kip they need to get moving, but Kip doesn't budge. He's decided he's not going back to school, he's going to find a job, even though Jean will be furious. School seems meaningless when their father is dead. Kip leaves, abandoning his schoolbag.

Francis's fantasizing about being a part of the gang proves that he did not join simply out of fear, but rather that some part of him desires the power associated with being a gangster. Although Jean and Mrs. Husting's derision of Kip for not being in school implies that he was kicked out or that his leaving was a shameful act, this narrative reveals that Kip left to work so he could help support the family, again demonstrating that a limited, initial impression of a person does not tell their whole story and is likely inaccurate.

Kip isn't in school for the rest of the day, but Francis hopes he'll change his mind after a few days. After school, he goes to meet the gang again, and he's thankful for the excuse to be anywhere but home. Pike, Mac, and Cray show Francis how to jump on the back of a tram after it's already rolling away so they don't have to pay, and though Francis is nervous—it's the exact way his father died—he decides he's going with them. He doesn't want to walk away from his life like Kip did. Terrified, he makes the jump. They ride for a while and get off to switch trams, but the next tram's conductor is watching them closely, so they decide to just pay the ticket price like everyone else.

Francis's hesitance to walk away from this opportunity in the way that Kip walked away from school suggests that on some level, joining the gang is a way for Francis to feel as if he belongs to something now that his father has died and his family seems thrust into chaos. While this does not justify Francis's joining the gang or the plan they are trying to pull off, it does appeal to the reader's sympathy. More than anything, Francis seems like a lost boy, unsure how to live without his father.

The boys get off the tram in Hawthorn, a wealthier district of Melbourne, and tell Francis that they've arranged to do some yard work for an old woman, but that while she's out in the yard with them, Francis is going to sneak into her house and steal whatever he can find. Pike warns Francis not to disappoint them. Francis agrees, proud to have this special role in the group.

Once again, Francis's easy agreement to burglarize an old women's home suggests that he is not the haughty, perfectionist, upstanding citizen that he presents himself as two years later. This again demonstrates an individual's capacity for change and growth over time.

Once the boys have started helping the old woman weed her garden, Francis sneaks into her house, imagining himself again as Lamont Cranston infiltrating an evil villain's fortress, rather than a young boy robbing an old woman. He searches through her kitchen, looking for cash, but finds nothing. He moves into her bedroom and starts rifling her drawers, but as he's in there he hears the old woman stomping back into the house, followed by the three boys shouting. One of them pulled up a flower instead of a weed and she's firing them already.

Interestingly, Francis uses his imaginary character to justify his own wicked theft, reimagining the act as a righteous strike against a cartoon villain. Retroactively, this suggests that Francis's pretending to be Cranston sneaking through the kitchen the night before may have been a way for him to cope with the pain of losing his father and feeling lost and alone in the world.

Francis finds a handful of shillings in a purse, which he pockets, and finds a red velvet pouch under her mattress, which he slips down his sock. Francis tries to slip out while the boys distract the old woman, but she spies Francis in the hallway, standing behind Pike. However, in her old age she does not realize that are four boys in her house now instead of three. In his head, Francis swears that if he survives, he'll become the most upstanding person in the world and take all the responsibility for the family. The old woman demands money for damages to her garden, and Francis hands her the shillings he stole from her purse, and she lets them all leave.

Francis's silent promise to take responsibility for his family and be an upstanding citizen seems to lead to his arrogant, insufferable demeanor seen in Kip and Jack's narratives. Once again, though Francis's condescension and superiority seem wholly despicable from the perspectives of other characters, this narrative suggests that such insufferable demeanor initially arose from Francis's guilt over the attempted theft and his subsequent desire to be a better person and take care of his family.

When they've made it to safety, the other boys are furious at Francis for handing over the shillings, even though it saved them. They beat him up and tell him he's out of the gang, warning him never to tell a soul about the attempted robbery. After they leave, Francis remembers the pouch he put in his sock, and retrieving it, opens it to find an **amethyst pendant**.

Although Francis is out of the gang and remorseful of the theft, the fact that he keeps the amethyst pendant suggests that that remorse only goes so far—he still retains a selfish streak.

CHAPTER 6: ANNABEL

Annabel cooks at home, following recipes from *Women's Weekly* on how to make mock meat dishes. Even though the war is over, strict rationing is still in place—many countries were left devastated, so certain food products are impossible to come by. She sets one end of their table with two plates and chairs. The other end she keeps covered with books or magazines—anything to cover the empty places where her other family members should be. Her father is already midway through his third bottle of alcohol in the afternoon, but he remains enthusiastic about her attempt at mock sausage and mock chutney and thanks her for the meal.

Annabel and her father experience hunger as result of a war that barely touched Australia, and never came close to Melbourne, demonstrating once again war's far-reaching effects and capacity to inflict suffering even on the other side of the world. The empty places at the table suggests that Annabel and her father feel a sense of loss, either for those who died or those who were never born to begin with, which seems to fuel her father's alcoholism.

When they are finished, Annabel's father asks if she has any money to spare him for drink, but she lies and tells him they are completely out. It's barely a lie, since they don't even have enough money to see them through the week. During the war, Annabel worked in a munitions factory and made better money, but now that the men are back, all the factory work went back to them, and she and her father are destitute again.

