

Noughts and Crosses



INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF MALORIE BLACKMAN

Blackman was born in London, England to Barbadian immigrants. As a kid, she wanted to be an English teacher, but she initially attended college to become a systems programmer instead. She later graduated from the National Film and Television School. Since starting to publish in 1990, Blackman has published a number of novels for adults and children, short stories, picture books, and early chapter books, in addition to writing for film, radio, and the stage. In terms of her novels, Blackman is best known for the *Noughts & Crosses* series, which consists of five novels and three companion novellas. The first in the series, *Noughts & Crosses*, was voted number 61 on BBC's 2003 "Big Read" list, ranking ahead of Charles Dickens's *A Tale of Two Cities* and some of Terry Pratchett's novels. She also made history by being the first Black person to ever work on the television show *Doctor Who*. She received an OBE (a British order of chivalry) in 2008 for her contributions to literature. She lives with her husband and daughter in Kent, England.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Blackman has said that *Noughts & Crosses* was inspired in part by the 1993 murder—and subsequent trial—of Stephen Lawrence, a Black teenager. Five white men murdered Lawrence while he was waiting for a bus in London, and though witnesses contacted the police with information about the perpetrators in the days following the incident, the police didn't arrest anyone for weeks. By 1996, all five suspects had been acquitted. But in 1997, the Home Office opened an inquest into the murder. Further investigations uncovered institutional racism and general incompetence in the local police force, and in 2012, two of the suspects were found guilty of murder. More broadly, though, *Noughts & Crosses* draws on the history of the legacy of slavery, Jim Crow (racial segregation) laws, and institutional racism in the United States, in addition to apartheid (a period of legally mandated racial segregation) in South Africa. The way that Callum and Sephy describe the first day of integrating Heathcroft directly mirrors what happened on the first day the Little Rock Nine, a group of Black high school students, tried to integrate Central High School in Arkansas in 1957. Furthermore, some of the arguments Callum's mum and dad have allude to arguments about how Black people should most effectively protest for equality: Mum supports a man who resembles Martin Luther King, Jr. in that he believes in peaceful protests and has been imprisoned many times for those protests. Dad's belief in armed protest seems

more in line with the aims of the Black Panther Party (though the Black Panthers were not involved in organizing violent events like what the Liberation Militia plans in the novel).

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Noughts & Crosses is the first in an eight-book series that continues Sephy's story of raising her daughter and then shifts to follow her daughter and other characters in future generations. It also includes three novellas that offer more backstory into characters from the first novel. In the way that the novel explores how people—specifically young people—become radicalized, *Noughts & Crosses* is similar to Neil Shusterman's dystopian novel *Unwind*. Some of the novel's early scenes, when Callum and other noughts are integrating Sephy's high school, also closely mirror scenes that Melba Beals detailed in her memoir *Warriors Don't Cry* (Beals is one of the Little Rock Nine, the group of Black students who integrated Little Rock's Central High School in the 1960s). Sephy and Callum's story of forbidden, doomed love takes inspiration from Shakespeare's classic play *Romeo and Juliet*, which has in turn inspired numerous other novels such as *These Violent Delights* by Chloe Gong and *City of Bones* by Cassandra Clare. And *Noughts & Crosses* is one of many novels that explores alternate histories, or what might have happened if history had unfolded differently (so in *Noughts & Crosses*, if Africa had colonized the rest of the world instead of Europeans colonizing the world). *The Man in the High Castle* by Philip K. Dick imagines what might have happened had the Axis alliance won World War II, while Ward Moore's novel *Bring the Jubilee* is about the Confederacy winning the Civil War.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *Noughts & Crosses* (also published as *Naughts & Crosses* and *Black & White*)
- **When Written:** 2000
- **Where Written:** England
- **When Published:** 2001
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary
- **Genre:** Young Adult Dystopian Fiction
- **Setting:** Early-2000s UK, in an alternate universe
- **Climax:** There is no single climax, given that there are several distinct story arcs, each with its own climax.
- **Antagonist:** Racism, Sephy's parents
- **Point of View:** First Person, narrated alternately by Sephy and Callum

EXTRA CREDIT

In the Real World. The Black explorers and inventors that Mr. Jason mentions in his history class are all real historical figures. Matthew Henson, the Black co-discoverer of the geographic North Pole, was also the first Black member of the prestigious Explorers Club (and more recently, in 2021, had a lunar crater named after him). Charles R. Drew, who invented the blood bank and was the first to separate plasma from blood, also protested racial segregation in blood donation. He even resigned from the American Red Cross (which initially barred Black people from donating and then kept blood from Black and white donors separate until 1950) in protest.



PLOT SUMMARY

Best friends Callum and Sephy are at their secret **spot on the beach**, where they kiss to see what it's like. Sephy is almost 14 and is thrilled that 15-year-old Callum will be attending her school this year to integrate it. Callum, though, isn't sure he and Sephy should act like friends at school—he's a nought and she's a Cross, and noughts and Crosses don't mix. That night, Sephy overhears her father, Mr. Hadley, meeting with a nought man and saying that he's angry "blankers" (a terrible slur for noughts) are attending his daughter's school.

The first day of school is horrible for Sephy and Callum both. A mob outside protests the nought students, and Sephy gets the mob to disperse by screaming that her classmates are acting like "blankers." Callum is hurt and offended, so Sephy agrees not to use the slur again.

Over the next few weeks, life gets harder for Sephy and Callum. At home, Callum's mum and dad fight about how to best fight for racial equality, while his brother Jude and sister Lynette (who's mentally ill and suffers delusions that she's a Cross) butt heads. Callum also starts to suspect that Dad and Jude are part of the Liberation Militia, an underground resistance group. Meanwhile, Sephy tries to help the noughts at school by sitting with them at lunch, but the school punishes her for this, and three girls viciously beat her up in retaliation. Sephy's actions offend Callum and make him feel angry and ashamed, and Callum's lack of enthusiasm makes Sephy feel bad just for being a Cross. She also becomes uncomfortably aware of how racist her culture is, and she fears that her parents will divorce as their fighting escalates.

Callum gets home one day to find Jude and Lynette exchanging blows. To stop all three children from fighting, Dad tells Jude and Callum why Lynette is ill: three years ago, she and her Cross boyfriend were beaten for being in an interracial relationship. One night, Lynette leaves the dinner table to go on a walk. Hours later, police come to the house and deliver the news that Lynette was hit by a bus and killed. They say it was an accident, but Callum discovers a letter from Lynette under his

pillow admitting she committed suicide. He vows to keep this secret. At about the same time, Sephy's mother attempts to commit suicide but survives.

Sephy is the only Cross to attend Lynette's funeral, but her presence isn't well-received; Dad and Jude both tell her to leave. In the weeks after the funeral, Callum realizes that Dad and Jude are becoming more involved with the LM. Mother's drinking escalates, which frightens Sephy—but her sister Minnie says they shouldn't do anything.

Six months after Lynette dies, Callum and Sephy decide to meet at the mall—but Jude tells Callum very seriously not to go. Suspecting the worst, Callum races for the mall and drags Sephy out—just before a bomb explodes, killing seven people. Enraged when she realizes that Dad and Jude were involved, Mum slaps Dad so hard she breaks her finger. At the hospital, so she can receive treatment, Mum allows the nurse to scan Callum and Jude's ID cards, which are linked to their fingerprints. That night, to help herself sleep, Sephy tries wine for the first time.

The next week is tense at the McGregor house, as Mum attempts to kick Dad out. But one night, police come to the house and arrest everyone except Jude, who is out. After a full night of interrogations, Mum and Callum learn that the police have identified Jude as the bomber—but also that the police are charging Dad with the crimes. Mum and Callum hire a nought lawyer, Mr. Stanhope, who insists Dad's case is a lost cause. But when he visits Dad, Mum and Callum learn that the police told Dad that they had Jude in custody, and that they would release him if Dad confessed to the bombing. Dad is enraged when he learns the police don't have Jude, but there's no way to take back his confession.

Sephy watches the case unfold on the news from home, and she knows Dad is innocent. Callum is suspended from school for no reason, but he's somewhat hopeful about Dad's prospects when an anonymous benefactor—presumably Sephy—pays for one of the best lawyers in the country, Kelani Adams, to represent Dad. But though Dad pleads not guilty to all the charges, and though Kelani mounts an impressive case, the jury finds Dad guilty of all the charges.

One hot afternoon, Mother makes Sephy put on an expensive dress to go to some undisclosed location. Sephy enters Hewmett Prison extremely confused and doesn't realize she's at Dad's execution until guards bring him out to the scaffold. However, just before Dad is killed, the prison governor stays the execution. When Mum and Callum get to see Dad hours later, Dad says he's done fighting. Sephy is extremely disturbed by the day's events—and is then confused when she learns Mother paid the McGregors' legal fees. She goes to bed and cries herself to sleep.

Sephy wakes in the middle of the night to rocks hitting her window—it's Callum. He climbs up to her bedroom, enraged by

all Crosses' behavior and half-wanting to take it out on Sephy. Instead, though, he lies down with Sephy, and she falls asleep. Callum considers hurting her but kisses her instead. He sneaks out in the morning. Not long after, Dad dies when he's electrocuted by the prison fence.

Months later, out of the blue, Jude approaches Callum at a burger joint and invites him to join the LM. Feeling he has no other options, Callum agrees. At the same time, Sephy's parents have finally agreed that she can go away to boarding school—but Sephy writes Callum a letter asking him to run away with her instead. Callum doesn't read the letter until it's too late, so he and Sephy part ways for two and a half years. During this time, Callum works his way up the LM ranks, hurting and killing Crosses and losing his humanity in the process. Sephy quits drinking, finds herself at school, and joins a resistance group. She decides to be a lawyer like Kelani Adams when she grows up.

After finishing school, Sephy unwillingly returns home. She's shocked to find a letter from Callum, inviting her to meet him on the beach. Sephy goes to the beach—but Callum is there with his LM cell (which temporarily includes Jude) to kidnap Sephy and extract a ransom out of Mr. Hadley. The cell takes Sephy to a remote house, where Jude makes Callum prove his loyalty to the LM by tasking Callum with cutting Sephy's finger, smearing the blood on a shirt, and filming Sephy reading the demands for her father.

The cell is expecting the General of the LM's second-in-command to visit them at their remote location, but Callum is immediately suspicious of the man, Andrew Dorn. When Andrew asks to see Sephy, Sephy visibly startles at the sight of him. The next day, Andrew, Jude, and three other members of the cell, Morgan, Leila, and Pete, leave to deliver more demands to Mr. Hadley, leaving Callum to guard Sephy.

Alone in the house together, Sephy and Callum have sex, and Sephy instantly bursts into tears afterwards. Jude and Morgan return before Sephy and Callum are fully dressed and while Sephy is still crying. They conclude that Callum raped Sephy, and they share that someone told the police about them: police arrested Leila, Pete is dead, and Andrew is gone. Jude and Callum fight and while they're distracted, Sephy runs away into the woods. Callum finds her before Jude or Morgan can, and he points her toward safety. Before she leaves, Sephy shares that Andrew is working with Mr. Hadley—Andrew is the man she saw meeting with Mr. Hadley years ago. Sephy gets home safely, and Callum, Morgan, and Jude split up for their safety.

Five weeks after returning home, Sephy discovers she's pregnant. Though Minnie initially agrees to keep Sephy's pregnancy a secret, she ultimately tells Mother and Mr. Hadley. Mr. Hadley insists that Sephy get an abortion, but she refuses. Callum learns about Sephy's pregnancy on the radio a few months later, and he heads home to see her.

Callum and Sephy meet in the Hadleys' rose garden, but the police ambush them and arrest Callum. Nobody will believe Sephy or Callum that he didn't rape her, though Sephy begins speaking publicly about not having been raped. Following Callum's trial, in which he's found guilty, Mr. Hadley makes a final attempt to manipulate the couple: he tells them both that if Sephy gets an abortion, he won't let the authorities hang Callum. They reject his manipulation, and Callum screams that he loves Sephy as he's hanged. Not long after, Sephy gives birth to a baby girl.



CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Callum McGregor – One of the protagonists and a nought, the novel follows Callum from age 15 to 19. He's been best friends with Sephy for her entire life, but in the novel's present, the two can only spend time together at their secret [spot on the beach](#). Though Callum loves Sephy—as a friend and as a potential romantic partner—he sometimes finds her naïve and insufferable. She doesn't understand that Callum's skin color causes him to feel intense shame, as does the fact that his family is extremely poor. However, Callum begins the novel hopeful, as he's one of the first nought students to integrate Sephy's prestigious Crosses-only school. But as students and staff at school bully Callum, he becomes angry and ashamed—and less willing to put up with Sephy's misguided attempts to help. However, Callum's lack of support for Sephy's attempts leads Sephy to believe Callum is turning his back on her. As Callum's anger mounts, he learns that Dad and Jude are involved with the Liberation Militia. He also learns the truth about his older sister, Lynette, who suffers from delusions that she's a Cross: that she was beaten for having a Cross boyfriend and is still recovering from that trauma. When Lynette dies, Callum is the only one who knows that she killed herself, and this weighs on him. Things get worse for Callum when Dad and Jude are involved in a mall bombing—and Dad is imprisoned, convicted, and sentenced to death when he didn't commit the crime. Following Dad's death, Callum joins the LM—though he tries first, and fails, to run away with Sephy. Callum quickly moves up the ranks of the LM and feels like he's losing his soul as he does, but he doesn't care. He agrees to help his cell kidnap Sephy, but things become even more complicated between the couple when they have sex during Sephy's imprisonment. Callum helps her escape. When he later hears that Sephy is pregnant with his baby, Callum goes to her and is arrested and charged with rape. Both he and Sephy refuse to give into Mr. Hadley's demands that they publicly state that he raped her. Callum is hanged for the crime.

Sephy Hadley – One of the protagonists, the novel follows privileged Cross Sephy from age 13 to 17. She's been best friends with nought Callum her whole life and believes that it's

going to be great when Callum starts at her prestigious school. However, as school starts, Sephy starts to grow up and let go of some of her idealism. She has a strong sense of justice, so it enrages her that Crosses at school mistreat noughts. And Sephy doesn't believe she's racist, so she occasionally says or does things—such as accusing her classmates of acting like “blankers” or sitting with the noughts at lunch—that offend and humiliate Callum. Though Sephy tries to empathize with Callum, this is hard for her. And more often, she finds herself resenting Callum for making her feel bad just for being a Cross, which damages their friendship (and their mutual crush, which simmers just below the surface for much of the novel). To deal with her confusion and her belief that neither Mother nor Mr. Hadley care about her, Sephy develops a drinking habit. Sephy struggles to comprehend when Callum's Dad is convicted and sentenced to hang, supposedly for setting off a bomb at a local mall. In the aftermath (and after Dad dies in prison), Sephy and Callum struggle even more to connect—but Sephy finally convinces Mother and Mr. Hadley to allow her to attend boarding school. Sephy sends Callum a letter asking him to run away with her instead, but he doesn't see it in time. They don't speak for the two and a half years Sephy is at school. Sephy finds purpose at Chivers and joins a pro-integration group, but everything falls apart when she gets home and agrees to meet Callum. He and his Liberation Militia cell kidnap her for ransom. Callum and Sephy have sex during her imprisonment, and five weeks after she escapes, Sephy discovers she's pregnant. Though her parents pressure her into getting an abortion (and Mr. Hadley tries to coerce Sephy by offering to pull strings so Callum is only imprisoned, rather than executed), Sephy refuses. She attends Callum's hanging and gives birth to a daughter months later.

Mrs. Hadley/Mother – Sephy and Minnie's mother and Mr. Hadley's wife is a wealthy Cross woman. She demands total loyalty from her nought staff (in the prologue, she fires Meggie for not corroborating an alibi in front of Mr. Hadley, but Meggie had no way to know what she was expected to say) and perfection from her daughters. For this, Sephy resents her mother, and she feels like Mother doesn't care about her. Some of this Sephy attributes to Mother's problems with alcohol. Sephy never sees Mother without a glass of white wine, and she believes that alcohol can make Mother happy in a way that Sephy and Minnie will never be able to. Though Sephy never gets to know her mother very well, she does become aware that Mother is deeply unhappy. Mother and Mr. Hadley's marriage has been unsupportive and volatile from the start, when Mother refused to let Mr. Hadley bring a son he had with another woman into the house. At some point, Mother had an affair, supposedly to attract Mr. Hadley's attention—but all that did was anger him and make him more physically and verbally abusive toward her. During the novel, Mother becomes so unhappy and depressed that she attempts to kill herself by taking sleeping pills, though it's also suggested that Mother

does this for attention and not actually to take her own life. In the months after she returns home from the hospital, Mother becomes clingier and more emotional with her daughters—and she also secretly funds Ryan's legal fight when he's accused of carrying out a bombing on a local mall. When Sephy finds out about this, Mother insists that Meggie and Ryan were her friends and she doesn't want to see them die. This, however, reflects Mother's privilege and her incomplete grasp of race relations: Meggie insists that she and Mother were never actually friends, as the power difference between them was too great. When it's revealed that Sephy is pregnant, Mother joins her husband in trying to convince Sephy to get an abortion.

Mr. Kamal Hadley – Sephy and Minnie's father and Mother's husband, Mr. Hadley is a powerful Cross in government: he's the home minister. He's a large, imposing man and is constantly angry and physically violent with his family members, particularly with Mother. It's only later that Sephy finds out that this is because Mr. Hadley and Mother have been having problems for their entire marriage, as Mr. Hadley had a son before he married Mother whom Mother wouldn't allow into her home. And Mother had an affair several years before the novel begins, something Mr. Hadley considers an unspeakable offense and continues to punish her for with his absence, verbal cruelty, and physical violence. Mr. Hadley cares much more about his work than he does about his family members—indeed, Sephy thinks that her father really only had a family at all because it's a prerequisite for being in the government. Though Sephy realizes her father is violent and checked out, it's still a shock for her when, one night, she overhears him having a meeting with a nought—and hears him using the slur “blanker” to refer to noughts. He says that he wouldn't have let noughts into Cross schools if he thought any noughts would get in, and that he only amended the education policy because of international pressure. Again, though, Sephy doesn't have to think about this much, because her father is chronically absent. It is a shock when he and Mother appear to be ready to divorce, and it's an even bigger shock when Minnie is able to convince Dad to let Sephy go away to boarding school. After Sephy is kidnapped, and Sephy's parents discover she's pregnant, Mr. Hadley tries to pressure her into having an abortion. He disowns her and hits her when she refuses but continues to try to pressure her by promising to save Callum (who's imprisoned) from being executed. Still, Sephy refuses to give in.

Minerva “Minnie” Hadley – Sephy's older sister, Minerva (whom Sephy calls Minnie to annoy her) is, in Sephy's mind, her exact opposite. Sephy believes that Mother loves Minnie better because Minnie is supposedly perfect and actually likes being from a wealthy, privileged family. Because of this, the sisters aren't close—and Minnie is distant, mean, and callous to Sephy. She's also selfish and cares about her reputation more than anything else—when girls beat Sephy up at school, Minnie

wants to know who did it, but only so that she can make sure nobody is going to beat *her* up. Sephy is especially hurt early in the novel when she notices Minnie in the mob protesting the integration of Heathcroft. The sisters briefly confide in each other when Mother and Mr. Hadley seem on the brink of divorce, and as Mum's drinking gets worse and worse. Minnie advocates for both herself and Sephy to be allowed to go away to boarding school, but ultimately she's only able to convince their parents to let Sephy go. Their relationship improves somewhat while Sephy is away, and Minnie is the first to catch on to the fact that Sephy is pregnant. But though Sephy confides in Minnie about her pregnancy, Minnie betrays Sephy's trust and tells their parents before Sephy is ready to share.

Meggie McGregor/Mum – Mum is Callum, Jude, and Lynette's mother and Ryan's wife. When readers meet her in the prologue, she's a hopeful person. She works for the Hadley family and dreams of Callum and Sephy, her Cross nannying charge, growing up and falling in love—but these hopes are dashed when Mrs. Hadley fires her. In the ensuing three years, Mum comes to believe that noughts and Crosses shouldn't integrate and should instead remain separate but equal. Because of this, she doesn't support Callum attending Heathcroft and integrating the school. However, as the novel progresses, Mum reveals that this isn't because she doesn't want Callum to succeed—it's because she wants to protect her children from even more racially motivated abuse. Mum's desire to protect her family, though, is complicated initially by her belief that Dad is "ineffectual," and then by Dad's involvement with the Liberation Militia. Mum believes that if integration is going to happen, it should happen through peaceful protest—not violence like the LM espouses. Lynette's death (which nobody but Callum knows was a suicide) drives a wedge further between Mum and Dad. Dad and Jude go on to carry out a bombing on the local mall, which causes Mum to try to kick Dad out so that she can protect Jude and Callum. When Dad is later arrested, Mum throws herself into rounding up a legal team who can defend him, and she remains hopeful after Dad's execution is stayed that Kelani Adams can clear Dad's charges. Mum seems to admit defeat after Dad dies and when Callum reveals that he's joining the LM. After Callum joins the LM, he never sees Mum again, though he does send her money.

Ryan McGregor/Dad – Dad is Callum, Jude, and Lynette's father and Mum's husband. He begins the novel as an easygoing, affable man. But when Mum loses her job and the family falls into poverty, Mum no longer sees Dad as just calm and supportive: she calls him "the most ineffectual man" she's ever met. Jude also resents Dad, but for supporting Callum attending Heathcroft and for supposedly "enabling" Lynette's mental illness (she experiences episodes where she believes she's a Cross). Callum, though, appreciates Dad's support, as Dad is one of his biggest cheerleaders when it comes to

attending Heathcroft and integrating the school. Much of Mum's issue with Dad stems from the fact that she doesn't believe he's properly protecting any of their children, as he supports Callum attending Heathcroft, struggles to protect Lynette from Jude, and ultimately draws Jude into the Liberation Militia. But after Lynette dies, Dad undergoes a change and insists his "ineffectual days" are over—which is implied to mean that Dad ramps up his involvement with the LM. This continues to cause tension in Dad and Mum's marriage, as Mum doesn't believe violence is the way to desegregate society. Despite Mum's disapproval, Dad and Jude are involved in bombing the Dundale Shopping Center and killing seven people. Unfortunately, when the police arrest the McGregors (except Jude) in the middle of the night to question them, Dad believes the officers who say they have Jude—and who say that if Dad accepts responsibility for the bombing, Jude will be okay. He makes a full confession and is enraged when he discovers the truth (that the police never had Jude). Despite pleading not guilty in court, Dad is convicted of murder and political terrorism, and he's sentenced to hang. The prison governor stops Dad's execution at the last minute, but by this point, Dad is done fighting and doesn't want to spend the rest of his life in prison. He dies when he's electrocuted by the prison fence. Noughts believe he died nobly by suicide; Crosses believe he got what he deserved for trying to escape.

Jude McGregor – Jude is Callum's older brother and the middle child of the family. Callum and Jude don't get along and never have: Callum regularly describes Jude as insufferable, or as a "toad." Part of the reason Callum dislikes his brother is that he thinks Jude seems annoyingly angry about the racism and discrimination noughts experience, which leads him to also say disparaging things about Sephy and use the offensive term "dagger" to refer to all Crosses. He also believes that noughts should be proud of who they are and not aspire to be more like Crosses—which is why he's also constantly fighting with his older sister, Lynette, who is mentally ill and experiences episodes where she believes she's a Cross. It's shocking for Jude when Dad explains that Lynette's illness was caused by physical and emotional trauma (she and her Cross boyfriend were beaten almost to death for their interracial relationship). He also struggles to process when Mum reveals that her grandfather was a Cross. Throughout the novel's first year, Callum resents Jude because he comes to suspect that Jude and Dad are involved in the Liberation Militia. It's implied that Jude is the one responsible for the Dundale Shopping Center bombing, as police find Jude's fingerprints on a soda can believed to house the bomb. But Dad ultimately takes the blame for the bombing, and Jude disappears after the trial is over. Not long after, Jude invites Callum to join the Liberation Militia and then again disappears for several years. When Jude and Callum finally reconnect and work together to kidnap Sephy and blackmail Mr. Hadley, Callum still finds Jude frightening and disturbingly hateful. He forces Callum to prove

his loyalty by physically harming Sephy. Jude manages to emerge unscathed when the LM cell is ambushed by police. And though Callum doesn't see Jude again after they split up for safety, Callum believes that Jude is the one responsible for alerting the General to the fact that Andrew Dorn, the second-in-command of the LM, is a double agent.

Lynette McGregor – Lynette is Callum's oldest sibling at 20 years old. When Callum first introduces Lynette to readers, he describes her as somewhat "simple." For the last three years, Lynette has existed in her own world that Callum thinks must be happy. She doesn't go out at all, and she experiences delusions where she insists she's not actually a nought, but a Cross. While Callum, Mum, and Dad go along with Lynette when she experiences her episodes, they make Jude extremely angry—he thinks that Lynette believes she's better than the rest of the family, and that their parents baby her too much. However, one night when Lynette and Jude actually engage in physical violence during one of Lynette's episodes, Dad finally tells Callum and Jude the truth about why Lynette suffers these delusions. Dad reveals that three years ago, Lynette was in a relationship with a Cross boy named Jed, and several nought men beat Lynette and Jed almost to death, just for being in an interracial relationship. Once Jed was released from the hospital, he moved away. But Lynette still struggles to remember that this happened years ago and that she's 20, not 17. And Dad suggests that she can't bear to think of herself as a nought, especially after noughts caused the trauma. Lynette starts to briefly recover when she and Jude fight physically, but she's unable to come to terms with how racist and demeaning the world is to noughts. Several weeks after the altercation with Jude, Lynette walks in front of a bus, killing herself, and makes it look like an accident—but she leaves a note for Callum, telling him the truth. For this, Callum hates Lynette. But several years later, as Callum faces his own execution, he wonders if Lynette may have had the right idea.

Mr. Jason – Mr. Jason is Callum and Sephy's history teacher at Heathcroft. They both find him insufferable because of the way he treats Callum and the other noughts: he regularly insults them, gives them poor grades for no reason, and generally acts like he hates them. When Callum eventually confides in Mrs. Paxton about what's going on in Mr. Jason's classes, she insists that Mr. Jason doesn't actually hate the noughts, because his mother is a nought. With this information, things start to fall into place for Callum (this, for instance, explains Mr. Jason's lighter complexion). But when Callum brings Mr. Jason's parentage up in conversation with Mr. Jason, the teacher's reaction suggests that having a nought mother doesn't make Mr. Jason more sympathetic—indeed, it makes him frightened and hateful of those society deems to be lesser.

Mrs. Paxton – Mrs. Paxton is Callum and Sephy's math teacher at Heathcroft. To Callum's extreme relief, and despite her being a dark-skinned Cross, she's one of the only teachers who treats

Callum like an actual person and not a second-class citizen who doesn't belong in school. She even argues with Mr. Corsa about how the nought students are treated at school and insists that the administration must crack down on the bullying noughts suffer, or risk losing bright students. Mrs. Paxton is also the one to reveal to Callum that Mr. Jason's mother was a nought.

Harry – Harry is the Hadley family's first nought driver. Sephy initially thinks that she and Harry have a close and trusting relationship, as she regularly asks him to drop her off a few blocks from school, and he often complies. But when he unwittingly ends up leaving Sephy to face the mob protesting Heathcroft's integration alone, Mrs. Hadley immediately fires Harry. Sephy doesn't know Harry was fired, though, and takes the new driver, Karl's, word that Harry left voluntarily. Sephy only learns the truth about what happened to Harry when she attends Lynette's funeral and discovers that Harry is actually extremely angry with Sephy and her family.

Sarah Pike – Sarah is Mrs. Hadley's nought personal assistant and secretary. She's blonde and timid, and her expression makes her look permanently surprised. Though she often demonstrates loyalty to Mrs. Hadley (such as by firing Meggie and refusing to let Callum into the Hadley house), Sarah also helps Sephy at times. She delivers an important letter to Callum, and she also helps Sephy hide the fact that Callum spends a night in her bedroom (though she later increases security so Callum can't get back in).

Mr. Corsa – Mr. Corsa is the headmaster at Heathcroft. Despite allowing noughts into the school, Mr. Corsa shows on several occasions that he in no way supports integration. When Shania is injured on her way to school on the first day, for instance, he refuses to help her. And later, in a conversation with Mrs. Paxton about the bullying the noughts are experiencing, he uses the slur "blanker" and insists there's no reason to intervene—eventually, the hostile school environment will encourage the nought students to leave.

Joanne – Joanne is a year above Sephy at Heathcroft. After Sephy attempts to sit with the noughts at lunch, she, Dionne, and Lola beat Sephy up. Several years later, after he joins the Liberation Militia, Callum gets revenge on the three of them. It's unclear if he kills them or just tortures them in some other way.

Lola – Lola is a year above Sephy at Heathcroft. After Sephy attempts to sit with the noughts at lunch, Lola, Dionne, and Joanne brutally beat Sephy up. Several years later, after he joins the Liberation Militia, Callum gets revenge on the three of them. It's unclear if he kills them or just tortures them.

Dionne – Dionne is a year above Sephy at Heathcroft. After Sephy attempts to sit with the noughts at lunch, she, Lola, and Joanne brutally beat Sephy up. Several years later, after he joins the Liberation Militia, Callum gets revenge on the three of them—and make sure Dionne, who was the most violent of the

three, suffers the most. It's unclear if he kills them or just tortures them in some other way.

Juno Ayelette – Juno Ayelette is Mr. Hadley's personal secretary, and she seems almost as famous as her boss. Like Mr. Hadley, she's callous and obsessed with preserving the Hadley family's reputation—so when she discovers that Minnie and Sephy called an ambulance after Mother's attempted suicide, she scolds them for calling on an insecure phone that instantly lets the press find out what happened.

Adam Stanhope – Adam Stanhope is the lawyer Mum and Callum hire to represent Dad during his trial. He's a nought—and to Callum's extreme surprise, he's a second-generation lawyer. Because he understands the importance of not appearing too successful to Crosses, Mr. Stanhope's office waiting area is dingy and dirty, but his actual office is plush and looks sleek and expensive. Mr. Stanhope is brusque and unemotional, and he's unconvinced that he can do anything for Dad until he learns that he has the money to approach Kelani Adams to help him.

Kelani Adams – One of the best attorneys in the country, Mrs. Hadley secretly hires Kelani Adams to represent Ryan, the supposed bomber of the Dundale Shopping Center. She's a Cross, and even Sephy, who doesn't care much about politics, has heard of her. (Sephy ultimately decides to follow in Kelani's footsteps and become a famous lawyer.) However, despite Kelani's reputation, she's unable to prove Ryan's innocence in court, though she is able to stop his execution at the last minute. But Ryan brushes off her insistence that she can still clear his name.

Andrew Dorn – Technically, Andrew Dorn is the General's second-in-command in the Liberation Militia—but Sephy and Callum discover that Andrew is actually a spy. This is because at the beginning of the novel, when Sephy is only 13, she overhears a meeting between Mr. Hadley and Andrew in which Andrew mentions trying to work his way up the ranks in the LM. Several years later, when Callum's LM cell has kidnapped Sephy, she recognizes him by his ponytail and his expensive brown boots with chains over the heels.

Alex Luther – Though he never appears in person in the novel, Alex Luther is a nought who fights for equality between noughts and Crosses through nonviolent protest, such as through sit-ins. He's been to jail many times for this. Mum admires him, but Dad thinks being jailed so many times means Luther's methods aren't working.

Leo Stoll – Mr. Stoll is a witness Kelani Adams calls in Ryan's trial. A Cross and a former police detective, Mr. Stoll was at the mall café when Callum drug Sephy out to protect her. He's able to verify that Sephy said at the time that Callum wanted to show her something, thereby proving to the court that Callum didn't know about the bomb.

Leila – Leila is the only woman in Callum's Liberation Militia

cell. Callum brought her into the LM after witnessing her beating up three Cross men who taunted and insulted her for asking them for money. Leila is beautiful and regularly propositions Callum, but he refuses her advances. She ends the novel imprisoned for her role in kidnapping Sephy.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Jed – Jed was Lynette's Cross boyfriend; he never appears in person in the novel. Three years before the main story begins, he and Lynette were beaten almost to death by noughts for being in an interracial relationship. His family moved away after the incident.

Shania – Shania is one of the four noughts who, along with Callum, integrates Heathcroft. She's eventually expelled for a minor infraction.

Karl – The Hadleys hire Karl, who's a nought, as their driver after Mother fires Harry.

Sergeant Collins – Sergeant Collins is the Cross police officer who informs the McGregors of Lynette's death.

Nurse Carter – Nurse Carter is the Mercy Hospital nurse who checks Mum in and, since Mum doesn't have her own ID, scans Callum and Jude's IDs instead.

Governor Giustini – The governor of the Hewmett Prison, Governor Giustini stops Dad's hanging from happening and oversees Callum's hanging several years later.

Shaun Pingule – A Cross, Mr. Pingule is the prosecuting lawyer in Ryan's trial. Callum finds him rude and imposing, but when Sephy testifies, she finds him encouraging.

Pete – Pete is the leader of Callum's Liberation Militia cell. He's killed during the attempt to pick up ransom money for Sephy and deliver more demands to Mr. Hadley.

Morgan – Morgan is in Callum's Liberation Militia cell. Along with Jude, he's the only one to survive and escape arrest after the disastrous attempt to pick up Mr. Hadley's ransom money and deliver more demands to Mr. Hadley.

Gordy – Gordy is one of Callum's coworkers at an auto shop while Callum is in hiding.

Rob – Rob is one of Callum's coworkers at an auto shop while Callum is in hiding.

Jack – Jack is the Cross prison guard responsible for guarding Callum when Callum is imprisoned for supposedly raping Sephy. Callum suggests that the friendship he forms with Jack is, to his surprise, genuine.

The General – The General is the anonymous head of the Liberation Militia. He never appears in person in the novel.

TERMS

Blanker – Blanker is an extremely offensive slur for noughts. Some noughts, like Jude, use the term to try to reclaim it in a positive way.

Cross – Crosses are Black people; they're in power in society because they colonized Europe and enslaved white people, or noughts. They believe their dark skin means that they're closer to God. When used to refer to a Black person, the word "Cross" is always capitalized.

Dagger – Dagger is an offensive term for Crosses; it's used exclusively by noughts.

Liberation Militia/LM – The Liberation Militia, or LM, is an underground nought resistance group fighting for equality between Crosses and noughts—sometimes through violent means. Its structure and member list are kept very secret, but it's headed by an anonymous **General** and members are divided into cells.

Nought – Noughts are white people. Within the world of the novel, they have very little power in society. Enslaving noughts has only been illegal for about 50 years, and noughts are only just starting to integrate Cross high schools when the novel takes place (prior to this, noughts were only allowed to be educated up to age 14).

Pangaeon Economic Community/PEC – The PEC is an international oversight body that has pressured **Sephy** and **Callum's** country—an alternate version of Britain—to integrate schools by threatening sanctions.

government has allowed noughts to be educated past age 14—so Callum is one of the first noughts in the country to integrate a prestigious, formerly Crosses-only school. This system leaves noughts chronically under-educated and under-employed, as due to a lack of education and Crosses' biases, most jobs available to noughts tend to be low-paying service positions.

So, even though Sephy and Callum begin the novel believing they're best friends, as the years progress, racism damages their relationship at every turn. For instance, when a racist mob accosts Callum, Sephy stops the mob's shouting by screaming that the Crosses are acting like "blankers." This is a racial slur for noughts, and Sephy's comfort with using it suggests that she doesn't realize how ingrained racist beliefs and language are in her society. Her many slip-ups in this vein cause Callum to pull back from Sephy at every turn. Through Sephy and Callum's relationship, *Noughts & Crosses* shows how racist beliefs and government policies sow division and fear, even between people who once considered themselves close friends. Racism, the novel shows, is a tragedy capable of destroying not only interracial friendships or romantic relationships, but also families and communities. And the novel offers little hope that the racism plaguing Sephy and Callum's world will improve much at all—if it ever improves. Instead, the novel pessimistically frames racism as something that people must adapt to and resist in small ways rather than something they can hope to fully overcome.



