

Past the Shallows



INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF FAVEL PARRETT

Though born in mainland Australia, Favel Parrett was raised primarily in Hobart, Tasmania. Amidst their parents' broken marriage, Parrett was (and remains) extremely close with her younger brother James, who served as the inspiration for Harry Curren's character. As a teenager, Parrett spent summers in the far south coast of Tasmania with her mother. The stunning, majestic landscape and rough waters of the region made a significant impact on her that she drew upon to create the setting for *Past the Shallows*. Parrett always dreamed of being a writer and had a zine called *Numb* as a young adult, but it was not until her thirties that she began seriously honing her craft. After studying Professional Writing and Editing through a technical and continuing education program, Parrett published *Past the Shallows* as her debut novel in 2011. She has since gone on to publish a second novel titled *When the Night Comes* and has contributed to a variety of literary journals and other publications. Parrett's books have been translated into several different languages and she has been nominated for a host of literary awards. In 2012, *Past the Shallows* won the Dobbie Literary Award as well as Newcomer of the Year at the Australian Book Industry Awards.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Due to the harsh, rustic environment of the Australian continent, colonial settlers in the late 1700s and early 1800s were forced to rely closely on a deep trust of their fellow men in order to survive. This concept has endured to the present day and has led to the prevailing value of "mateship" in mainstream Australian culture, a principle that encourages a tight-knit sense of respect, solidarity, and friendship among men. Today, "mate" is used as a common term of endearment among friends. *Past the Shallows* takes place just off the coast of Tasmania, Australia, and the story's characters grapple with the same ancient, near-mythical landscape that humbled the continent's early inhabitants. The notion of mateship plays a clear role in the novel's central themes, as Harry, Miles, and Joe Curren's loyal brotherhood imbues them with hope and purpose amidst their suffering.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Favel Parrett's prose in *Past the Shallows* is distinctively sparse, a writing style that harkens back to the fragmentary minimalism of writers such as Ernest Hemingway. As in Hemingway's stories, many of the crucial details in the novel

are obscured or implied rather than explicitly stated, as Parrett keeps an objective distance and allows readers to make their own inferences. Parrett cites Cormac McCarthy as one of her foremost inspirations—like Parrett, McCarthy is a contemporary author who emulates Hemingway in his concise, straightforward writing style. McCarthy's novel [The Road](#) is both stylistically and thematically similar to *Past the Shallows*, as both stories portray close familial bonds in the wake of profound tragedy.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** Past the Shallows
- **When Written:** Unknown
- **Where Written:** Victoria, Australia
- **When Published:** 2011
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary
- **Genre:** Novel, contemporary fiction
- **Setting:** Bruny Island off the coast of Tasmania, Australia
- **Climax:** Dad throws Harry overboard into the storm waves and reveals the truth of Mum and Uncle Nick's deaths to Miles
- **Antagonist:** Dad/Steven Curren
- **Point of View:** Third-person limited

EXTRA CREDIT

Surf's Up. Growing up, Favel Parrett never thought that she would surf in the ocean. Now, much like Miles and Joe Curren in *Past the Shallows*, she surfs nearly every day and cannot imagine her life without it.

Odd Jobs. Before becoming a writer, Parrett had an eclectic mix of jobs including delivering mail, working in a bakery, and even DJing.



PLOT SUMMARY

Past the Shallows is the story of three brothers, Harry, Miles, and Joe Curren, growing up in a small fishing town on Bruny Island off the southeastern coast of Tasmania, Australia. The brothers have had a painful upbringing full of hardships, as their Uncle Nick drowned on the same night that Harry and Miles were involved in a car accident that killed their Mum. Additionally, the boys' beloved Granddad becomes ill and passes away. After the deaths of their loved ones, the boys are left in the neglectful care of their Dad, an abalone fisherman who has become a violent alcoholic after the loss of his wife and

brother-in-law. Joe has previously escaped the abusive household to live with Granddad, but his younger brothers Harry and Miles are left to bear the brunt of Dad's addiction-fueled cruelty.

As the Curren boys struggle to grow up without loving parents, their brotherhood becomes their support system. Harry, Miles, and Joe each find escape in one another's company and in nature. Miles is forced to take on the responsibility of working on the fishing boat with Dad and his fishermen Martin and Jeff, as well as taking care of Harry. Miles has a complicated relationship with the **water**, as he is afraid of diving for abalone but finds solace in surfing with his older brother, Joe. Harry, on the other hand, is petrified of the ocean and escapes into the woods when he is left alone during the long stretches that Dad and Miles spend on the fishing boat. He inadvertently befriends the local hermit George Fuller and his dog Jake, finding the love and understanding in his relationship with George he lacks from his own abusive father.

Joe, who works as a carpenter, is unable to handle the pressure of being a surrogate father figure for his two younger brothers, despite his love for them, and spends years building a boat in hopes of sailing away from Bruny Island. After the boys' Aunt Jean contests Granddad's will and reclaims the house that he left for Joe, the boys reluctantly clear out Granddad's belongings. Miles discovers that their grandfather kept the wreckage of Mum's car from the night of the accident and finds a shark tooth necklace between the car seats. The mysterious tooth haunts Miles as he tries to place its origin, wondering who could have left it in Mum's car. Once Granddad's house is packed, Joe's dream becomes a reality as he bittersweetly leaves his two younger brothers to live on his boat and travel the world.