Annabel's brief ability to work a factory job and make money demonstrates how for many women at that time, the war brought loss but also new opportunity to perform roles generally held by men. Many women flourished in such positions but, like Annabel, were forced to leave them after the war ended. This suggests that women's role in the workforce was seen as a temporary necessity rather than a valid life path during this era.

Annabel's father laments not being able to take care of her and being a terrible father, and she tries to convince him it's okay; she knows he drinks out of pain. They do this routine every single night. In time, he'll start to pass out, and she'll either help him to his bed, or if he's too drunk and lands in the hallway, she'll make sure he's not injured and then set him up with pillow and blanket on the floor. Today, he starts to fade, so Annabel half-carries him to his armchair to sleep there. As he falls asleep, Annabel tells him that she's going for a walk and then going to a dance with Francis. Her father says Francis is harmless, though he doesn't trust Kip, and falls asleep.

Annabel and her father, bereft of mother or brothers, form an unconventional family, especially since her father's alcoholism is so debilitating that she must care for him. Annabel effectively operates as the parent between the two of them, cooking, cleaning, earning money and providing for her ailing father. Annabel's shift into this new role exemplifies how in unconditional families, created by choice or ill fortune, members often change roles and adapt themselves to function within their circumstances.

As Annabel gets ready to go out with Francis, she reflects that she doesn't entirely understand their relationship. Francis is firm, serious, mature, seemingly perfect, works in the law office. No one other than Francis has ever called on Annabel in her life, and she's not entirely sure what Francis sees in her. She's met Kip briefly a few times since he came home from the war, knows he works with the photographer at the newspaper, but she doesn't know him and doesn't ever think about him. Francis arrives and asks if he could speak with her father, but Annabel tells him he's already asleep and they leave together.

Placed immediately after Francis's rather damning narrative, Annabel's perception of Francis as the perfect gentleman yet again demonstrates that one cannot trust their limited perception of a person to accurately or wholly assess their entire character. Although the reader already knows that Kip and Annabel eventually marry, she has little regard for him at this point, suggesting that their meeting may play a central role in Annabel's narrative.

They walk together by the river, outside of Richmond. Annabel thinks this part of the river looks beautiful, but Francis can never sit still long enough to admire it. He talks about his work at the law office and mentions that his mother Jean would've liked Annabel, except that she's dead now. Annabel recalls silently that Jean was despised by most when she died, "on account of Connie." Francis asks after Annabel's father—apparently not truly aware of his condition—and wonders if he wouldn't be better off on his own. Annabel isn't sure what Francis means, but feels she can't just leave him, especially since he raised her on his own after her mother died in childbirth.

Although Jean or Connie's fate has yet to be revealed, Annabel's remembrance that Jean was a hated woman hints at the horrible tragedy that will befall them both. Meanwhile, the revelation that Annabel's mother died in childbirth, leading to their present unconventional situation, demonstrates that such an unusual family situation may not be a mark of poor decisions earlier in life, but simply the result of unpreventable tragedy and misfortune.

Francis tells Annabel that he has a gift for her, and shows her an **amethyst pendant**. It's the most beautiful thing she's ever seen. Francis tells her about how an old lady gave it to him after he spent hours charitably helping her with yard work, as he was often in the habit of doing as a boy He tells the pendant comes all the way from Europe, and the old lady received it from some member of a royal family. Annabel believes him and, overjoyed to be with such an honorable man, puts the pendant around her neck.

Although Francis presents himself as upstanding and honorable, and certainly seems well-regarded by most in Richmond, his blatant lie to Annabel about where he got the pendant reveals that he is still selfish and conniving to some degree, and too cowardly to admit that he stole it. Although Francis does seem to have grown and changed, his falsehood suggests that at his core, he is still the same.

Annabel and Francis take a tram to a massive, elaborate dance hall filled with people their age. Francis goes to visit with some friends, and from a distance Annabel sees him swig from a silver flask, like her own father. Millie and Jos, girls she knew years ago, visit with Annabel, and their lavish dresses remind her of her own poverty. However, they're both stunned at Annabel's beautiful **pendant**, but when she tells them that Francis gave it to her, they seem concerned, especially since Annabel and Francis aren't engaged. Jos's brother Mac approaches them, wearing a soldier's uniform. Annabel hasn't seen him in years. When he asks her to dance, Annabel tells him he'd love to.

Along with his blatant lie about the pendant, Francis's drinking from a flask suggests that he has at the very least the potential for the same tragic alcoholism that plagues Annabel's father. Annabel's recognition that both Jos and Millie seem better off financially suggests that Annabel is making sacrifices to stay and provide for her father. Lastly, although Mac was previously seen as a thief and a gangster, his proper appearance wearing a soldier's uniform suggests that he, too, has grown and changed.

While they are dancing and catching up, Francis angrily approaches and tells Annabel they are going to leave. Mac confronts Francis, also chiding him for remaining a civilian during the war, and it seems there may be a fight. Just as the tension between them seems about to break into violence, Kip arrives, wearing his own uniform, on the pretense of catching up with Mac like he was an old friend. Kip puts a guiding hand on Mac's back and holds his arm out graciously for Annabel, who threads hers through his and leads them away from the gathered crowd, with Francis following furiously behind.

Kip's confidence to take hold of the situation and avert violence, as well as his forthrightness with Annabel, contrasts greatly with his interaction with her in the first narrative, suggesting that he, too, has grown and matured into a man. The fact that he appears in a soldier's uniform further suggests that his time in the military played a significant role in that maturation, just as it seems to have done for Mac.