AWARENESS AND PRIVILEGE

Teenage Sephy is a Cross (a Black person)—and she's wealthier than most, as her father, Kamal Hadley, is the home minister in the government.

Because of her racial and financial privilege, Sephy has grown up lacking nothing; she looks at the world fearlessly and expects other people to be good, kind, and helpful to her. Because of this, it's hard for Sephy to sympathize with her best friend Callum, who's a nought (a white person). Callum's family has lived in poverty since Mrs. Hadley fired Callum's mother, Meggie, as her housekeeper three years ago. And as noughts, all of Callum's family members have limited opportunities and are discriminated against because of their skin color. Much of Sephy's personal growth happens as she gradually becomes aware that her seemingly idyllic world is actually very racist, unfair, and dangerous for anyone who isn't a dark-skinned Cross like her. *Noughts & Crosses* thus suggests that a person's perception of racism is closely linked to how privileged they are, and how much they themselves suffer racism. Someone who suffers racism, like Callum, has no choice but to notice it everywhere—but for someone privileged like Sephy, acknowledging and then trying to understand racism is a choice. The novel also suggests that everyday people becoming aware of how their society is racist won't do away with



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.



RACISM, DIVISION, AND TRAGEDY

Noughts & Crosses takes place in an alternate universe where, instead of Europe colonizing other parts of the world, people from Africa colonized

Europe. This means that Black people (who are known as Crosses) are the dominant racial group across the world, and they subjugate white people (who are known as noughts). Though the noughts' enslavement ended about 50 years before the novel begins, the world that 13-year-old Cross Sephy and 15-year-old nought Callum inhabit is still extremely racist and segregated. Crosses look down on noughts and erroneously believe that noughts are "smelly," eat strange foods, and naturally behave badly. It's only in the last few years that the

racism—it's only when people in power notice discrimination and recognize it as harmful and wrong that things will start to change.



LOVE, LUST, POWER, AND VIOLENCE

Noughts & Crosses is very concerned with love and romance. The romance between privileged Cross

Sephy and nought Callum starts off innocently enough: as young teenagers and best friends spending an idyllic afternoon on the **beach**, Callum asks to kiss Sephy just to see what it's like. But their romance is forbidden because they're of two different races, and their relationship grows increasingly passionate and violent as racism and segregation reshape their lives and start to pull them apart. Particularly for Callum, who becomes progressively angrier over the course of the novel's span of three and a half years, it's nearly impossible to separate his love for Sephy from his desire to hurt or kill her—and everyone else who looks like her. Through their relationship, *Noughts & Crosses* presents love (and especially that between people of different skin colors) not as something sweet and pleasant, but as something intimately and confusingly interwoven with violence, fear, and danger.

Sephy and Callum's relationship isn't the only romance in the novel to be tinged with violence. Both their parents' marriages are plagued by physical and/or verbal abuse, and Callum's older sister Lynette's interracial relationship ended tragically when she and her boyfriend were beaten almost to death. The violence that tinges every romance in the novel reaches a horrific climax when Callum is executed for supposedly raping Sephy—despite both him and Sephy insisting that the sex they had was consensual. But in their society, where love between noughts and Crosses is forbidden (and criminalized when it does happen), romance is seemingly doomed from the start to end violently.



FRIENDSHIP

Noughts & Crosses focuses on the friendship between privileged Cross (Black person) Sephy and the nought (white person) Callum, whose family

lives in poverty. The novel begins when the two are still young teenagers, and Sephy and Callum have been best friends since Sephy was born (Callum's mother, Meggie, was Sephy's nanny and brought young Callum to work with her). As children, Sephy and Callum can have a genuine, fulfilling friendship precisely because neither of them understands that, due to their different skin colors, they're not supposed to be friends. But as they get older, their friendship crumbles when Callum starts attending Sephy's school as one of the first noughts to integrate the country's school system, and Sephy fails to support Callum or even understand the racist abuse he experiences at school and in public. The novel also briefly touches on the supposed friendship between Mrs. Hadley and

Meggie. While Mrs. Hadley, the more privileged of the pair, insists that she's legitimately Meggie's friend, Meggie later maintains that the women were *never* friends—the power differential between them made genuine trust and support impossible. Through characters' different perceptions of their relationships, the novel suggests that enjoying spending time with someone doesn't make a true friendship. Even between two people who enjoy each other's company, outside forces (like racism or class differences) can prevent people from genuinely understanding each other.



YOUTH, INNOCENCE, AND GROWING UP

At its heart, *Noughts & Crosses* is a story of how Sephy, a wealthy Cross (Black person), and Callum, her poor nought (white) best friend, grow up. Sephy is 13 and Callum is 15 when the novel begins, and it follows them for the next three and a half years, as their lives take wildly different paths than they expected. For both Sephy and Callum, but to differing degrees, growing up entails becoming increasingly aware of the darker aspects of their world, which is racially segregated. Indeed, noughts are in constant danger of violence or discrimination from racist Crosses. Sephy is innocent and naïve when the novel begins, ignorant of the fact that Callum goes through his days fearing he'll be demeaned or even hurt because of his skin color. And she never entirely grasps this idea, which indicates that by the end of the novel, Sephy hasn't fully matured. But Callum, as a nought who's erroneously accused of raping Sephy, is executed before his 20th birthday. This outcome shows that in Sephy and Callum's society, it's a privilege to get to grow up at all. In this way, *Noughts & Crosses* portrays childhood as a time when kids are naïve and unaware of the unpleasant aspects of the world around them. It suggests that childhood is an enviable state, but one that inevitably comes to an end, at least for underprivileged or marginalized people—sometimes through death, but more often through disillusionment and fear.



FAMILY

In addition to exploring Sephy and Callum's friendship and eventual romance, *Noughts & Crosses* also focuses on Sephy and Callum's families. On the one hand, Sephy's family has never been very supportive: her father, Kamal Hadley, is a high-ranking government official who prioritizes his job over family, while Mother is an alcoholic and is arguably as checked-out as her husband. Sephy's home life causes her to turn to Callum for support, and also to begin drinking alcohol to ignore how alone and unsupported she feels. Callum's family, on the other hand, initially seems tight-knit and supportive. But this changes when Dad and Callum's older brother, Jude, become involved with the Liberation Militia, a group promoting racial equality between noughts

(white people) and Crosses (Black people)—something that concerns and disturbs Mum, as she believes in either keeping things separate but equal between the races, or fighting for progress via peaceful protest. Additionally, Mum is devastated when Callum’s older sister Lynette commits suicide (though no one but Callum is aware that Lynette’s death was a suicide and not just an accident). As internal and external events devastate both the McGregor and Hadley families, Callum and Sephy’s parents attempt to make their homes safe refuges for themselves and their children—but due to both families’ deep-rooted dysfunction, they fail to do so. Sephy’s family, for instance, has guards and surveillance around their home, but they still fail to protect Sephy from being kidnapped, because Sephy doesn’t trust her family or their staff enough to tell them that she’s going to the beach to meet Callum (who is involved in the plot to kidnap her). Through these failures, *Noughts & Crosses* portrays families whose members don’t support or trust one another as not just dysfunctional and destructive, but also woefully incapable of protecting people from the horrors of the outside world.

where they can be children, innocent to the evils of the wider world. But as the novel progresses, and as Sephy and Callum start to grow up—and as Sephy in particular discovers how racism affects noughts—the spot on the beach starts to lose its magic and charm. Attempts to connect with each other at this spot on the beach start to fall flat, signifying that both Sephy and Callum are growing up and starting to leave behind their innocence—and particularly their ignorance of how their racist and segregated society is going to keep them apart.

The final step toward both Sephy and Callum losing their youth and innocence happens when Callum corrupts the spot on the beach by using it as the site from which to kidnap Sephy. He preys on the innocence and idealism she still has by inviting her there—and then shatters her innocence, and his own, by allowing other members of the Liberation Militia to violently kidnap her. With this, Sephy and Callum are forced to acknowledge that they’re no longer children, and that their idealized visions of a future together are little more than hopes and dreams.



SYMBOLS

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



ORANGE JUICE

Orange juice symbolizes Sephy’s wealth and privilege. To Sephy, having fresh orange juice around all the time is normal and expected. It’s also no big deal for her to purchase a glass of orange juice when she’s out and about, like when she’s at the mall. The fact that orange juice is so normal to Sephy illustrates how privileged she is. She has no idea, for instance, that Callum sees orange juice as an unattainable luxury that he only dreams of drinking. For Callum, orange juice is such a luxury that he’s only had it when Sephy has snuck some for him. He wishes he lived a life where he had more drink options than his nightly glass of milk, and only if he’s lucky (there are times when his family can’t afford milk and so drinks tap water with dinner). Not having access to orange juice is a constant reminder to him that unlike Sephy, his family is extremely poor.



THE SPOT ON THE BEACH

Sephy and Callum’s special spot on the beach represents their youth, innocence, and idealism. At the beginning of the novel, their spot on the beach is where Sephy and Callum can spend time together as genuine friends, and they don’t have to worry about racism or pressures from the outside world while they’re there. In this way, their spot is



QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Simon and Schuster edition of *Noughts and Crosses* published in 2020.

Prologue Quotes

“Honestly, Mrs. Hadley,” said Meggie McGregor, wiping her eyes. “That sense of humor of yours will be the death of me yet!”

Jasmine Hadley allowed herself a rare giggle. “The things I tell you, Meggie. It’s lucky we’re such good friends!”

Meggie’s smile wavered only slightly. She looked out across the vast lawn at Callum and Sephy. Her son and her employer’s daughter. They were good friends playing together. *Real* good friends. No barriers. No boundaries. Not yet anyway.

Related Characters: Meggie McGregor/Mum, Mrs. Hadley/Mother (speaker), Callum McGregor, Sephy Hadley

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 1

Explanation and Analysis

Three years before the main action of the novel begins, Meggie is still employed by the Hadley family as a housekeeper and nanny. She and Mrs. Hadley are talking and watching their young children, Sephy and Callum, play. First, this passage makes it very clear that there’s a huge

power differential between Meggie and Mrs. Hadley, simply by showing Mrs. Hadley referring to Meggie by her first name, and by having Meggie refer to Mrs. Hadley with an honorific (Mrs.). This, combined with the note that Mrs. Hadley is Meggie's employer, shows that Mrs. Hadley has much more power than Meggie. Using the honorific suggests that Meggie is expected to speak to Mrs. Hadley with respect and with deference, while Mrs. Hadley doesn't have to do the same in return, given Meggie's status as an employee. This power differential then complicates Mrs. Hadley's insistence that she and Meggie are "such good friends." Since Meggie's smile "waver[s]" when Mrs. Hadley says this, it implies that they're not actually that great of friends—Mrs. Hadley just thinks they are, possibly because, as the more powerful person in this relationship, she isn't aware of how careful Meggie might have to be in order to keep her employment. Put another way, it's in Meggie's best interest to allow Mrs. Hadley to think that they're actually friends, as this means it's more likely that Mrs. Hadley will continue to pay her.

But while the relationship between the adult women in this passage seems fraught and questionable, Meggie suggests that the relationship between young Sephy and Callum is genuine. And this she attributes to the fact that the two are young and, presumably, aren't yet aware that they're not "supposed" to be friends because of their different skin colors. Essentially, it's the children's innocence that enables their friendship. But Meggie also implies that the children will one day grow up, and they'll no longer have their innocence to bolster their friendship. This is what she's referring to when she says that Callum and Sephy don't have any boundaries "yet."

Chapter 1 Quotes

☝️ "Us noughts and you Crosses." I shook my head. "It makes it sound like...like you're in one place and I'm in another, with a huge, great wall between us."

Callum looked out across the sea. "Maybe we are in different places..."

"No, we aren't. Not if we don't want to be, we aren't." I willed Callum to look at me.


"I wish it was that simple."

"It is."

"Maybe from where you're sitting."

Related Characters: Sephy Hadley, Callum McGregor (speaker)

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 23

Explanation and Analysis

Sephy and Callum are sitting at their special spot on the beach a day or two before Callum will start as one of the first nought students to integrate Sephy's formerly all-Crosses school. Callum has just encouraged Sephy to broaden her mind and consider that there's more to life than just noughts and Crosses.

Sephy resents Callum's word choice because in her mind, there's little or no difference between noughts and Crosses, aside from their respective skin colors. She doesn't think of herself as being racist, and she definitely doesn't believe that the world on the whole is all that racist. So hearing Callum imply that there's a huge divide between races, and that Sephy is more caught up in the divide than she should be, is offensive to her. It also contradicts her innocent and idealized view of the world, which is uncomfortable for her. This is mostly because Callum is Sephy's best friend, and she doesn't see his skin color as much of a barrier to their being friends. So in addition to not wanting to accept that the world itself is racist and will go on to do everything it can to keep them apart, Sephy doesn't want to believe that the world is already conspiring to keep them apart—it's not until later in the novel that Sephy realizes the implications of having to meet Callum at this secret spot on the beach, where nobody knows where they are and nobody will find them. Because of their races, they have to hide their friendship—but at this point in the novel, Sephy isn't really aware of this.

In this passage, Callum reads as much older, wiser, and more jaded than Sephy. He's only about 18 months older, but because he's a nought who experiences racism on a daily basis, he can't help but understand that things are only going to get more difficult in his relationship with Sephy. His experience with the world has shown him that this is inevitable. Sephy, on the other hand, is young, naïve, and innocent—and she's nowhere close to being ready to grow up and accept difficult truths about her world. And in addition, Sephy is also very wealthy while Callum's family is very poor, which contributes to the gap that Callum perceives between them. So because of her skin color and her family's wealth, Sephy truly *is* living in a different world than Callum—one where, unlike him, she's not afraid for her safety or of being humiliated regularly.

Chapter 5 Quotes

☝ “STOP IT! YOU’RE ALL BEHAVING LIKE ANIMALS!” I shouted so hard my throat immediately began to hurt. “WORSE THAN ANIMALS—LIKE BLANKERS!”

The sound of the crowd slowly died away. “Just look at you,” I continued. “Stop it.” I glanced down at Callum. He was staring at me, the strangest expression on his face.

Callum, don't look at me like that. I didn't mean you. I'd never mean you. It was just for the others, to get them to stop, to get them to help. I didn't mean you...

Related Characters: Sephy Hadley (speaker), Callum McGregor, Shania, Mr. Corsa

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 57

Explanation and Analysis

When Sephy gets to school on the first day, she encounters a mob screaming slurs at the four nought students (including Callum) who are going to be integrating Heathcroft. To stop the mob, Sephy shouts that they’re acting like “blankers” (a slur for noughts).

Sephy’s comfort using the slur “blanker” shows, first, how entrenched she is in her racist society. She might think that she’s not racist, but Sephy can’t yet escape the fact that in her (Cross, upper class) world, it’s normal and considered okay to use “blanker” like this. This, of course, doesn’t make the slur *actually* okay—it isn’t—but it speaks to how normalized racist language like this is in Sephy’s society that it seems to come out of her mouth without her even thinking about it.

Using “blanker” like this, to refer to how cruelly and out of control her classmates are behaving, also starts to lay the groundwork for readers to understand the prejudices Crosses hold against noughts. The implication here is that all noughts behave badly, so if Crosses behave badly, they’re behaving like noughts. This in turn continues to hold up racist and prejudiced thoughts and institutions in Sephy and Callum’s world, as Sephy essentially implies through her words that she sees noughts not as individual people with their own quirks or behaviors, but as a mass of people who all behave the same way based on their skin color.

Even though Sephy uses this slur without thinking, she shows that she is starting to grow up and understand how racist her world is. Her friendship with Callum helps her to come of age because, in this case, she sees firsthand how much using “blanker” has hurt him—useful feedback that will help Sephy modify her behavior and make better

choices going forward. However, even though she’s starting to grow up and mature, she still struggles to take responsibility for her actions—it’s impossible for her to accept that she said something extremely offensive. Instead, Sephy mentally doubles down on the fact that she didn’t mean to refer to Callum. This also starts to drive a wedge between Sephy and Callum, as it becomes increasingly difficult for Callum to bring himself to be around Sephy when she continually says things like this without fully understanding how offensive she’s being.

Chapter 7 Quotes

☝ Why couldn’t he understand that I hadn’t been talking about *him*? It was just a word. A word Dad had used. But it was a word that had hurt my best friend. A word that was now hurting me so very, very much.

Related Characters: Sephy Hadley (speaker), Callum McGregor, Mr. Kamal Hadley

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 60

Explanation and Analysis

Sephy and Callum are on the beach the evening after Sephy shouted that an angry mob of Cross students were acting like “blankers,” a slur for noughts. Callum is trying to explain to Sephy why she can’t use the word, and Sephy is struggling to understand what exactly she did wrong.

Throughout this passage, Sephy goes quickly back and forth between minimizing what she said (by saying she wasn’t talking about Callum and noting that her father, Mr. Hadley, uses the slur) and accepting that she did something terrible (by noting that she understands she hurt Callum, and the fallout is hurting her). As she does this, Sephy is maturing and starting to develop a better understanding of how racist her society is. She realizes now that while “blanker” might be a word that she’s accustomed to hearing her parents say when they think she can’t hear, it’s not actually acceptable for her to say under any circumstances. In other words, Sephy’s understanding of what’s normal and what *should* be normal is starting to shift.

Along with this shift, Sephy is also starting to develop some sympathy for Callum. She doesn’t want to hurt him because they’re best friends, and she cares deeply for him. So she can’t ignore that she’s done something clearly wrong and hurtful—and even if she doesn’t understand exactly what she did, it’s still on her to apologize and try to make things

right. For his part, Callum struggles to accept Sephy's apology because he recognizes that Sephy doesn't entirely realize what she did wrong. And this reflects Sephy's privilege: she's not used to getting in trouble with a friend like this, it's uncomfortable to find herself in this position, and she doesn't entirely think that she deserves Callum's ire. But still, Sephy recognizes that whatever her thoughts on the matter are, the most important thing is that she recognize that she did hurt Callum—and it's her responsibility to apologize and promise not to use the slur again.



Chapter 11 Quotes

☝☝ “That Band-Aid’s a bit noticeable.”

“They don’t sell pink Band-Aids. Only dark brown ones.” Shania shrugged.

My eyes widened at that. I’d never really thought about it before, but she was right. I’d never seen any pink Band-Aids. Band-Aids were the color of us Crosses, not the noughts.

Related Characters: Sephy Hadley, Shania (speaker), Callum McGregor

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 78

Explanation and Analysis

A few days into the school year, Sephy sits with the four nought students at lunch. Shania is the nought student who was injured by the mob on the first day of school, hence the Band-Aid on her forehead.

This is a major “aha” moment for Sephy, as it’s a moment when she realizes that all aspects of her society are racist to some degree. Noughts don’t just experience racism when, for example, racist Crosses scream slurs and shout that they’re not wanted at school. Noughts also get the message that they’re second-class citizens every time they’re injured and have to use a bandage that’s not the right color to match their skin. Not producing Band-Aids to match a variety of skin tones is one way that Sephy’s society (unwittingly or on purpose) broadcasts who they think matters most: Crosses. Crosses are the ones who get to minimize their injuries with bandages in the right color, while noughts are instead relegated to having their injuries stand out with a bandage that doesn’t match their lighter skin.

That this is a new discovery for Sephy highlights that she’s coming of age and becoming more aware of how her world

really functions. She’s developing more awareness of how noughts move through the world differently than she (as a wealthy Cross) does, and this helps her develop some empathy for what their lives are like.


Chapter 17 Quotes

☝☝ “I’ll find out who did this and when I do—they’ll be really, *really* sorry.” And the look in my sister’s eyes told me that she was serious. Deadly serious. For the first time since the three pigs had started laying into me, I felt almost good. Minnie had never been on my side like this before. It was almost—but not quite—worth it if it meant Minnie and I would grow closer...

“No one touches a Hadley. No one,” Minnie stormed. “If they think they can get to you with no comeback, then it won’t be long before someone tries it on with me. I won’t have that.”

My tentative bubble of well-being was well and truly burst.

Related Characters: Minerva “Minnie” Hadley (speaker), Sephy Hadley, Joanne, Dionne, Lola

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 100

Explanation and Analysis

Minnie has come to ask Sephy the names of the girls who beat Sephy up at school to punish her for sitting with the noughts at lunch. Sephy refuses to tell Minnie that it was Joanne, Dionne, and Lola.

This passage highlights how disconnected the Hadley family members are from each other. Sephy is extremely grateful when, at first, she believes that Minnie is going to look out for her and support her—something that Sephy frames as unusual and unexpected. For once, Sephy believes, she’s getting the kind of sisterly support that she’s craved for much of her life. Indeed, this also highlights how badly Sephy wants to connect with her family members, or at least Minnie. Sephy wants to be able to rely on her family to support her, and for a moment, Sephy has some hope that she’s going to be able to rely on Minnie in the future.

However, Minnie quickly shows Sephy that she’s not actually interested in looking out for Sephy. Instead, Minnie is interested in looking out for *herself* and making sure that she’s not going to suffer for Sephy’s perceived mistake. This creates some emotional whiplash for Sephy, as she goes from thinking one moment that things are going to improve between her and her sister, to realizing the next moment that Minnie is still extremely selfish. And this illustrates one of the main roots of the Hadley family’s dysfunction: each

family member's selfishness. Minnie and Sephy are both selfish, but they've been raised by parents who also only look out for themselves. This creates a family situation where nobody feels supported—which throughout the novel pushes Sephy away from her family members and toward Callum instead.

Chapter 26 Quotes

☝☝ “Because her boyfriend was a Cross. Your sister was beaten and I left for dead because she was dating a Cross. And she didn't even tell us. She was afraid of what we'd all say. So is it any wonder that she can't bear to think of herself as one of us anymore? Is it any wonder she can't even leave this house anymore? Her mind hasn't been right since 'cause she's still hurting.”

Related Characters: Ryan McGregor/Dad (speaker), Lynette McGregor, Callum McGregor, Jude McGregor, Jed

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 129

Explanation and Analysis

Dad breaks up fights between Jude, Lynette, and Callum by finally sharing with his sons why Lynette suffers from delusions that she's a Cross: she and her boyfriend were beaten almost to death for being in an interracial relationship three years ago.

First, Dad tries to impress upon his sons that in their society, interracial relationships are seen not as positive things, but as liabilities. He insists that Lynette was afraid that her family would look down on her for dating a Cross, which put her at greater risk of violence because she didn't have a robust support network at home. On a societal scale, Dad also implies that many people don't believe noughts and Crosses should mix, let alone fall in love. This is why Lynette and her boyfriend, Jed, were targeted in the first place: their relationship was seen as dangerous and as a transgression, not as proof that love can transcend all sorts of societal boundaries. Callum doesn't internalize his dad's words at this point in time, but the revelation should raise huge red flags for him in his relationship with Sephy. While they aren't beaten for loving each other, Callum is ultimately hanged for supposedly raping Sephy. Society, Lynette and Callum's fates show, is inclined to react with fear and violence to interracial relationships in this fictional world.

Dad then ties Lynette's current trouble believing she's really a nought to the trauma she experienced when she was

beaten. He suggests that being beaten for loving a Cross by nought men has made Lynette not want to identify with noughts, people who look like she does—she sees them as violent and exclusionary, and doesn't want to associate with them. Going out in public would force Lynette to face up to the fact that she is a nought, because in this world, noughts are never allowed to forget that they're effectively second-class citizens. So the only way to protect herself and maintain her delusions is to stay home, where Jude is the only person who torments Lynette for insisting she's a Cross.

Chapter 33 Quotes

☝☝ “What're you talking about? She's got friends dripping out of cupboards,” I scoffed.

“Not close ones. Not real friends that she can tell anything and everything to.”

“She's probably driven them all away with her funny moods, [...] If I didn't have to live in the same house as her I wouldn't put up with her either.”

“She's lonely,” said Minnie.

“Why doesn't she just go out and make some new friends then?” I asked.

Minnie smiled, one of her superior smiles that instantly ruffled my feathers. “You're very young, Sephy.”

Related Characters: Sephy Hadley, Minerva “Minnie” Hadley (speaker), Mrs. Hadley/Mother, Mr. Kamal Hadley

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 165

Explanation and Analysis

Mother has recently returned from the hospital after attempting to commit suicide, and her drinking has gotten worse since she got home. Sephy has approached Minnie to ask what, if anything, they should do about it.

Minnie tries to impress upon Sephy that Mother isn't being purposefully overbearing and difficult to be around. Mother is just lonely, a possibility that Sephy finds ridiculous. In Sephy's understanding, Mother has lots and lots of friends and must have the ability to go out and make more if she doesn't like the ones she currently has. But as Minnie observes at the end of this passage, Sephy is very young—and very naïve.

Throughout the novel, Mother is framed as someone who is trapped in a situation where she isn't happy and has very

little power to change things. Sephy doesn't seem to fully grasp how much Mother's reputation—and that of Mr. Hadley—precedes her. Mother can't just go out and make more friends in part because everyone knows of her, and everyone knows of her husband, and nobody wants to cross either of them. It's also implied that Mother is widely seen as ineffective and as an alcoholic, which makes her even more of a joke among her peers.

Sephy also misses the fact that Mother's "funny moods" are a normal reaction to feeling so trapped and unhappy. This isn't to say that Mother's moods might not be difficult for Sephy to weather—Sephy is often upset with her mother for behaving erratically or in ways that Sephy doesn't understand. But it suggests that Sephy is innocent to the fact that Mother is struggling and doesn't have the perfect life that Sephy thinks she does. Minnie, who's a few years older than Sephy, better understands the social constraints Mother is encountering with her friends, so she has a bit more empathy for her mom. Sephy, however, just isn't there yet.

Chapter 50 Quotes

☝☝ “We had to, Mum. Our cell was ordered to do it. Some of us set it up last night, but they said they'd phone through with the warning an hour before it went off. I swear they did. They said that everyone would be evacuated in plenty of time.” The verbal waterfall tumbled from Jude's mouth.

“You killed, you *murdered* all those people...,” Mum whispered, appalled.

“Dad said they would phone through with a warning. That's what he said. I don't understand.” Jude turned bewildered eyes toward Dad.

Related Characters: Jude McGregor, Meggie McGregor/Mum (speaker), Ryan McGregor/Dad, Callum McGregor

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 219

Explanation and Analysis

Dad, Jude, and Callum have all just gotten home after a bomb went off at the Dundale Shopping Center—a bomb that Liberation Militia members Dad and Jude were involved with. Mum is demanding to know if, and how much, her husband and son were involved.

For Jude (and later, for Callum), joining the Liberation Militia represents a coming of age. Joining the resistance group gives the boys a purpose and something to focus their

energy on—and it makes them feel like they're making a difference in a positive way. But despite this, Jude reads very much like a confused little boy in this passage. He admits his involvement to Mum when she scolds him and demands an answer, and he looks to Dad for an explanation as to why the promised warning didn't go through, resulting in seven people's deaths. This complicates Jude and Callum's belief that joining the LM is a step toward becoming adults—as Jude's confusion here shows, being part of the group doesn't mean that things suddenly make sense, or that a member actually has power and can control how things play out.

This conversation also drives more wedges between Mum and the rest of her family members. Mum sees the LM as stealing her husband and sons from her and throwing them into dangerous, violent situations. And Mum believes that as a parent, her job is to protect her sons from violence or imprisonment, not support them in joining such an organization.


Chapter 55 Quotes

☝☝ “Sephy, don't follow your mother, okay? She's headed for a mental home—or a coffin. Is that really what you want?”

That made me start and no mistake. Was that really where Mother was going? I didn't want her to die like that. I didn't want to die like that. I regarded Callum, seeing myself as he must see me. A silly, pathetic child who thought that drinking was a way to grow older faster.

Related Characters: Callum McGregor (speaker), Mrs. Hadley/Mother, Sephy Hadley

Related Themes:    

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 242

Explanation and Analysis

Callum found Sephy drunk at their spot on the beach and is upset that she's turning to alcohol to cope with various strains and stressors on her life. Callum insists that if Sephy starts drinking now, she'll wind up like her mother—who is an alcoholic and whom Callum implies is in danger of hurting or killing herself because of her addiction. If Sephy wants to grow up, in other words, Callum insists that she has to stop drinking—it's a fast track to dying and not getting the opportunity to grow up.



This is a transformative moment for Sephy. She's only 14 at

this point, and she's not at all ready to die. Rather, she just wanted to escape her problems for a little while, and she's discovered that with alcohol, she can mostly do that. Sephy also indicates that she saw alcohol as something grown-up, and she believed that drinking made her grown-up as well. But Callum is able to make Sephy see that by drinking, she's actually just being very immature, and her drinking makes her look even more privileged and out of touch with reality. Sephy's willingness to listen to Callum and nobody else in this regard highlights how important his friendship is to her. She wants to impress him and make him proud—and while Sephy loves her mother, familial bonds aren't enough to make her want to stop drinking and grow up without the help of alcohol.

Chapter 60 Quotes

☝☝ “No, Meggie. I'm guilty. That's the truth and I'm sticking to it. I won't let them put you and Callum in prison for this. Or Jude.” Dad lowered his voice again. “Just make sure that Jude stays lost so the daggers can't get their hands on him. If they find him, he'll rot in prison.” A tiny, sad smile played over Dad's face, but it was gone in an instant. “But at least my confession means he won't die.”

Related Characters: Ryan McGregor/Dad (speaker), Meggie McGregor/Mum, Callum McGregor, Jude McGregor

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 265

Explanation and Analysis

Dad has just told Mum and Callum that he confessed to planting the bomb at the Dundale Shopping Center—a confession that will kill him but will save Jude from prison or death. It's left somewhat ambiguous who actually did plant the bomb—signs point to Jude—but Dad definitely did not do it.

The complete lack of justice in the novel's justice system shines through this passage. Dad previously told Mum he didn't plant the bomb, but here he doubles down on his formal confession that he planted the bomb. The fact that Dad does this suggests that the police and other powers that be don't actually care about getting to the bottom of who planted the bomb—they just need someone to convict so it seems like they're doing something. And Dad is willing to play along and take the blame because doing so was framed as the only way for him to protect his family (officers threatened to imprison Mum and Callum, in addition to

Jude, if Dad didn't confess). So even though Mum and Dad both recognize that Dad is going to be taken away from the family because of his confession (it's customary for people convicted of such things to be executed within the world of the novel), Dad still frames what he's doing as a way to honor and protect his family—possibly for the last time.

Chapter 65 Quotes

☝☝ “Who're you trying to convince? Me or yourself?”

And then I did the last thing either of us expected. I burst into tears. My sister put her arm around me then, allowing my head to rest on her shoulder—which just made me feel worse.



“Minerva, I've got to get out of here. I've got to, before I explode.”

“Don't worry. I'm working on it with Dad.”

“Yeah, for yourself. But what about me?”

“No, I'm working on Dad for both of us,” said Minnie.

Related Characters: Minerva “Minnie” Hadley, Sephy Hadley (speaker), Mrs. Hadley/Mother, Mr. Kamal Hadley

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 283

Explanation and Analysis

Sephy has approached Minnie to ask for her advice about going away to a boarding school, but Minnie instead asked Sephy about her relatively new drinking habit. Sephy has insisted that she only drinks for the taste.

In this passage, Sephy feels extremely vulnerable. Most of the time, she prides herself on being different from her family, and it's almost a point of pride that she doesn't think they know much about her. But here, Sephy has no choice but to confront that her big sister sees right through her. Minnie can tell Sephy is hurting and turns to alcohol to try to cope, and she realizes that the alcohol isn't helping Sephy. Part of the reason this makes Sephy feel bad is because she isn't feeling good about herself, so Minnie's care and concern feels totally unearned. This speaks to how emotionally distanced Sephy is from any of her family members if it's such a shock to experience kindness and compassion like she does here.



Even as Sephy feels more connected to Minnie, though, she still expects her sister to behave selfishly and to look out only for herself. This is why she snaps that Minnie is certainly only talking to Mr. Hadley about Minnie going away to school—it's totally unexpected that Minnie would

think about Sephy's desires (not to mention her health and safety) at all. With this, the novel suggests that Sephy may be cutting herself off from a source of support by insisting that she and Minnie are so different and hate each other. Minnie is clearly able to rally and help Sephy—it might not be so far out of the realm of possibility that the girls could form a healthier relationship with each other.

Chapter 66 Quotes

☝☝ The judge was droning on and on at the jury, telling them what the case was about and what it was not about. Twelve good men and women and true, hanging on the judge's every word. Twelve good Cross men and women, of course. How else could justice be served?

Related Characters: Callum McGregor (speaker), Ryan McGregor/Dad

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 284

Explanation and Analysis

Callum is sitting in the public gallery on the first day of Dad's trial, listening to the judge speak to the jury about the case. Callum doesn't elaborate on what the judge says the case is or isn't about, but given his somewhat resigned and sarcastic tone, it seems likely that Callum doesn't agree with the judge's assessment. This, of course, could be because Callum knows his dad is innocent, but the trial is proceeding as though Dad is guilty anyway. Then, it's interesting that Callum notes that the jury is made up entirely of "Twelve good Cross men and women," because this is the only way—according to his society—that justice will be served. This speaks to the belief in Callum's society that noughts are untrustworthy and biased—that is, the belief that if there were noughts on the jury, the decision would be tainted by noughts' biases. However, once again Callum's sarcastic tone suggests that the issue here is actually the Crosses' biases: it's the Cross jury's belief that Dad is obviously guilty, despite evidence to the contrary, that will result in Dad's ultimate conviction.

Chapter 69 Quotes

☝☝ Mr. Pingule, the prosecutor, smiled at me encouragingly, which helped a little. A very little. I hadn't expected to be quite so nervous. [...]

"Take your time, Miss Hadley," the judge said, smiling.

I smiled back at him gratefully. Maybe I could do this. Maybe it wouldn't be so bad after all.

Related Characters: Shaun Pingule, Sephy Hadley (speaker), Callum McGregor, Ryan McGregor/Dad

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 289

Explanation and Analysis

Sephy is testifying during Dad's trial, and she's extremely nervous. What's most striking about this passage is the difference between how Sephy sees Mr. Pingule and the judge, and how Callum saw the two men (and the opposite as well; that is, how the judge and Mr. Pingule treat Sephy and Callum differently). Callum, presumably because he was a nought, was unsettled from the moment he took the stand. Mr. Pingule went out of his way to ask questions designed to make Callum look unreliable—and he didn't treat Callum with any warmth or generosity. Sephy, though, is a Cross, and Mr. Pingule treats her very differently. He and the judge smile at Sephy and make her feel welcome and comfortable. And where Callum saw Mr. Pingule as being out to get him, Sephy sees the prosecution as trying to help her—even though she doesn't think Mr. Pingule's side is the correct side. But as a wealthy Cross who believes her world is generally fair, Sephy has little reason to believe that she won't be treated well on the stand. In this way, Sephy's privilege and status as a Cross blinds her to the fact that noughts aren't made to feel the same way when they testify. Instead, they're harassed and constantly have their honesty questioned.

Chapter 71 Quotes

☝☝ According to the reporters on the telly, Kelani was making sure that the trial was as fair as possible—and putting the judge's back up in the process. Good for her!

Ryan McGregor just had to be found not guilty. It was only right and proper.

It was only just.

It was only justice.

Related Characters: Sephy Hadley (speaker), Kelani Adams, Ryan McGregor/Dad

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 305

Explanation and Analysis

Sephy closely follows Dad's trial on television in the days after she testifies. By the end, she's thrilled that the prominent lawyer Kelani Adams is legitimately trying to prove Dad's innocence, and she's certain the jury will agree with Kelani.