Kip and Mac chat about the war. When Jos catches up to them, she remarks that Kip joined up rather late, but Mac defends him, stating that Kip's station in Borneo saw plenty of hard fighting, even late in the war. Kip "looks Jos square in the face" and tells her that he had to wait for Jean to die, especially because Jean was so reviled by their community after Connie's death and the inquest that she wouldn't even get out of bed. Francis and Jos seem ashamed, and Annabel is surprised to hear Kip speak so plainly about this shameful part of their family's past.

Mac's defense of Kip's honor as a soldier again contrasts with the times he'd tried to beat him up as a kid, further suggesting that Mac himself has become an honorable man during the war. Once again, Kip's reasons for staying out of the war initially foreshadows the revelation of Connie's tragic death, as well as Jean's seemingly shameful decision that led to it.

Mac asks what happened to Jack Husting, and Kip answers that he was killed in North Africa. The crowd goes silent as they all remember their own lost loved ones. Annabel observes that there are holes in the crowd everywhere, people that ought to be there but aren't. "That's what war means," she reflects.

Once again, even in Australia, everyone seems to have lost someone, demonstrating the cost of war even for those who are far away from the dangers of combat.

Jos breaks the silence, pointing out Annabel's **pendant** from Francis. Kip is surprised by its obvious value, but when he asks where Francis got it, Francis goes suddenly silent. Annabel believes he is just being shy, so she starts to explain about the charitable work he used to do for old women. Francis tries to stop her from speaking, but Mac has already heard it. Mac remarks that Francis certainly has an active imagination, and thinks it ironic that Francis now works in law; perhaps he'll pay Francis's boss a visit. Francis takes Annabel outside.

Kip's surprise at the pendant and its value suggests that Francis had not even told his twin brother about it over all these years. Francis's attempt to stop Annabel from repeating the lie suggests that Francis rightly fears being exposed as a fraud, since everyone will be able to see that his reputation as a perfect citizen is marred by a long-concealed theft.

Francis and Annabel are alone outside. Francis paces back and forth angrily, but Annabel still does not understand what happened. Francis accuses her of running her mouth and insists that even she should know "how to act like a lady instead of a fishwife." Annabel is stunned and deeply offended. Kip arrives again and tries to convince Francis to go inside and try chatting up a different girl. Annabel tells him there's no need to intervene, but Kip insists he wants to keep Francis from saying anything he'll regret. Francis again demeans her for her poverty. Annabel is furious and decides she'll walk home, but first starts to unclasp the **pendant** from her neck.

In spite of Francis's earlier chivalry, calling Annabel a "fishwife" is a harsh jab both at her poverty and her gender. This reveals that Francis is still mean-spirited beneath his veneer of respectability, and still holds the bigoted views about women he espoused when he mocked Connie's dream of being a professional photographer. Once again, although Francis seems to have changed himself in some ways—he is far less haughty, for instance—his poor inner character remains the same.

Kip tells Annabel she shouldn't give back the **pendant**, since it was a gift, but Francis wants it back to give to some other girl. Kip decides that he'll buy it from Francis—though Francis demands an inordinate sum—by making payments out of his monthly salary for two years, so that Annabel can keep the valuable jewelry. Kip takes Annabel by the hand and asks her to let him be generous to her, and then takes the pendant and refastens it around her neck, his hand brushing her skin. Francis calls Kip a "bloody idiot."

Much like Charlotte, Kip's decision to burden himself with two years of debt to re-gift the pendant to Annabel suggests that he values people more than money. In doing so, Kip redeems the amethyst pendant as a symbol of love and dedication to others, even though Francis previously used it as a tool to buy Annabel's affection.

Francis goes back into the dance, and Kip and Annabel walk in the quiet dark before taking the train back to Richmond. When Annabel enters her house, she wakes her father. He stumbles outside to urinate before collapsing into bed. She knows his drinking is killing him; he won't be alive much longer. As Annabel helps him undress and get settled, she asks him why he doesn't trust Kip. As her father rolls over and passes out once more, he mumbles, "Take you away from me."

Annabel's father's answer to her question suggests that he could already see Francis's shallow value and Kip's great depth of character, and knew long before his daughter that she could easily be swept off her feet by him. The value that Annabel's father sees in Kip once again contradicts Jean and Mrs. Husting's low view of him as a youth.

CHAPTER 7: JEAN

Jean is stressed and already late for work. Kip and Francis are asking her too many questions, and she can't find Connie, who should be making breakfast for them. The heat oppresses her and her head throbs, making it difficult to "keep a civil tongue." Next door, the Hustings are mourning the death of their son Jack. News of his death just arrived last night. Kip tries to reminisce about his fondness for Jack, but Jean doesn't have time to hear it. Kip also reminds her too much of her late husband, and some days she secretly can't stand the sight of him. The pain is so great that it builds into a fury inside her, half at Kip and half at her husband for dying in such a stupid, drunken manner and leaving her with the children. She'd envisioned motherhood to be sweet and ideal, not chaotic, stressful and lonely.

Jean's narrative depicts motherhood as a difficult burden to bear, far greater than one's children can ever understand. Although Jean's character is never completely redeemed and she remains a rather wretched figure, her narrative does serve to explain where her bitterness and anger come from and help the reader to see that the one-dimensional depiction of her in Kip's narrative does not tell the whole story. This is exemplified most by the revelation that Jean's dislike of Kip is due in large part to the fact that he reminds her of her dead husband, and simply seeing Kip causes her a mixture of pain and fury.

Jean finds Connie sitting against a tree in the backyard, hands on her stomach. She looks terrible, and she's weeping for Jack. Jean is unsympathetic. She tries to get Connie up, since she needs to be at work, but Connie looks her in the eye and tells her she's pregnant. Jean assumes she's pregnant by Mr. Ward, her employer, that it's a ploy to force him to marry her, and Jean thinks Connie is a "wonderful clever girl" and hugs her. Jean is already fantasizing about how they'll move from Richmond to Hawthorn, they'll be wealthy and taken care of. When Connie tells her Mr. Ward isn't the father, Jean assumes she must've been raped, which is terrible, but at least they can force the father to marry Connie.

Although Jean does labor to keep her family together and alive, her initial belief that Connie is a "wonderful clever girl" for seducing Mr. Ward into impregnating her not only reveals her own doubles standard toward Connie's sexual conduct, but also reveals that she herself is conniving and selfish. Rather than sympathizing with her daughter or fretting for the future, Jean's first thought is how much she'll personally benefit, suggesting that her character is rotten at its core. Connie's weeping for Jack hints that Jack is indeed the father of her child.

Connie states marriage isn't possible either, but insists that she wants to keep the baby. Once again, Jean is furious with her husband for dying and leaving her with this mess. Connie mentions that there are convents out in the country where single mothers can go to live and give birth, but Jean thinks it a terrible idea. When she sees that Connie is sick, she surmises that she must be less than six weeks pregnant, which means she still has time to get rid of it. Connie refuses this idea, but Jean is insistent, arguing that it's simply how the world works.

Once again, Connie's unexpected pregnancy and decision of whether she should abort it or not run parallel to Charlotte's own pregnancy and dilemma. However, although Connie wants to keep the pregnancy, she faces more social stigma and has less choice in the matter than Charlotte does, suggesting that while it is a similar situation and even has similar stigmas attached, many aspects of an unexpected pregnancy are far better for women in the modern era than women in Connie's day.

Jean makes a long speech to Connie about the shame she'll carry for the rest of life if she keeps the baby, calling her a "slut" and accusing her of being a "loose woman" with "no morals" and a "bastard" child. Connie is indignant, but when Jean argues that it shames not only her but her brothers, especially Kip, Connie softens. Jean hopes that someday Connie will have the chance to have children the right way, with a husband, but for now she knows a "respectable woman" on Victoria Street who can provide an abortion and solve this problem. But they have to go today.

The shame that Jean tells Connie she'll face as a single mother seems grotesque by modern standards, again suggesting that women today face less stigma—though some of it still remains—around sexuality. The fact that Connie agrees to have the abortion only when she realizes her pregnancy will bring Kip shame, as well, suggests that her concern for him and his future outweighs her concern for herself.

Inside, Francis is about to go to school. Jean asks Kip if he's ever seen Connie go out with a boy, and Kip says he hasn't, though seems to be withholding something. Jean gives him a long list of errands to run so that the house will be empty when they return, and she can say Connie is sick with a bad flu all week.

The fact that Kip seems to be hiding something suggests that he has some idea of whom Connie may have been seeing, though this will not be revealed until the final narrative.

With the boys out of the way, Jean takes Connie and all the money she's saved over the years and leads her to Victoria Street. Connie is extremely ill and "reluctant, but without the strength to fight." As they walk, Jean realizes Connie probably wishes she could just kill herself instead, Jean feels that way herself quite often, but "it's a coward's way out." They arrive at a nice, clean dress shop and enter. Jean tells the clerk that they are there to see the store owner for a "personal matter." The store owner arrives and mentions that it's been a long time since Jean has needed their services.

Although Jean seems spiteful and neglectful to Kip, Jean's wish that she could just end it all but determination to keep on living again suggests that motherhood is a greater burden on her than Kip could ever realize. Though far from perfect, Jean seems to be doing the best she can. However, the store owner's comment implies that Jean has had an abortion herself, yet she is still angry at Connie for going through the same thing, which suggests that she is hypocritical and overly-harsh toward her children.

The store owner ushers them to a closed-off dressing room in the back of the store and charges a high price, all the money that Jean's family has saved. Jean pays and helps Connie lay on the bench. Connie is again resistant, stating that her baby is all she has of its father, but Jean presses her to proceed. An old seamstress with calloused hands comes in to prepare for the operation. They give Connie a tall shot of whiskey, and as she watches her daughter drink it down, Jean reflects on the pity of her daughter trusting her to take care of everything, just like she was a small child again. Jean is not allowed to be there during the procedure, so she steps out of the dress shop, leaving Connie to the care of the old woman.

The price of the operation and the unsanitary, unprofessional conditions in which Connie must have her abortion in greatly contrasts with the medical abortion available to Charlotte, which is safe, clean, affordable. This contrast again suggests that women in Charlotte's era enjoy far more freedom and better access to birth control measures than women in the past. Although Jean heavily pressures Connie to have the abortion even though she does not want it, Jean's inner narrative suggests she is only doing what she thinks is best for their family.

While she waits, Jean goes home to do chores while the house is empty, and she realizes it's the first moment of solitude she's had in years. She reflects on motherhood, which is a gift in that while your children are alive in the world you can never feel truly alone. On the other hand, thinking of the Hustings mourning their lost son, it also brings the greatest pain in the world when something you were supposed to protect and take care of dies, even more so than when a husband dies, since they should be able to take care of themselves. She returns to retrieve Connie.