Sephy's assessment of the situation reads as extremely naïve. Readers have seen many times already that Sephy's society doesn't afford noughts justice or even the benefit of the doubt, so it seems unlikely that Kelani antagonizing the judge is going to help. However, it's hard to tell if *anything* is actually going to help Dad's case—as a nought, he's extremely likely to be convicted for the mall bombing, even though he didn't actually do it. But Sephy is young and idealistic, so she doesn't have any idea that Kelani is fighting a losing battle—even if it is good and important that Kelani fight it. In Sephy's mind, it just make sense that Dad go free: he's innocent, so this is what should happen. But again, believing this ignores the fact that Sephy doesn't live in a just society that treats noughts fairly. It's easy enough for Sephy to say this because she's so privileged and idealistic, but Sephy saying it isn't going to change anything for Dad and for other noughts in similar situations.

Chapter 77 Quotes

☝☝ “You stupid girl. Who d’you think paid for their lawyer and all their legal fees?” Mother took hold of my shoulders and shook me. “I prayed and paid and did everything I could to make sure that Ryan wouldn’t hang. What more could I have done? You tell me.”

Related Characters: Mrs. Hadley/Mother (speaker), Sephy Hadley, Meggie McGregor/Mum, Ryan McGregor/Dad, Kelani Adams

Related Themes:     

Page Number: 326

Explanation and Analysis

When Mother and Sephy get home from Dad's stayed execution, Sephy explodes at her mother and attacks her for her drinking. Sephy also insists that mother never actually

cared about the McGregors.

In her explanation to Sephy, Mother speaks as though she feels trapped in her role as Mr. Hadley's wife. Because of their marriage, Mrs. Hadley is well known in society, which means that she can't just do whatever she wants. She's previously said that she's been paying for a mistake she made for years—and some of that “paying” has entailed suffering physical violence at Mr. Hadley's hands. So Mother feels very constrained in what she could or couldn't do to help the McGregors, out of fear of scandal and because she likely fears her husband's reaction. Sephy, though, is extremely young, naïve, and idealistic, so she doesn't necessarily grasp her mother's difficult place in society.

Then, it's worth noting that Mother physically shakes and hurts Sephy here. The Hadleys' family life is tinged with violence—Mother has suffered physical violence from Mr. Hadley, and now she perpetuates that violence by shaking Sephy. This normalizes violence in a family situation for Sephy, and it also makes her feel even less connected to and willing to trust her family.

Chapter 80 Quotes

☝☝ When I'd come into her room, I'd been burning up with the desire to smash her and everything else around her. Sephy was a Cross I could actually hurt. And yet here she was, asleep and still holding on to my arms like I was a life raft or something. There's not an inch of space between her body and mine. I could move my hands and...And. Anything I liked. Caress or strangle. Kill or cure. Her or me. Me or her.

Related Characters: Callum McGregor (speaker), Sephy Hadley, Ryan McGregor/Dad

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 339

Explanation and Analysis

The night that Dad's execution is stayed, Callum throws rocks at Sephy's bedroom window, and she invites him into her room. He's extremely angry and they fight, but he and Sephy ultimately fall asleep together.

As Callum holds Sephy, he reflects on how his evening has gone. He begins by articulating just how angry he is—and by saying outright that while he's angry with Crosses on the whole, he didn't initially see any problem with taking that hatred out on Sephy. Callum blames Crosses generally for the racist, violent world he inhabits—it's Crosses that



incorrectly sentenced Dad to death, and it's Crosses who ultimately stayed the execution as well. So in many ways, Callum just feels powerless in society. But when it comes to Sephy, Callum knows he has power over her because she trusts him. This puts him in a position where he can consider that if he wanted, he could hurt or kill her—she's gotten close to him, and it wouldn't take much physically to betray her trust.

The fact that Callum is thinking this way at all about Sephy—a friend whom he also has an intense crush on—speaks to how intimately violence and romance are connected in the world of the novel. Callum loves Sephy, and the two consider running away together at various points throughout the novel's three-and-a-half-year span. But they cannot separate their love for each other from the fact that Callum, at least, sometimes sees Sephy as a target, not as an equal partner.

Chapter 89 Quotes

☝☝ I used to comfort myself with the belief that it was only certain individuals and their peculiar notions that spoiled things for the rest of us. But how many individuals does it take before it's not the individuals who are prejudiced but society itself? And it wasn't even that most Crosses were prejudiced against noughts. I still didn't believe that. But everyone seemed to be too afraid to stand up in public and say, "This is wrong." And by everyone, I meant me included.

Related Characters: Sephy Hadley (speaker), Mr. Kamal Hadley, Ryan McGregor/Dad, Callum McGregor, Shaun Pingule

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 367

Explanation and Analysis

Sephy is preparing to return home after two and a half years away at the Chivers boarding school, and she's explaining to readers how she's changed in that period of time. In particular, she's spent a lot of time thinking about how racism functions in her society.

In this passage, Sephy acknowledges how naïve she was in the novel's previous sections. She used to believe that the real reason racism is so prevalent in her society is because there were a few people in power—such as her father—who went out of their way to develop and uphold racist policies that kept noughts subjugated. These days, Sephy understands that it's not just a handful of people who have

“spoiled things” for everyone else. Every Cross in Sephy's society is complicit because, as Sephy notes, even if a Cross doesn't genuinely hold racist beliefs, a majority of people are too afraid to speak out and fight for what's right. This shows how Sephy's society keeps all people in line and encourages them to uphold the status quo: it doesn't allow noughts to speak out and fight for their rights, and it disincentivizes Crosses from becoming activists by making it seem like too big of a risk to do so.

However, Sephy complicates her assessment of this belief as naïve and childish when she continues to insist that most Crosses aren't prejudiced against noughts—itsself a naïve view. The novel has shown again and again that Crosses, even those who think of themselves as forward-thinking, still hold racist beliefs that they might not even realize are racist. This was the case, for instance, when Sephy said the people in the mob outside her school were acting like “blankers”; using the slur seemed like second nature to her, and she didn't understand how horrifically racist she was being. Similarly, during Dad's trial, Callum was treated like an unreliable, dangerous witness simply because he was a nought. The judge and the prosecutor were rude to Callum and tried to discredit him in every way possible—while when Sephy testified, they treated her kindly and offered encouragement. And Sephy herself has observed Crosses exhibiting signs of fear when they're just around noughts in public, suggesting that many Crosses believe noughts are naturally dangerous criminals. So in many ways, this passage shows that Sephy has grown up—but she still has a long way to go in accepting and understanding just how deeply racism is baked into her society.

Chapter 94 Quotes

☝☝ And we'd succeeded. We had Sephy. *No!* Not Sephy...Just a Cross girl—who deserved everything she got, who'd get us everything we needed. I paused outside the cell door. I could do this. I had to do this.

Be what you have to be, Callum, not what you are...

I repeated that phrase over and over in my head, the way I used to do when I first joined the LM. The way I had to whenever there was something...distasteful that needed to be done.

Related Characters: Callum McGregor (speaker), Sephy Hadley

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 391

Explanation and Analysis

Callum's Liberation Militia cell has kidnapped Sephy, and Callum is preparing to enter her cell so he can film her reading the demands for Mr. Hadley and bloody an article of clothing.


By this point in the novel, Callum believes he's become unfeeling and desensitized to the violence he has to commit as part of being in the LM. But as his anxious inner monologue shows, Callum isn't as desensitized as he might like to be—at least when it comes to Sephy. Callum is trying to go out of his way to dehumanize her, just as Crosses have dehumanized him and his family. But Callum finds that he can't do this entirely: he and Sephy have history. They were friends, and they were almost more than friends. But for now, Callum's primary loyalty is to his LM cell, so he sees dehumanizing Sephy (at least in his own mind) as an essential coping mechanism so he can get through this ordeal.

Callum's conflicted inner monologue indicates that while he wants to be loyal to the LM—and he seems to truly support the LM's goals, even if he takes issue with their methods—it's hard, if not totally impossible, for him to forget that he doesn't actually *want* to hurt people, and he doesn't think that all Crosses are evil. In a way, Callum has lost his innocence as he's engaged in violence he refuses to describe to readers. But he also implies that somewhere deep inside of himself, Callum is still a child—he still wants to think the best of people, and on some level, he still sees Sephy as his childhood friend and wants to return to that happy time before everything got complicated. In the present, though, turning to violence is just how Callum has to survive.

Chapter 96 Quotes

☹️ The cut was deep—for both of us. Deeper than I'd intended. A scratch would've been deeper than I intended. She went to put her finger back in her mouth but I grabbed her hand again. She struggled, trying to pull her hand away. Maybe she thought I was going to cut her again. I put her finger in my mouth.

Related Characters: Callum McGregor (speaker), Sephy Hadley

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 402

Explanation and Analysis

Callum has just sliced Sephy's finger to bloody a T-shirt, but the cut he made was much deeper than he intended to make it. The fact that Callum hurt Sephy—intentionally and unintentionally—speaks to how complicated Callum's feelings are about her. Callum loves Sephy, but he's trying hard to tell himself that she's just a Cross girl, and that she doesn't deserve his kindness or his compassion. That mindset is, after all, what will allow Callum to do what he believes he must do to support his LM cell's aims of using Sephy to bargain for a ransom from Mr. Hadley. But this causes Callum's feelings for Sephy to become tied up in violence and, for Sephy, fear. Callum loves Sephy, but he hurts her—and Sephy loves Callum, but she's also afraid of him. This tension makes Sephy and Callum's relationship confusing for them both. And the confusion comes to the forefront in this passage when Callum hurts Sephy, and then turns this into a surprisingly intimate moment by putting her finger in his mouth to comfort her and help stop the bleeding.

Chapter 101 Quotes

☹️ Ashamed of myself for having asked, I tried to turn my head away, but Callum's restraining hand on my cheek stopped me. He carried on rubbing my stomach. We watched each other in a silence that surrounded us like a bubble of barbed wire.

Related Characters: Sephy Hadley (speaker), Callum McGregor

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 418

Explanation and Analysis

Callum is the only member of his Liberation Militia cell guarding Sephy (whom they've kidnapped), and he's entered her cell to sit with her and rub her stomach. Sephy has asked Callum to let her go.

The tension in this passage is palpable. On some level, Sephy trusts Callum—he's been a lifelong friend, and she doesn't seem to fully believe that he's let go of his humanity entirely. But in the current circumstances, Sephy still fears Callum, what he stands for (due to his involvement with the LM), and what he might do to her.

What makes this most anxiety inducing for Sephy is that she and Callum are sharing an extremely intimate moment. His hand is on her face, he's forcing her to look at him, and he's gently rubbing her stomach (which hurts after being punched hard several days ago). But at the same time, these

tender actions are still tinged with violence. Callum's hand is "restraining"; there's force and a power dynamic at play as Callum makes Sephy look at him. Sephy's stomach hurts because of what Callum and his companions in the LM have done to Sephy, and Callum is the one who orchestrated her violent kidnapping in the first place. And noting that it feels like Callum and Sephy are in a "bubble of barbed wire" brings that violence to the forefront. Barbed wire can cause major injury to anyone or anything that tries to climb over or through it, due to the wire's namesake barbs. In this case, the violent elements are keeping both Sephy and Callum in, and the outside world out—but they can't escape the violent undertones present in their relationship.

Chapter 104 Quotes

☝☝ "Mum's grandfather, our great-grandfather, was a Cross. That's what Mum told me that day. We've got Cross blood in our veins."

"I—I don't believe it," I whispered.

"It's true. Mum only told me because I joined the LM. She said I was part Cross, so killing them would be just like killing my own. Poor Mum! That backfired on her."

"What do you mean?"

"None of them ever wanted us. What has any Cross ever done for me except look down at me? I hated them even more after Mum told me the truth. Poor Mum."

Related Characters: Jude McGregor, Callum McGregor (speaker), Meggie McGregor/Mum

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 439

Explanation and Analysis

Jude and Callum are in hiding after Sephy escapes, and Jude shares what Mum told him years ago in the hospital, when Mum made Callum go away for a few minutes.

Jude believes that Mum told him about his great-grandfather's race because she believed it would encourage Jude to see all people as fundamentally the same.

Presumably, Mum wanted Jude to realize that no matter a person's skin color, it's inappropriate to kill or otherwise harm people. Having Cross blood in his veins would, in Mum's thinking, shift Jude's worldview to a more generous one, where he and Crosses aren't actually so different.

While this is a nice idea in theory, both Jude and Callum's reactions suggest that it's nothing more than a good theory.

Given how racist their society is, Jude is wholly unable to see Crosses as anything more than his oppressors. And he realizes too that it likely wouldn't make a difference if he were to start telling Crosses that his great-grandfather was a Cross. Crosses still see Jude as a nought, so they're going to continue to treat him like a second-class citizen. This is why Jude insists he hates Crosses even more after learning about his family history. In his experience, having a drop of Cross blood doesn't make a bit of difference when he outwardly looks like a nought.

Chapter 113 Quotes

☝☝ "No, he just raped you and made you pregnant instead," Dad said bitterly.



"Kamal, please—," Mother began.

"Callum didn't rape me. He didn't."

"But you're pregnant, so he must've." Mother frowned.

"I'm pregnant because we made love to each other," I shouted angrily.

Related Characters: Mr. Kamal Hadley, Mrs. Hadley/Mother, Sephy Hadley (speaker), Callum McGregor

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 462

Explanation and Analysis


Sephy is several months into her pregnancy with Callum's baby, and Callum has just been arrested after sneaking onto the Hadleys' grounds to see Sephy. The way that Mr. Hadley and Mother talk about Sephy's pregnancy and the sex she had with Callum highlights that in this society, love—let alone consensual sex—between a nought and a Cross simply doesn't exist. Any relationship or physical contact must have been coerced, Mr. Hadley and Mother believe. This is also why Mother and Mr. Hadley are simultaneously pressuring Sephy to terminate her pregnancy, as they don't understand why she'd want to carry to term a baby conceived through rape.

In insisting not only that Callum didn't rape her, but that she was a fully willing participant when they had sex, Sephy is saying something that in her society is extremely radical. She acknowledges, for one, that noughts are just as human as Crosses and experience all the same range of emotions and desires—and that it's absolutely possible for noughts and Crosses to feel desire for each other.

Chapter 116 Quotes

“Once I’d been found guilty nothing on earth could’ve made the judges overturn the verdict. The reason is simple. I’m a nought who dared to fall in love with a Cross. And worse still, I actually made love with her. And worse than that, she’s pregnant with my child and doesn’t care who knows it.”

Related Characters: Callum McGregor (speaker), Sephy Hadley, Ryan McGregor/Dad

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 480

Explanation and Analysis

Callum is narrating from jail; he’s been imprisoned and sentenced to hang for supposedly raping Sephy.

Just as was the case when Dad stood trial for the Dundale Shopping Center bombing, Callum makes it clear that the jury’s verdict was decided long before jury deliberations actually began. Nobody in Dad’s trial, aside from his family and his lawyers, believed he was innocent—and in Callum’s case, he’s similarly assumed to be guilty. And this is despite the fact that Sephy has been speaking publicly about the fact that Callum didn’t rape her. But one person isn’t enough to change society’s mind about Callum’s innocence or guilt, which speaks to how racist Callum and Sephy’s society is.

Further, Callum once again lays out how his society thinks about relationships between noughts and Crosses. In their world, interracial relationships ideally don’t occur. But if they do, people assume that a nought must’ve coerced a Cross, or otherwise violently forced them into the relationship. Callum and Sephy’s relationship is particularly fraught when it comes to the public’s perception of it, because Sephy got pregnant as a result of having sex with Callum. Unlike in Lynette and Jed’s relationship years ago, there’s going to be evidence—a baby—that Sephy and Callum loved each other and chose to consummate their relationship. And for that, within the logic of their racist society, Callum is going to have to pay with his life.

“I used to think about it a lot,” I sigh. Dreams of living in a world with no more discrimination, no more prejudice, a fair police force, an equal justice system, equality of education, equality of life, a level playing field...”

“Good grief! Is this a thesis or a fairy tale?” Jack asks dryly.

“Like I said, I used to think about it a lot.”

“I’m not sure I share your faith in a society ruled by noughts,” Jack tells me thoughtfully. “People are people. We’ll always find a way to mess up, doesn’t matter who’s in charge.”

Related Characters: Callum McGregor, Jack (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 481

Explanation and Analysis

Ten minutes before Callum’s execution, he and his prison guard (and friend), Jack, discuss what life might be like if noughts were the dominant race instead of Crosses. In Callum’s mind, life would be perfect: people would be equal, and noughts would have all the opportunities that Crosses currently deny them.

However, Callum misses an important point as he describes his vision of an ideal society to Jack. Crosses, as the group of people who colonized others, behave the way they do because of this legacy of colonization and ultimately, slavery. It’s a process to let go of these legacies and move forward into a more egalitarian society. And if noughts had been the colonizers, they may have fallen prey to the same racist patterns that the Crosses did.

Indeed, this passage is where the novel most overtly encourages readers to think about *Noughts & Crosses* and the alternate universe it presents in relation to the reader’s world, where white people colonized the rest of the world and enslaved and subjugated Black people. *Noughts & Crosses* simply inverts the power structure that currently exists in the real world (or that existed in the early to mid-20th century, as much of the social structure resembles the Jim Crow American South, and some events mirror those that took place during the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s). This is a way to highlight for readers how cruel the real world’s system is, as seeing it inverted forces readers to look for the similarities and consider how things might be different if Black people were in charge. And while it is of course impossible to say whether Black people colonizing the rest of the world would’ve changed things dramatically or stayed the same, the novel still insists that the thought exercise is an important one if people want to dismantle racist systems in the real world.



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.

PROLOGUE

Meggie McGregor wipes her eyes and compliments her boss, Mrs. Hadley, on her sense of humor. Mrs. Hadley says it's "lucky [they're] such good friends," which makes Meggie's smile waver a bit. But Meggie watches her son, Callum, playing with Mrs. Hadley's daughter, Sephy. The children are actual good friends, without boundaries—at least not yet. It's summer and beautiful. And at least for the Hadleys, there's not a cloud in the sky.

While Mrs. Hadley says that she and Meggie are "such good friends," the narration suggests there's a power imbalance—Meggie goes by her given name, while Mrs. Hadley uses an honorific (suggesting she's more powerful). And Meggie's wavering smile also indicates that Mrs. Hadley might be misguided in her thinking. Meggie noting that Sephy and Callum are good friends without boundaries is ominous. It suggests that in the future, when they're not so young, something is going to come between them.



Mrs. Hadley's blond secretary, Sarah Pike, approaches and says that Mr. Hadley just arrived. Mrs. Hadley is shocked and says she's glad. Meggie stays quiet—she's not getting involved in the Hadleys' inevitable fight. As Mrs. Hadley wanders inside, Sarah murmurs that Mr. Hadley looks angry. Meggie invites Sarah to have a drink from the pitcher of ginger ale, but Sarah says she doesn't want to get in trouble and heads back inside. Meggie turns back to the kids. Their worries are so simple right now. Maybe life will be better for them. Meggie's husband likes to wonder what would happen if something huge happened, like a virus or a revolution wiping out all the Crosses. But Meggie prefers to think smaller—"what if Callum and Sephy...?"

Describing the looming fight between Mr. and Mrs. Hadley as inevitable makes it clear that the Hadley home isn't a happy one; it's filled with conflict. When Sarah enters the scene, it becomes clear that both she and Meggie are employees of the Hadley family. Sarah seems very worried about keeping her job, which suggests the Hadleys might not be a great family to work for. Meggie, meanwhile, starts to allude to bigger world issues that will one day affect her and the Hadleys' children. Wishing the world was different—and better—for them implies the world needs to improve.



Meggie realizes Kamal Hadley is watching her. He approaches and asks what she was thinking about. Flustered, Meggie stumbles over her words and says she wishes Callum and Sephy could stay this age forever. Mrs. Hadley appears just as Mr. Hadley asks Meggie if she had a nice time last night. Meggie is confused; Mr. Hadley is furious. Did she do something wrong? With Mr. Hadley's prompting, Meggie says she watched television at home last night. Then, Mr. Hadley gets up and slaps Mrs. Hadley across the face before going inside.

When faced with an imposing figure like Kamal Hadley asking what she did last night, Meggie reaches for the only thing that feels at all appropriate: the truth. Clearly, though, this wasn't the right answer, if Mr. Hadley then slaps his wife after hearing Meggie's answer. This speaks to how tense things are in the Hadley household—even their staff have to get involved with family conflict and suffer accordingly, despite trying to stay out of it.



Meggie tries to inspect Mrs. Hadley's face, but Mrs. Hadley swats Meggie's hand away. She hisses that Meggie didn't help her when she needed it—Meggie realizes she was supposed to be Mrs. Hadley's alibi for last night. Mrs. Hadley stalks inside.

Meggie had no way of knowing what she was supposed to say, so it's clear that Mrs. Hadley is being unfair to her. This could spell trouble for Meggie, though, because as Meggie's employer, Mrs. Hadley holds way more power.



Later that night, Meggie patches Jude's school pants yet again while her husband, Ryan, assures her she doesn't need to worry about what happened this afternoon. Then, the phone rings. It's Sarah: Mrs. Hadley is firing Meggie. After a minute, Meggie sighs that Jude's education is over now. They can't afford to pay for it anymore, and Mrs. Hadley isn't going to just let one of her Cross friends employ Meggie now. Meggie says she's going to see Mrs. Hadley. Fourteen years of employment should buy her some goodwill. Ryan knows this won't end well. Meggie is back two hours later, and on this night, Lynette disappears.

Several things in this passage point to the McGregors living paycheck to paycheck, such as patching Jude's school pants so many times and no longer being able to afford school at all now that Meggie lost her job. Meggie goes into her conversation with Mrs. Hadley expecting that her former employer will treat her with compassion—but Ryan's reaction suggests that this is, perhaps, too much to ask. And ending this passage with Lynette's disappearance adds an ominous note.



CHAPTER 1

It's now three years later, and Sephy is enjoying a beautiful August afternoon on the **beach** with her best friend, Callum. Callum, though, asks out of the blue if he can kiss her, just to see what it's like. Sephy wrinkles her nose—kissing is “feeble”—but she agrees. It takes a minute to decide who tilts their head which direction, and Sephy is disgusted when Callum licks his lips. But then, Sephy watches Callum lean in until their lips meet. They both close their eyes—until Callum sticks his tongue in Sephy's mouth.

Sephy reads as extremely young and innocent here, given that she's not yet sexually mature enough to be interested in kissing. Callum's interest in kissing shows how much older and more mature he is than Sephy. But because Sephy and Callum are good friends, Sephy is willing to experiment for Callum's sake—even if she doesn't yet see the point of kissing.



Sephy pulls away, disgusted, but then agrees to try again. Callum kisses Sephy gently. At first his tongue is gross, but then it feels nice and Sephy kisses him back. Her heart starts to thump, and she pulls away. Callum apologizes and says the kiss was just okay, which annoys Sephy. At Sephy's prodding, Callum says he hasn't kissed any other Cross girls, or nought girls. He wanted to kiss Sephy because she's a friend. Sephy turns back to the sea. She loves her family's private **beach**, which stretches for miles. She and Callum have their special spot at one end, where they've made a hole in the fence.

Despite initially not being interested, Sephy is starting to see the allure of kissing—suggesting that, after all, she's starting to grow up. Describing the beach reveals several things. First, it shows how immensely wealthy the Hadleys are—they own miles of private beach. Then, noting that Sephy and Callum have a secret spot on one end—with a hole in the fence that presumably Callum uses—suggests that they're not supposed to be spending time together.



Sephy realizes Callum is looking at her with an odd expression on his face. He says he's thinking about what it would be like to be the only two people in the world and asks if Sephy ever thinks of running away. But then, bitterly, Callum says there's no point: the whole world is the same, so he doesn't know where he'd go. When Sephy insists the world isn't so bad, Callum says it depends on one's point of view—and Sephy, unlike Callum, is on the inside. Sephy says she'd run away with Callum, but he'd soon be bored of her.

This passage establishes how privileged Sephy is. As Callum notes, as a Cross, Sephy is on “the inside,” by which he means to say that the world is designed to work for Sephy. Callum, as a nought, doesn't enjoy this kind of privilege. He also makes it clear that he's going to suffer no matter where in the world he goes, which shows racism is a widespread problem in the novel's world, not just in this particular country.



Sighing, Callum says they need to get on with their tutoring session. Sephy is disappointed; she'd hoped Callum would say he'd never get bored of her. It's too beautiful to work on homework, but Callum says he doesn't want to give the teachers at Sephy's school any reason to kick him out. Sephy points out that Callum is being cynical; he was accepted, so he'll be fine. She says it'd be great if he ended up in her class and is surprised when Callum doesn't immediately agree. Callum admits that it's humiliating for the noughts to be stuck in the "baby class." Sephy resents this—she's almost 14, after all—but Callum points out that he'll be 16 in six months, and he'll be in class with 12- and 13-year-olds.

Sephy points out that it just makes sense; Callum is a year behind. Callum bitterly says that's not his fault; recently, noughts were only allowed to be educated until age 14, at underfunded noughts-only schools. He spits that he only got into Heathcroft because Sephy helps him. Sephy feels like she needs to apologize, but she's not sure what for. She pulls out her schoolbooks and she and Callum jokingly discuss the merits of math, which according to Callum will be the language humans use to communicate with aliens. He suggests that Sephy think "above and beyond just us." Sephy retorts that her mind is free, but Callum says, "There's more to life than just us noughts and you Crosses."

Sephy objects to Callum's word choice—saying it that way makes it seem like there's a huge wall between noughts and Crosses. Callum says there might be, but Sephy isn't convinced. Annoyed, they finally open Sephy's math textbook. Normally, Sephy can tell Callum anything. But suddenly it seems like Callum is much older and wiser than 15. Sephy feels her exact age: a month from turning 14.

Later, Callum says they should head home. Sephy suggests she go to Callum's for the evening, but Callum refuses. Sephy asks why she can't come to Callum's house anymore, and asks if it's because of Lynette. Callum spits that it has nothing to do with Lynette and walks Sephy to the stone steps leading up to the Hadleys' grand country house. It's huge for only four people, and Sephy notices Callum flinch at the sight of the house. He asks for a hug and hugs Sephy so hard it hurts. Then he runs away, refusing to answer if he'll see Sephy at school tomorrow. Sephy is so confused.

Again, it's a sign of how privileged Sephy is that she doesn't see the point in working on homework, and doesn't understand how demeaning it is for Callum to be in class with kids two to three years younger. Callum seems anxious to impress and not give anyone at his new school a reason to get upset with him, something that Sephy seems to have never considered. Sephy also seems naïve and innocent when she says she'd love to have Callum in her class—she hasn't considered that this might be even more of a humiliating experience for him.



Callum starts to introduce readers to the novel's highly segregated society, in which noughts are undereducated, don't get as much government support as Crosses, and don't seem to have as much power to change things. Sephy, as a member of the powerful group (as a Cross and a wealthy one at that), doesn't quite get it. Why, she reasons, should she have to apologize when it's not like she's responsible for keeping Callum down? But Callum obliquely encourages Sephy to consider why divides based on skin color exist at all, and how Sephy could help make things more equal.



Again, it's a sign that Sephy is both privileged and sheltered that she doesn't believe there's a wall between noughts and Crosses. She seems to reason that because she and Callum are friends, things must be okay. Callum implies, though, that things aren't. This helps explain why he seems so much older: he doesn't think the world is as perfect as Sephy does.



It's still a mystery what happened to Lynette at the end of the prologue, but it seems like whatever happened has changed things at Callum's house. At the very least, Sephy is no longer welcome there. Callum flinching at the sight of Sephy's house, though, shows that he's not welcome there anymore, either. Hugging Sephy so hard it hurts introduces an element of violence and pain to Sephy and Callum's relationship. They're friends, and they have feelings for each other, but those feelings are confusingly intertwined with pain.



Mother's shouting breaks Sephy's reverie. She clearly hasn't had enough wine yet, since she's in a terrible mood. Mother scolds Sephy for being out late and drags her into the house. She doesn't notice Sephy scowling at her. Sephy knows Mother wants her to be perfect like Sephy's older sister, Minerva, whom Sephy calls Minnie to annoy her. Sephy thinks about her kiss with Callum—it was amazing. But the day wasn't perfect, since Sephy and Callum had to creep around. "If only Callum wasn't a nought."

The way Sephy describes Mother suggests she has a drinking problem, which makes Sephy feel unsupported at home. And more generally, Sephy feels like she's not good enough. Noting that things between her and Callum aren't as good as they could be since Callum is a nought shows how racism and segregation are shaping Sephy and Callum's relationship: they can't openly be in love.



CHAPTER 2

Standing outside his house, Callum closes his eyes and tells himself he lives somewhere grand. But when he opens his eyes, his house is still a "rundown hovel." Callum pushes the shame and anger down and walks in the front door. Mum immediately runs for Callum and asks where he was. Callum ignores her and sits at the table—where his 17-year-old "toad" of a brother, Jude, says Callum was with his "dagger friend." Callum hates the word and tells Mum he was just walking.

What shines through in this passage is Callum's intense shame as he faces his family's poverty. The poverty, perhaps even more than being a nought, makes Callum upset and ashamed. Callum also doesn't seem to get along well with family members, if he describes Jude as a "toad." Jude's use of the word "dagger" (which Callum frames as at least wildly impolite, if not a slur) also suggests he's not interested in integrating—which could also be part of Callum and Jude's issue with each other.



Jude, eating some spilled pasta right off the table, distracts Mum from Callum for a moment. Callum greets Lynette, but she looks down. She and Callum have always been close. But though she's 20, Lynette has been "a bit simple" since she was in an accident three years ago. She always looks serene, and Callum envies her sometimes. Mum asks Callum again where he was, but Dad changes the subject by asking if Callum is ready for school tomorrow. He's thrilled his son is going to Heathcroft, but Mum says it's a mistake: noughts should have their own schools that are just as good as Cross schools. They shouldn't mix, as Crosses will always treat noughts as second-class citizens.

Callum starts to share what happened to Lynette at the end of the prologue, but he leaves things vague. He frames Lynette as possibly struggling to recover from some major trauma. Conflict emerges between Mum and Dad in this passage: Mum believes noughts and Crosses should live in a separate but equal society, while Dad supports integration. So it's clear that life at home isn't great for Callum, as he constantly finds himself at odds with Jude and in the middle of his parents' fights.



Callum is shocked to hear Mum say this. Segregation has existed for forever, and what will please the noughts and Crosses? Different planets? Mum and Dad continue to argue, but Callum insists he'll be fine. As Jude quips that Callum will soon be too good for them, Callum sips his milk. He wishes he could have **orange juice**, like Sephy has every night, but it's too expensive. Jude continues to taunt Callum. He's been unbearable since Callum got accepted to Heathcroft, and it's a constant struggle to not hit him. Callum wants to escape to the **beach** with Sephy and thinks of their kiss. He's excited to go to school tomorrow. He'll be able to make something of himself with a "proper education"—and then nothing can stand between him and Sephy.

It's unclear to Callum why Mum is just now coming out in support of segregation. Callum seems to agree more with Dad, especially since it's framed as though he's going to be one of the first nought students to attend Heathcroft (Sephy's school). Orange juice emerges as a symbol for Sephy's wealth and privilege, and Callum aspiring to have orange juice with dinner every night speaks to his desire to move up the social ladder. His insistence that getting a "proper education" will also help speaks to how strongly he wants to move up in social class and transcend racial divisions.



CHAPTER 3

Sephy shuts down her computer. Tomorrow is the first day of school, and she's not excited for it. She is excited that four noughts, including Callum, will start at her school. As she creeps downstairs for a drink, she asks God to let Callum be in her class and imagines showing him around the school. Sephy then thinks of Mother, who suddenly became humorless and miserable about three years ago. Her dad, Mr. Hadley, is still fun, when he's around; he's in politics and is never home.

As Sephy hits the bottom step, she hears Mr. Hadley angrily saying that the “bleeding-heart liberals in the Pangaeian Economic Community” make him sick—they're forcing him to let “blankers” into schools and the police force, and the Liberation Militia still isn't happy. Another man is with Dad, and he says the Liberation Militia will just keep demanding more things. Sephy is shocked. She's never heard Dad use “blanker,” a horrible slur, to refer to noughts before. The guest tells Dad about the struggles he's having working his way up the ranks of the Liberation Militia, and he insists it's dangerous to keep meeting in person. Dad insists on a monthly meeting anyway.

Sephy creeps closer as Mr. Hadley grouses that he hates that “blankers” are going to Sephy's school—he wouldn't have changed the education bill had he thought any would pass the entrance exam. Sephy is hurt. She creeps forward until she can see Mr. Hadley's reflection in a mirror. To her surprise, she also sees that Mr. Hadley's guest is a nought, with a ponytail and brown boots with chains over the heels. None of this makes sense; noughts don't come to the house unless they're staff.

Sephy accidentally trips over the phone cord, attracting Mr. Hadley's attention. Enraged, he comes into the hallway and demands to know what Sephy heard. She sputters that she heard nothing and just wants a drink. Trying hard to be casual, Sephy gets a glass of water and walks slowly back upstairs. As she reaches the top, Mr. Hadley calls her back for a hug. He apologizes for yelling and asks if Sephy is still his princess. She nods that she is.

Having a computer at all marks Sephy as privileged compared to Callum (the novel was written in 2001, before a computer in every home was commonplace). Sephy reads as very young and naïve. She seems unaware of how racist her world might be, and she's surprisingly incurious about why her parents are the way they are. She sees them as authority figures only, not as real people.



This is a turning point for Sephy. It's not entirely clear how much she knew about Mr. Hadley's political views before this, but hearing him spew such racist rhetoric comes as a shock. In particular, hearing him use the slur “blanker” is something Sephy finds very disturbing. Note that Mr. Hadley doesn't seem to acknowledge that his guest, whoever he is, seems to be making dangerous sacrifices to meet in person—a mark of Mr. Hadley's privilege and entitlement.



In his political life, Mr. Hadley seems to be trying to walk a fine line: he wants to look progressive, but not actually implement policies that will be progressive in practice. The fact that noughts passed the seemingly difficult entrance exams shows that those students are intelligent—but Mr. Hadley isn't willing to see those students as kids like Sephy, who deserve a good education.



Mr. Hadley starts to look somewhat dangerous in this passage—this may be the first time Sephy is really aware that her father can be volatile. Calling Sephy back for a hug is a way to try to smooth over the fact that he seriously scared his daughter, and it shows Sephy that she'll have to police her behavior to stay in her father's good graces.



CHAPTER 4

Callum dumps his school supplies onto his bottom bunk. He has the required items, but he feels like he's missing something. Callum tells himself he's lucky as he repacks his bag. Mum knocks on the door and lets herself in. She takes over packing the school supplies and says that no matter what happens, she'd like to congratulate Callum on getting into Heathcroft. Callum asks what she means by this, but Mum says she just wants Callum to be happy and not get hurt. She says Callum might not totally understand the "challenge" of attending Heathcroft. Some Crosses aren't happy about noughts getting in, and Callum cannot lash out.

Callum assures Mum he'll be good—and nothing can get him out of Heathcroft now. She asks if he's too old for a goodnight kiss. Realizing the kiss is for her benefit, not his, Callum offers Mum his cheek, but she laughs at his annoyed look instead. They both head downstairs, but Mum stops abruptly on the stairs and says she is proud of Callum. Callum didn't know this; it's seemed like Mum wanted him to fail the entrance exam.

In the living room, Dad and Lynette are on the couch and Jude is at the table with a map. Noticing the look on Lynette's face, Callum asks if she remembers his seventh birthday. It doesn't work: Lynette says she doesn't belong here, since she's a Cross. Jude scornfully says Lynette is white like the rest of them. He says coddling Lynette for this mental illness is ridiculous, and Callum also thinks he's better than the rest of the family. Jude insists he's the only kid in the family who knows what he is.