Once again, in spite of Kip and the reader's view that Jean seems a poor mother, her narrative argues that she is doing the best that she can with her limited means. While this does not excuse her mean spirit, selfishness, or favoritism, it does go a long way in fleshing Jean out as a full character and helping the reader to sympathize with her crushing burden of responsibility.

Jean finds the dress shop emptied for the evening and the old woman and Connie waiting outside. Under her dress, Connie has a towel to stop the bleeding fastened by a belt around her waist. She is pale. As Jean helps her home, she notes that her daughter feels lighter than before, and wants to get her in bed and settled before her brothers get home.

Connie's lightness is likely not due to the fetus removed from her womb, but rather a figurative reflection of the burden of responsibility that has been lifted from her shoulders by the abortion, since she no longer has to face the prospect of life a single mother.

However, when they are nearly there, walking up a side street, Connie doubles over in pain and slumps against the wall, sliding down to sit on the ground. Jean sees a dark stain spreading down Connie's dress and thinks she must have sat in a puddle, until she catches the metallic scent and realizes it is blood. Lots of blood. Jean tries to pick her up, but she's "dead weight" now, unmanageable, though still conscious. Connie mumbles that she was going to have the baby, she'd already decided and wrote to the father, they'd be there waiting for him when he returned. Now it's sitting in a biscuit tin on the ground. Jean runs off to find help.

Connie's abortion and subsequent hemorrhage are doubly tragic, since if she had kept the baby as she'd wanted to, she would also still be alive and healthy, even though she faced a very difficult prospect as a single mother. Connie's apparent shift in Jean's arms from a light load to dead weight reflects that Connie's death will be a greater burden on Jean's conscience and character than if Connie had lived, had the baby, and faced the social stigma that came with it.

When Connie was a child, although everyone says not to leave a baby alone in a bath or they might drown, Connie never did. Jean would tell her to sit up straight and not fall into the water, then leave to do chores and return later and Connie would still be there, sitting up as told, playing in the water. Jean trusts Connie. When she leaves her to go find help, and finds none on the empty street, that what Jean thinks about. "That's the only reason I leave her."

Jean's memory of Connie's ability to take care of herself even as a child seems to be Jean's way of justifying the fact that she left Connie sitting on the street while she went to find help. This suggests that Jean is haunted by guilt over the decision to leave her daughter where she sat, bleeding out.

CHAPTER 8: ALEC

Alec sits outside alone while a jet flies overhead, "away from home in a world of strangers." He doesn't have his sketchbook because he forgot it, and no phone because Charlotte won't let him for fear of the radiation, because she's intent on "making [him] a leper." Alec thinks of his friends, who are off somewhere playing Xbox in Tim's garage or at the movies. Charlotte wouldn't let Alec go out with his friends earlier that evening and is "ruining [his] life," so he walked out. At least Stanzi understands that he's 17 and basically an adult. Stanzi gives him space. Alec imagines himself driving away forever in two years when he has his driver's license. He considers taking the tram farther away just to see where it goes, but he decides to go home.

The presence of jets and an Xbox in Alec's narrative immediately establishes that it takes place in the early 2000s. Alec's running away from Charlotte and feeling that she is oppressing him and ruining his life establishes the conflict between mother and son as the primary conflict of this chapter. In this regard, Alec's situation bears some semblance to Kip's conflict with Jean in Kip's narrative, since he, too, felt mistreated by his own mother and resented her. However, the suffering that Kip experienced seems substantially greater than Alec's.

When Alec gets home, his sister Libby is standing in the kitchen cleaning silverware. She yells to her mom that Alec is back, and Alec insults her. They bicker angrily, Alec insulting her intelligence and infuriating her—since he ran off, she had to do all the housework herself. He then goes up to his room and grabs his sketchpad, ready to sketch Charlotte's "maternal fury."

In spite of Alec's similar position to Kip, his relationship to his sister is far less admirable or affectionate than Kip's to Connie, depicting Alec as an angst-ridden, immature teenager rather than a young boy trying to survive the world after the loss of his father.

Charlotte comes in, furious that he ran away while she was talking to him, and forces him to call her "mother" rather than "Charlotte." Alec is snide and sarcastic, only making Charlotte more furious. Alec complains about not having an Xbox or a TV in his room, saying that he lives in "Nazi Germany." She tells him she can do whatever he wants when he's a real adult, and he says the first thing he'll do is get a tattoo. He's not afraid of making permanent decisions, unlike Charlotte's own fear of commitment, demonstrated by her two children and no boyfriend. Charlotte's had enough and yells for Stanzi to come talk to him instead.

Alec's description of his own suffering—living without a TV in his room or an Xbox—as living in Nazi Germany suggests that he has a wildly-inflated view of his own suffering, again depicting him as little more than an immature child. However, Alec does make the astute observation that Charlotte fears commitment and making such weighty decisions, which should recall in the reader's mind that she relied on the pendant and fate to even decide whether or not to have Alec at all.

Stanzi, who is now a personal trainer, bounds up the stairs. Alec thinks she must rush to help all the time because she and Charlotte are afraid that if he or Libby are ever left alone with any unanswered questions, they'll suddenly realize they have two "smother mothers" and no fathers besides their two distant, biological dads. Stanzi is not angry like Charlotte, and jokes about living as an Amish person while Alec complains about Charlotte's weird rules. After listening sympathetically for a bit, Stanzi reminds him that they have an anniversary to get to, and it means a lot to his grandfather, Kip].