Jude and Callum both leap up at the same time, but Dad steps between them. Lynette says she's obviously not a nought—she doesn't behave badly like her brothers. Lynette happily holds out her arm and says her skin is beautiful and dark, and she's closer to God because she's a Cross. Jude mutters that she's "stupid," but Callum agrees with Lynette—whose skin is so pale it's translucent—that she's beautiful.

CHAPTER 5

Sephy is in the backseat of her family's car, smiling because she's so excited to see Callum at school today. She asks the nought driver, Harry, to drop her off around the corner. He insists Mother will be mad, but Sephy can't stand being teased. Harry grudgingly drops Sephy off a few streets from school, and Sephy makes sure he's not going to follow her before walking to school.

Finally, Mum starts to imply that she's unsupportive of Callum attending Heathcroft because she's worried for his emotional wellbeing, if not his physical safety. Her word choice suggests that she's being deliberately vague about the "challenge[s]" Callum might face as one of the first noughts to integrate Heathcroft. But still, she wants to support Callum, which is why she opens this conversation by praising him for getting in. It's not that she doesn't want him to get an education—she doesn't want him to get hurt.



Mum may very well have wanted Callum to fail the entrance exam, if only because she fears that attending Heathcroft will put Callum at risk. But throughout this passage, Callum reads as naïve and very young—he seems totally innocent regarding the struggles he might face at school.



Finally, readers get a look at exactly what plagues Lynette: delusions that she's a Cross and not a nought (though it's still not clear how this developed, or why). Jude is extremely fed up with, it seems, his entire family. He suggests that they should be secure about, if not proud of, who and what they are—and that going along with Lynette when she experiences these episodes, or approving of Callum attending Heathcroft, means family members are ashamed of their race.



Lynette establishes here that Crosses believe that noughts naturally behave terribly, something that will be important later. She also shares some of the reasons Crosses insist they're superior: part of their superiority comes from their religious beliefs that elevate them above people of other skin colors.



Sephy seems to think of Harry as a friend, rather than Mrs. Hadley's employee: all she can think of is her embarrassment, not the fact that Harry could get in trouble for not getting Sephy all the way to school. This also speaks to Sephy's youth.



Sephy hears a rumbling sound and figures out what it is when she turns the corner. There's a mob in front of the school shouting, "no blankers in our school." Sephy watches police officers escort Callum and three other noughts through the crowd. She elbows through the crowd to the school steps and sees her good friends—and Minnie—in the crowd. As the crowd surges forward, one of the noughts falls and is injured. Crosses cheer. Sephy has never been so angry. Mr. Corsa, the headmaster, comes out of the school to stand beside Sephy. He does nothing when she says they have to help the injured nought girl. But then, Sephy screams that her classmates are behaving like "blankers." The crowd stops shouting, but Callum gives Sephy a strange look. Sephy hopes he doesn't think she directed the slur at him.

To Sephy, what she sees is totally wrong, and new—it seems like she's never thought of her friends, Minnie, and her classmates as being so racist as to shout horrible slurs at the nought students. This challenges her view of the world, especially when Mr. Corsa is unwilling to help the injured nought girl. So Sephy takes it upon herself to fix things by screaming at the mob to stop, and using this slur in the process. The fact that Sephy uses the slur without thinking speaks to how ingrained racism is in her society—even though she doesn't think of herself as racist, she unwittingly says things that are harmful.



CHAPTER 6

Callum can't believe Sephy said that—he's going to wake up from this dream any minute. His mind is playing tricks on him. Callum is a nought, but he's "worth more than nothing" and isn't a waste of time and space. He's not a "blanker."

For Callum, hearing Sephy use "blanker" is like a punch in the gut. Sephy might think she's his friend—but she still holds troubling views about noughts that call her ability to support Callum into question.



CHAPTER 7

It's a beautiful evening on the **beach**, but Sephy is miserable. She asks Callum to say something—she said she's sorry, and it's "just a word" after all. Callum explains that the fact that Sephy used that word will always hurt. Crying, Sephy says she didn't mean Callum and was trying to help. He suggests they see less of each other, but Sephy says Callum is her best friend. She needs him. Callum asks her to promise to not use that word again. Sephy doesn't get it—it's just a word—but she sees it's hurting her friend. She promises.

To Sephy, "blanker" is "just a word" because she hasn't ever had to fully confront what the word means. Callum described in the previous chapter that "blanker" means that a person is worth nothing, and is a waste of time and space—it's extremely hurtful. And it's even worse to hear something like that coming from a friend. Sephy shows that she's trying to be a good friend, though, when she decides that she might not understand, but that it's still essential to never use the word again.



Sephy procrastinates heading home. Callum puts his coat around her shoulders when she shivers, and Sephy leans her head on Callum's shoulder. He doesn't seem to appreciate it. Sephy vows to never use the word again. Callum speaks up finally and says that they can be friends outside of school, but they shouldn't talk at school. He doesn't want Sephy's other friends to abandon her. Sephy insists that's silly, but Callum stands up. Sephy says she's staying on the **beach** for a while and watches him walk away. She feels like a spectator to her life now, and she realizes she has a choice to make: what kind of a friend she wants Callum to be. It's upsetting to think about it.

Sephy is trying to act like everything is normal between her and Callum. For Callum, things aren't normal—so Sephy leaning her head on his shoulder isn't innocuous right now. Rather, it makes it seem like she's doing what Mr. Hadley did when he called Sephy back for a hug after frightening her: trying to use physical affection to make past abuse seem less bad. Sephy also struggles knowing that she's going to have to work harder to be Callum's friend going forward. Their easy days of friendship are over.



CHAPTER 8

Mum is enraged by the time Callum gets home, but Dad is the one to ask where Callum was. Callum can't tell them the truth (he said goodbye to Sephy two hours ago, but then hid and watched her to make sure she got home), so he says he was walking and thinking. Dad asks if Callum is okay; he tried to come to Heathcroft earlier, but Crosses told him he had no business there. Jude starts to curse, but Mum stops him. Dad asks Callum how classes were. Callum says they were fine. This is another lie: the teachers ignored the noughts and the Crosses bullied them. Dad tells Callum not to let the "dagger swine" drive him out of school.

Jude says he saw Callum and his "friend" on TV and heard what she said. Callum insists Sephy didn't mean it like that, but Mum, Dad, and Jude all agree that the Hadleys are terrible people. When Callum notes that Mum and Mrs. Hadley used to be friends, Mum says they were *never* friends. That's not what Callum remembers. Mum nannied Minerva and then Sephy. It was like one day Mum and Mrs. Hadley were friends, and then three years ago everything suddenly changed. Sephy and Callum have continued to see each other and even made a blood oath to keep seeing each other at their secret place on the **beach**.

Dad shushes everyone as the news comes on. First, the newscaster shows footage of Kamal Hadley saying that the government wasn't blackmailed by the Liberation Militia to let noughts into Cross schools. Dad snorts and Callum tunes out—until Jude says, "Long live the Liberation Militia!" Dad praises Jude, and Callum notices Mum looking away. Something is going on, and Callum feels excluded.

CHAPTER 9

Mother opens Sephy's bedroom door to tell her that Mr. Hadley is on TV. Sephy rolls her eyes—she's not five—but turns on her TV. Mr. Hadley is saying that change in society should be slow, even when Minister Pelango says that noughts have more rights in other PEC countries than they do here. Minister Pelango says it's his duty to "drag" people into the future, for the sake of Crosses *and* noughts. Sephy changes the channel as soon as Mother leaves the doorway. She's tired of politics.

Callum clearly cares about Sephy despite being mad and conflicted about their relationship. But he has to hide this from his family, as they don't support friendship between noughts and Crosses. And Callum pulls further away from his family when he lies about how his day went. But Dad also seems to suspect that Callum isn't telling the whole truth, and he seems far more animated as he warns Callum about the "dagger swine." He wants Callum to be equal to the Crosses—but he also clearly despises the Crosses.



Callum reads as far more naïve than his family members. He seems to look back on Mum and Mrs. Hadley's friendship as something genuine. However, Mum insists that due to the power dynamic between employer and employee, their friendship was never able to really flourish. This introduces the idea that friendships in the novel might look fine to an outsider, but an outside look doesn't always give someone the full picture.



Notice that Callum isn't interested in the news, or his parents' reactions to it, until Jude brings up the Liberation Militia and Dad responds. He hasn't fully explained what the Liberation Militia is yet, but it seems to be causing strife in Callum's family—note that Mum looks away as though she doesn't approve.



Mr. Hadley is still trying hard to look progressive enough to not be called backwards—but it doesn't seem like that's working. Given this spirited debate on the evening news, it appears that there are some major political upheavals in the works. But Sephy isn't aware or mature enough to care. All of this is still boring for her, because she doesn't grasp how this might affect her—or her relationship with Callum.



CHAPTER 10

Finally, Heathcroft comes on TV. Callum notices that nobody shows how the police officers supposedly protecting the nought students still let the Crosses physically assault and spit on the noughts. The newscaster says the nought students met “some hostility” today, which makes Callum snort. Jude mutters, and Callum doesn’t blame him—he’s also enraged. His anger disappears, though, when Lynette grabs Callum’s hand. The TV shows Sephy yelling at the crowd, and Callum excuses himself to do homework. From the other room, Callum listens to Jude say that noughts and Crosses can never be friends—Callum is fooling himself about his friendship with Sephy. Mum and Dad both agree, and Mum says she’ll talk to Callum soon. Callum wonders if maybe his family is right.

Getting Callum’s inner monologue and his experience of walking up to Heathcroft shows that the news is intentionally downplaying how volatile the mob was this morning. The language the newscaster chooses suggests that they don’t see the mob as anything to get too worked up over—even though the mob was shouting horrible slurs. Callum is still reeling after hearing Sephy use “blanker,” and he doesn’t want to expose himself to any more trauma. But in leaving the room, he gets to hear what his family really thinks—and this makes him feel even more at odds with them, too.



CHAPTER 11

Sephy is already tired of her history class and it hasn’t even started—but luckily, Callum has this class too. Sephy refuses to let another friend sit next to her and waves to Callum when he enters the room. He looks away and sits next to a nought. Sephy is humiliated. She doesn’t care that Callum is a nought, and she wants everyone else to see that—so why would Callum do this to her? Mr. Jason comes in and begins the lesson. He’s in a foul mood and, for no reason at all, asks Callum if he’s “too poor to even pay attention.” Sephy glares at the teacher and realizes how she can show Callum she doesn’t care if others know they’re friends.

Sephy has good intentions; she’s trying to do the right thing by making Callum feel welcome. But she’s totally missing that Callum might not feel safe accepting her kindness—indeed, it might put them both at risk. And by characterizing Callum’s actions as a slight against her, Sephy makes this situation about how she looks to her peers and not about helping Callum. Put another way, Sephy is unwittingly prioritizing her own desires over Callum’s.



When the bell rings, Sephy is the first up and she barges past Mr. Jason. For this, he makes her wait until everyone else has left the room. Sephy finally enters the lunch hall. Her heart thumps as she collects her food and takes her tray to the table where all the noughts are sitting together. She asks to join them. Callum asks what Sephy thinks she’s doing, but she sits before anyone can tell her not to. She introduces herself to the nought girl, Shania, who has a dark brown band-aid on her forehead.

Again, Sephy totally ignores what Callum and the other noughts want (for her to not draw attention to them) and barges ahead. Now, the noughts are in a difficult position: if they tell Sephy to go away—even if their reasoning is totally valid—they’ll be considered the rude ones. Sitting with them will make Sephy look good, rather than making the noughts look like her equals.



Sephy tries to make small talk with Shania. When she notes that Shania’s band-aid is really obvious, Shania says they only sell dark brown ones. Sephy hasn’t thought of this before. Just then, the deputy headmistress appears and tells Sephy to go back to her own table. Sephy realizes she’s telling Sephy to get back to the other Crosses. The noughts aren’t looking at Sephy. When Sephy whispers that she’s sitting with her friend, the deputy headmistress hauls Sephy out of her chair and drags her to the headmaster’s office. Seeing Callum turn away, Sephy feels like she’s finally getting the message.

Sephy has never had to confront how racist her world is before. It’s designed for Black people like her—and it’s a shock to realize that noughts don’t move through the world as easily and happily as she does. The deputy headmistress pulling Sephy away reinforces that the school administration isn’t happy about the integration process, and they’re going to go out of their way to hinder it.



CHAPTER 12

Leaving his lunch half eaten, Callum frantically walks and then runs out of the school. He runs all the way to the **beach**, where he collapses and punches the sand until his fists are bleeding. He wishes the sand was Sephy's face.

The spot on the beach has formerly been a place where Callum felt safe and secure. Now, it's a place to think of Sephy—and take out some of his anger at her.



CHAPTER 13

After school, Sephy approaches her family's Mercedes—but instead of Harry, a strange nought man who introduces himself as Karl, the new driver, gets out. He tells "Miss Sephy" that Harry moved on and promises to take a good luck card directly to Harry for Sephy. Sephy isn't pleased. Harry wouldn't just leave her; something must have happened. Suddenly afraid, Sephy asks if Karl really is the new driver. He offers to show her his ID, but Sephy says it's okay. As Karl drives off, Sephy watches people pointing at the car. She got in so much trouble today for sitting with the noughts. She wouldn't mind if Callum hadn't turned his back on her. She'll never forget it. Maybe Mother is right: Crosses and noughts can't be friends.

As in the prologue, the power dynamic is highlighted in this passage when Karl goes by his first name, but he calls Sephy "Miss Sephy." And again, Sephy has what may be a naïve and somewhat selfish understanding of her relationship to Harry. Harry was nice to Sephy, but he was also Mother's employee—so Sephy may be idealizing their relationship, in addition to missing that Harry could've been fired. Sephy is also still making the fiasco at lunch all about her. She's not showing any empathy for Callum—who's hurting, angry, and at greater risk of harm than Sephy is, being a nought.



CHAPTER 14

Callum sits for hours as the sun sets. When did life get so complicated? He had no idea he'd be so unwanted once he got to Heathcroft. It doesn't seem like an education is going to help much, either: no Cross is going to employ Callum for anything but menial jobs. But Callum desperately wants to learn. He just doesn't know how that will help him.

Callum is quickly becoming disillusioned with his new life at Heathcroft. He realizes that life isn't actually going to be so different: he'll be educated, but his highly segregated world isn't going to offer him any way to use his education.



Callum doesn't understand why things are the way they are. Crosses are supposedly closer to God, according to the Good Book. But the Good Book also says things like, "Love thy neighbor," which Callum takes to mean that people should live and let live. If that's true, why do Crosses treat noughts terribly? Noughts aren't enslaved anymore, but according to Dad, not much has changed in practice. Dad and Mum don't believe in the Good Book, since it's written by Crosses and is therefore biased. Callum, though, thinks "the truth is the truth," though he can't understand why even the word "nought" is negative—it means nothing. Why were the noughts given that name?

Interestingly, Callum seems to either believe, or want to believe, in what the Good Book says—even if his parents insist the Good Book is biased. This could reflect Callum's desire to be more like the Crosses (at least in terms of culture and societal wealth). The Good Book, though, also seems to be part of the justification for why noughts were enslaved and are now second-class citizens in society. This may all reflect Callum's innocence and the fact that he's still a child trying desperately to make sense of the world around him.



Callum spits, "I don't understand," and realizes soon after that Sephy is watching him. She turns and walks away. Callum chases after her and grabs ahold of her arm, but Sephy says she's not going to stay where she's not wanted. She's still upset, even when Callum says that what he did today was for her own good.

Sephy's behavior adds insult to injury for Callum, as he's watching their friendship slip away at the same time as he confronts how racist his society is. Society—and Sephy's lack of understanding of how racism works—is pulling them apart.



As Sephy turns away again, Callum is suddenly terrified—losing her would feel like the end of everything. He suggests they go up to Celebration Park on Saturday for a picnic. Sephy agrees, but says she still won't hang out tonight—Callum is a snob who clearly believes that noughts and Crosses can't be seen together. If he's not a snob, he's a hypocrite, since he'll only talk to Sephy when nobody can see. Callum tells Sephy to get lost and watches her walk away.

Callum doesn't quite know what to do with Sephy, but he knows he definitely doesn't want to lose this friendship. So it's difficult for him to hear her call him a hypocrite or a snob. For Callum, because he's a nought, he can only safely be himself with Sephy on the beach, where nobody is going to watch them and judge him. Sephy doesn't understand this.



CHAPTER 15

Sephy finally understands what the proverb saying to be careful what you wish for means. She's spent months helping Callum study for the Heathcroft exam and praying for him to get in—and now that he's at Heathcroft, everything is terrible. Sighing, Sephy tells herself she can't sit in the bathroom stall forever. She just wanted to escape everyone's stares, and she's afraid that she and Callum aren't friends anymore after last night. So when the bell rings, Sephy gets up.

Sephy is finding it difficult to accept that her world is far more racist than she thought it was—though she's not quite mature and aware enough to realize that's what's actually happening. She also doesn't have the empathy yet to understand that Callum is struggling with feeling like a second-class citizen, if not worse, wherever he goes.



As Sephy unlocks her stall door, though, three older girls, Joanne, Dionne, and Lola push Sephy back into the cubicle. They shove Sephy and tell her to never sit with the “blankers” again—everyone else at school will start treating Sephy like a “blanker,” too. Dionne asks why Sephy even wants to be around the noughts, since they smell bad and eat weird foods. Sephy says this is nonsense; Callum bathes daily. The older girls share a look and then push Sephy onto the toilet lid.

Joanne, Dionne, and Lola want to put Sephy in her place and make it clear that even trying to be nice to the noughts won't be tolerated—they're going out of their way to uphold society's racism. The girls saying that noughts smell bad and eat weird foods is extremely racist. It suggests they see noughts as almost an entirely different species—and as subhuman.



Lola warns Sephy to stay away from the “blankers” again. Shocked, Sephy asks if the girls have even spoken to noughts before. Joanne says she has—when they serve her in restaurants. And all noughts are criminals and involved with the Liberation Militia anyway. The news, Lola says, doesn't lie about the noughts. Remembering something Callum said, Sephy says the news tells people what they want to hear. She says noughts are people. At this, Lola slaps Sephy, and the girls exchange some punches. Finally, Joanne and Lola each grab one of Sephy's arms. Dionne beats Sephy up.

Joanne saying that she's spoken to noughts when they serve her illuminates how Joanne thinks the power dynamic should be: she should only have to speak to noughts when they're in service positions and she has power. This is extremely racist and classist. In particular, Lola saying that all noughts are criminals mirrors racist sentiments in the real world that insist Black people are criminals—which isn't true, and is just dehumanizing.



CHAPTER 16

At the end of the school day, Callum is trying to look on the bright side—only a few Crosses bullied him—when Shania rushes up and asks if he's heard about Sephy. Shania is thrilled—being beaten up serves Sephy right—but Callum's heart stops. Shania insists Sephy was just trying to make herself look good and says that Sephy's mother came to pick her up. Callum races away from Shania and runs all the way to the Hadleys' house.

Despite his conflicted feelings about Sephy, Callum doesn't want her to get hurt. Shania shows she didn't interpret Sephy's attempt to sit with the noughts at lunch as a genuine attempt to connect. This in turn shows another reason why Sephy's attempt didn't work: at this point, the noughts see no reason to believe that Crosses genuinely want to get to know them, given how often Crosses dehumanize noughts.



Sarah answers the door when Callum rings the bell and says the doctor doesn't want anyone disturbing Sephy. Sephy, Sarah says, is badly bruised and will be home all week. Just then, Mrs. Hadley appears inside, and Callum pushes back when Sarah tries to shut the door on him. Callum asks Mrs. Hadley if he could see Sephy, but she says he's done enough—he must be proud for setting Sephy up to get beaten up. Apparently he turned his back on Sephy. Callum is shocked. Nobody understands. Callum says he wouldn't let Sephy sit with him because he didn't want this to happen. As Mrs. Hadley walks away, Callum shouts that Mrs. Hadley would hate him even if he'd welcomed Sephy. She responds by telling Sarah to never let Callum in.

Mrs. Hadley blames Callum for Sephy getting beaten up. Sephy is Mrs. Hadley's daughter, and she no doubt wants to protect her—but Mrs. Hadley is also underestimating the vitriol and racism that both Sephy and Callum are encountering at school. Given how racist Sephy's classmates have been, it doesn't seem like it would've made a difference had Callum accepted Sephy with open arms—it may have even made things worse for Sephy. But because Callum is a nought, Mrs. Hadley doesn't feel like she has to listen to him or seek his point of view.



CHAPTER 17

There's nothing on TV, so Sephy settles for the news. A banker has been imprisoned for fraud, and three nought robbers stole millions' worth of jewelry. Why did the newscaster only call out the noughts for their race? The banker was a Cross, and that wasn't mentioned.

Sephy is becoming more aware of all the little ways in which her world is racist. Not calling out the Cross's skin color suggests that being a Cross is, in this society, normal—and only deviations from normal, like noughts, need to be called out.



Minnie suddenly appears in Sephy's doorway, asking who beat her up—she wants to kill whoever did it. This is somewhat comforting, but Sephy is in so much pain that she just wants to be alone. Sephy shrugs as Minnie asks questions about the incident. Then, Minnie says that nobody can get away with this—soon, someone will try to beat her up. Sephy shouts for Minnie to go away. Once Minnie is gone, Sephy thinks of Callum. This isn't comforting. Everyone has turned their backs on Sephy. This is all the noughts' fault. Maybe Sephy and Minnie have more in common than Sephy thought.

At first, Sephy thinks that Minnie is trying to be supportive and make her feel better. But Sephy quickly discovers that Minnie is being selfish: she doesn't want to suffer for being Sephy's sister. This makes Sephy feel increasingly alone, especially since the last time she saw Callum was during their fight on the beach. Sephy's loneliness (and her privilege) makes her feel like this is the noughts' fault—a sign that despite Sephy's good intentions, her beliefs are still basically racist.



CHAPTER 18

Callum loves math—and he loves his teacher, Mrs. Paxton. She's a Cross, but she treats Callum like he's a real person. She might move him into a more advanced class after the Crossmas holidays. Callum looks up from his worksheet to see that Sephy has just entered the class. She refuses to look at him. The only free seat is next to Callum, and Sephy tells Mrs. Paxton she can't sit there—she's not supposed to sit with noughts. Mrs. Paxton says that's just at lunch, so Sephy sits and moves her chair as far away from Callum as possible. Callum prays for God to not let anything come between him and Sephy. He knows he's not supposed to believe in the God of the Crosses, since he's a nought, but he needs help.

Callum doesn't elaborate much about how Mrs. Paxton makes him feel like a person, but Mrs. Paxton clearly presents a model for how Crosses should treat noughts. Sephy, though, is so hurt and confused that she's not able to look to this teacher for guidance on how to treat Callum. So instead, she ends up behaving even more offensively by trying to insist she can't sit next to him due to his race. At this point, Callum is getting desperate. Sephy is rude and annoying, but he loves her—and believes losing her friendship would be devastating.



CHAPTER 19

Math class seems to drag on forever. When it's finally over, Sephy sweeps her things into her schoolbag, desperate to leave. But Callum asks her to wait and asks how she's doing. She says she's fine. When Callum says he's glad, Sephy says he doesn't actually care, since he didn't visit or send a card. Callum says he did visit, but Mrs. Hadley wouldn't let him in. Sephy knows he's telling the truth. As they stand up, aware everyone is watching them, Callum asks Sephy to meet him at their **spot** after dinner—but he'll understand if she's not there.

Sephy is struggling with possibly losing her best friend, and it's also hard to accept that she doesn't know how to be a good ally to nought friends. But here, Callum lets Sephy know that this isn't just a friendship issue: Sephy's family is working very hard to keep them apart and make things difficult. This continues to push Sephy further away from her family members and causes her to trust them less.



CHAPTER 20

Sephy must not be coming, but this makes sense. Callum knows he behaved the way he did in the lunchroom because he was afraid. He's tired of being afraid. Sephy arrives, interrupting Callum's thoughts. They admire the beautiful sunset, and then Callum said he truly did try to visit. Sephy says she believes him—Mother would totally forbid Callum from visiting. Callum realizes that the old Sephy is back, but he still feels the urge to apologize. Sephy, though, apologizes for missing their outing to Celebration Park. Hesitantly, Callum asks if Sephy remembers their last trip there. Sephy says she does; it was a lovely day. Callum thinks that his memory of the day is very different.

Just like Sephy, Callum is caught in a difficult spot. He's afraid for his safety if he acts like they're friends in public, but he also fears losing Sephy's friendship if he rejects her, even if he does so for safety reasons. In this passage, it seems like he's starting to choose to prioritize Sephy's friendship over his own safety. When Callum brings up the last visit to Celebration Park in this way, it suggests that whatever happened affected Sephy and Callum differently—presumably because of their differing skin colors.



CHAPTER 21

Sephy had lied to Mother about the trip to Celebration Park; she told Mother she was spending the day with a rich Cross friend. The day at the park with Callum was so fun. The train journey was the only bad part.

Sephy's intro to the outing highlights again that she's been having to sneak around with Callum for some time. Their friendship hasn't been a public one since Mrs. Hadley fired Meggie.



CHAPTER 22

Callum wasn't sure if Sephy was going to show for their trip to Celebration Park. He's never sure if she'll show up, though. But Sephy did show up—she crept up behind Callum at the station and dug her fingers into his kidneys to make him jump. When he asked her not to do that, she said he loved it and sarcastically said he was in “one of [his] sunshine moods.”

Callum doesn't seem like he's secure in his friendship with Sephy if he never trusts her to show up. This could be because of the power difference between them: as a Cross, Sephy has way more power than Callum does. And making Callum jump like this is one way that Sephy lords that power over Callum, though it doesn't seem like she realizes she's hurting him.



CHAPTER 23

Sephy had told herself that someday, Callum would actually look happy to see her, but she won't hold her breath. She handed Callum his first-class ticket. Sephy had pulled money out of her own account for the tickets, rather than asking Mother or Sarah. Using her own money made the day feel more special. Sephy knew deep in her bones that the day was going to be special.

Readers know that Callum is happy to see Sephy, but he's not thrilled to be poked in the kidneys. Sephy, though, is too self-centered to realize that she's pushing Callum away. However, at the same time, she's trying to pull him closer and make their relationship feel more special by using her own money to keep the day secret from her family.



CHAPTER 24

It was the train journey from hell and it ruined Callum's whole day. With three stops to go, two Cross police officers got on to check IDs. Callum wasn't surprised by this; Sephy was. When the officers got to Callum, they took his ID and asked him for his name and age—information that's on his ID. They asked where he lived, and where he was going. Upon hearing he was going to Celebration Park, they said he was a long way from home. They asked for Callum's ticket, and then asked where he got the money for it—or if he bought it himself at all.

The fact that Sephy is surprised is a sign of her privilege: she's not used to being questioned for just existing in public, like Callum is. The fact that this experience ruins Callum's whole day speaks to how demeaning it is to be constantly thought of as a criminal. Wherever Callum goes, Crosses think the worst of him—and Crosses with institutional power, like police officers, have the ability to make Callum's life scary and miserable.



When Callum admitted he didn't buy the ticket, the officers asked him to come with them. Sephy suddenly jumped up, said that Callum was with her, and offered to give them phone numbers for her father, home office minister Kamal Hadley, or his personal secretary. The officers backed down, but they glared at Callum. They'd been humiliated by a child and couldn't even take out their anger on a nought.

It's unclear why Sephy waited so long to set the officers straight—she could've saved Callum a lot of grief by mentioning from the outset that she and Callum were together. And note that Sephy gets the better of the officers by making it clear that she's wealthy and well-connected. It works, but she also unwittingly lords her power over Callum.



Once the officers wandered away, Sephy winked at Callum and asked if he was okay. Sephy then said she wasn't going to let the officers ruin her day. Callum looked away, not wanting to blame Sephy for the way the police treat noughts. She's not responsible for the way security guards follow noughts around stores. Callum doesn't even go into gift shops anymore, since all Crosses believe noughts just steal. Callum doesn't want to resent Sephy for the fact that his education is thought of as being less important than hers. He pushed his loathing deeper inside himself.

The wink makes it seem like, to Sephy, this was just a fun exercise and nothing to worry about. But Callum explains to readers that for him, this is so much more. This is proof that Crosses think poorly of him, just because of his skin color. Callum believes that Crosses want him to fail and expect him to be a criminal. And it's getting harder for him to not loathe Sephy alongside all the other Crosses who treat him terribly.



CHAPTER 25

Back in the present, Sephy asks if Callum was thinking of the police officers. He doesn't deny it, and Sephy thinks they would upset her too, if she was in his shoes. Callum says he wants to remember the day as a good day, once they got to the park. Sephy knows he's lying. He wants to connect what happened on the train to Mother not letting him in. Sephy's sure of it; she's not naïve anymore. She's growing up. But she's also afraid to ask Callum what he's actually thinking. And honestly, her main memory of the day is of feeling ashamed of how the officers treated Callum, and of herself. She resents Callum for making her feel this way. She shouldn't feel guilty for just existing.

Sephy's head fills with questions. Why are nought men and women always portrayed badly in old films? Why aren't noughts in the news unless it's bad news? These days, Sephy pays attention to how Crosses and noughts speak to "their 'own' kind." They relax with others like them, and are afraid around people who are different. Life used to be easy, but Sephy suspects those happy days are gone.

Callum says it was a good day at the park. Sephy agrees—but it's not the truth. She wishes Callum would say what he's thinking, but he doesn't. Sephy sighs that it'll be winter soon; this means that Mother won't let her down on the **beach** as often. Callum asks who beat Sephy up. Sephy refuses to say; she can't do anything to get back at them. But she finally tells Callum. Callum assures her he won't do anything; he's "a lowly nought," after all. Sephy tells him to stop—she's not his enemy. They both apologize.

CHAPTER 26

When Callum gets home, the house is in chaos. Lynette is experiencing another episode and Jude is upset, as usual—but strangely, Lynette is yelling back at Jude, and Jude's face is bleeding. Dad is standing between them. As Jude and Lynette try to hit each other, Jude spits that "daggers" still see a nought when they look at Lynette. When Lynette insists she has dark skin, Jude drags her to the broken mirror, pulls her face close to his, and says they're equally white. He calls her pathetic and says if she hates herself so much, she should just die. If God is real, she'll come back as a "dagger" and Jude won't have to feel bad about hating her.

Sephy saying that she'd be upset too if she were in Callum's shoes suggests that she's not upset because she's not in Callum's shoes. In other words, she can't empathize with Callum entirely, because she doesn't suffer. And Sephy also shows that she's not willing to try to truly understand how Callum feels, which keeps her from being a good ally. To make things even worse, she starts to blame Callum for making her feel bad. This shows that Sephy doesn't really want to have to confront her privilege. It's too uncomfortable.



Sephy isn't willing to ask Callum about his experience, but this doesn't mean she isn't becoming more aware of how her society is racist. She homes in on the fact that noughts and Crosses are afraid of each other, and she realizes that Crosses produce media that only confirms their biases against noughts.



Neither Sephy nor Callum are willing to speak honestly about their trip to Celebration Park—which keeps Sephy from learning more about how Callum moves through the world. This makes it even harder for her to develop empathy for him and other noughts. As they both become more miserable in their friendship, they also start to act increasingly hopeless about their racist world ever improving.



It's important for readers to remember that Lynette is mentally ill—so aside from being extremely rude and saying damaging, hurtful things, Jude isn't helping his sister heal. Rather, it appears as though he's lashing out because of the hatred he feels for Crosses; it stings for him to see his own sister identifying more with Crosses than with noughts. This conflict makes Callum's home life even less safe and supportive, and this starts to push all three McGregor children to look for support elsewhere.



Dad tells Jude to stop, but Jude says *someone* has to tell Lynette the truth—nobody, not Dad, Mum, nor Callum, have enough backbone to do it. Callum says that Lynette isn't the only person who can't stand Jude, which causes Jude to rush Callum and knock him to the ground. Dad pulls Jude up and slaps him across the face when Jude turns away. In a menacing voice, Dad says Jude has no idea what Lynette has been through, so he can't judge her.

Dad explains that three years ago, at the same time Mum lost her job and Jude had to drop out of school, Lynette and her boyfriend were attacked by four nought men. Callum and Jude had always heard that Lynette was away for two weeks caring for their sick aunt, but Dad says Lynette didn't want anyone to know the truth. She was in the hospital for two weeks. The attackers almost killed both Lynette and her boyfriend—all because her boyfriend was a Cross. He asks if it's any wonder that Lynette can't think of herself as a nought, after all noughts have done to her.

Callum realizes Lynette's hands are bleeding. She stares at them, and then looks up and asks where Jed is. Dad says that Jed left a long time ago. Lynette looks suddenly horrified and asks where she is and where Jed is—he was here yesterday, or last week. Dad gently reminds Lynette that she's 20, not 17. Jude reaches for Lynette, apologizing, but she slaps him away and runs upstairs. Callum has never seen Dad and Jude look so lost. Callum turns and sees himself in the mirror. He realizes that he looks just like Dad and Jude. He had no idea he shares their same hates, fears, and feelings.

CHAPTER 27

As Sephy watches Mother drink wine, she realizes it's been a long time since she's seen Mother without a wine glass in hand. She startles Mother by asking her if she can have a party for her 14th birthday. Mother looks up from her glossy magazine filled with beautiful dark-skinned women—and Sephy realizes there are never nought women in the magazines. The first nought model was featured in a magazine last year. Sephy comes back to the present when Mother agrees to the party (she must have had a lot to drink to be in such a good mood). On some level, Sephy resents the wine for making Mother happy, when she and Minnie clearly can't.

Jude makes it clear that he thinks he's doing the right thing by insisting to Lynette that she's white—though this is corrupted somewhat by his cruelty and his unwillingness to try to understand why Lynette might suffer from these delusions. Dad's menacing warning indicates that Jude doesn't know everything, and it's foolish to think he does.



Lynette's story (and Dad's analysis of what happened) suggests that Lynette doesn't see the Crosses as evil oppressors. Rather, she sees noughts—like Jude—as the people who hurt her and destroyed her relationship with her boyfriend. Noting that Lynette didn't want anyone to know what happened suggests that she feels ashamed. In this way, she shares a lot in common with her brothers. Their shame just takes different forms.



To Jude and Callum, Lynette's odd behavior suddenly makes sense, and she seems young and in need of protection rather than ridiculous. For Callum, though, the main takeaway from all this isn't that Lynette is recovering from major trauma. It's that he, Jude, and Dad are all at a loss as to how to help her. They're having to balance their personal hatred of Crosses with their love for Lynette. And it's hard for Callum to realize he's just as upset and ashamed as his family members.



Sephy is continuing to become more aware of how her world is structurally racist as she realizes the magazines only feature Cross models. In this society, noughts aren't seen as being as beautiful as Crosses. In addition, Sephy also struggles to feel like Mother actually loves or support her when Mother only seems happy when she's drinking. So Sephy not only feels inadequate, but as though she also can't trust Mother's good mood to be genuine.



When Mother gives Sephy the option of a magician or an entertainer, Sephy reminds Mother she's turning 14—and then says she'd like an entertainer. Mother tells Sephy to go tell Sarah to plan it. This shouldn't be a surprise; Mother and Mr. Hadley never even buy Sephy's birthday and Crossmas presents themselves. Sarah does and she has good taste, but Sephy never uses those gifts. Sephy figures that just like the gifts don't matter to her parents, she doesn't matter to them either. Only one person matters and now, it's up to Sephy to show him he matters. She's going to surprise Mother and everyone else at her party and expose them for the racist hypocrites they are.

At first, Sephy tries to insist that she's too old for such childish entertainment. But Sephy is still very young, as she hasn't been forced to grow up yet, so she's ultimately fine agreeing to have an entertainer at her birthday party. She also elaborates more as to why she feels like her parents don't care—they never buy her gifts to show her they know what she likes. All of this causes Sephy to turn away from her family and to turn toward Callum (the "one person" who matters), though her plan to expose everyone as racist seems questionable.