Stanzi's transformation from an overweight and cynical counselor to a fit and positive physical trainer demonstrates each individual's capacity to change themselves over time—for the better, in Stanzi's case. Additionally, Stanzi's position as the second parent in lieu of any fatherly demonstrates that in an unconventional family, individuals may change rules and new structures may emerge.

Alec's grandmother Annabel, Kip, and Uncle Frank arrive, and the whole family sits down to eat. Although Kip and Annabel speak positively of Charlotte's vegan casserole, nobody eats much. Frank tells Libby about how the whole family used to live in this house, and then just himself after Kip moved out, and then he gave it to Stanzi and Charlotte and moved himself into the nursing home after he retired from the law firm. Alec thinks Stanzi and Charlotte are "lame" for staying in the same house all these years.

Again, in spite of Jean and Mrs. Husting's belief that Kip would never amount to anything, Alec's narrative reveals that Kip fathered two generations, proving his own value and arguing that one should not judge a person entirely on their limited perception in that moment in time.

When the meal is over, Kip stands to make a speech about his marriage with Annabel 50 years ago and how happy he is to have the whole family at one table. Alec is bored. Kip talks about how it bothered him that he and Annabel only had the one **amethyst pendant** to give and two daughters—even though Stanzi took cash instead. He gives Stanzi the **shilling**, now threaded on a silver chain, making her well up with tears, and enough money to Charlotte to make her cry as well. Kip makes a scene of looking for his glasses in his pockets, and then asks Alec to go retrieve them from his car.

The fact that Stanzi wells up with tears at Kip's gift of the shilling—which she'd previously disregarded and tried to replace with just another penny—suggests that she has let go of much of the bitter cynicism she carried at 35 and now appreciates the gift and the loving connection it represents between family members. Once again, Stanzi's marked transformation demonstrates each individuals potential to change and grow into a happier, healthier version of themselves.

Alec walks out to the car, thinking about all the different generations in that house and how they all know exactly who they are, except for he and Libby who only half-know on account of their absent fathers. When Alec opens the car door he finds the glasses next to a package with his name on it. He opens it, finding a note from Kip explaining that this is his gift, though he should probably keep it a secret. Alec opens the box and is thrilled to find a new Nintendo DS. However, he realizes that he needs to find a place to hide it from Charlotte; his room won't work. Searching around the outside of the house, Alec finds a loose brick in the wall and pulls it out, but finds something else already stashed in there.

Although Alec technically knows who both he and Libby's biological fathers are, his feeling of not truly knowing who he is suggests that it takes an actual relationship to know someone. This is significant, since Alec himself fantasizes about taking off and running away, beholden to no one, though he apparently does not make the connection that is what his own father, Craig, did. This contradiction suggests that Alec will face his own decision someday to either stay put and accept himself and the people around him, or to leave and abandon that identity.

Alec brings the item, a biscuit tin, inside to show everyone. Kip asks him to open it and he does, pulling out an old photo of a woman hoisted up on a soldier's shoulder, kissing another soldier as he leans out of a train. Kip looks at it, silent, face almost anguished. He tries to stand but falls over, and they lay him on the couch. Charlotte tries to call an ambulance, but Kip and Annabel insists he's fine. Kip explains it's a photo of his sister. Kip never knew that Connie had the photo developed. He reveals to the family that Connie didn't die of the flu, as everyone said, and explains about her abortion. Charlotte is angry about the "ridiculous sexist taboos" but Annabel explains that's just how the world was back then. Kip looks at Alec and tells him that Alec gave Connie back to him.

The photo described is the same photo on the cover of the novel, which inspired the final chapter, as well as the entire story that precedes it and each of the nine main characters involved. The fact that Kip hid the true cause of Connie's death for so long suggests that it was a point of great shame and pain for his family long after she died. Charlotte's angry reaction at the shame Connie had to face and the awful conditions of the operation reveals just how far society's acceptance of abortion and view of women has come.


As Annabel and Uncle Frank are getting ready to leave, Charlotte realizes that Kip has disappeared. Alec finds him in the backyard, standing beneath a tree, which he says is the last place he ever saw Connie alive. Connie never got to see Kip marry or meet his children; she was only 19 when she died. Kip takes Alec's face in his hands and tells him that every time he sees someone he leaves may be the last, and he needs to love them in that moment, to kiss them goodbye each time. As Kip leaves, Alec thinks about how frail he seems now, and thinks back on the way that Kip stood in for his and Libby's father throughout their childhood, performing all the fatherly duties. After Kip's kissed everyone goodbye, Stanzi drives them home and then goes out for the night.

Alec's recollection of Kip fulfilling the fatherly duties for himself and Libby suggests that although they technically had two parents, Charlotte and Stanzi, their fathers' absences was still felt. Even so, Kip stepping in to fulfill that fatherly role when needed again demonstrates the manner in which an unconventional family structure can still function just as well when individuals adapt and are willing to take on new roles. Importantly, Kip seems just as loving and supportive as any father could be, suggesting that although it is unconventional, their family is as loving and beautiful as any.