CHAPTER 28

Callum is waiting for his parents to go to bed, but they're too busy arguing. Mum is arguing that Alex Luther has the right idea using peaceful protest methods; Dad insists that because Luther is in jail all the time, his method isn't working. He uses "blanker" to refer to noughts, and says that the General (the anonymous head of the Liberation Militia) is actually helping. Mum thinks killing just makes a bigger impression. Callum is tired of listening; his parents have this fight all the time. Sephy gave him their secret signal earlier (three phone calls that she lets ring twice before hanging up). Sephy is now going to call any minute, so Callum is waiting by the phone.

Mum and Dad's argument seems to mirror arguments about how Black people should best fight for equality. Alex Luther seems to mirror Martin Luther King, Jr., who advocated for peaceful protest and spent time in jail; the Liberation Militia, meanwhile, is militant and, to take Mum at her word, kills to make a point. That Mum and Dad are having this argument indicates that there are big questions in this society about how noughts should fight for more rights. But Callum is still pretty young and focused on his own things, so his parents' fight isn't interesting to him.



Just as Callum starts upstairs, figuring Sephy won't call, she calls. Before Sephy can say whatever she wants to say, Callum asks what classes they have tomorrow. He groans when Sephy says they have history, but Sephy doesn't know what's wrong with history. Mr. Jason torments Callum, but if Sephy can't see that, Callum says he won't tell her. Callum asks why Sephy called, and Sephy invites him to her birthday party in two weeks. Mother doesn't know he's invited, but Callum says he'll come. When they hang up, Callum realizes that if he's right about Sephy's intentions, it's true that to her, he's a nought first and a friend second.

It's infuriating and hurtful for Callum that Sephy doesn't seem to notice that Mr. Jason treats him terribly—and Callum is getting tired of having to explain these things to Sephy. This is another drag on their relationship. And the party seems to be shaping up to damage their relationship further. As Callum understands it, Sephy wants to use him as a prop to prove Mother and her friends are racist—but she doesn't realize that Callum, as a nought, could end up in danger for showing up.



CHAPTER 29

Sephy can't sleep. Inviting Callum to her birthday seemed like a great idea, but now it's not looking so good. If things were different, he'd be the first person on her guest list—but things aren't different.

Sephy is starting to mature a little; she realizes that perhaps things won't be safe for Callum at the party. She's starting to accept that her world is racist, and for Callum's safety, she can't have everything she wants.



CHAPTER 30

In history class, Mr. Jason announces that today, he's going to show the class that all famous people are people, just like the students in class. He says it's easy to think of great explorers or inventors as beings above and beyond normal people, but anyone can "aspire to greatness." Staring right at Callum, Mr. Jason says that anyone can be whatever they want to if they work hard enough. Callum doesn't understand why Mr. Jason hates him so much. If it's because Callum is white, then that's silly—Mr. Jason isn't even that dark. By that logic, Mrs. Paxton should be the one to treat Callum so terribly because her skin is very dark.

Mr. Jason asks the class for the names of the people who invented traffic signals, pioneered blood banks, and perform open heart surgery. Callum is the only one who can list the inventors—and for that, Mr. Jason suggests Callum teach the lesson. More hands go up when Mr. Jason asks what all those men have in common. Students have many suggestions, but they're missing the obvious one. Callum puts his hand up and says all those men were Crosses. This is the right answer, and Mr. Jason says that from the time Crosses' ancestors sailed from Cafrique, they've been leading backward civilizations into the future.

Callum won't stand for this. He puts his hand up and says that noughts have contributed to progress too. For example, the Cross Matthew Henson went to the North Pole with a nought, Robert Peary—they're joint discoverers of the North Pole. Mr. Jason has never heard of Peary, and Callum says that's because Crosses write the books and leave noughts out. At this, Mr. Jason gets even angrier and insists Callum is lying. He sends Callum to "go and stand outside the headmaster's room" until he's ready to behave.

Callum knocks over his chair, glares at Sephy, and storms out. Crosses might have learned to make guns that made them powerful, but that doesn't make their methods right. Slavery has been over for 50 years, but it doesn't seem like much has changed—and it's so unfair. Maybe Mum and Jude are right, and Heathcroft is a waste of time. At Mr. Corsa's office, Callum figures that Mr. Jason probably wants Callum to stand outside Mr. Corsa's door, where he's most likely to get in trouble.

Callum recognizes that though Mr. Jason is speaking as though he's talking to everyone in the class, his body language is telling Callum that Callum and other noughts cannot "aspire to greatness," no matter how hard they work. Callum is casting about trying to figure out why Mr. Jason hates him so much. Nothing seems to make sense if it's just because of skin color. But this just illustrates one of the novel's bigger points: hatred doesn't always make logical sense.



Callum is better versed in history than his Cross classmates. But he's punished for knowing things because he's a nought, and noughts aren't thought of as being intelligent and knowledgeable. Mr. Jason then goes on to present a really backwards view of colonialism. If the novel's world is just an inverted version of the reader's world (in which Europeans colonized the world), then Mr. Jason is ignoring the fact that colonizers destroyed advanced civilizations worldwide.



Even if Callum previously expressed skepticism about his parents' views on the Good Book (that it was written by Crosses and is therefore biased), here he seems to buy that the historical record is thoroughly biased—at least when Mr. Jason is saying such offensive things. Mr. Jason is so caught up in proving the Crosses' supremacy that he's unwilling to consider new information.



Callum is starting to wonder if Heathcroft isn't going to give him an education—if it's just going to wear him down and make him angry instead. Figuring that Mr. Jason gave his directions specifically so that Callum would get in as much trouble as possible shows that Callum knows he can't win at school: even when he does as he's told, he still gets in trouble.



As Callum approaches the door, he hears angry voices coming from inside the office. Mrs. Paxton and Mr. Corsa are arguing—Mrs. Paxton wants to crack down on the bullying the noughts are experiencing, and Mr. Corsa wants to let the “blankers” decide Heathcroft is too hard so they leave. Mrs. Paxton points out that she and many other teachers wanted the noughts here, and it’s their responsibility to make school safe for the noughts. But Mr. Corsa insists the government only let noughts in to please the Pangaeon Economic Community. Callum doesn’t want to listen anymore.

Mrs. Paxton seems to fully support the nought students—but she also seems extremely naïve about her coworkers’ lack of support for the noughts. So even though Callum has previously thought of Mrs. Paxton as a safe ally, overhearing this fight makes it seem as though he can’t trust her to fully understand the extent of her coworkers’ vitriol and racism. Broadly speaking, Callum also gets proof here that most adults at school don’t want him here.



A minute later, Mrs. Paxton comes out of the office. Callum tells her why he’s not in Mr. Jason’s class right now, and when she suggests he learn when to keep quiet, he says he can’t just not speak up—noughts won’t ever get the recognition they deserve if they stay quiet. He says too that Mr. Jason hates him. Mrs. Paxton says that Mr. Jason is just trying to toughen Callum up, and that none of the teachers want the noughts to fail. Callum scoffs, but Mrs. Paxton tells him a secret: Mr. Jason isn’t against the noughts because his mother was a nought.

Suggesting that Callum doesn’t contradict Mr. Jason’s racist teachings shows that Mrs. Paxton really doesn’t understand how dehumanizing being in school is for Callum. Few people want him here, and most people are going out of their way to make him feel unwelcome. But Mrs. Paxton then reveals her reasoning as to why Mr. Jason isn’t actually against Callum: he has nought blood. She essentially proposes that because he (presumably) loves one nought, he wants all noughts to succeed.



CHAPTER 31

Minnie and Sephy are sitting on the stairs, listening to their parents fight. Fighting is rare: Mr. Hadley is never home and when he is, Mother is usually too drunk and out of it to fight. Mother is telling Mr. Hadley to not do “this” to her, while Mr. Hadley sarcastically says that Mother has been a great parent to “all” his children. Crying now, Mother asks if she was really supposed to let her husband bring his “bastard” into the house, and says that when she first refused to let him come, she made a mistake. Mr. Hadley says marrying Mother was a mistake and he’s had enough.

Most of the time, Sephy and Minnie can ignore that their parents’ marriage is so strained because their parents are seldom in the same place at the same time. And note that for the girls, this seems like a pretty emotionless experience—they’re just gathering information about their parents by listening in. It turns out that Mr. and Mrs. Hadley’s marriage is even more dysfunctional than it initially seemed, if Mr. Hadley has a son somewhere.



Sephy is shocked that she and Minnie have a brother. Downstairs, Mother suggests that she and Mr. Hadley start again, but Mr. Hadley says that’s silly. Their relationship is over, and Mother has let herself go too much. At this, Minnie stalks away. Sephy stays put and listens to her parents argue about whether Mother has appropriately supported Mr. Hadley throughout their marriage. Mr. Hadley assures Mother that she and the children will get everything they need, but once the election is over he’ll go public about their separation. Mother threatens to divorce him, but he says that’ll make him happy.

Listening in on this conversation teaches Sephy just how cruel her father can be—his contempt for Mother is palpable, and this is presumably what causes Minnie to get up and leave. The Hadleys also seem to frame their marriage as purely transactional. They’re not married because they love each other, but because they feel they’ve “earned” a relationship and support based on past actions.



Sephy grabs her jacket and races out the door before anyone can stop her. All that she's learned is so shocking. It's also shocking that Callum is in their place on the **beach**. He puts his arm around Sephy when she sits down next to him, and she apologizes for how Mr. Jason treats Callum. Callum smiles and suggests that neither of them apologize for other Cross or nought "idiots."

Sephy takes a deep breath and says she has a confession to make: she invited Callum to her party for "the wrong reasons," just to upset Mother and her friends. She's taking the invite back now. Callum thanks her. Sephy sighs that growing up is hard, and Callum adds that it's only going to get harder. Sephy doesn't ask him to clarify—what he might say scares her.

Keep in mind that as she's a bit of a young romantic, Sephy is no doubt disturbed to hear her parents fight. So it's nice for her to find Callum here, since she believes that Callum genuinely loves and cares about her. Unlike her parents' relationship, Sephy's relationship with Callum isn't so transactional.



This is a moment where it starts to look like Sephy is growing up and gaining maturity. She realizes that she has some power, and that she should use that power to protect Callum and their friendship. But still, Sephy isn't totally ready to accept the horrors of her world, since she won't ask Callum what else is going to happen.



CHAPTER 32

Callum is on his bed, thinking about what Mrs. Paxton said about Mr. Jason. He doesn't believe Mr. Jason secretly likes him: Mr. Jason *definitely* hates Callum. Just then, Lynette knocks on the door and asks to come in. She says she isn't okay, and Callum says he isn't either—but he'll survive. Lynette asks Callum about school and then asks how he manages to keep going. He says he wants to be someone and make a difference. Lynette asks what he'd choose if he had to choose just one, being someone or making a difference.

Callum laughs. But then he says he'd rather be someone and have lots of money and respect. Lynette gives him an odd look, but Callum insists it's no use making a difference if you don't get any money for it. Callum asks Lynette what keeps her going, but she smiles an odd smile and says that being "bonkers" kept her going. Now that she's not living in a fantasy, she feels empty. She asks if he also believes everything seems pointless—Callum got into Heathcroft, but no college will take him. Lynette apologizes and as she leaves the room, warns Callum to be careful—bubbles tend to burst, and the higher Callum's bubble gets, the further he'll have to fall. Callum is annoyed—Lynette should be cheering for him. But he knows she's hurting.

As far as Callum is concerned, actions speak louder than words—and Mr. Jason's mean treatment tells him everything he needs to know about how Mr. Jason feels about noughts. Still, though, Callum has dreams of overcoming these challenges if he's able to tell Lynette that he wants to be someone and make a difference. This dream seems to be what motivates Callum to stick with Heathcroft at all.



Callum's answer is selfish and seems to disturb Lynette a little bit. But keep in mind that Callum is also very worn down from living a life in near poverty, so it's perhaps not surprising that he aspires to be rich rather than to help others. Lynette is clearly struggling, but in a different way. She seems to feel increasingly hopeless now that she's realized she's not a Cross. It's also hard for Callum to realize yet again that his family members don't support his dreams. And surviving each day at Heathcroft is even more difficult without support at home.



CHAPTER 33

Sephy hesitantly enters Minnie's room and asks if Mother and Mr. Hadley might actually get a divorce this time, since Mother was the one to suggest it. Minnie just shrugs. When Sephy asks about their brother, Minnie says he's just their dad's son—she's known about him for years. Their dad had a fling before he met Mother. Sephy is shocked that she and Minnie see the situation so differently. She says she's going to ask Dad about their brother, but Minnie forbids Sephy from doing so—it'll make Mother even more miserable.

Sephy asks why Mother is so unhappy. Minnie says Mr. Hadley's son is part of it, but Mother also had an affair, probably just to attract her husband's attention. And she also has no friends. Sephy says Mother has lots of friends, but Minnie insists none of them are real friends. Sephy sniffs that if Mother treats her friends the way she treats Sephy, she can see why—but Minnie says Mother is lonely. When Sephy asks why Mother can't go make more friends, Minnie observes that Sephy is very young. Minnie says her wish for Sephy is that she never gets older.

CHAPTER 34

After history class, Callum asks Mr. Jason for a word. He wants to know why he got a C- as a midterm grade when he's been excelling at homework and tests. Mr. Jason says the grade reflects Callum's attitude, and asking about the grade at all reflects Callum's bad attitude. He suggests Callum appeal his grade if he doesn't like it. Callum says he will—but Mr. Jason says he'll never amend the grade. Enraged, Callum asks why Mr. Jason hates him so much. Mr. Jason should be on his side, since he's half nought. At this, Mr. Jason shakes Callum and asks where he heard that lie. Callum stumbles that he just assumed. Mr. Jason says that every time he sees a nought, he thanks God he's not one of them. He storms away.

CHAPTER 35

Sephy watches Mr. Jason storm down the hallway, looking angrier than ever. She only notices because she's been studying every boy's face, wondering if her brother attends Heathcroft. Sephy then notices Callum standing in the doorway and runs to tell him about her brother—but he brushes her off and asks if she's capable of thinking of anyone but herself. As he storms away, Sephy realizes his expression matches Mr. Jason's.

Now that Sephy knows there's more to her parents and their marriage than she thought, she wants to find out as much as possible about them and about her half-brother. Sephy seems to find the idea of a brother intriguing—he'd be another person to perhaps support her—but Minnie sees him as nothing more than an annoying interloper. Sephy wants to connect with her family (which is why she approaches Minnie about this at all), but Minnie isn't at all receptive.



Minnie might not be eager to connect with her sister or her parents, but she's also very protective of Mother—and very astute when it comes to parsing why Mother is so unhappy. She realizes too that Sephy isn't old enough to realize that Mother is somewhat trapped in her marriage. Her reputation precedes her; it's not like she gets to start fresh with potential new friends.



No matter what Mrs. Paxton said earlier, Mr. Jason seems to genuinely dislike Callum and want him to fail—the way he's grading Callum doesn't seem fair. But it's dangerous for Callum to bring up that he knows Mr. Jason's mother was a nought. Mr. Jason's defensive reaction seems to suggest that Mrs. Paxton was telling the truth, but that clearly hasn't made Mr. Jason more sympathetic to noughts. Instead, it's caused him to hate noughts. It's worth considering that if Mr. Jason were to embrace his parentage, he could be putting himself at risk: other Crosses may treat him worse if they knew.



Callum is right that Sephy is self-absorbed right now, but the biggest thing in her life at the moment is the fact that she has a brother out there somewhere. And she knows Callum isn't her brother, so he's not one of the boys she's studying in the hallway. But Callum brings Sephy back to earth and reminds her that there's more to life than her own dramas—and she must remember this if she wants to be a good friend.



CHAPTER 36

When Callum sits down for dinner, he realizes everyone at the table wears the same sour expression. Mum asks what's wrong with everyone, but Lynette says she's going for a walk. She goes upstairs for a bit and then everyone watches her grab her jacket. She says, "Bye, everyone," gives a sad smile, and walks out. Then, Mum asks Dad to tell her what happened. When he's done three hours later, Mum glares at Dad, Jude, and Callum in turn. She asks where her daughter is and says that Dad is the most useless man she's ever met if she couldn't keep Jude and Lynette from fighting.

Jude insists it wasn't Dad's fault, so Mum turns on him. She scolds him for goading Lynette and tells him to get an honest job at the bakery. Jude says he doesn't want an honest job—he wants to go to school. This is news to Callum, since Jude has been unbearable since Callum was accepted to Heathcroft. Jude insists that Mum and Dad don't care about him, so he'll leave. But as he throws open the front door, he stops—there are two policemen on the step.

The policemen ask to come in. The sergeant introduces himself as Sergeant Collins, and he says he has bad news: Lynette walked in front of a bus. It was no one's fault, and she died instantly. Callum knows it's his fault as Collins says Lynette is in the morgue of the local hospital. Mum sinks to the ground, howling, and then goes quiet. Collins leaves his business card for Dad and then leaves. A moment later, Mum pulls away from Dad and says that everyone must be proud of themselves—was Lynette thinking of what Dad, Jude, and Callum said when she walked in front of the bus?

CHAPTER 37

Sephy flips through channels—nothing on TV is entertaining—until Minnie snatches the remote and throws it. Minnie spits that Mother and Mr. Hadley are splitting up for real this time; does that mean anything to Sephy? Sephy says it does, but she can't do anything. Minnie gives Sephy a dirty look and leaves the room. As Sephy retrieves the remote and thinks angry thoughts about Minnie, Minnie suddenly shouts for Sephy to call an ambulance. Instead, Sephy runs upstairs and finds Minnie in Mother's room. Mother is on the floor with a pill bottle; there are a few pills around her. Minnie screams again for Sephy to call an ambulance. Sephy is in shock that Mother tried to kill herself.

Lynette's goodbye is ominous—this is awfully final for just going on a walk. This is especially true since she's gone for hours, something Mum seems to find concerning. Mum finding out about the fight between Jude, Lynette, and Callum also starts to distance the family members from each other. Mum no longer trusts Dad to protect their children, and Mum seems to fear that her sons have driven Lynette away.



In this moment, Callum realizes how little he knows Jude. Jude doesn't seem all that different from Callum, since he wants an education. And like in Callum's case, racist societal forces have gotten in the way of Jude attending school. Jude also implies that he craves parental support, but Mum and Dad aren't able to support him in the way he'd prefer.



It's interesting that Callum instantly blames himself for Lynette's death. He feels like he failed at supporting Lynette and mediating her relationship with Jude. Mum, on the other hand, blames everyone else for Lynette's death. She makes the case that because Dad wasn't able to protect Lynette from Jude (and she ropes Callum in here), Lynette was too upset to pay attention to her surroundings. Mum also seems to believe that Lynette's death was an accident—while Lynette's final-sounding goodbye suggests Lynette may have stepped in front of the bus on purpose.



As teenagers, both Sephy and Minnie feel powerless as they watch their parents fight and now finally begin the separation process. Sephy has a bit more power in this passage because she has the remote and can therefore decide what they watch on TV. But things take a turn for the worse when Minnie discovers that Mother has attempted suicide. This makes an impending divorce pale in comparison. Though note that Sephy seems to be shocked more at the idea that Mother would kill herself, not necessarily at the prospect of life without her mother.



CHAPTER 38

Callum can't cry, so he figures something is wrong with him. He flops around on his bed and sticks his fists under his pillow so he doesn't punch the wall. He finds an envelope with his name on it under the pillow—and the writing is Lynette's. Terrified, Callum opens the letter. Lynette writes that she wants him to know the truth. If he's reading this, hopefully she's dead. She's just tired, and she can't stand being sane again. Lynette explains that she'll try to make it look like an accident to save Mum and Dad the shame, but she needs Callum to know the truth. She doesn't want to live in a world where she'll never be good enough because she's a nought. She hopes Sephy and Callum have better luck than she and Jed had.

Callum stares at the letter, his eyes finally getting wet. He sits until his eyes stop smarting and then tears it into pieces. For the first time ever, Callum hates Lynette. She gave up. She wished him all her love at the end of the letter, but it seems like love just causes pain and makes people give up. Callum vows to never let anything make him want to follow in her footsteps.

Callum is grieving and angry—and he's struggling to figure out how to manage his difficult emotions. Finding Lynette's letter confirms that Lynette's death was a suicide. Lynette implies that she doesn't want Callum to share with Mum and Dad that she committed suicide, so if Callum agrees to follow her wishes, she's putting a huge burden on him. In addition, Lynette notes that she's generally worn down by the racism she experiences on a daily basis. This speaks to how harmful racism is: it pushes Lynette to take her own life, as dying seems preferable to suffering racism regularly.



At the beginning of the chapter, Callum wanted nothing more than to cry—but now he pushes his tears away. Believing that Lynette “gave up” makes Callum so angry that he decides to avoid love altogether, presumably so that he won't want to die himself one day. This, of course, has major implications for his relationship with Sephy, as Callum does have feelings for her.



CHAPTER 39

Sephy and Minnie are sitting in the hospital hallway, waiting to hear something about Mother. Suddenly, Mr. Hadley's personal secretary, Juno Ayelette, appears and marches toward the girls—and scolds them for not thinking. They never should've called an ambulance on the landline, and should've called her first. Now the story is out that Mother is trying to attract attention because Mr. Hadley is leaving her. Minnie and Sephy are confused—Mother tried to kill herself. But Juno scoffs: someone who wants to die takes more than four sleeping pills. Juno pulls out her phone and calls someone to tell them that they must spread the word that this was an accident. Minnie grabs Juno's phone and stomps on it.

Whatever Mother's goal was, her daughters recognize that she needs medical attention. Juno, on the other hand, cruelly suggests that they can't take Mother seriously. What matters more, Juno insists, is that the Hadley family preserve its reputation and not seem overly dramatic in the papers and on the news. It seems like there's some hope that the Hadley women, at least, might pull together and support each other when Minnie stomps on Juno's phone in protest.



CHAPTER 40

Today is Lynette's funeral. She's been gone a week, and Callum has spent the week doing nothing. He spends the morning of the funeral on the **beach** and returns home to find his house full of people. Callum knows Lynette would be just as surprised by the fuss everyone is making as he is. He also knows Mum and Dad would be devastated to know Lynette's death was intentional, so he's decided they'll never know.

As Callum decides to take on the emotional burden of keeping Lynette's suicide a secret, he draws away from his parents. He's trying to protect them, but by keeping this secret, Callum also doesn't let his parents support him and help him grieve for his sister.



Realizing he hasn't seen Mum and Dad in a while, Callum goes looking for them. He finds Dad in the corner with two other men and heads that direction, but he stops when he sees the solemn looks on their faces. Callum watches Dad nod as the other two talk, and then sees him pocket something another man gives him. He then sees Mum see Dad—and she's clearly livid. Callum is so caught up in watching his parents that he doesn't notice the room quiet down until it's silent. When Callum turns around, Sephy is there.

Sephy approaches Mum and Dad and offers her condolences. Mum assures Sephy she's not intruding, but as Sephy notices the hostile glares from the other attendees, she says she should leave. Mum argues—but Dad is glaring at Sephy. His expression matches the one Mrs. Hadley gave Callum when he tried to visit Sephy after she was beaten up. Jude steps forward and tells Sephy to leave—if Sephy really cared, she would've been helpful for the last three years when the McGregors were so poor, and she wouldn't have acted like a "brat" and gotten Harry fired.

Sephy stares at a man Callum has never seen, Harry, and says in a shocked tone that the new chauffeur said Harry quit. Harry says he was fired for not protecting Sephy from the riot at school. Jude shoves Sephy and says that Crosses like her have only hurt his family, and Dad tells Sephy to leave. When Sephy says she hasn't done anything, Dad says that's exactly right—and now she's here in a dress that cost more than he makes in a year, expecting everyone to celebrate her. Callum tries to approach Sephy, but a woman holds him back and whispers that noughts and Crosses don't mix. Sephy runs from the room, crying.

Mum tells Jude that was uncalled for, but Dad spits that Jude only told the truth. Many people, including Mum, stare at Dad in disbelief. When did Dad decide "live and let live" wasn't good enough? Dad tells Mum that his "ineffectual days are over" and pushes past her. Callum is terrified.

CHAPTER 41

Sephy is so confused. It's only been three years since Meggie worked for Mother, but the McGregors today are nothing like what Sephy remembers from three years ago. Sephy feels for the McGregors after what almost happened to Mother. She could easily be in the same place right now, but her attempts to show compassion just keep falling flat.

Callum is very absorbed in his own grief. This, combined with his youth and his innocence, means that he's been somewhat unaware of what's brewing between Mum and Dad. But here, Callum sees that there's clearly something going on; Dad's involved with these men in some way, and Mum is not happy about it. It's unclear what's happening, and Sephy's arrival means that Callum has to wait to find out.



Noting that Dad and Mrs. Hadley's expressions match suggests that the animosity that noughts and Crosses feel for each other is similar on both sides. And in the McGregors' home, noughts for once have more power than Crosses like Sephy have. This is why Dad and Jude feel comfortable speaking so bluntly to Sephy; in this situation, Sephy doesn't have the social power that she usually does.



The discovery that Harry was indeed fired makes Sephy look naïve. She learns in this situation that she can't take someone like Karl at his word—and she shouldn't trust her parents to treat their staff fairly. Then, Dad essentially accuses Sephy of pretending to care about Lynette just so she looks good. And he notes that it's extremely tone deaf for her to come in such an expensive dress, as it just highlights how poor the McGregors are.



Now, Callum can't ignore that tensions are rising in his family—and between noughts and Crosses. Dad's insistence that he's done being "ineffectual" is extremely ominous, as it suggests he's going to go to greater lengths to change things.



In Sephy's mind, she and the McGregors are in the same boat in that they've all recently experienced a death or a near-death in the family. But she's unable to see how her privilege and her power make her an unsympathetic figure to Callum's family—and make any sympathy she shows them seem contrived.



CHAPTER 42

Callum sits down beside Sephy on the **beach**. After a while, Sephy says she meant no harm, but going to the funeral wasn't a great idea. Sadly, Sephy says she just wanted to show she cares—and a card seemed too impersonal. Callum doesn't know what to say. Sephy asks if this is growing up, and then she asks Callum to put an arm around her. He hesitates, but he doesn't explain to Sephy why he hesitates.

It's exhausting for Callum to have to consistently explain to Sephy why nobody appreciates her gestures. She has good intentions, but Sephy still puts herself and her desires first. She does this here by asking Callum to put an arm around her. Essentially, she wants to be comforted because she feels bad for offending people—while Callum is feeling bad because his sister died.



CHAPTER 43

It's been two weeks since Mother's "accident," and Karl brings Minnie and Sephy to visit her nightly. Mother is better physically, but Sephy is not used to Mother's behavior: these days, Mother is affectionate, emotional, and actually speaks. Immediately when Minnie and Sephy enter Mother's room, Mother asks to hug them and kisses their cheeks. Sephy has to stop herself from wiping the kiss off. Mother brightly says that her daughters are the only people who care whether she lives or dies, and when Minnie points out that Mother's friends would visit her, Mother says she doesn't want her friends to know she's here.

Sephy thrives on consistency, so Mother's abrupt change in behavior is unsettling. It's particularly difficult for Sephy because Mother is suddenly acting like she truly loves and appreciates her daughters—something Sephy didn't believe was true before. However, note that Mother reads as somewhat desperate for any attention, and her daughters are a conveniently captive audience. Mother may feel powerless, but she knows she does have some power over her children.



Mother says she'll see her friends when she leaves. But for now, she wants Minnie to bring her makeup bag and bring a bottle of champagne tomorrow—today is the first day of the rest of her life, and she's celebrating. Minnie hesitates, and Mother's smile seems to crack. Suddenly becoming somber, Mother tells Minnie and Sephy to never take chances so they never make mistakes. She made a mistake once because she was lonely—and Mr. Hadley has never stopped punishing her for it. So to avoid that, her girls should be perfect.

Mother's choice to brush off suggestions to contact her friends implies that her relationships with her friends are, perhaps, not as strong as Minnie and Sephy might think. Minnie also seems to go into this conversation hoping that Mother might back off the alcohol after this experience. But instead, Mother makes it clear that she has no intention of giving it up. It's what helps her feel good after the "mistake" she made (presumably, her affair).



CHAPTER 44

It's now been three months since Lynette's funeral. Mum announces to Dad, Callum, and Jude that she's going out; she's been going on walks every night and staying out late. When Dad asks how long Mum is going to be like this, Mum points to the map on the table and asks if he's going to give "that" up. Dad says no, so Mum leaves and slams the door. Callum asks what's going on and steps closer to the table, but Jude rolls up the map and Dad stays quiet. Callum notices the map is a blueprint. Grimly, Dad says that he and Jude need to go out to a meeting.

Tensions at the McGregor house continue to rise. Mum wants to prioritize her family, but she refuses to do so if Dad and Jude won't do the same (instead, they're prioritizing whatever the map/blueprint is all about). Not revealing what the blueprint is also shows readers how in the dark Callum is about what's going on with his family. It seems like he's the only one who doesn't know exactly where everyone's energy is focused.



Feeling very excluded, Callum asks why he doesn't get to go. He begs to go—he just wants to belong to something. Jude refuses, but Callum tells Dad that if Jude is old enough to belong to the Liberation Militia, then he's old enough, too. Dad scolds Jude for telling Callum they're part of the LM, but Callum says he figured it out on his own. Dad says in any case, Callum can't come—it would mean the end of Heathcroft. Callum insists he's wasting his time there anyway, since there's only one other nought besides him still there. Dad insists that Callum *must* stay in school. Jude warns Callum to not tell his “dagger friend” about the LM—that'll kill Dad and Jude.

Callum demonstrates that he's somewhat aware of what's going on—but he also reads as young and naïve as he asks to join the LM along with Dad and Jude. Callum just wants to feel like he belongs somewhere, and he doesn't feel at all like he belongs at Heathcroft. It's a sign of how disillusioned Callum is becoming that he no longer wants to attend Heathcroft. Previously, he wanted an education, even if it wasn't going to get him a career—but he doesn't see the point anymore.



CHAPTER 45

One night, when Minnie is buried in a magazine, Sephy asks what they're going to do about Mother's drinking. It's getting worse. Minnie repeats what Mother says: that drinking “smooth[s] out the rough edges.” Sephy isn't convinced. Mother has been home for a while now, and she's overbearingly affectionate—but she's also drinking more than ever and wearing strong perfume to cover it up. Sephy knows Mother is getting sadder and lonelier, and there's nothing Sephy can do to help.

Sephy wants everything to be fixed—which to her means getting Mother to stop drinking. Minnie, though, takes a different view and supports Mother's drinking, though her response doesn't seem to get at the whole reason Mother is drinking. Indeed, at this point, Sephy seems more aware than Minnie that Mother is struggling emotionally and feels isolated. But Sephy can't connect with Mother or with Minnie, further distancing the family members from one another.



CHAPTER 46

It's been almost six months since Lynette died. Callum's 16th birthday in February was quiet and sad without Lynette there. She faded into the background when she was alive, but these days, Callum misses her so much. He's still keeping her secret, but he desperately wants to tell someone, ideally Sephy. But he can't bring himself to do it, and it would feel like betraying his family. To feel less alone (Mum, Dad, and Jude are all out), Callum calls Sephy. She wails that she's going to the mall with Mother today, which is her worst nightmare. Callum laughs at her, but suggests they meet up later tonight. Sephy can't fully commit—it will take Mother hours to purchase a single pair of shoes—but she'll try. Callum says he might see Sephy at the mall anyway, since he needs some school supplies.

Callum knows instinctively that talking to someone about Lynette's suicide is going to make him feel better. But Callum's loyalty to his family keeps him from speaking up, and this means that he never gets the opportunity to deal with his emotions. The phone call with Sephy reads as pretty normal for Callum and Sephy: Sephy is still exasperated by what she perceives as Mother's ridiculousness, and they both still want to connect with each other. And Callum's note that he needs school supplies suggests that at least in the moment, he's feeling better about Heathcroft than he did a few months ago.



CHAPTER 47

Mother asks Sephy if she likes this pair of shoes. Sephy says she does—but Mother says she liked a pair of burgundy shoes from four shops ago better, so she'll go try them on again. Sephy is so annoyed.

Sephy is trying really hard to be supportive, but she finds Mother ridiculous and difficult to genuinely support. This drives Sephy further away from her mother emotionally.



CHAPTER 48

Surprisingly, Mum, Dad, and Jude all come home for lunch. It's even a bit pleasant—Mum makes small talk. Once the meal is over, Callum gets up and says he's going to the mall. Jude leaps up and says that Callum can't go there, not today. The room grows tense, but Jude won't say what's going on. Mum stares at Jude and suddenly, Callum realizes what's going on. The Liberation Militia must be planning something at the mall—and Jude is involved. Callum remembers that Sephy is at the mall and bolts out the door.

Just as things seem poised to improve with Callum's family, Callum senses that everything is going to come crashing down. But while Callum realizes that Jude is trying to protect him and keep him safe, Callum feels loyalty to Sephy as well—he doesn't want to see her hurt. Prioritizing Sephy's safety over his own speaks to the depth of Callum's feelings for Sephy, even if Callum hasn't voiced them outright.



CHAPTER 49

Sephy is almost at the end of her rope. She's been shopping with Mother for five hours now, and has only just gotten away to drink a glass of **orange juice** at the mall café. Mother is putting her purchases in the car. Suddenly, Callum races up and says they have to get out of here—it doesn't matter that she hasn't finished her drink. Sephy realizes Callum is terrified as he drags her out of her seat. A Cross man asks Sephy if Callum is bothering her, but Sephy tells the man Callum just wants to show her something and lets Callum drag her away.

Sephy's orange juice at the mall is another symbol of her privilege: she can afford what Callum has previously framed as a luxury drink. But when Callum interrupts her and pulls her away from the orange juice, it suggests that Sephy's privilege isn't going to shield her against whatever is going to happen next. And even though Sephy doesn't know what's going on, she still trusts Callum to keep her safe.



Suddenly, every alarm in the mall goes off. Callum tells Sephy to keep moving, and they race for the nearest exit. Other people see Callum and Sephy running and in moments, everyone is running for the doors. Once they're outside, Callum keeps dragging Sephy along—and then there's a flash and a boom. Sephy flies through the air and hits the ground. Her ears ring, and she's not sure how long she lays there or if she's dead. Then, Sephy sits up and sees smoke billowing out of the mall. Callum asks Sephy if she's okay, but Sephy tells Callum to tell her he's not somehow responsible for the bomb. Sephy gets up and races to check on Mother.

This is an extremely tense and confusing experience for Sephy. Though she survives the bomb, the blast still throws her and temporarily damages her hearing. Worst of all, though, is Sephy's growing suspicion that Callum was involved with the bomb. Readers, of course, know that he had nothing to do with planting it, but Sephy has no way to know that. So the fact that Callum somehow knew about the bomb makes Sephy feel like she and Callum are growing even further apart.



CHAPTER 50

Mum accosts Callum with questions as soon as he gets home—she wants to know where Jude is. He left just after Callum did. Mum still doesn't know what happened, but before Callum can tell her, an emergency alert comes on the TV. A newscaster explains that a bomb exploded at the Dundale Shopping Center, killing at least seven people. The newscaster says that five minutes before the bomb detonated, the government received a warning from the Liberation Media.

Both Mum and Callum suspect that Dad and/or Jude were involved in the bombing. For Mum, it's essential that she find her oldest son so she can protect him. And it seems like a shock for both Mum and Callum to realize that Dad and Jude's involvement with the Liberation Militia has led to this violent act. But the LM's actions also suggest that noughts are fed up with the status quo—and they're willing to go to extremes to try to make change.



From behind Callum, Jude says that's a lie—he and Dad are in the doorway. The TV shows footage of the bloody carnage outside the mall, and then the prime minister comes on the screen. He says that all the Liberation Militia has done is make the government less interested in working with them. Jude starts to ask Dad something, but Dad shushes him. Mum turns the TV off and asks Dad to tell her the truth: did he and Jude plant the bomb? Dad says it's none of Mum's business. Even angrier now, Mum asks Jude if *he* planted the bomb. Disobeying Dad, Jude blurts that their cell had to—but there was supposed to be a warning an hour before it went off, and everyone was supposed to be evacuated. He doesn't understand why that didn't happen, and he turns to Dad.

Mum tries not to vomit and says that Dad and Jude murdered people. Dad's defiant expression seems to crumble, and he reaches for Mum—but she slaps him so hard she breaks a finger. She screeches that Dad promised not to endanger his family, and she insists murdering people won't bring Lynette back. Dad says that now, the Crosses know the Liberation Militia mean business. Mum ignores Dad and asks Jude to take her to the hospital so she can get her finger looked at. Dad offers to take her, but she warns him to stay away from her.

Once Jude and Mum are out the door, Dad hugs himself and starts to pray—this is odd, Dad doesn't believe in God. But Dad suddenly notices Callum and stops. Callum says he'll go help Mum and Jude and runs away.

CHAPTER 51

It's early in the morning and Sephy hasn't slept at all. Mother is okay after the bombing, and outwardly, Sephy is too. Inside, though, she's tormented by the knowledge that Callum knew about the bomb. He saved her life, but she almost wishes he hadn't. Sephy heads downstairs, hoping some warm milk might help her feel better. But when she opens the fridge, she finds Mother's bottle of chardonnay. Sephy pours herself a tiny bit; it tastes like vinegar. But as she drinks more, she decides she likes it. After a full glass, Sephy falls fast asleep.

Given what Jude says about how the mall was supposed to be evacuated before the blast, it seems as though the LM just wanted to make a threat but not hurt anyone—but for whatever reason, the threat morphed into actually killing people. This is a huge shock for Jude in particular. He seems to have innocently trusted Dad and the LM to act fairly and follow through with the lifesaving warning—and it's unclear to him why this didn't happen.



Dad is caught between his loyalty to Mum and his loyalty to the LM. He wants to support a cause he believes in, but Mum makes it clear that Dad's loyalty to the LM is seriously damaging their marriage. Mum's choice to resort to physical violence illustrates that violence plagues most romantic relationships in the novel, whether they're between noughts, Crosses, or noughts and Crosses.



Things get even more confusing for Callum when he sees Dad pray to a god who's supposed to only look out for Crosses. But it's too hard for Callum to try to talk to Dad right now, so he follows Mum and Jude instead.



Sephy is struggling to confront some difficult potential truths about Callum. Again, while readers know Callum isn't involved with the LM, Sephy doesn't know this—and she clearly sees the LM as a group that's purely violent and scary. This causes her to call her friendship with Callum into question, and to wonder if she really knows Callum at all. And for now, alcohol starts to look like a good way to escape these things she doesn't understand.



CHAPTER 52

Mercy Hospital—the noughts’ hospital—is in chaos, with all the noughts injured in the mall bombing in the emergency room. Callum wonders how Jude feels about seeing “the result of his handiwork,” but Jude stares at the floor and asks Mum constantly if she’s okay. Mum finally snaps that she’s not okay and Jude should stop asking “stupid questions,” but she apologizes—she’s angry at Dad and lashing out. She tells Callum to go somewhere while she tells Jude something. Callum grumbles, but goes to stand by the broken vending machine.

Callum watches Jude’s face go white in response to whatever Mum says. Jude shakes his head emphatically; he doesn’t like what he’s hearing. When Callum can’t stand it any longer, he walks back to Mum and Jude. Jude runs away, and Mum refuses to tell Callum anything. When Jude returns 30 minutes later, he gives Mum a strange look.

Finally, a nurse calls Mum’s name. The nurse introduces herself as Nurse Carter and asks for Mum’s ID card—nought hospitals have been supposedly abusing their government grants, so now it’s policy that hospitals must gather ID information. Mum left her ID at home, so Nurse Carter says she’ll need cards from two people who can vouch for Mum. Mum is enraged, but Nurse Carter asks Jude for his ID card. Jude and Callum both offer their cards, and Nurse Carter swipes them through a card reader. The machine will store the boys’ details. Mum leaps up and tells the nurse to delete her sons’ information, but Nurse Carter says she’ll wipe the information as soon as Mum returns with her own ID card. Callum suddenly realizes why Mum is so uptight.

Nurse Carter then examines Mum’s hand. It takes an hour for an X-ray machine to become available, and almost another hour before a doctor can set Mum’s finger. As the doctor bandages the finger, he tells Mum she has to keep it dry for three weeks. Mum says she can’t—she’s a housemaid and won’t be able to clean. The doctor says she’ll never be able to use her finger again if she doesn’t let it heal. Finally, Mum is done. She approaches Nurse Carter’s office, knocks on the door, and says she’ll be back with her ID card tomorrow. Nurse Carter assures Mum she has nothing to worry about.

For now, Callum seems to share Sephy’s negative feelings about the LM and the bombing: describing Jude’s “handiwork” connotes that Callum’s tone is sarcastic and upset. Jude reads as particularly young here—he wants to make sure Mum still loves him, even if she is angry with him. Callum is made to feel even younger when Mum sends him away while she tells Jude something that she clearly thinks is beyond Callum’s understanding.



All of this is extremely confusing for Callum—but readers don’t get any more information than Callum does, so what Mum says remains a mystery. But keeping Callum in the dark continues to distance him from his mother and brother, since they’re making him feel like an immature child.



The system of government grants makes it clear that Mercy is a government hospital—so Jude and Callum’s identity information is going to be accessible to any government agents who might try to connect Jude to the mall bombing earlier. This is why Mum is so upset about her sons having to provide their information. But Mum can’t refuse to cooperate if she wants medical care, putting her in an impossible position—in order to get her finger fixed, she has to put her sons in potential danger.



The amount of time that Mum, Callum, and Jude spend waiting for imaging and doctors highlights that this isn’t an efficient, well-funded hospital—the noughts presumably have poorer hospitals than the Crosses do. And again, Mum finds herself in an impossible position: she can’t support her family if she doesn’t work, but she can’t work for a short period if she wants to stay employed for the long term. This speaks to how desperate the McGregors’ finances are.



CHAPTER 53

These days, Sephy limits herself to one glass of wine per night. It's just enough to make her feel calm, and her first hangover taught her not to overdo it. She's not a drunk like Mother. She just drinks "Well, because." She doesn't like the taste of wine, but Mother is right: it "smooths out the rough edges." When she's drinking, Sephy doesn't care as much about Mother or Callum. Isn't that awesome?

If Sephy is drinking to help herself calm down, it follows that she's experiencing a great deal of anxiety right now. This makes sense: Sephy is still disturbed because she believes Callum was involved with the bombing, and Mother's drinking is unsettling. With a glass of wine, though, Sephy finds that she doesn't have to care so much.



CHAPTER 54

Even though Mum has Callum and Jude's information erased from the hospital database, she remains on edge. Finally, during one Sunday lunch, Mum tells Dad she wants him to leave the house by tomorrow morning. It's the only way to protect Jude from being hanged. Dad argues that he's involved with the Liberation Militia so that his sons can have a better life, but Mum isn't convinced. Jude says that if Dad is going, he's going too. And even if he stays, he's not giving up the LM. He's making a difference and believes in what he's doing. Mum says that in that case, Dad and Jude can both leave—she'll protect Callum. As everyone else starts shouting, Callum runs out the door.

Things have gotten to the point where Mum feels like the only way she can keep her sons safe is by distancing herself from Dad (and by extension, from the Liberation Militia). But Dad insists that Mum is actually doing more harm than good in this regard: his involvement with the LM is how he's fighting to give his family a better life. Mum and Dad's priorities are very different, which adds to the tension. Jude is, by this point, wholly committed to the LM's cause—it makes him feel grown-up and like he has purpose. Callum feels neither of these things, so his only choice is to run.



CHAPTER 55

Laughing hysterically, Sephy greets Callum and tells him it's a beautiful day. Callum, though, isn't laughing. He leans forward, sniffs Sephy's breath, and then shakes her and asks what she's doing. Frightened, Sephy tells Callum to let go and falls when he does. The ground is swaying; it's hard to get up. When Callum accuses Sephy of being drunk, Sephy says she just had one, maybe two, glasses of cider. Callum tells Sephy she's "stupid," she's going to end up like Mother. At least Mother had a reason to start drinking, but Sephy's reasons just show that she's entitled and bratty.

Callum has an outside perspective on Sephy's family situation, and he sees more clearly than Sephy does that Mother's drinking is hurting every member of the Hadley family. He clearly doesn't want Sephy to get hurt with her drinking—he's her friend, after all—but notice how forcefully he touches and speaks to her. It's violent and cruel, which suggests that Callum is struggling to separate his feelings for Sephy with his desire to lash out and hurt her.



Finally, Sephy says that she drinks because she's tired. She's tired of her family and of the way Callum makes her feel. She's supposed to be perfect and live a boring life, but that makes her want to vomit. She wants something more. Callum tells her she won't find anything in a wine bottle, or she'll end up like Mother will: in an assisted living facility or dead. Sephy jumps. Is that really what's going to happen to Mother? Suddenly, Sephy feels like a silly child.

Because Sephy trusts Callum, she's willing to speak honestly with him about how she's feeling. This has an immediate effect: Callum is able to make Sephy see that drinking isn't going to help, and it's going to put her in danger. Having this laid out for her, Sephy realizes that drinking only makes her look young, naïve, bored, and entitled.



After a minute, Sephy says she should head back. She promises to try to stop drinking, but won't promise to stop outright. Then, she leans forward and kisses Callum. He pulls away—she stinks of alcohol. Sephy accuses him of being as cruel as Mr. Hadley. When Callum tries to grab Sephy's arm and ask her to stay, Sephy screams that he's too caught up with the Liberation Militia to care about her. Callum insists he's not part of the LM, but he won't tell Sephy how he knew about the mall bomb. When Sephy says she wishes he'd let her die in the mall, Callum kisses her. Sephy kisses him back, and their hands wander.

The alcohol lowers Sephy's inhibitions, which is part of why she tries to kiss Callum. She's also desperate for someone to love her and make her feel cared for, and right now, Callum seems like her best (and only) option. But despite the fact that Sephy and Callum do go on to kiss, outside forces are still coming between them. Sephy doesn't fully trust Callum when he says he's not part of the LM, and Callum seems displeased with Sephy's unwillingness to stop drinking entirely.



CHAPTER 56

Callum knows things went too far with Sephy. They didn't have sex, but he really only wanted her to see that he doesn't care if she stinks of alcohol. In any case, Sephy is too young. She's clearly just drinking because she's bored and wants attention. Callum tries to make himself stop thinking of Sephy—he's being pathetic and needs to sleep.

Callum can no longer ignore his feelings for Sephy, though they continue to be uncomfortable. He believes he should have bigger things to think about, like surviving his next day at school, than his kiss with Sephy.



Callum wakes up to the front door being broken down. There's shouting and footsteps, and then smoke is everywhere. Callum screams for Jude and then realizes the smoke isn't smoke: it's tear gas. As Callum feels his way down the stairs, two voices shout at him to get down and then tackle him to the ground. They cuff him and drag him out of the house. Callum is crying and can't breathe, the tear gas is so painful. He screams for Mum, Dad, and Jude, and can hear Mum crying as he's shoved into a police car. He has no idea what's going on.

This terrifying scene shows how vulnerable noughts are to police brutality—even if they didn't do anything, like Mum and Callum. Callum is never told what's going on, and he's made to experience all sorts of pain and fear, seemingly just to intimidate him. In this difficult moment, Callum screams for his family members—he still relies on them to keep him safe.



CHAPTER 57

Sephy knows she has to get out of here. She doesn't want to lose Callum, but he'll understand. She can't stop thinking about him, especially after he kissed and touched her earlier—but he couldn't possibly be interested in a kid like Sephy. That's ridiculous. So Sephy decides to take her own advice. She approaches Mother and asks to go away to boarding school. Mother is shocked and clearly drunk as Sephy says she'd like to attend Chivers, which is only 100 miles away.

Sephy's increasingly complicated life is making her feel claustrophobic. To make that sensation stop, Sephy reasons that the only thing to do is escape. She knows that as a Cross, nobody will support her in a relationship with Callum. This is why she tries to talk herself out of admitting that they like each other; a relationship would just complicate things even further.



Mother asks what she'll do without Sephy. For a moment, Sephy and Mother understand each other perfectly, and Sephy almost changes her mind. Mother, though, says Sephy can't go. Mother wails when Sephy storms out and slams the door. Sephy knows she has to talk to Callum. He'll support her once she explains herself—and she has to get out before it's too late.

The dysfunction in the Hadley family comes to the forefront in this passage. Mother wants Sephy around because having her daughters nearby means that Mother can feel in control. Essentially, Mother wants to keep Sephy a dependent child as long as possible. The effect of this, though, is that Sephy shifts her focus outside her family and to Callum.



CHAPTER 58

Two plainclothes officers are interrogating Callum—and they have been for hours. They want to know about Jude, Dad, and Mum’s involvement in the Liberation Militia—but Callum insists he doesn’t know anything. The questions keep coming for hours, until Callum thinks he’s losing his mind. Eventually, Callum’s mind shuts down.

Callum comes to in a cell, with Mum stroking his hair. Mum says that Dad is being questioned; she doesn’t know where Jude is. He wasn’t in the house when the police came. She explains that investigators found Jude’s fingerprints on a coke can in the mall. They matched his fingerprints to Jude’s data at the hospital. Starting to cry, Mum says that they’re saying Jude will hang—they’ve already put out a massive reward offer for information. Callum snaps that they probably planted the evidence. Jude wouldn’t set off a bomb.

Callum asks why the police are talking to Dad still, if they want Jude. Mum doesn’t know—but she hopes Dad is careful. Just then, the cell door opens and the officer tells Mum and Callum that they can go. When Mum asks where Dad is, the officer says he’ll be formally charged soon—but he won’t share any more information. When Callum asks what Dad is being charged with, the officer finally answers: political terrorism and seven counts of murder.

Keep in mind that Callum is just a child; he’s only 16. The officers are dehumanizing him by questioning him in this manner, until Callum actually passes out due to the exhaustion and the trauma. This highlights that Callum (and other noughts) have good reason to fear the police in this society.



It’s hard to tell if readers should trust Callum’s assessment of Jude’s innocence or not—Jude did admit that it was his and Dad’s LM cell that planted the bomb. However, given how the police treat noughts as though they’re all criminals, Callum’s insistence that the police planted the evidence doesn’t seem out of place. There’s no trust between the police and a huge swath of the population.



What Dad is going to be charged with suggests that the police believe he’s the one who planted the bomb—so Dad is seemingly taking the fall, either for Jude or for someone else in his LM cell. But at this point, it’s unclear whether Dad’s loyalty is more to his family or to the LM (and if he’s protecting Jude, Dad’s loyalty is in both places).



CHAPTER 59

Sephy wills Callum to pick up the phone. It’s nine in the morning, where is everyone? Sephy tells herself that she can just tell Callum later that in September, she’ll be gone at Chivers. Will Callum care?

Readers know that Callum is in jail still, something that Sephy isn’t aware of. She’s too focused on herself right now to consider what Callum might be going through.



CHAPTER 60

Mum and Callum have spent the morning visiting any lawyer’s office that offers free legal aid. Other lawyers, upon learning about Dad’s case, have shown Mum and Callum out. Callum isn’t hopeful about the office he’s in now, Stanhope and Rigby—the office is disgusting. As Callum tells Mum they can do better, a voice behind him tells Callum not to judge. The nought man introduces himself as Adam Stanhope, the son of the firm’s founder. This impresses Callum; there are barely any nought attorneys, let alone second-generation attorneys.

Because of their poor financial situation combined with being noughts, Mum and Callum don’t have as many options as they might otherwise when it comes to lawyers. To Callum, this is a huge gut punch: he doesn’t believe anyone who keeps such a disgusting office could possibly do any good for Dad. But Mr. Stanhope starts to look a bit more promising when Callum discovers he’s a second-generation attorney—there may be more to him than meets the eye.



Mr. Stanhope leads Mum and Callum across a sticky floor and flings open a door to reveal a clean, polished office. Seeing Callum's amazed look, Mr. Stanhope says that Crosses are reassured by a nought lawyer who doesn't seem successful. Once everyone is seated, Mum tells Mr. Stanhope about Dad's case. Mr. Stanhope says only, "I see" as Mum says Dad didn't do it and she doesn't have much money. Mr. Stanhope says he can't work for free, and this case will be expensive. But he'll talk to Dad and then decide. When Callum asks if Mr. Stanhope is a good lawyer, Mr. Stanhope says he's won more cases than he's lost.

Mum and Callum are sitting in the police station waiting room while Mr. Stanhope talks to Dad. They've been here forever, and Callum suspects Mr. Stanhope snuck out the back. But Mr. Stanhope appears and grimly asks Mum and Callum to follow him. As soon as Mum enters the cell, she runs into Dad's arms. After Dad hugs Callum, he asks where Jude is. Confused, Mum says Jude disappeared before the police even came.

Dad is suddenly furious. He says the police said they had Jude—and so Dad confessed to all the charges to save Jude. They threatened Mum and Callum if Dad didn't. Dad tells Mum he didn't plant the bomb, but he had no choice. Mum, shocked, says Dad is going to hang. She looks to Mr. Stanhope, who says that Dad confessed on video. Callum thinks that Jude can't be the bomber as Dad explains that he used a coke can from home and kept other bomb supplies around the house. Jude must have touched them, which accounts for the fingerprints. Dad shouts that Jude isn't guilty; *he* is. Mum sobs, but Dad says that he won't let his family go to jail. With his confession, Jude won't die.

CHAPTER 61

Sephy watches with horror as a newscaster says that Ryan McGregor has confessed to the Dundale mall bombings and his family members are in hiding. He obviously didn't do it. How can Sephy help? Minnie interrupts Sephy's thoughts to call Ryan a "blanker scumbag" and say that the whole family should hang. Mother scolds Minnie, but Minnie keeps going; this is going to hurt Mr. Hadley, since Meggie used to work for them.

Minnie suggests that Callum must be guilty too, but Sephy argues that's not true. Mother tells Sephy to grow up and leaves the room. Minnie tells Sephy that she knows nothing about how the world works and leaves as well. Sephy feels so alone. Why does everyone leave her? But she is certain that Ryan isn't the bomber.

Mr. Stanhope might have more money and outward success than Callum's family, but he's still working within the same racist framework. This is why he feels like he has to keep a gross waiting room—he doesn't want to seem threatening to potential Cross clients. While Mum seems happy to go with Mr. Stanhope simply because the attorney will take the case, Callum wants a better indication that Mr. Stanhope can actually help. Callum is a bit more idealistic than Mum right now.



With Dad's life on the line, Mum has put aside her issues with Dad and is throwing herself fully into supporting him. This highlights her loyalty to her family—she's going to do whatever it takes to help her husband and sons. Though it at first seems like a good sign that Mr. Stanhope didn't bail on the McGregors, his expression and Dad asking after Jude indicates that there's something odd going on.



To readers and to everyone in the room, it's clear that the police set Dad up. Moreover, the police are clearly only interested in convicting someone of the crime, whether or not that person is actually guilty. In other words, they want to look like they're doing something, not actually carry out justice. And Dad shows that his loyalty is, at this point, to his family: he fell for the police's trap because he wants to save his family members from death or dehumanization.



In Sephy's mind, it's obvious that the McGregors have nothing to do with the bombing—these are people she once loved and trusted. Sephy's family members, though, now see their former employee's family as just another nought family—which means the McGregors are, to Minnie, criminals and bad people.



Minnie and Mother aren't willing to call out Sephy directly, but they seem to take offense at her naivete. But they presumably think Callum is guilty for racist, prejudiced reasons, given that Minnie thinks the entire McGregor family is guilty by association.



CHAPTER 62

The secretary shows Mum and Callum into Mr. Stanhope's office; the lawyer called them here for some urgent reason. Mr. Stanhope asks why his phone calls haven't been getting through. Mum and Callum explain that they're staying with relatives because they've gotten hate mail—and bricks through their windows.

Mr. Stanhope says that he has good news: he can take the case, with Kelani Adams's help. Kelani Adams is a world-renowned Cross attorney. Mr. Stanhope says an anonymous benefactor offered to pay the legal fees. Mum insists they can't accept charity, but Mr. Stanhope says this is Dad's only chance. Mum turns to Callum. Callum wants Mum to make the decisions, but he says they should accept the help. Secretly, Callum knows Sephy sent the money, and he vows to pay her back.

The hate mail and property damage show that even though the police aren't targeting Mum and Callum like they're targeting Dad, Mum and Callum are still at risk. Society at large—which is racist and assumes they're guilty—is going to punish Mum and Callum for their perceived involvement.



For Mum, learning that someone is offering to pay the legal fees is a blessing—but it also makes her feel powerless and highlights her precarious financial situation. When she asks Callum for his opinion, she's trying to make Callum feel more mature and as though he has a say in things. This is an attempt to help Callum retain some of his dignity.



CHAPTER 63

Sephy gets home from school to find Mr. Hadley's suitcases in the hallway. She races for him and leaps into his arms, giggling. She asks how long he's staying, and he says he'll be home for a while. Sephy realizes Mother is in a rocking chair watching, and it makes her heart drop. Sephy realizes her dad isn't home for Mother, or for her—he's home because of Ryan McGregor's case. She asks if he'll only stay until after the trial is over. He says nothing is decided, but Sephy figures this is a lie.

Sephy clearly loves her father and craves a close, affectionate relationship with him. But seeing Mother, and realizing that Mr. Hadley is home for Ryan's case, shows Sephy that things are never going to be simple. It's always going to feel fraught to openly love her father, when Mother loathes him so much—and it's hard to accept that Mr. Hadley cares about his career more than his daughter.



CHAPTER 64

As Mr. Corsa calls Callum into his office, Callum makes note of how fancy and imposing Mr. Corsa's office is. He sits, and Mr. Corsa says that it'd be best if Callum was suspended for a while. Callum spits that Mr. Corsa thinks he's guilty just because Dad is supposedly guilty, and Mr. Corsa must be thrilled—there's only one more nought after Callum to run out of the school. When Mr. Corsa notes that Shania was expelled for "gross misconduct," Callum shouts that Shania slapped a student because he slapped her first—and he only got a scolding.

Note that Mr. Corsa never gives any legitimate reason as to why Callum should be suspended. This implies that as Callum suggests, Mr. Corsa is more concerned with how it looks having the son of a supposed bomber in his school than with either the truth or Callum's dignity. For Callum, the whole thing is ridiculous: he sees his suspension and Shania's expulsion as part of an unfair plot to drive noughts out of Cross schools.



This is happening to all noughts in Cross schools, all over the country. They're all being expelled for minor infractions. Mr. Corsa stands, says he'll be happy to have Callum back "once the dust clears," and offers Callum his hand. Callum knows the dust will never clear and refuses the handshake. He slams the door as hard as he can on the way out. When Mr. Corsa comes out of the office and tells Callum to come back, Callum smiles—he doesn't have to do what Mr. Corsa says anymore. He feels gutted, but he's never coming back.

Mr. Corsa says what he needs to say in order to make it seem like he wasn't outright rude to Callum. But Callum senses that he's going to spend the rest of his life trying to "settle the dust" that started to fly when Dad and Jude got involved with the mall bombing. Though Callum resents this and is angry and upset, he feels like he finally has some agency: he can choose to leave Heathcroft now, where he couldn't before.



CHAPTER 65

Sephy lets herself into Minnie's room and stops herself from giggling when Minnie throws a pillow at her. Sephy asks Minnie's advice about going away to Chivers. She says that Mother said no. Minnie says boarding school is a great idea, which is why she also asked to go away to school. Sephy is shocked. Sighing, Minnie says maybe the two of them would be happier if they'd relied on each other, but instead, Sephy drinks to escape and Minnie gets nastier. Sephy insists she doesn't drink except for the taste. When Minnie asks if she's just trying to convince herself of that, Sephy bursts into tears.

Minnie frames her and Sephy's difficult relationship as something totally past fixing. In her mind, things are the way they are, and it's no use trying to connect to each other. This starts to explain why Sephy's family is so distant, if Minnie picked up this mindset from her parents. However, Minnie does force Sephy to confront that her drinking is becoming problematic, so perhaps the sisters' relationship isn't all lost.



Minnie puts an arm around Sephy and says she's been talking to Mr. Hadley about them both going away to school. She thinks she's making progress. Bitterly, Sephy says their dad doesn't care about them as much as he cares about politics and his career—they've barely seen him since he's been home. Minnie promises that by September, they'll both be gone.

Even if Minnie accepts that she and Sephy are never going to be close friends, she shows here that she does care about helping Sephy be happy and successful. But Sephy focuses only on the fact that she still feels alone; Mr. Hadley's neglect is the most important thing in Sephy's mind.



CHAPTER 66

Callum is high up in the courtroom's public gallery. Dad is down below, along with the jury—which is composed entirely of Crosses, as usual. The clerk stands up and asks Dad if he pleads guilty or not guilty. Callum stands up and shouts, "Dad, don't do it!" The judge and the jury glare at Callum, and Dad meets Callum's eyes before shouting that he pleads not guilty to each charge. Everyone in the room gasps, and by the end, the public gallery is cheering. The judge throws everyone out.

Noting that juries are normally all Crosses suggests that noughts often don't get a fair trial, given how biased and racist Callum's world is. When Dad pleads not guilty to the charges, it invigorates the noughts in the public gallery and gives them some hope. At least for a while, Dad can stand up for himself with dignity and pride—and encourage others to do the same.



CHAPTER 67

Sephy is shocked when she receives a subpoena to appear in court on Monday. Minnie says this is what happens when you hang out with noughts. To Sephy's surprise, Mother tells Minnie to be quiet so she at least looks intelligent. Mother's expression is still serious, though, and she says this is why she warned Sephy to stay away from Callum. This is going to destroy Mr. Hadley's reputation. When Sephy insists it's not her fault, Mother snaps that Sephy will get fleas if she lies down with dogs and stalks away.

Both Minnie and Mother espouse the idea that noughts are naturally criminals, and that anyone who associates with them is going to be drawn in. And it's extremely racist when Mother invokes the saying about getting fleas if one lies with dogs—that likens noughts to dirty, parasite-infested animals. To Sephy, this is absurd. She sees Callum as an individual person, not as a collection of negative stereotypes.



CHAPTER 68

As Callum is sworn in to testify, he agrees to tell the truth—but he wonders which version of the truth this all-Cross court will like. The prosecution lawyer, Shaun Pingule, starts by asking Callum his name—and then asks him in three different ways if Callum is part of the Liberation Militia. Already Callum can tell the jury doesn't trust him. Mr. Pingule asks if Dad and Jude are part of the LM (Callum answers no), and he asks for Callum's thoughts on the LM. Panicking, Callum says noughts and Crosses should be equal and he supports people who try to make things more equal. Kelani asks this question to be withdrawn and the judge agrees—but again, Callum realizes his credibility is damaged.

Callum makes it clear to readers that he doesn't feel safe or comfortable telling what he believes is the truth in this court—a sure sign that the proceedings aren't going to be fair or just, since Callum can't trust in the process. And Mr. Pingule's questions seem designed to discredit Callum. For instance, Callum realizes that even if him saying that he supports equality between noughts and Crosses is withdrawn from the official court record, the jury still heard it. They'll still think about it, and they'll still consider Callum dangerous and unreliable.



As Mr. Pingule asks Callum if anyone in his family knew about the Dundale mall bombing, Callum can tell this is a trap. Mr. Pingule then brings in a massive TV—and shows surveillance footage from the mall. The video shows Callum running out of a store, entering the café, and then leaving it again with Sephy in tow. Callum identifies Sephy, says she's a friend, and says he was late to meet up with her and wanted to show her something. He can't remember what. Mr. Pingule sits down, and Callum feels like he's condemned Dad. But then, Kelani gets up to question Callum. She asks him to describe his relationship with Mrs. Hadley—and walks him through saying that if Mrs. Hadley had been in the café with Sephy, he would've waited to approach.

Again, it's clear that Callum doesn't trust that this trial is going to get Dad justice when he suspects that Mr. Pingule is trying to trip him up. It seems like Callum is just lucky that Kelani is able to swoop in and reframe what could otherwise be construed as damning proof that Callum knew about the bombing beforehand. Keep in mind too that Kelani is one of the best lawyers in this fictional world—so it seems like Callum and his family are perhaps in a better position than other noughts who don't have access to such accomplished lawyers.



CHAPTER 69

Sephy is on the stand. She's extremely nervous—but Mr. Pingule and the judge are kind and encouraging, so she feels a bit better. Mr. Pingule walks Sephy through explaining that she was in the café while Mother was putting away shopping. Callum approached her and said he wanted to show her something outside, but he didn't say what. Sephy knows that's not the whole truth, but she doesn't know what else to say. Then, Mr. Pingule asks Sephy to describe her relationship to Callum, and tells her that the only way Callum and his family will get hurt today is if she doesn't tell the truth.

Annoyed now, Sephy insists that Callum wanted to show her something outside. She tells Mr. Pingule that she and Callum are only friends, and when he asks if she knows who planted the bomb, Sephy truthfully says she doesn't.

Consider the difference in how Callum felt that the judge and the lawyers treated him with how Sephy sees things. While Callum felt that Mr. Pingule was going out of his way to make him look bad, Sephy sees Mr. Pingule as kind and encouraging. This is presumably because Sephy is a Cross, so she's presumed to be innocent and helpful while Callum, as a nought, is immediately treated with suspicion.



Sephy seems to resent Mr. Pingule's implication that she's bending the truth because she's in love with Callum and is trying to protect him. This is, of course, exactly what Sephy is doing—but the fact that she honestly doesn't know who planted the bomb works in her favor.



CHAPTER 70

Now that Callum has testified, he can watch court proceedings from the public gallery. He refuses to sit with Mum out of shame—he knows he and Sephy have condemned Dad. But then, Kelani calls a Cross man named Leo Stoll to the stand. Mr. Stoll explains that he's a retired police officer. Then, Kelani asks Mr. Stoll to identify Callum—and Mr. Stoll says he was in the mall café and watched Callum drag a girl out. He asked the girl if she was okay, but the girl said Callum was a friend and wanted to show her something. He also notes that Sephy didn't seem afraid. Callum is ecstatic.

Leo Stoll's testimony backs up both Sephy and Callum's stories of what happened at the mall café on the day of the bombing. Tracking him down and getting him to testify is another nod to Kelani's skill as a lawyer. Again, though, most noughts probably don't have access to lawyers like her, so Dad might be getting a fairer trial than many noughts on trial for similar offenses.



CHAPTER 71

Sephy spends her evenings watching the news for any coverage of Ryan's trial. She still doesn't know how to help him. On the night that the news shows Callum's house burning to the ground, Sephy goes to her room and sobs. Fortunately Callum's family is with relatives, but she desperately wants to help. Sephy wonders how Meggie managed to hire Kelani Adams. Sephy knows of Kelani, and she believes it when the newscasters say that Kelani is making Ryan's trial as fair as possible. Sephy is certain Ryan will be found innocent. That's justice.

Here, Sephy reveals that she didn't hire Kelani Adams, but the novel leaves the identity of the benefactor a mystery. As she watches the trial unfold, Sephy feels powerless and alone. However, the fact that Dad and Callum are still experiencing racism and prejudice in the courtroom—and the fact that they still live in a racist society—suggests that Sephy is naive to think Dad will go free.



CHAPTER 72

Callum throws his tenth draft of a letter to Sephy in the trash and starts again. He writes that he doesn't know how she came up with the money to hire Kelani Adams, but he's so grateful. He promises to make it up to her. Callum crumples that letter as well. He feels so helpless. He's been having a recurring nightmare about being in a cardboard box that he can't break out of—and then he discovers that it's a coffin. When he discovers it's a coffin, he stops fighting and waits to die. That's the most terrifying part of the dream.

Just like Sephy, Callum feels helpless and lost. He doesn't know how to thank Sephy for her help (though readers know Sephy wasn't the one to hire Kelani), and he feels indebted to Sephy. Callum's dream can be read as a reaction to his racist world. When he was a bit younger, it seemed like he could break out of the mold of what noughts are "supposed" to be—but as Callum gets older, it becomes harder to believe his life will ever get any better.



CHAPTER 73

Finally, the trial ends and the jury go to consider their verdict. Sephy flips through channels, looking for anything that will bring her as up to date as possible. All commentators think Ryan is guilty, but none of them say so outright. It's so annoying. When Minnie complains about Sephy changing channels, Sephy goes upstairs to watch alone. Ryan isn't guilty. Why does Sephy feel like the only Cross to believe that?

Sephy again reads as very naïve and young here, particularly when she can't figure out why she's the only Cross who thinks Ryan is innocent. Sephy is probably one of only a handful of Crosses who thinks Ryan is innocent. Further, Sephy believes her society's court system is fair—but that reflects her innocence, not the truth.



CHAPTER 74

Mum and Callum hold hands and wait for the foreman to speak. The judge asks the foreman if they found Ryan guilty of political terrorism. The foreman says something, but Callum doesn't hear it. Around Callum, people are in shock and bury their faces in their hands. Mum looks frozen. Callum doesn't know why he can't hear the foreman. But when the judge asks if the jury finds Ryan guilty of murdering a woman, Callum hears the verdict.

Though Callum doesn't share explicitly what the jury's verdict is, given the reactions of people around Callum and Mum, they've found Dad guilty. This drives home that the justice system in Sephy and Callum's world isn't just or fair. Readers know Dad is innocent, and yet he's convicted of a crime he didn't commit.



CHAPTER 75

Sephy is sitting on a swing in the backyard when Mother shouts for her. Mother is clearly in a mood as she tells Sephy to go put on her expensive navy dress. Sephy is shocked; she's only supposed to wear the dress with Mother's permission, it's that expensive. It's the middle of July—there are no birthdays to celebrate. Mother won't tell Sephy why she has to wear the dress. As Sephy heads upstairs, she sees Mother down two glasses of wine, one after the other.

Sephy is curious as to where Mother is taking her, but her emotional distance from Mother means that Sephy doesn't feel comfortable asking what's going on. And at this point, Sephy is so desensitized to Mother's drinking that it doesn't necessarily read as a red flag to her that Mother downs two glasses of wine so quickly—but this suggests that something bad is going to happen.



Minnie doesn't know what's happening either. Sephy figures it's something official, though, when she opens the front door and spots Mr. Hadley's government Mercedes in the drive. Thrilled to see her dad, Sephy rushes for the car and pulls the door open before Karl can—and Mr. Hadley snaps at her to act like she's "been brought up, not dragged up." It would hurt less if he slapped Sephy. She carefully sits as far away from him as possible and doesn't ask where they're going.

Sephy doesn't try to figure out what Mother is so upset about because these days, Sephy doesn't find her mother interesting. But Sephy adores Mr. Hadley and wants to impress him, so him speaking to her in this cruel way feels like a huge betrayal. And this makes Sephy act more like a child: she pouts and ignores the rest of her family.



The car pulls up outside the Hewmett Prison at 5:50. Crosses are pulling up in cars, and noughts—all dressed in black—enter through the pedestrian entrance. This is so confusing: why does Sephy have to wear her fancy dress to go to a prison? Sephy follows her family to a courtyard, which is filled with seats. There’s a scaffold on the other side of the courtyard. Sephy notices that all the noughts are either crying or glaring hatefully at the Crosses. She’s surprised to see Callum in the crowd. Suddenly, a voice booms out and announces that this is the execution of Ryan McGregor—his appeal has been denied. Sephy finally understands, and she’s appalled.