As Libby, Charlotte, and Alec are about to go to bed, they all notice that Kip has left the photo sitting on the couch. Charlotte begs Alec to take it, since she thinks Kip must be frantic without it. Alec doesn't want to since he'll have to take two trams to get to the nursing home and won't be home until very late. However, Charlotte begs him and makes him feel guilty by saying that Kip is old and might die this very night, and then Alec would feel terrible for not doing this nice thing for him. After pleading and negotiating, Alec finally relents, leaving with the photo in the biscuit tin in his backpack.

Although Alec is reluctant, his eventual willingness to carry the photo to his grandparents suggests that despite being an angst-ridden and often ungrateful teenager, he does truly love his family. Although Charlotte's begging and guilt-tripping can be read as manipulative, since it is not for her own gain, it seems just as likely to be rooted in her deep love for Kip and wish for him to be reunited with the photo.

Alec is near the first tram station when a shiny red sports car pulls up, the nicest car Alec has ever seen. As Alec is marveling at it, the window rolls down and Alec sees it's Tim and and his friends; one of their older brothers is at the wheel. They just got the car and have a bunch of beer, and are going to road trip the to beach and spend the night. They want Alec to join them. Alec reflects on the fact that he's done nothing in life until this moment. This could be the greatest night of his life: beer, pizza on the beach, maybe even girls in bikinis.

Once again, Alec's idea that he's accomplished nothing in his young life but could somehow redeem himself by partying on the beach suggests that he is quite immature. However, the chance to drink beer, eat pizza, and drive around in a fancy car represents a rare opportunity for Alec to feel like a normal teenager with normal parents, rather than the son of an eccentric single mother.

As Alec puts his hand on the door to climb inside, he feels the strap of his backpack and remembers the photo and Kip. He feels trapped. If he doesn't go, his friends will make fun of them like people did at school when they found at he had two moms, and assumed that they were gay and he was gay too. But on the other hand, Kip could die tonight without the photo of Connie. Alec hates himself for it, feels as if his life is over, but decides he has to go to the nursing home. His friends call him a loser and speed off, and Alec thinks they'll never hang out with him again. He'll be a loser forever.

The derision Alec receives at school for having two moms (who in reality are sisters, not a gay couple) demonstrates that in spite of all the ways society has progressed, many of the same old stigmas and prejudices exist, including the general intolerance toward unconventional families. Alec's choice between going with his friends or taking the photo to his grandparents represents the greater choice about honoring his family or meeting the expectations of his peers and society at large.

Alec enters the nursing home where Kip, Annabel, and Frank all live together, and finds Kip and Annabel's apartment. They don't understand why he is there at first, but he tells them he came to drop off the photo. Kip is stunned that he left it behind and Alec realizes that he didn't even know it was missing. He could have gone with his friends and given it to Kip another day. Alec is furious at himself. But now, with nothing better to do, he stays and has tea with Kip while Kip tells him about the old days, about Frank and Connie, and he holds the photo in both hands. While Kip is talking, Alec thinks about how, although Libby annoys him, he'd never want to lose her: "While Libby is alive, I know I'll never really be alone."

Although Alec's choice to honor his family and be loyal to them was not as dire as Charlotte made it seem—since Kip was not frantic—his prioritization of family over friends or fitting in seems to help him recognize the true value of his family, and especially of Libby. Alec's belief that family keeps one from truly being alone mirrors Jean's belief that children keep one from being alone, suggesting that family is the most valuable thing an individual can have, even when they don't get along.

When Alec opens the door to his own home, Charlotte yells at him; he should've been home hours ago, except he stayed to talk to Kip. Alec is about to protest when Charlotte wraps her arms around him like she never has before, sobbing. She has to reach up to hold onto his neck, and Alec realizes for the first time how small his own mother is compared to him, and how she'll only get smaller while he grows larger. He lifts her off the floor with his own hug and comforts her as best he can.

Alec's realization that he is growing larger while his mother seems to grow smaller parallels Jack's realization that he is outgrowing his parents. However, Alec's realization seems to help him recognize the difficulty of Charlotte's position as well, offering some level of empathy for her as she watches her own son, to whom she gave birth, rise above her.

Charlotte, sobbing, gasps about a traffic accident on the freeway on the news. Over her shoulder on the TV, Alec sees the same red sports car in which his friends were riding. He kneels in front of the TV, touching the screen, looking at the wrecked car and bodies covered by tarps. The newscaster rambles about a possibly stolen vehicle, drunk driving, and families who've lost their sons.

The fact that Alec could have died had he chosen friends and fun over loyalty to his family affirms his decision. This suggests that even an unconventionally formed family is the most important thing in one's life, and should be seen a gift.

CHAPTER 9: CONNIE

Connie lies awake at night. The mild winter air is humid and still, and it feels as if it will rain. Connie peeks at Jean and sees her fast asleep, which is fortunate for both of them. She rises, sees her brothers asleep in their room as well, and creeps to the front door to look out at Richmond in the dark. She closes the door. She knows she should go back to sleep; she has to work in the morning, only a few hours from now. Instead, Connie takes off her nightgown and puts on her daytime dress.

By setting Connie's narrative as the last, the structure of the book establishes her story as the focal point around which all the other narratives revolve. Additionally, Connie's narrative describes the scene from the real-life historical photo of a departing soldier kissing a woman through a train window, which inspired the entire book.