Sephy presumably knew that Ryan was found guilty, so the fact that she didn’t seem to realize his execution was coming—even when she’s at the prison—makes her look even younger and more naïve. The noughts’ hateful glares indicate that they blame the Crosses for Ryan’s death; they don’t believe at all that Ryan’s trial was fair or balanced. The fact that Sephy is again in a fancy dress at a somber event (as she was at Lynette’s funeral) also makes her look privileged and out of touch, even if internally she’s upset and thinks this is wrong.



Mother and Mr. Hadley are grim and somber as guards lead Ryan out. Nobody is speaking. Sephy looks around and then meets Callum’s eyes. She shakes her head and mouths, “I didn’t know.” She never would’ve come had she known. Furiously, Sephy tells Mother she wants to leave and gets up to go, but Mother slaps Sephy’s face. Sephy sits down and decides she just won’t watch—but she finds that she has to watch. She looks at Callum again, who, like all the other noughts, looks like he wants every Cross to die. Sephy will never forget that look. The clock starts to strike five as guards put a hood on Ryan’s head and the noose around his neck. Ryan shouts, “Long live the Liberation Militia.”

For Sephy, it’s essential that she convey to Callum that she isn’t at all okay with attending his dad’s execution. But Mother’s slap quickly and violently puts Sephy in her place—any rebellion will not be tolerated, at least in public. It’s also a shock for Sephy to see Callum looking just as angry as all the other noughts. Though Sephy sees Callum as her friend and as an individual person, she now has to confront the fact that Callum is a nought—he suffers like all noughts in this society, and he is livid about it.



CHAPTER 76

Just as the clock strikes the final time, the prison governor runs out from the scaffolding—and says the execution has been stayed. Nobody cheers. Callum is confused; did Kelani find new evidence that Dad is innocent? She’s been working up to this moment to free him. Callum watches the guard take the hood off of Dad’s head. Dad doesn’t seem to understand what’s happening. The prison governor introduces himself to the spectators as Governor Giustini, and he says Dad’s sentence has been commuted to life imprisonment. Dad starts to shout his support for the Liberation Militia again, but his knees buckle.

Learning that Dad’s death sentence has been commuted to a life in prison is confusing for everyone at the execution—Dad most of all. Dad appears as though he was prepared to face his death and die for a cause he believed in, but now he’ll have to totally reorient his outlook. Callum, though, still seems hopeful that Kelani will have figured something out to save Dad. It’s not yet clear if this reflects Callum’s youth and his relative innocence, or if things have changed dramatically.



The prison courtyard suddenly erupts. Noughts rush the metal barriers between them and the scaffold, furious and desperate to rescue Dad. Callum ignores Mum pulling him back and rushes forward with the others, watching guards lead Dad back into the prison. He turns around and watches the Crosses hurry away. Is Sephy enjoying this free entertainment? It’s so unfair that the Crosses got to sit like this is a theater, while the noughts were penned up like cattle. Is it any wonder the noughts hate Crosses so much? People start to get injured in the surging crowd. Callum is angry—and giddy. But his anger disappears when Mum grabs him and leads him to go see Dad.

Callum’s initial feelings of confusion and hope transform into rage, and he’s pulled into the mob. Rushing the fence makes him feel like for once, he has a purpose. Now, Callum’s friendship with Sephy is just fuel for his rage, rather than a calming force. All he can see is her wealth and her privilege. Especially given how dehumanizing this experience was for all the noughts in attendance, the way the Crosses act as though this is entertainment is even more painful.



CHAPTER 77

Once Sephy and Mother are back home (Mr. Hadley went back to work), Sephy screams at her mother to not trick her like that again. Mother insists it was their duty to go and support Mr. Hadley, but Sephy spits that it was barbaric. As Mother pours wine, she says she wasn't even watching. Sephy snatches the bottle from her and throws it across the kitchen. It doesn't break, but it does spill wine on the floor. Mother tells Sephy to go to her room, but Sephy says that Mother would've cared more if they'd hung a wine bottle. Mother slaps Sephy, but Sephy doesn't react—she tells Mother to go lick the spilled wine off the floor.

Mother hisses that Sephy knows nothing—Meggie and Ryan were her friends, and she didn't want to see them hang. Sephy asks why Mother even went then, and Mother says you don't get to do everything you want in life. As Sephy continues to berate her mother, Mother reveals that she paid the McGregors' legal fees. Sephy is to keep that secret. Sephy insists that Mother just did it because she has a guilty conscience and runs to her room. She lies on her bed and sobs.

Part of the reason that Sephy is so angry is because being forced to attend the execution made her face up to her family's and her own complicity in a racist society. Sephy resents Mother for going and not speaking up and saying that it's wrong to kill an innocent man—and for stopping Sephy from leaving the execution in protest. But Sephy is too angry and immature to formulate these thoughts coherently, so instead, she attacks Mother for her drinking.



It's interesting that Mother maintains that Meggie and Ryan were her friends, especially since Meggie said previously that she and Mother were never real friends. Mother may, like Sephy, be blind to the power dynamics inherent in the Hadley family's relationship with the McGregors. But this does solve the mystery of who paid the McGregors' legal fees, whatever Mother's motives may have been.



CHAPTER 78

Two hours after the execution is stayed, Mum and Callum finally get in to see Dad. Dad, now deflated, walks into Mum's arms and then they all sit down. Mum says she's glad Dad is alive, but Dad says he isn't—he was ready to die. He doesn't want to rot in prison. Just then, Kelani Adams enters the room, looking triumphant. She hugs everyone and then says she's prepared to launch the appeal. Dad tells her that this will go no further. Kelani argues that Dad is innocent, but Dad says they both know he'll never get out of prison. Mum begs Dad to accept the help, but Dad says he'll find his own way out of prison.

The prison guard—who has been silent up to this point—says that there's no way to escape. The fence is electrified, and the gates are always guarded. Mum asks Dad to promise to not do anything "stupid," and Kelani asks Dad to trust her to do her job. The guard says visiting time is up, so Dad gets up and walks away. He tells Mum he's getting out. Mum just watches him go—and then tells Callum that Dad didn't even say goodbye.

Even though Dad embraces Mum, he speaks as though he's no longer interested in staying alive—not even for Mum or Callum's sake. Indeed, he seems fully checked out and as though he doesn't believe that a court will ever believe Kelani that he's innocent. In a way, Dad is fully accepting that he doesn't have any power in society anymore as an inmate for life. And in his mind, it's not worth it to keep trying to prove his innocence when failing is so likely.



Note that while Dad said he'll find a way out of prison, he may not necessarily be referring to escaping—he may also be referring to committing suicide. Particularly since he leaves Mum without saying goodbye, it suggests that he no longer feels a real connection to his family. This further fractures Callum's family and leaves Callum and Mum alone.



CHAPTER 79

Sephy wakes up to stones hitting her window. It's Callum. He clammers up the drainpipe and onto Sephy's balcony. Sephy wants to apologize for everything. But she thinks it'd sound trite, so she decides it's better to say nothing. She tries to ask if she can help and how Meggie is, but then runs to lock the door—she doesn't need visitors. But when Sephy turns around, Callum is right there. He says he thought she was going to get help and his expression gets colder every second.

Callum spits that Mr. Hadley must be proud—his political reputation is restored now that an innocent man is imprisoned. Sephy refutes this, but she knows it's true. Sephy notices Callum clenching his fists. He's so angry, and he wants to hurt someone. Callum hisses that he and Sephy must stop seeing each other—it'd ruin her reputation too to be seen with him. Sephy tries to touch Callum's cheek, but he jerks away and shouts that he doesn't want her pity. She tries to get him to be quiet, but he shouts that she must want people to know she has a “blanker” in her room. He says he hates Sephy and every other “dagger.”

Crying, Sephy says she knows—Callum has hated her since she called him a “blanker” on the first day of school. She suddenly realizes lots of things, including why she started drinking. Callum says that Sephy has hated him since he refused to be there for her at school. After a minute, Callum asks why they're still together. Sephy says they're best friends, and she loves him. When Sephy says it again, Callum says it's impossible for noughts and Crosses to be friends or to love each other. Sephy asks why he's here if that's true. He doesn't know.

Sephy sits on her bed and Callum joins her. Sephy wants to say so many things, but she can't speak. She holds out her arms to Callum. He doesn't respond until Sephy starts to turn away, and then he pulls her close and kisses her. Callum tells Sephy to turn around and then spoons her. Sephy wants to get under the covers, but figures she should settle for this—it's better than Callum's rage. She tells him not to leave without writing down his address and phone number, and then apologizes for sitting at Callum's table and for going to Lynette's funeral. Callum tells Sephy to forget it, and she falls right to sleep.

Sephy seems aware that there's not much she can say that is going to make anything better for Callum. He's going through an unspeakably difficult experience right now, and Sephy reasons that the best thing she can do is make sure Callum isn't found in her bedroom. But this backfires because Callum is assuming the worst of Sephy in this moment—he's too angry to trust her.



It's somewhat unclear exactly what bearing Dad's trial has on Mr. Hadley's political reputation (the novel never specifies if it's well-known that Meggie worked for the Hadleys). But regardless, Sephy finds herself having to choose between defending her father and validating her friend. Validating Callum, though, becomes next to impossible because of how angry he is. He's overwhelmed by his emotions—and Sephy, as his friend and a Cross, makes an easy target.



In this moment, Sephy starts to understand that her privilege and innocence have made her very tone deaf and consequently caused her to be a poor friend to Callum. But Callum acknowledges that both he and Sephy have hurt each other. If they're going to move forward, they're going to have to apologize—which it seems like only Sephy is currently capable of doing. But it's much less of a risk for her to admit what she's done wrong, given her privileged position.



Even if Sephy is becoming more aware of her privilege, she still reads as a bit tone deaf in this passage: she expects Callum to embrace her wholeheartedly, rather than acknowledging that he might need some time to think about her apology. She also seems to see Callum's anger as normal, which speaks to how integrated anger, fear, and violence have become in Sephy and Callum's relationship. It's so normal that Sephy can fall right to sleep, even as she knows Callum is still angry.



CHAPTER 80

Sephy is fast asleep, but Callum isn't. This is not what he expected. He got here wanting to smash things, including Sephy. But now she's in his arms. He could do anything—he could caress her, or he could strangle her. In her sleep, Sephy turns to face Callum. He kisses her, and she wakes up and kisses him back. But Callum pulls away and angrily asks if she's kissing him because she wants to, or because she feels guilty. She tries to turn away, hurt, but Callum won't let her. He refuses to leave when she asks him to and suggests they get some sleep. Sephy falls asleep again on Callum's shoulder. Callum whispers a secret in Sephy's ear—something he's never told anyone else, even himself.

Callum's inner monologue illustrates how closely connected romance and violence are for him: Sephy is both the object of his affections and a convenient target if he'd like to take out his anger on a real person. And Callum's anger and tenderness as he kisses Sephy also drive home that this is a very tense romance: Callum doesn't seem to trust that Sephy genuinely has feelings for him. Rather, he suspects that she's using her sexuality to make him feel better, something Sephy's hurt reaction suggests isn't true.



CHAPTER 81

Sephy wakes from a pleasant dream to Sarah and Mother demanding she unlock her door and let them in. Sephy calls that she's fine, shakes Callum awake, and shoves him toward the bathroom. She mouths that she's going to let them in—they haven't done anything wrong—and puts a bathrobe over her expensive dress, which is now wrinkled. Once Callum is in the bathroom, Sephy opens the door. Sarah suspiciously says Sephy slept until noon, but Sephy yawns casually. Then, Sephy notices Callum's sneakers by her bed.

Sleeping until noon could simply be a consequence of being up so late—but it could also indicate Sephy and Callum's comfort with each other, at least while they're both asleep and have their guards down. Sephy's insistence that she hasn't done anything wrong still seems naïve—her parents wouldn't appreciate knowing that she spent the night with Callum, but she doesn't seem to fully grasp how dangerous this could be for him.



Brightly, Sephy says she'll be down after a shower. Sarah looks suspicious—and stops abruptly when she notices Callum's sneakers. Sephy assures Mother that everything is fine as Sarah walks slowly to the sneakers and kicks them under the bed, and then starts to make the bed. Mother snaps that Sarah shouldn't do that and stalks away. As Sarah follows, she hisses to Sephy to get Callum out, now. Once they're gone and the door is locked, Callum comes out of the bathroom. He and Sephy laugh. They decide to cuddle for a while longer before sneaking Callum out.

Sarah might not be as unthinkingly loyal to Mother as Sephy previously thought, if Sarah is willing to protect Callum and Sephy by hiding his sneakers. And though Sephy is the more naïve one in this situation, neither Callum nor Sephy seem to care much about how much trouble Callum could get in if they were to be found out—a symptom of their youth and their relative innocence.



CHAPTER 82

The newscaster announces that this morning, Ryan McGregor—the “convicted bomber of the Dundale Shopping Center”—was killed while trying to escape prison. The electric fence electrocuted him. His family is devastated, and officials are looking into the incident.

It's left ambiguous whether Dad was actually trying to escape, or whether running into the fence was a suicide. The newscaster, though, is undoubtedly a Cross, so it makes sense for them to frame Dad's death as an escape attempt. This reinforces the image of Dad as a criminal.



CHAPTER 83

Sephy writes a letter to God, asking him to leave Callum's family alone. She amends that request—this must be the devil's work. But maybe that's not right either. Maybe God invented hate, and now people blame him or the devil because that's easier than blaming themselves. This is so confusing. But God should help Callum's family—and everyone else.

Sephy is so confused by her world that the only place she feels she can turn is to God. But even then, prayer doesn't seem to offer much relief. Sephy is trying to figure out where racism comes from, essentially, and she's coming up empty. But she does know that her world needs help, or tragedies like Dad's death are just going to keep happening.



CHAPTER 84

Callum enters a burger joint and waits in line. Dad was murdered in July, and since then, Callum feels like something in him has died too. Officially, Dad's death was a suicide. All noughts know that's not true, though. Callum hasn't seen Sephy since that night he spent with her; Sarah made it impossible for him to sneak back in. He's gone to the **beach** a few times, but that's starting to feel childish. When Callum gets his food, he sits down to eat. He's not hungry; he just needs something to do. Mum has been out of it, and Jude is still missing. Callum is only 16 and a half, but it feels like his life is over.

As Callum's family and friendships disappear and fracture, he feels increasingly alone and unable to make sense of the trauma he's experienced. But though Callum can't really process his trauma, he does find that he's starting to grow up. The spot on the beach represented his and Sephy's youth and their innocence, and it's only because Callum is starting to feel more adult that the beach now feels childish.



Callum is shocked when Jude sits down opposite him. Jude says he knows what happened to Dad, and it's time for payback. He's clearly nervous and praises Callum for leaving Heathcroft. Then, he asks if Callum would like to do something "worthwhile," and says someone will be in touch. Callum isn't to tell Mum anything, and Callum has to decide if he's in or not. Callum knows what Jude is asking: if Callum is ready to join the Liberation Militia. When Jude says that this is Callum's chance to make a difference, Callum suddenly feels like he has purpose. He says he's in. Jude tells Callum to go home, pack a bag, and say goodbye to Mum.

Where working toward an education or even considering a relationship with Sephy didn't make Callum feel at peace or as though he was doing anything useful, the way that Jude frames joining the LM makes Callum feel at last like there's something he can do to help his world. This makes sense, given how Callum's other attempts to change things have failed. Trying to integrate Heathcroft peacefully was just traumatic—but in the LM, Callum can feel like he has some power.



CHAPTER 85

In a letter to Callum, Sephy asks him to not say they're too young—he's almost 17, and she's almost 15. He just has to consider her offer: they should run away together. She wants to be with him, and if they don't go now they'll never be together. She knows they're not ready to be lovers, but they could still go away and help each other. Sephy writes that she has money saved and they can both work. Mother has agreed to let Sephy go to Chivers, and she's leaving at 2:00 p.m. on Sunday. She'll wait for Callum until the moment she gets in the car.

Sephy might genuinely want to run away with Callum. But given the way that Callum has described their world at large (not just their country), it seems unlikely that Callum and Sephy would find anything better than what they already have. So Sephy's offer still represents her youthful idealism. She hasn't internalized Callum's insistence a year ago that no matter where they go, they'll still experience racism.



Just as Sephy finishes writing, Sarah walks into the kitchen. Sephy asks if Sarah would deliver the letter to Callum. Sarah insists it could put her job in danger and asks if Sephy is pregnant. Sephy laughs. Sighing, Sarah says she'll do it as long as Sephy doesn't do anything hasty. Sephy hands over the letter and skips away. This isn't hasty—she's been thinking about this for her whole life. Callum is going to rescue her and they're going to escape. It'll be amazing.

Sephy approaches Sarah as though Sarah is an equal, but recall that Mother has not hesitated to fire any nought staff who are willing to go against her and help Sephy. But Sephy is too caught up in her excitement about running away with Callum to think about this. She's still young, naïve, and unaware of her own privilege.



CHAPTER 86

Mum appears behind Callum to say that someone's downstairs for him—and she asks what he's doing. Callum says he's going away, "somewhere where [he] can make a difference." Mum asks Callum to give her love to Jude and keep his head down. As she turns to go, she asks what to do about Sarah downstairs. Callum says he doesn't want to see her.

Mum understands immediately that Callum is leaving to join the LM. At this point, she seems to have given up on her earlier goal of trying to keep her family together, safe, and distant from violence. So now, she has to resort to just offering her support in case Callum decides to ever return.



Once Mum is gone, Callum throws a shirt in his bag. He's supposed to meet someone outside the bus garage. It seems ridiculously contrived, but if it makes Jude happy, Callum will do it. Once the front door closes, Callum heads downstairs. Mum points to the letter Sarah left, but Callum says he'll get it tomorrow when he returns for his other things.

Readers can infer that Sarah has brought Sephy's letter to Callum—and because he's not interested in seeing Sarah, it seems likely he won't meet Sephy in time. For now, he's too caught up in his newfound purpose to give any time to someone, like Sarah, who he sees as helping his enemies.



CHAPTER 87

Sephy is convinced Callum is going to come for her—but as Mother shouts for Sephy to get in the car, she realizes he isn't. As Sephy turns to the car, Minnie runs up behind her. Sephy tells Minnie she wishes Minnie could come to Chivers too, but Minnie says it's too close to exams for her to switch schools (Mother's argument). Sephy tells Minnie to stop caring so much about what other people think, and Minnie tells Sephy to stop drinking. Sephy agrees that she stopped for a while (after cuddling with Callum), but then started again because she was lonely. Minnie tells Sephy to stop trying to be like Mother. She kisses Sephy on the cheek.

It's heartbreaking for Sephy to realize that her plan isn't going to work: Callum isn't coming for her. And it's even more heartbreaking to realize that Minnie has gone out of her way to help Sephy, but isn't going to get anything that she wants out of the deal. But this does show Sephy that Minnie is in her corner and will support her—whether it's helping Sephy leave their dysfunctional house, or helping her think more critically about why she's drinking.



Sephy slides into the car next to Mother. Why didn't Callum come? Does he not believe in her, or is he just more sensible?

Sephy wondering if Callum is just "more sensible" is essentially an acknowledgement that inviting him to run away was childish—she's becoming aware of how young she is.



CHAPTER 88

Callum runs faster than he ever has toward Sephy's house, begging God to help him. Just as he reaches the rose garden, he sees a car pull out of the drive—with Sephy and Mother inside. Sephy is looking down. Callum shouts for her and runs after the car. He even meets the driver's eyes in the rearview, but the car accelerates. Callum trips and falls. The car is now out of sight. Callum feels like he's watching his dreams disappear.

This is a huge turning point for both Callum and Sephy, as Sephy doesn't know that Callum came after her. In particular, Callum's belief that he's "watching his dreams disappear" suggests that he's not actually that sold on joining the LM—he'd really rather be with Sephy. But for now, he'll have to follow through with the LM.



CHAPTER 89

It's so funny. When Sephy first got to Chivers, she cried herself to sleep because Callum didn't want to run away with her. Sephy also didn't realize how addicted to alcohol she was until she started shaking—she was having withdrawal symptoms. After three weeks of pretending she had the flu, Sephy threw herself into school activities. Now, she realizes Chivers was the best thing she ever did for herself. She got to rework her identity and make new friends who actually like her. School is hard, and Sephy makes a point to never spend holidays at home.

Sephy is writing now from some unspecified point in the future, and it's clear she's grown up a lot in the time between the last chapter and this one. She realizes that when she lived at home, she felt compelled to embody a certain identity. But at Chivers, away from her dysfunctional family and the racist environment at Heathcroft, Sephy is able to better explore her identity and become a person she feels proud of.



Sephy has also joined a dissident group. The Cross group took a pledge to help integrate noughts and Crosses—though they all believe nothing will really change until the old people currently in charge die. The group is what really keeps Sephy focused at school. Sephy used to tell herself that it was just a few people spoiling things for everyone else. Now, she believes that most Crosses aren't actually prejudiced; they're just too afraid to call out wrong things when they see them. Sephy is also afraid, but with her dissident group, she at least feels like she's doing something.

The dissident group gives Sephy the purpose she craved in her old life, but couldn't find. Now, she realizes that working quietly in support of integration makes her feel like she's doing something meaningful—even if it's not as splashy as shouting at mobs or sitting with the noughts at lunch. However, Sephy still seems naïve and unaware of how racist her world is, if she thinks most Crosses aren't prejudiced. The novel has shown again and again that even Crosses who don't think they're racist—like Sephy—are products of a society that normalizes casual racism.



For a while, Sephy considered inviting Minnie to join. But she decided not to—Minnie is too busy, and it's miserable at home with Mother. Mother is still drinking. Sephy doesn't drink anymore because she wants her future to be different. It won't include Callum, for one. She's going to be a lawyer like Kelani Adams and speak up and get so famous that the government and the PEC won't be able to intimidate her. She thinks about Callum still, but she no longer hopes for "the impossible." Sometimes she wonders if Callum still thinks of her.

Sephy's dreams of becoming like Kelani Adams have a good chance of coming true, thanks to Sephy's family's wealth and privilege. She can afford law school, and she already understands how the government works after seeing her father work in it for so many years. But she still doesn't seem to grasp that she might not be able to use her power to become fully untouchable: after all, Kelani wasn't able to save Dad.



CHAPTER 90

Dad once said that once the Liberation Militia gets you, they never let go. Callum gets that now. Over the last few years, he's worked his way up from tea boy, to grunt, to private, to sergeant. He also took care of the girls who beat Sephy up—Dionne, Lola, and Joanne—and made sure that Dionne in particular suffered. Callum lost some of himself when he did this, but that's okay. The Callum who sat on the **beach** and watched the sunset doesn't exist anymore.

Now, Callum is in a cell with three others, Pete (who's in charge), Morgan, and Leila. Callum was the one to bring Leila into the group when he watched her brutally take down a few Cross men who insulted her when she asked for money for a coffee. She was so grateful for the opportunity to join the LM that she offered to have sex with Callum. He refused, but mostly because he doesn't want distractions.

So by the time Callum is 19, he's well known: to move up the ranks, Callum had to beat up and kill Crosses. Callum did it all, but he's lost his soul in the process. He misses Mum. He hasn't seen her since he joined up, though he does send her money. Callum hasn't seen Jude at all.

Just after Callum turns 19, the LM command sends word that they're sending a lieutenant to the cell to "assess [the] cell's 'efficiency.'" Pete is enraged, but he puts everyone to work taking inventory and cleaning. When he's sure everything is in order in their headquarters in the tunnels under Celebration Park, the cell sits down for dinner. But as they start to eat, Jude appears and asks why no one is guarding the door. Callum leaps up, but Jude tells him to sit down if he's not in charge. Pete stands, and Callum catches the look in Jude's eye. Jude doesn't trust him—and that means the entire cell is in danger.

The way that Callum introduces this chapter suggests he feels trapped in the Liberation Militia now. He doesn't seem to regret the opportunities the LM has given him, such as getting revenge on the three girls that beat Sephy up. But understanding that he's stuck with the LM implies that perhaps Callum does miss his old self, the one that sat on the beach—but he doesn't think he can return to that state anymore.



The way that Callum frames turning down Leila and not wanting "distractions" suggests that he's fully committed to his work with the LM. As he learned with Sephy, romance can complicate things—and for now, he doesn't believe making things complicated is worth it.



Note that the first-person narration means that Callum is the one insisting he's lost his soul—so he could be telling the truth, or this could be wishful thinking. Indeed, noting that he misses Mum suggests that Callum is still somewhat in touch with his emotions.



Celebration Park was a special place for Callum and Sephy. The fact that it's now Callum's LM cell's headquarters shows that Callum is (purposefully or otherwise) corrupting these happy places and memories from his past as he gets deeper in the LM. When Jude turns out to be the lieutenant and clearly doesn't trust Callum, Callum knows he's going to have to deal with old family trauma he previously thought he'd left behind.



CHAPTER 91

Sephy is heading home for the first time in two and a half years, just to appease Mother. Karl picks Sephy up at Chivers and drives her home silently. It turns out when Sephy arrives home that Minnie and Mother are out. It's kind of a relief; Sephy doesn't know how to handle Mother. Sephy will only be home for a few days, since she starts a summer job at a law practice in a week. Sarah greets Sephy warmly once Sephy is inside and offers Sephy a note—from Callum. Sephy's heart pounds as she reads it. Callum asks her to meet him at their place late tonight. Why does he want to see her? Why does Sephy suddenly feel conflicted? It doesn't seem like there's any harm in going, but something tells her to stay home.

Sephy is still fighting against her familial obligations. She's becoming more independent, and she doesn't see her family as a source of support—coming home is just a way to make Mother stop fussing. This is why it's a relief that nobody is home: Sephy doesn't want to see anyone anyway, and she's too focused on her future life that doesn't include being close with her family. Callum's note, though, brings Sephy back into the past. On some level, she seems to still hope that things will work out between her and Callum.



CHAPTER 92

Jude confirms that everyone knows what they're supposed to do later, but Callum notes that Sephy might not even come. At this, Jude asks if Callum is up for this; Jude needs to be sure of Callum's loyalty. Jude says that if Callum lets him down, they're not brothers anymore. Morgan and Pete are excited—this is going to make them famous—and Jude says they'll be rich, too. Pete is going to get his own LM division if this goes well.

This chapter makes it clear that Sephy is going to walk right into a trap if she goes to meet Callum on the beach. Callum is corrupting the innocence of his and Sephy's spot on the beach by using it as a trap.



CHAPTER 93

Sephy walks barefoot along the **beach**, feeling at peace. She knows now that Mr. Hadley will always prioritize politics over his family, and that's okay. She also knows that she'll always be a disappointment to Mother. That's fine too; Mother is disappointed with her own life and just wants to live vicariously through Sephy. Sephy will make her own choices, however. And when it comes to Callum, Sephy is happy to settle for friendship.

Over the last two and a half years, Sephy has come to many conclusions about her family and where she fits into it. She's mature enough to realize that her parents are people, with their own weaknesses. And she realizes that she, too, is her own person, and she can make choices for herself that will allow her to find happiness that her parents never could.



Sephy checks her watch and turns around—Callum is right there. He's grown, his hair is longer, and he looks mysterious and grown-up. Sephy smiles and approaches with arms out, expecting a hug. But she can tell something is wrong. Callum steps forward, kisses Sephy coldly, and then Sephy sees four other noughts behind him. She realizes what's happening and runs for her life. It's so dark that Sephy can barely see where she's going—and she realizes that she's miles away from anyone and going the wrong way.

Callum shows how closely entwined love and violence are when he decides to kiss Sephy before letting his cell kidnap her. And Sephy now has to confront that Callum isn't the boy she knew years ago: he's changed, and these days, he's not safe or trustworthy. And she realizes too that because she doesn't trust her family, she's alone and in danger, as nobody knows where she is right now.



Sephy turns to run for the sea, but someone grabs her. Sephy kicks them and keeps running, but runs right into a punch in the stomach. Whoever punched her says, “That’s for my sister.” Sephy can barely breathe as someone picks her up, shakes her, and then starts to drag her over sharp rocks. Everything goes black as a bag is put over Sephy’s head.

The person who punched Sephy is presumably Jude—he’s punching her to get revenge for Lynette’s death. Jude seems to pin his whole family’s struggles on the fact that Mrs. Hadley fired Mum years ago, and for now, Sephy is an easy target.



CHAPTER 94

Jude, Morgan, and Pete are ecstatic—they’ve kidnapped Kamal Hadley’s daughter, and she’ll die if he doesn’t work with them. Sephy is now stashed away in the middle of nowhere. Jude tells Callum he’s proud of him, but Callum shoves Jude against a wall and tells him to never underestimate his loyalty again. Jude agrees, but he also laughs. Callum wants to destroy Jude. He turns away and sees that Morgan, Pete, and Leila are all staring at him admiringly.

This is a tense situation for a variety of reasons. But for Callum, things are difficult because he’s caught between wanting to impress his brother and look competent, and his possible lingering feelings for Sephy. His cell, though, seems to admire Callum for being able to put aside his old feelings for Sephy and kidnap her—a sign that perhaps Callum’s heart is hardening.



Jude says that next, they need to deliver a ransom note with proof they have Sephy to Mr. Hadley. Jude asks Callum to decide what the proof should be. Callum knows this is a test. He says he’ll cut some of Sephy’s hair and film her holding today’s paper, and he’ll stain some article of clothing with Sephy’s blood. He tries to tell himself that it’s not Sephy; she’s just “some Cross female.” Everyone stares at Callum as he gathers his supplies and heads for Sephy’s cell.

Jude wants to make sure that Callum is fully committed to the LM’s cause—which is why he insists that Callum be the one to hurt and intimidate Sephy. To Jude, that will prove that Callum doesn’t love her anymore. It’s hard to tell if Callum still loves Sephy, but it’s clear that hurting her isn’t an easy prospect: he still sees her as an old friend and not “some Cross female,” as he tries to tell himself.



Callum and the rest of the cell are in a three-room brick cabin; they keep prisoners in the bedroom as needed. As he approaches the bedroom, he thinks of how Jude and Pete have been planning this since they heard Sephy was heading home. The General himself even gave the okay, and the General’s second-in-command will be here in a day or two. The cabin is remote, but two people will be on guard at all times, just in case. So far, they’ve been successful. Callum tells himself he can do this. He reminds himself to be what he has to be, not what he is. He’s been repeating this to himself since he joined the LM. Callum unlocks the cell door.

The way that Callum describes the cabin gives more insight into what activities the LM engages in: kidnapping is common enough, if this cabin has been used in the past for prisoners. Callum also shares that this is a very high-stakes kidnapping, and not just because Sephy is from such a wealthy family. The entirety of the LM is watching, and so it’s essential that Callum do what he’s supposed to do. But he suggests that being violent isn’t what he wants to be—it’s just what he has to do to survive.



CHAPTER 95

Sephy struggles to sit up when she hears the door unlock. She’s in so much pain, but she doesn’t want anyone to know how badly she hurts. Callum is in the doorway, and Sephy draws back—he tricked her, and she’s afraid of him. She feels like her mind is shutting down as Callum cuts off a lock of her hair, but then she’s relieved. Callum gives her a newspaper; he needs to film her holding it. Sephy says she isn’t going to help him just as two other noughts appear in the doorway. The man tells Sephy to hold it or he’ll break her arms. When the man calls Callum “little brother,” Sephy recognizes him as Jude.

For Sephy, not letting anyone see how much pain she’s in is a safety thing: she wants to seem strong, as that might help her stay alive longer. This is an extremely traumatizing experience for her, and it’s made worse by the fact that Callum is the one cutting her hair and getting close to her. Though she once loved him, Sephy doesn’t believe she can trust him anymore—his loyalty seems to lie elsewhere now.



Sephy grudgingly accepts the paper. Callum tells the watching noughts to go away, but the woman says venomously that she's here to see Kamal Hadley's daughter. Jude tells the woman, Leila, to go guard the door, and Callum gives Sephy a message to read aloud. Sephy takes one look at the note, throws it, and shouts that her dad shouldn't give the LM any money. Jude slaps Sephy and says she'll do as she's told or she'll die. He then leaves the room. Sephy considers running, but she can't think straight.

Sephy knows she has to get Callum to remember how things used to be. Softly, she tells him that she gets why he thinks he has to do this, but this isn't okay. She's been involved in nonviolent protests, and changing the world with violence is very unjust. Callum spits that he tried to change things by getting an education, but that didn't work. Sephy offers to help, but Callum says he doesn't need charity and he doesn't need Crosses supervising everything he does. Sephy tries again to say that he can do things differently, but Callum tells her to be quiet and read.

CHAPTER 96

Callum films as Sephy reads from the script. She tells Mr. Hadley that he'll never see her again unless he follows the instructions in the envelope that accompanies the video, and he can't tell anyone. When Sephy is done reading, she looks up, crying. Callum motions for her to hold up the paper so he can zoom in on the date and then puts the camcorder away. He asks Sephy to tell him everything she's wearing—down to her jewelry and underwear—and then tells her to take her shirt off, or he will.

Sephy undresses and asks if Callum is going to kill her. He says that's ridiculous and feels silly for saying that—he thought he could do this. Sephy continues and asks why Callum and Jude hate her so much. Then, she says she's not "stupid"—nobody is trying to hide their identities, so they're going to kill her no matter what. She throws her tee shirt on the floor. Callum tries not to stare as she puts her sweater back on—Sephy's adult body is so beautiful.

Being watched by the rest of the cell raises the stakes for Sephy and Callum alike. Callum is performing for more than just Sephy, and at the moment, he cares more about impressing his cell than about Sephy. For Sephy, she's outnumbered many times over with the rest of the cell watching, and resisting could be more dangerous than if she were just resisting Callum.



Sephy, like Callum's mum years ago, believes that people should try to change the world through nonviolent protests. But for Callum, that just seems ridiculous. Integrating Heathcroft was supposed to be nonviolent, but Callum was bullied every day for going, and he changed nothing. So even if Callum doesn't really want to be violent, he's desperate enough to think that violence is the only way forward.



Sephy doesn't have the closest relationship with her father, but it's still very traumatizing for her to have to read these demands to him. Callum's gruff demeanor seems to be a protective attitude: he doesn't want to betray that this is difficult for him, too. And things seem even scarier for Sephy when Callum threatens to undress her if Sephy won't—this is a threat of sexual violence.



To Sephy, it seems clear she's going to die, so fighting back doesn't seem as potentially dangerous anymore. If she's going to die, she reasons she might as well go out fighting. Sephy is focused on gathering information, but for Callum, this is a confusingly sexually charged situation. He hasn't seen Sephy in years, and he can't ignore that she's grown up and is a beautiful adult now.



Callum tells Sephy she'll be okay, but Sephy scoffs—doesn't he want to get revenge for all the time he had to pretend to be her friend? Did the night they spent in her room mean anything? Callum points out that Sephy murdered Dad. At least, Crosses did; Dad refused to spend a life in prison for a crime he didn't commit. Sephy spits that this confirms that she's going to die, but Callum isn't going to do it—he lets others do his dirty work. Callum insists he's killed “daggers” before, and Sephy says she'd be easy to kill because she's “just a black dagger bitch.” Suddenly enraged, Callum grabs Sephy's hand, slits her finger with a knife, and smears her blood on her shirt. It's proof that the LM are lethal and serious.

As soon as Callum lets go, Sephy puts her finger in her mouth. The cut is deeper than Callum intended to make it, and when she pulls her finger out of her mouth, he grabs her hand and puts her finger in his mouth. After a while, Sephy takes her finger back and says that she wants Callum to kill her, and he must do it quickly. Callum struggles to keep his emotions in check as he leaves the room. He has to do this.

Callum notices Jude watching him and hands his brother the videodisc and the bloody shirt. Jude studies the shirt and says he now knows Callum is on his side. Now, Jude says, he and Pete are going to take the items to Mr. Hadley while Leila and Morgan guard the house. It's Callum's responsibility to guard Sephy. Callum is confused—the first- and second-in-command never go off together. Jude continues and tells Callum to welcome the General's second-in-command if he arrives first with the password, “Golden Man.” Callum watches Jude go. He doesn't trust his brother at all.

CHAPTER 97

Sephy doesn't turn around when the door opens; she continues to rub her painful stomach. Callum tells her he has dinner, but she doesn't respond. When he pulls her to face him and gives her a plastic tray, Sephy throws it against the wall. Callum leaves and locks the door behind him.

Sephy also seems to want to figure out how Callum actually feels about being a part of the LM, and about kidnapping her. Callum's responses show that the tension in this situation is making it difficult for him to control his emotions and his actions. This is in part because it's confusing for him to have to be so violent and cruel to someone he once considered a friend, and may have even loved. But Callum is also still trying to recover from Dad's death, and he believes associating with the LM is the only way to get revenge.



This interaction turns oddly intimate when Callum puts Sephy's finger in his mouth after cutting it deeply. He seems to struggle to control himself when he lashes out—but he still wants to help Sephy feel better. This highlights how intertwined violence and romance are in Callum and Sephy's relationship.



As has been the case for much of the novel when it comes to Jude, Callum feels like he has to prove himself. But Callum also struggles to trust that Jude is on his side, or that Jude even wants Callum to prove himself at all. This lingering familial tension means that Callum can't trust that his involvement with the LM is going to go well. The McGregors' familial dysfunction is still causing issues, even years after the family members parted ways.



Now, both Sephy and Callum are resorting to violence. However, Callum's violence is directed at Sephy (moving her body without her consent) while Sephy's violence causes no harm. It's just to make a point, which speaks to her relative powerlessness.



CHAPTER 98

Sephy's insistence that they're going to kill her keeps running through Callum's head, making it impossible to sleep. Leila comes in to pee, and Callum scolds her for leaving the front unguarded. But just after she heads out the door again, there's a commotion out front. It's not the police—it's a tall blond man with expensive boots, and he has Leila in a headlock. The man asks Callum and Morgan who's in charge and says he's not impressed with the cell. He gives the password on the second try and introduces himself as Andrew Dorn, the General's second-in-command.

Morgan and Leila return to their guard posts and Andrew asks to see the prisoner. Callum unlocks the bedroom door. Sephy is awake and as Andrew tells her he hopes Mr. Hadley really loves her, Callum notices Sephy startle as she sees Andrew's boots. The boots are brown with silver chains—ostentatious, but Callum doesn't know what's otherwise wrong with them. Once Callum and Andrew have left the bedroom, Andrew tells Callum to not let Sephy leave the room alive. Callum says he'll take care of it.

Callum seems to not have considered that the cell might kill Sephy, which shows that in some ways, Callum is still a naïve, idealistic kid. However, he's ripped back into his dangerous adult reality with Andrew Dorn's arrival. The fact that Andrew needs two attempts to get the password, and that he seems so openly disgusted with the cell, puts Callum on his guard. The stakes are getting higher.



Andrew's boots seem very similar to the ones worn by the nought man that Sephy saw speaking with Mr. Hadley years ago—suggesting that Andrew might be a double agent. Andrew's insistence that Sephy should die then seems even more sinister. It's unclear whose side he's actually on—or if Sephy could be safer than she thinks she is.



CHAPTER 99

Once Sephy is alone again, she starts to explore her room. The room is made of bricks and plaster. Since she's not tied and gagged, Sephy figures she's in the middle of nowhere. Sephy knows she's seen the man with Callum before, but she can't place him. She drags the bed away from the wall and finds a note scratched in the plaster: "To my fellow Crosses, keep the faith." Aside from a bucket, there's nothing else in the room. Sephy sits back down and wonders if Mr. Hadley knows she's been kidnapped yet. She hasn't seen him in six months. Who knows what the LM even wants. This is such a bad joke: Sephy didn't want to go home, but now she'd give anything to see her family again. She knows she never will.

Sephy isn't ready to give up on the possibility that she could escape, but it's looking less likely that an escape attempt would be successful. Particularly when Sephy finds the note from a Cross prisoner scratched in the plaster, Sephy has no choice but to confront the reality that the LM has killed other Crosses in this place. And now, Sephy realizes her fractured family situation has harmed her, and she was perhaps misguided to want to get far away from them. Now, they can't help her because she didn't trust them with the truth about where she was going.



CHAPTER 100

Andrew, Callum, and the rest of the cell sit around the TV and watch as Kamal Hadley announces that he's withdrawing from politics. The cell is now going to pick up ransom money and tell Mr. Hadley to release five LM prisoners before he can see Sephy. Jude reminds everyone of the plan: Leila will stay here while he, Pete, and Morgan make calls so nobody can trace them. Callum will pick up the money and drop off the instructions. Andrew suggests that Leila makes the pickup and Callum stays. Jude is annoyed that Andrew is questioning his authority, but Callum is angry about being made a babysitter.

The LM are planning to raise the stakes for Mr. Hadley, possibly multiple times—and Callum knows now that Andrew has no intention of letting Sephy out alive. So this is all just for show. But especially given what readers now suspect about Andrew, his suggestion to change who does what reads as concerning. Jude and Callum pick up on this, despite not having any real reason yet to suspect Andrew. Both Jude and Callum want to seem competent and powerful.



As Andrew leads everyone else out of the house, he instructs Callum to shoot Sephy if anyone suspicious arrives. Jude whispers to Callum to not let them down as he follows Andrew. Once the door closes, Callum wishes he was anywhere but here. He remembers watching Sephy's car drive away two and a half years ago—if only he'd gotten her letter in time. He'd still be alive instead of frozen inside, though Callum also fears he's not as frozen as he'd like.

For Callum, being left alone with Sephy is a frightening proposition. He implies that she's the reason he's not as "frozen" as he'd prefer to be, and he seems to worry that being with her will further erode his resolve to follow through with the LM's goals. Without others present to remind him of his loyalty to the LM, Callum is a bit lost.



CHAPTER 101

Sephy lies in bed and rubs her aching abdomen. Callum comes into the room, surprising her, but she refuses to tell him what's wrong. He sits next to her on the bed and takes over rubbing her belly, insisting that he does care that she's in pain. Sephy asks him to let her go if he cares, but he says he can't. Then, Callum says he loves Sephy. He told her once before, when she was asleep, but now he's not afraid for her to hear it. Sephy's heart pounds. This can't be true, and she points out that Callum said love between noughts and Crosses can't exist.

Once again, a frightening moment (because of the power dynamic that exists currently between Sephy and Callum) becomes strangely tender when Callum takes over rubbing Sephy's stomach. The fact that Callum is only now willing to vocalize that he loves Sephy is interesting. He may believe that all is lost and Sephy is going to die, so it's better to tell Sephy the truth. Or, he may be planning to save her. For now, it's impossible to tell.



Callum says it does. At least, he cared when he saw Sephy drive away for Chivers. He explains that he got the letter too late to catch her. At this, Sephy starts to cry. Callum wanted to be with her, and suddenly, his hand on her belly feels like it's burning her. Sephy is unable to answer when Callum asks if she hates him. She starts to say something about another place or time, but Callum says he can only think of now and kisses Sephy. Sephy kisses him back. This must be a dream.

Learning that Callum came after her is infuriating for Sephy. As a self-protective measure, she's spent years convincing herself that Callum doesn't love her, but now, she knows the truth. And Sephy and Callum's love for each other is fast becoming something that neither of them can ignore. Again, their love is tied up with pain, as Sephy feels like Callum's hands are burning.



Callum moves his hands up Sephy's body and doesn't move them when she tries to push him away. She tries to speak, but Callum shushes her and says he loves her and would never hurt her. Sephy tries to push him away again, but then pulls Callum close. It feels like they've both caught fire as Callum and Sephy undress and have sex.

It's another sign of how intertwined violence is with romance that Callum outright ignores Sephy's physical signals that she doesn't want to go any further. But ultimately, Sephy decides that her desire to have sex with Callum outweighs any fear of him.



When they're done, Sephy sits up, sobbing. She can't stop, and she wonders if she looks as "miserably unhappy" as Callum does. They both frantically dress, but Sephy struggles to get her shoes on the right feet. Callum tries to pull Sephy into an embrace, but she pulls away and cries harder. Suddenly, the door bursts open and Jude and Morgan rush in. Sephy still can't stop crying.

Sephy never explains why she's "miserably unhappy," but pushing Callum away when he tries to comfort her suggests she might regret having sex with him. And things take a turn for the worse when Jude and Morgan catch Sephy and Callum in this state. They may not understand that Sephy and Callum do love each other, even though Sephy is crying.



CHAPTER 102

After a long, tense silence, Callum asks Jude what happened. Jude asks Callum the same, but then says that Leila is arrested and Pete is dead—there were undercover police everywhere. The only reason he and Morgan got away is because they switched their locations at the last moment. Looking at Sephy, Jude says he thought they could take Sephy somewhere else, but now things have changed. Callum knows he's effectively killed himself and Sephy.

Once Jude sends Morgan away, he asks why Sephy is crying and wearing her sweater inside-out. Callum blushes but says nothing, and Jude spits that they could've let Sephy go no matter what Andrew said, but now that Callum has raped Sephy, they'll have no choice but to kill her if they want to live. As Jude starts to insult Callum, Callum punches Jude to the ground. In moments, the boys are fighting hard—but then Jude shouts that Sephy is running away. Jude shouts for Morgan as they run out into the moonlit night. They see Sephy plunge into the woods. Callum has to find her before Jude or Morgan do.

Things are starting to fall apart for this LM cell after the disastrous pickup operation, and because Sephy and Callum have had sex. Jude makes it clear to Callum that Callum is in deep trouble now. Callum has shown the LM that his loyalty lies with Sephy, not with them—so now both Callum and Sephy are liabilities.



Jude assumes that Callum raped Sephy because Sephy is crying—it looks like she didn't want to have sex. But Jude also assumes this because, in their society, genuine love between noughts and Crosses is thought not to exist—and it's punished when it does happen. This, for instance, is why Lynette and Jed were beaten almost to death. Things get even more complicated when Sephy then escapes. It seems less likely that Jude will be able to fix things now.



CHAPTER 103

Sephy's pursuers are getting closer. She hides behind a tree as Jude stops nearby. He tells her that they're miles away from civilization, and if she comes back, he won't harm her. Sephy stays quiet and thinks she hears Jude moving further away. He implies that if she doesn't reveal herself and they find her, they'll kill her. After a few minutes, Sephy turns to go the opposite direction as Jude—and comes face to face with Callum. Callum shouts that he sees Sephy heading back for the cabin, and Sephy hears Morgan and Jude running away.

Callum takes Sephy's hands, points out Orion's Belt in the sky, and tells her to keep it behind her until she reaches the road. He refuses to stay and discuss anything, but Sephy tells him to wait: she's seen the man with the fancy boots with Mr. Hadley before.

It's impossible to tell if Jude is telling the truth about not killing Sephy—Jude hasn't shown himself to be forthcoming or honest with Callum, and he has even less incentive to be honest with Sephy. But things start to look up for Sephy when Callum sends Jude and Morgan running in the opposite direction. This is proof that Callum's loyalty has shifted to Sephy, at least in this instance.



Tipping Callum off to the fact that Andrew might be a double agent is something Sephy does because she loves Callum. She doesn't support the LM, but she doesn't want to see Callum hurt by this man.



CHAPTER 104

Callum is in a dingy hotel room with Morgan and Jude, watching Kamal Hadley on the news. Mr. Hadley says that Sephy is still unconscious, but she was found this morning. One kidnapper is dead and another is captured. He didn't pay the kidnappers. At this, he walks away. Jude mutes the TV and asks why they should trust Sephy's word that Andrew Dorn works with her father. Callum asks how Jude can explain how the police knew where everyone would be—Andrew was the only other person, aside from those involved, to know everyone's role in the phone relay and pickup. Callum notes that Jude and Morgan probably only escaped because they didn't have a chance to tell Andrew they changed their places.

Callum notes that Andrew also insisted that Callum was to kill Sephy if police came. That would've condemned Callum to death, but Andrew probably also knew Sephy would recognize him. Eventually, Callum is able to convince Jude and Morgan that he's right. Morgan is enraged, but unfortunately, they have no proof that Andrew is a traitor—and they'll die if they accuse him of betraying them. Jude says they have bigger things to worry about anyway, but Callum snaps that he didn't rape Sephy. Neither Jude nor Morgan believe this, so Callum walks away.

Jude suggests they all split up and then meet back up in six months, on Callum's birthday. Nobody should say anything about Andrew, if only because they have no way to get a message to the General or even identify the LM's mysterious leader. Morgan is angry that Andrew will be able to expose others in the meantime, but Jude says they have no choice. Then, Jude sends Morgan out to get food.

Once they're alone, Jude says he has something "funny" to share with Callum: that night in the hospital, Mum told Jude her great-grandfather was a Cross. Callum can't believe it. Jude says Mum told him to try to convince him not to join the LM—Jude would be killing his own blood. But Jude says it just made him hate Crosses even more, especially since Crosses consistently treat him terribly. Callum is still confused, but Jude gives Callum some final advice before they split up: stay away from Sephy. She'll kill him otherwise.

For now, everyone has gotten away from the cabin in the woods in one piece; Sephy is safe with her family, and what's left of Callum's LM cell is in hiding. To Callum, it's obvious that Sephy is telling the truth. But because Jude and Morgan see all Crosses as fundamentally untrustworthy, they're unwilling to consider that Sephy might have given them useful information. Readers, of course, know that Sephy isn't lying. This shows how the interracial suspicion at play in this world keeps people from trusting important intel.



Callum, Jude, and Morgan are in a very dangerous spot: Andrew represents danger, but if the rest of the LM trusts him, they'll look like traitors if they tell the truth about Andrew. The power structure in the LM keeps people from being truly safe. For Jude, at least for now, it's a bigger issue that Callum supposedly raped Sephy. Jude's unwillingness to believe Callum speaks to how unusual it is for noughts and Crosses to have genuine romantic relationships in this society. Such a thing is unbelievable.



Morgan's rage that Andrew will be able to expose other LM members shows how dedicated he is to the LM. For now, if he, Jude, and Callum value their lives, they have to put that loyalty aside. If they don't, they'll never be able to help the LM by ousting Andrew.



Mum told Jude about his great-grandfather being a Cross to try to convince Jude that noughts and Crosses aren't so different. They're all human. But to Jude, that's ridiculous. Crosses have never treated Jude well, and likely never will, even if they do know that he has Cross blood in his veins. Looks, Jude realizes, are all that matters, and this belief helps keep his society violent and segregated.



CHAPTER 105

It's only seven in the morning but for the fifth day in a row, Sephy is puking. Finally, she gets up, brushes her teeth, and heads downstairs. Having the flu is so miserable. It's been five weeks since she was kidnapped. Since then, doctors have poked her and tested her, and the police asked her embarrassing questions about what her kidnappers did to her. It all made Sephy mad. She didn't tell them much, and she doesn't want to think about what happened. The kidnapping was bad, but she can't bear to think of Callum. She still thinks of him all the time.

As Sephy makes tea and toast, Minnie comes into the kitchen and asks if Sephy is okay. Minnie observes that Sephy has been vomiting for a few days now, but Sephy isn't in the mood to talk. Minnie asks when Sephy is ever going to talk about what happened, and Sephy says she never will—and it won't reflect badly on Minnie, so Minnie should leave her alone. Then, Minnie asks Sephy if she's pregnant. Sephy stares back and says she can't be. She runs from the room.

Sephy stares at the pregnancy test, telling herself she won't know the truth until she uses it. Finally, she follows the instructions and counts to 60. She can't be pregnant; she's just sick. But when Sephy looks at the test, the line is so bright she doesn't even have to pick the test up to see it. What is she going to do?

Sephy is still struggling to process what happened to her—and especially since the experience was so confusing, given her conflicted relationship with Callum, she has no interest in telling anyone what happened. Nobody, she believes, would understand. Instead, Sephy is withdrawing into herself and focusing on what Callum might be up to these days.



Sephy lashes out at Minnie because historically, Minnie has only approached Sephy when Minnie is afraid that whatever happened to Sephy will negatively affect her. This was the case when Sephy was beaten up for sitting with the noughts, for instance. And it's totally unwelcome when Minnie suggests that Sephy might be pregnant—for Sephy, that's unthinkable.



Being pregnant with Callum's baby—and having conceived when she was kidnapped—complicates things for Sephy. The “embarrassing questions” she mentioned earlier in the chapter were presumably about whether she was raped, and eventually, people will find out she did have sex—and they may believe she was raped, no matter what Sephy says to contradict that.



CHAPTER 106

Callum has nothing now, not even the Liberation Militia. He still has three months before he can meet up with Morgan and Jude, and he misses them. He's had to stop himself from going to see Mum; he knows a visit would just hurt her. Sometimes, Callum wonders what Sephy is doing in the same moment, or why she cried. He'll never know because he'll never see her again. These days, Callum is convinced he's dead. He died before he started Heathcroft, and now he's in hell. He didn't even know it.

Now, Callum is cut off from everything that gave him meaning or purpose. He doesn't have his family anymore, he doesn't have Sephy, and he can't even trust that his memories of having sex with Sephy are truly happy ones. Deciding that he's dead is a way for Callum to hide from his emotions and not have to feel them. If he's dead, his emotions won't matter.



CHAPTER 107

When Sephy hears a quiet knock on the door, she leaps off her bed and pretends to have been brushing her hair. Minnie comes in quietly and asks if Sephy is okay. She's concerned: Sephy hasn't gone back to school, she always looks like she's been crying, and she only wears leggings and baggy sweaters now. Sephy is annoyed, but Minnie says Sephy must be pregnant and starting to show. Sephy instantly bursts into tears.

Minnie pulls Sephy close and says that if Sephy had asked, she and everyone else could've helped her long ago. She points out that Sephy can't just ignore that she's pregnant—she'll have to tell Mother. Horrified, Sephy begs Minnie to keep her secret. Minnie grudgingly agrees and leaves. Sephy returns to weeping. Her dreams for the future are gone—now she just wants her baby.

Sephy is by now four to five months pregnant, so Minnie is likely right that she's starting to show. Interestingly, Minnie's concern for Sephy seems genuine—it's hard for her to see her sister so sad and not doing anything. But Sephy has been hiding what's going on for months now, so Minnie's concern hits her hard and causes her to lose control of her emotions.



Minnie is right: Sephy can't hide her pregnancy forever, and people are going to find out. But this is a frightening thought for Sephy, in part because she does want her baby. That desire is possibly dangerous for her, as her baby will be proof that noughts and Crosses can love each other—something her society would rather ignore.



CHAPTER 108

Callum is now working in a car repair shop, and his coworkers Rob and Gordy are asking him what he'd do with all the money in the world. This is annoying; Callum likes his work because it's mind-numbing and takes his mind off things. Callum says he'd build a rocket and leave the planet. Rob insists that things would be different for noughts on this planet if they had money, but Callum insists it's not that easy. Just then, the boss comes out of his office and tells Callum, Rob, and Gordy to get back to work.

Once the boss is back in his office, Rob starts to mock him—but Callum shushes Rob and turns up the volume on the radio. An announcer is saying that Mr. Hadley is refusing to confirm or deny that Sephy is pregnant, and that the baby was fathered by one of her kidnappers. Sephy is also refusing to speak about what happened. When Gordy starts to shout in shock, it takes Callum a second to realize it's because he smashed the radio. Callum walks out of the shop.

Recall that at least sometimes, Callum figures he's dead. So his wanting to leave everything behind by moving to a different planet follows: perhaps things would be better elsewhere, where he doesn't have to suffer in his racist and dangerous society. In his opinion, money won't fix much. He doesn't believe, for instance, that he could buy the Hadleys' respect or their blessing to date Sephy.



Learning that Sephy is pregnant with a baby Callum knows he fathered changes everything for him. Again, his smashing the radio shows how closely violence is tied up to love and relationships—just hearing that Sephy is pregnant is enough to push Callum to violence. But for now, Callum is single-minded: nothing matters now but Sephy.



CHAPTER 109

Sephy is livid. She's in the living room with Mother, Mr. Hadley, and Minnie, and Minnie has told their parents that Sephy is pregnant. This must be payback for Sephy calling her Minnie instead of Minerva. Now, everyone knows and it's all Minnie's fault. Sephy will never forgive her. Mr. Hadley says the only option is to deal with this "quickly and discreetly:" he's booked Sephy an appointment tomorrow. She won't be pregnant tomorrow evening.

It's somewhat childish and petty of Sephy to think that Minnie told their parents because Sephy continues to use a childish nickname for her. Sephy's pregnancy is on a totally different level than sibling squabbles. For Mr. Hadley, the fix for Sephy's pregnancy is clear: make it go away. His insistence that Sephy get an abortion shows that he thinks he has the power to dictate what Sephy does.



Sephy is shocked and asks if her parents really want her to get an abortion. Mother asks if Sephy really wants “the bastard child of a raping blanker,” but Mr. Hadley answers: Sephy doesn’t. He tells Sephy she should’ve spoken up months ago, when they could’ve dealt with it privately. Mother and Dad assure Sephy that it’ll be over soon, and she certainly can’t think straight in her condition. Sephy marvels that finally, her parents are united—and *she* made that happen. Mr. Hadley suggests that they should all go on vacation soon so Sephy can put this all behind her.

Softly, Sephy says she’s not going to the clinic. She’s keeping her baby. Mr. Hadley is incredulous, but Sephy says it again. Mr. Hadley notes that everyone knows how the baby was conceived, and Sephy will be pitied and scorned for the rest of her life. Sephy insists she doesn’t care.

CHAPTER 110

All along his journey down the coast, Callum phones Sephy’s house and uses their old signal. Hopefully she’ll be willing to see him. At nightfall, he creeps up the stone steps to the rose garden outside her bedroom window. Is Sephy going to be willing to talk? Callum has to see her.

CHAPTER 111

Sephy knows Callum is out in the rose garden without even having to look. She can sense him. She’s so nervous. Should she see him? Will he want her to get an abortion too? Sephy tells herself she owes it to herself to talk to him.

CHAPTER 112

The Hadleys have enclosed the rose garden in a greenhouse since Callum was last here, and the scent is overpowering. Just as Callum starts to wonder if Sephy will come, she appears behind him. Seeing her feels like a lightning bolt hitting Callum’s heart. She says it isn’t safe for Callum to be here, but he says he had to. He asks if it’s true she’s pregnant, and Sephy says it is. They embrace, and Callum feels overwhelmed—they’re having a baby. As they kiss, Callum feels the ice in his heart shatter. He puts his hands on Sephy’s belly.

To Mother and Mr. Hadley, it’s inconceivable that Sephy might have consented to sex, or that she might want to continue her pregnancy. This shows how Sephy’s society thinks of love between noughts and Crosses: if it happens, it’s not genuine and was instead coerced. For Sephy, this is bewildering. Her parents don’t understand at all, and it’s not much consolation that it seems like she inadvertently saved her parents’ marriage.



When Sephy refuses to terminate her pregnancy, she asserts her independence and her burgeoning adulthood. She no longer needs her parents to make her choices for her.



For Callum, it’s essential to see Sephy and see how she feels about being pregnant with his baby. Using their old signal is a way for Callum to connect to his childhood and the way things used to be, which helps him feel more alive than he has in years.



This is extremely stressful for Sephy. She doesn’t want to get out there just to discover that Callum agrees with Mr. Hadley and wants Sephy to terminate her pregnancy. Sephy has already made up her mind, and she craves Callum’s support.



Enclosing the rose garden makes it feel like Sephy and Callum are truly in their own world, as they’re physically separated from the racist world outside. In their private universe, it’s safe for Callum to feel his emotions and express his love for Sephy and their baby. Their love is, in this case, enough to push Callum to move past the violent things he’s done as part of the LM and dedicate himself to his new chosen family.



Sephy says she'll name a boy Ryan, after Callum's Dad. Callum asks Sephy to call a girl Rose. Sephy says she'll use Callie Rose, and Callum grudgingly agrees. Then, Callum asks why Sephy cried that night. Sephy is quiet for a minute, and then says that she knew she loved him when they had sex. But she also realized that because he's a nought and she's a Cross, there's nowhere for them to go where they'll be at peace. Things were never going to be okay, even if they'd run away together. She was mourning all the things they were never going to have.

Then, Sephy asks if Callum was telling the truth when he said he loved her. Callum puts his hands out and Sephy takes them. It seems like love is an avalanche—but instead of running away from it, they keep running into it. Callum suggests they run away just as lights start to click on. Before Callum can react, someone hits him in the head, and he blacks out.

Sephy is growing up: she realizes now that she and Callum will always suffer, simply due to the fact that they're different races. When she and Callum had sex, just as now, it seemed like it was just the two of them in the world—but she knows that this feeling is only temporary. Now, Sephy is ready to face the world as it is: racist, and intent on keeping Sephy and Callum apart.



Once again, Callum and Sephy's love is described using violent imagery. Avalanches are extremely dangerous and sometimes deadly. Likening their love to an avalanche suggests that it's too big and overpowering for Sephy and Callum to resist. And it acknowledges that their love was doomed from the start, just because of their respective races.



CHAPTER 113

Mr. Hadley explains that he had extra security installed after Sephy was kidnapped for exactly this reason: he knew Sephy's kidnappers would try again. Sephy screams that Callum wasn't here to kidnap her, but no one will listen to her. The police wouldn't listen as they took Callum away, and now Mr. Hadley won't listen to her either. Mr. Hadley insists that Callum was one of Sephy's kidnappers, but Sephy says Callum saved her. Mr. Hadley says that Callum just raped Sephy and got her pregnant.

Sephy insists Callum didn't rape her, but Mother says he must have if Sephy is pregnant. Shouting, Sephy says she's pregnant because she and Callum had consensual sex. It was great and she regrets that she can't have sex with Callum again. At this, Mr. Hadley slaps Sephy so hard she falls. He insists she's not his daughter anymore; she's a "blanker's slut" and she's going to have an abortion. He marches away and Mother follows. Sephy sobs.

Once again, Sephy runs up against the fact that most people in her society don't believe that noughts and Crosses can be genuine friends, let alone be in love with one another. By getting the extra security and insisting that Callum is once again trying to kidnap her, Mr. Hadley shows he doesn't believe Sephy that she loves Callum and had consensual sex with him.



Sephy's relationship with her parents certainly wasn't improving, but with Mr. Hadley's slap and his insult, her relationship with them gets even worse. Sephy is already suffering punishment for daring to love Callum: her own family is turning against her, further exposing its dysfunction and unwillingness to support its members.



CHAPTER 114

In his prison cell, Callum reads the paper. Now that his trial is over, he's not on the front page anymore (he's on page three or four). Nothing written about him, though, is accurate. He's mostly reading to pass the time, but one article catches his attention. It's about a suspected "mole" in the Liberation Militia. Supposedly, all LM activities are at a standstill until they find this person. Callum mentally praises Jude—that's his work. Hopefully the General can catch Andrew Dorn before he disappears.

Prison seems, for Callum, to be pretty boring: there's not much to do except read the paper to pass the time. On some level, Callum is still loyal to the LM, since he mentally praises Jude for raising the alarm about Andrew Dorn. So whatever happens to Callum next, he can rest knowing that a cause he supports is going to continue to flourish thanks to his help.



Callum throws the paper away and thinks of Lynette. He's been thinking of her more often these days. When she died, he'd hated her for being a coward. But he realizes he was selfish. Lynette had been through a lot. Callum had let things rob him of humanity, but Lynette seems to have had a better idea: "fade out" for a while. Maybe she just wasn't ready to come back to reality.

Callum's thoughts are interrupted by Jack, the Cross prison guard who has become Callum's good friend. Jack says Callum has a visitor and judging by his expression, Callum won't like this visitor. Callum asks if he has a choice and starts to pull on his shirt, but Jack says that the visitor is coming here (rather than meeting Callum in the visitors' hall). A minute later, Callum's jaw drops. It's Kamal Hadley.

Mr. Hadley enters Callum's cell and sends Jack away. He then says he'd like to propose a deal: for cooperating, Callum will be sentenced to life, but will only serve eight to 10 years. Mr. Hadley says for this to happen, Callum must publicly state that he kidnapped and raped Sephy. Sephy, he explains, won't "put this whole business behind her" unless Callum does the same. She thinks she owes him for saving her, and she'll abort the child she doesn't want if she knows Callum won't die. It's clear Mr. Hadley has chosen words that will cause Callum as much pain as possible.

Callum sinks to the bed. He doesn't really believe Sephy doesn't want the baby, but what if Mr. Hadley is telling the truth? Callum has to choose between his own life and his child's life. He asks if Mr. Hadley objects to him and Sephy having a baby, or *all* mixed-race children. Mr. Hadley refuses to answer and asks for Callum's answer. Callum stands and, knowing it'll "damn [him] to hell," gives the "right" answer.

CHAPTER 115

Mr. Hadley barges into Sephy's room without knocking. It's nearly midnight. Warily, he sits down and says that Callum is going to hang—but Sephy can stop it. Mr. Hadley says he can only save Callum if Sephy agrees to have an abortion. When Sephy asks why, Mr. Hadley says Sephy is too young to have a baby, and she was raped. Sephy notes that she's too far along to have an abortion, but Mr. Hadley says it's still possible. Sephy asks if her dad is going to kidnap and force her to have an abortion if she refuses. Hurt, Mr. Hadley says he'd never do that, but Sephy says he's still pressuring her by forcing her to choose between Callum and her baby's life. Mr. Hadley says it's Sephy's choice and leaves.

With the benefit of hindsight, Callum sees that Lynette's delusions about being a Cross were protective. They protected her from the horrors of her world, which eventually pushed her to decide that life wasn't worth living anymore. Callum is particularly attuned to the horrors in his world—he's in prison, after all.



The note that Callum and Jack have become good friends suggests that friendship can transcend all manner of boundaries—it's unexpected that someone like Jack, who's in a position of power, would take the time to befriend an inmate like Callum. This offers hope that things will eventually improve for the characters.



Since readers have insight into Sephy's perspective in addition to Callum's, it's clear that Mr. Hadley is lying: Sephy genuinely wants to continue her pregnancy, and she isn't staying pregnant just for Callum's sake. But it seems as though Callum hasn't had a chance to speak to Sephy since that night in the rose garden, so it's unclear to him whether Sephy has changed her mind since then.



Callum is probably correct in thinking that Mr. Hadley takes issue with all mixed-race children, given Mr. Hadley's desire to keep noughts and Crosses as separate as possible. For now, it's not clear what the "right" answer is, but Callum makes it clear that it's going to have horrible consequences for him.



Especially since readers just saw Mr. Hadley attempting to manipulate Callum, it's clear that Mr. Hadley is just doing everything he can to try to get Sephy to agree to an abortion. Though he insists he won't force her to terminate the pregnancy, he also doesn't treat her with respect (barging into her room, slapping and insulting her earlier in the novel), so Sephy's question seems well founded. Mr. Hadley is also still insisting that Sephy was raped, which shows that he still believes that true love between noughts and Crosses is impossible.



Sephy knows that if she chooses Callum, he won't be in prison forever. When he gets out, they can be together and have more children. But would they be able to live with the ghost of their first child? Sephy knows she doesn't have a choice, and she asks God to help her.

Sephy makes something of an effort to consider Mr. Hadley's offer—she knows it would give her a life with Callum. But when she asks God for help, it seems as though she's choosing her baby: she needs help coming to terms with this choice.



CHAPTER 116

Jack throws down his playing cards and says he doesn't want to play anymore. Callum teases him, but he knows Jack is having a hard time. Jack has been the one to update Callum about the outside world. Sephy has said publicly that Callum didn't rape her, and some of the national papers are questioning whether Callum should die. A psychiatrist is insisting that Sephy suffers from Kidnapper Empathy Syndrome, but that's nonsense. In any case, no judge is going to overturn the ruling that Callum is guilty, and the reason is simple: Callum is a nought who had sex with a Cross, and now Sephy is pregnant.

Under these difficult circumstances, Sephy has finally found the courage to stand up and speak up about how unfairly society treats noughts—it's the only way she'll save the man she loves. But Callum insists that it's too late for Sephy to do much good. Most people in their society don't believe noughts and Crosses can be in love, so Callum is going to pay the price—presumably his life—because he and Sephy fell in love.



Now, it's Callum's last day alive. Jack says he has 10 more minutes. After a moment of silence, Callum asks if Jack has ever thought of how life would be if their positions were reversed, and white people were in charge. Jack hasn't thought about it, but Callum says *he* has: it'd be a world with no discrimination, prejudice, or inequality. The justice system would be fair, and people would all get a good education. Jack wryly suggests that no matter who's in charge, people always mess up. Callum insists that someday, things will be better. Just not for him.

In Callum's imagination, life with noughts in charge would be idyllic, because they wouldn't replicate the unjust systems that Crosses have set up. In this passage more than anywhere else, the novel encourages readers to consider Jack and Callum's thoughts—and since the reader's world features white people in charge and harmful racism against Black people, it suggests that Jack is right. People will inevitably subjugate each other, it will just look different depending on who's in power.



Jack softly says that Sephy tried to get in to see Callum multiple times, but higher ups don't want Callum having any visitors. Then, Callum asks Jack for a favor that might get him in trouble: delivering a letter to Sephy. Jack agrees and pockets the letter. Callum sits on his bed. There are so many things he wants to do, like see Mum and apologize. All her children are dead or running from the police, and she lost Dad, too. What's Jude up to these days? Is he safe, and is he taking down Andrew Dorn? How does Sephy feel about Callum? Is she still pregnant? Callum will never be able to talk to her again.

As Callum stares down his death, he looks back on his relationships with his family. He understands that by now, his family is totally shattered—Mum no doubt knows that Callum is about to be hanged, and Jude is still hopefully alive and working for the LM. Callum also has to think about his chosen family with Sephy, which is breaking apart before he and Sephy could even build a life together. The novel's racist society has destroyed both of these families entirely.



Just then, Callum hears the security door open. Governor Giustini comes to the doorway of Callum's cell and asks if he has any last requests. Callum says he just wants to get it over with. He tells himself to be calm and collected as Jack, tears in his eyes, gently handcuffs him. Callum decides he has to stay hopeful until the very end as he follows Giustini out, Jack right by his side. Other prisoners wish Callum luck.

Callum no doubt remembers that Dad's execution was stayed at the last moment—he could be hopeful that he might actually survive the ordeal. What exactly he's hopeful for remains ambiguous, however. It's a sign of how genuine Jack and Callum's friendship is that Jack is crying. Jack recognizes Callum's humanity, and he doesn't want to see his friend hang.



Callum steps out the door into the bright sunlight. Jack leads Callum up the scaffold stairs and asks for his forgiveness. Callum says Jack hasn't done anything—and Jack says Callum hasn't, either. Callum looks at the crowd, hoping to see Sephy. But Jack says he has to put a hood over Callum's head. Callum doesn't want the hood—how will he see Sephy?—but once the hood is on, Callum realizes he can cry without anyone seeing. Then, as someone pulls the noose around Callum's neck, Callum hears Sephy shouting that she loves him. He mentally thanks God and shouts back that he loves Sephy too.

The rules surrounding executions mean that Callum can't have his actual last wish: to see Sephy one more time. But the reveal that Sephy is present to watch the execution helps Callum feel loved and supported in his last moments. Broadly speaking, Callum's execution suggests that for noughts, it's something of a privilege to get to grow up at all. Callum may be innocent, but he's still denied the opportunity to live as an adult.



CHAPTER 117

Sephy screams that she loves Callum as the trapdoor opens and Callum's body swings on the rope. She can't tell if he heard her, and she asks God to let Callum have heard her—if God's there.

Sephy realizes that there's nothing she can do to stop Callum's execution. All she can do is hope that Callum died knowing he was loved.



A newspaper birth announcement states that on May 14, Sephy Hadley and the deceased Callum McGregor had a baby girl named Callie Rose. The baby's last name is McGregor.

Giving Callie Rose Callum's last name is a way for Sephy to honor Callum. His legacy will live on not just in his baby's blood, but in her name as well.





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