When Connie opens the door and steps out again she sees Jack watching her, waiting for her. She steps out to meet him in the night and they are both silent for a long time. Jack is on leave, but he's returning to combat tomorrow. Connie feels as if they are in a separate world, in a private world that only reaches as far as the small light from the streetlight reveals. They talk about his returning—it's hard on his parents. They won't even come to the train station to see him off. The rain begins to fall, but Connie does not want to go inside yet. They're both soaked within seconds, and Jack grabs her by the hand and leads her to his parents' stable, where it is warmer and dry.

The fact that Jack is on leave from the military implies that he has already enlisted, which means that it takes place at least several months after Jack's narrative earlier in the story. The fact that Jack's mother won't come to see him off as he ships off for war suggests that she does not respect his decision. However, for Jack, going off to war likely seems like a good way to put distance between himself and his overbearing mother once again, so that he can stand as an adult on his own.

Jack and Connie talk and pet Charlie. Jack says he wished he'd come home from the station years earlier, but he didn't realize how good the neighbors were. Connie he remarks soon he'll be off again, this time farther away. When Jack mentions that Mrs. Husting thinks Connie will be engaged to Mr. Ward any day now, Connie decides she'll make a run for home through the rain. She needs to get back to her own bed, to Jean and her family. Jack stands close to her and asks her not to go. He slides her dress sleeve up her arm and runs his hand down the length of it, wicking away the water.

Jack's remark about the neighbors implies that he wishes he'd have gotten to know Connie sooner than he did, since they grew up right next to each other and never realized the relationship they could have had during that time. Connie's stated wish to return to her own bed suggests that she feels the growing tension and allure between them, and is caught between acting on her desires or returning to her sensible, responsible life.

Jack puts his hands on her waist and tells Connie that he thinks about her every night when he walks the city, and tonight she is here. She looks into his eyes, dark and beautiful, and steps toward him, pressing the full length of her body against him. Jack whispers that if she lets him kiss her, he can die "a happy man." He kisses her and she kisses him back, until they almost fall over and find themselves sitting on the floor, Connie across Jack's lap.

Despite Connie's initial hesitation, pressing her body against Jack's clearly suggests that she already feels a desire for him. Connie's hesitation seems then to be a consequence of society's repression of women's sexuality outside of marriage during this time, and demonstrates the conflict between what she desires to do and the morality with which she has been raised.

As they continue kissing, Jack takes Connie's breast in his hand. They both try to stop themselves but unable. Connie thinks that she has kept herself from ever desiring anything in her life until now. In this moment she understands what desire truly is and gives herself over to it. It gives her a sense power. They undress each other and have sex in the stable, and for those brief minutes they are "utterly together."

Connie's realization suggests that she has been so burdened and preoccupied with tending to and supporting her family that she has repressed any desires she may feel as a young woman. This contrasts with the comparative sexual freedom Charlotte experiences as a woman in the modern era.

As Connie dresses, thinking about how she needs to get home and bathe before the sun comes up, Jack tells her that he doesn't expect her to wait for him while he's at war—he knows that she has a life planned out for her and he has "nothing to offer." Connie says that it's only the life that Jean planned, and she'll make her own decisions. Jack only has one request.

Connie's insistence that marrying Mr. Ward is not her plan, but Jean's, suggests that had she survived, she would have waited for Jack. Thus, it's clear that she values love and passion over wealth and security.

Connie and Kip are at the train station, under the pretense of meeting a photographer there for the newspaper to photograph the departing soldiers who are packing the trains. Connie brought a spare camera in case the photographer, who hasn't arrived, runs out of film. She's amazed that although she feels entirely different, transformed from the inside, even Kip does not notice a difference in her.

Connie's feeling of transformation suggests that her brief romance with Jack is a coming of age experience for her, the moment in which she discovers what passion and desire truly mean to her. This development only makes her eventual death more tragic.

Kip spots Jack leaning out of a train car window and points him out to Connie, calling out to him. The photographer still hasn't arrived, so Connie gives Kip the camera and tells him not to hit the button since it's already loaded with film. She pushes through the crowd to see Jack one last time. Another soldier sees Jack leaning down and Connie reach up, so he hoists Connie onto his shoulder and lifts her into the air. Connie kisses Jack as the train begins to roll away, carrying her love away from her. The other soldier sets her down and disappears into the crowd. As the soldiers and the crowd leave, Connie fears that she'll forget that kiss, forget Jack's face. Kip appears at her side, hands her the camera, and claims he didn't touch any buttons, just as she said.

Although Kip claims not to have taken any pictures, the existence of the photo (which Alec finds in the biscuit tin many years later) suggests that he secretly did. This also seems to be the first photo Kip takes in the course of his eventual photography career. Connie's willingness to kiss Jack even in front of a crowd of people, including Kip, suggests that her love and desire for him has given her a new sense of courage, confidence, and something to look forward to in life. Again, this moment, though fictional, is the same moment captured in the historical photo which inspired Toni Jordan to write the novel.

Connie lies in bed, night after night, grateful for life even though she doesn't know what the future will be. She thinks about her brothers, about Jean stuck with no husband and three children, and about her own grandmother, practically enslaved to her husband. In all of it, Connie thinks, the secret to being happy is to be grateful. She has had one night with the man she loves and, "just this once, I have had something that my heart wanted."

Connie's reflection of her grandmother's near-slavery, Jean's difficult position as a single mother, and Connie's own lot as a woman in a male-dominated society suggests that she will accept this role, since she has already learned that she can be happy in spite of its limitations.

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