In Joe's absence, Dad's behavior quickly spirals out of control. After Martin is injured and has to take a leave from fishing, Jeff convinces Dad to begin poaching abalone in protected waters in order to yield a more fruitful harvest, a decision that catches the attention of the Fisheries authorities and places Dad's livelihood in jeopardy. Dad's drinking also becomes worse, as he often abandons Miles and Harry to spend his nights at the local pub. In the midst of a two-day alcohol bender, Dad and Jeff lash out violently at Harry and Miles, as they force Harry to drink whiskey and Jeff slams Miles's head into a coffee table. After this horrific incident, the boys run away from home and end up at George Fuller's house. Miles ultimately decides to leave Harry with his schoolmate Stuart Phillips, where he knows his little brother will be safe.

Miles goes back to live with Dad, and they end up nearly running into Harry in the middle of the road one night, as he emerges from the woods after a visit to George's shack. Dad is livid, and they bring Harry back to live at the house with them. One morning soon after, Dad inexplicably wakes up Harry and Miles before dawn and forces the boys to come out on the

fishing boat despite the violent winter storm that is brewing. As Dad and Jeff dive for abalone, Miles does his best to calm Harry's fear of the water but is interrupted when he realizes that the boat's engine has stopped and cut off Dad and Jeff's air supply.

Dad and Jeff eventually make it back to the surface, where Dad is furious with Miles and unfairly blames him for the engine failure. He vengefully holds Miles underwater until Harry kicks his father and forces him to release Miles. Dad's ire then switches to Harry, who attempts to call for help on the boat radio. As he grabs and furiously shakes the little boy, Dad notices the shark tooth necklace that Miles had given Harry that morning to wear for good luck. Recognizing it as having belonged to Uncle Nick, he grows even more furious, implying that Harry is actually Nick's biological son and throwing him overboard into the bitterly cold water. As Miles fights to jump in after his little brother, Dad restrains him and confesses that Mum and Uncle Nick were having an affair and that Nick did not drown. Rather, he had been in the car with Mum, Harry, and Miles on the night of the accident and Dad removed his body from the scene in hopes of saving their family from the humiliation of the infidelity.

After this harrowing revelation, Dad finally lets Miles go and Miles springs into the water after Harry. He tries desperately to save him and swim for land but is unable to find his way amidst the violent storm waves crashing around them. The brothers tread water for as long as possible until Miles eventually slips away into a hypothermic delirium and loses consciousness. He wakes up in the hospital to find that he survived, and that Joe has come back to stay at his bedside. Miles is thrown into a state of hysterical shock when Joe tells him that Harry drowned to death.

Miles and Joe are utterly grief-stricken at the tragic death of their little brother. Dad has seemingly fled town in shame and the brothers are at a loss of what to do or where to go. After living on Joe's boat docked near Granddad's house for a short time, they decide to leave Bruny Island. Not wanting to endure the platitudes of Aunt Jean and other relatives at Harry's funeral, Miles and Joe decide to have their own ceremony with George and Jake at the sand dunes of Cloudy Bay. After burying Harry's beloved collection of beach treasures, the brothers say goodbye to George, who had become the Harry's dearest companion before his death. He returns the shark tooth necklace that Miles had given to Harry for good luck, and Miles realizes that George was the one who found Harry's body. The novel ends as Miles and Joe board Joe's boat and sail away from Bruny Island, devastated yet hopeful as they look ahead to the future and embark on a new path.



CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Harry Curren – The youngest of the three Curren brothers. Harry is a sweet, innocent little boy who is neglected after the death of the boys' Mum and left alone for the majority of the day while Dad and Miles work on the fishing boat. Although Harry is terribly mistreated by Dad, he is unusually thoughtful and selfless for a child his age, preferring to spend his money on his friends and brothers rather than himself and taking care of Miles when he is ill. While he is younger and smaller than Miles, he often risks his own safety trying to defend his older brother from Dad's abuse. Even Auntie Jean, who has a strained relationship with the Curren family, seems to adore Harry and is moved to tears by his kind spirit, which reminds Jean of her late sister. Unlike Miles and Joe, who love to surf, Harry is terrified of the **water** and avoids going out on the family's boat because he is prone to seasickness. Although Harry is generally very sensitive and skittish, he is inherently curious and loves to explore nature and collect "treasures" on the beach. He shares a deep connection with animals that leads him to meet George Fuller's dog Jake in the woods, follow him to George's shack, and gradually befriend the lonely old man. Harry forms a close relationship with George, who becomes a warm paternal figure in the little boy's life. It is eventually revealed that Harry is likely the biological son of Uncle Nick rather than Dad, a fact that tortures Dad and ultimately leads him to throw Harry overboard from the fishing boat in the midst of a bitterly cold winter storm. Harry drowns in the ocean despite Miles's attempts to save him, and the loss of their beloved little brother devastates Miles and Joe.

Miles Curren – The middle sibling of the Curren family. As the younger brother of Joe and the older brother of Harry, Miles must shoulder the responsibilities that his siblings are unwilling or unable to do. After Uncle Nick's death, Dad forces Miles to take Nick's place and man the fishing boat while Dad, Jeff, and Martin dive for abalone. Miles dreads this job and is terrified by the notion that he, too, will one day have to dive in the dark, turbulent ocean **waters** that surround Bruny Island. Instead, Miles yearns to grow up to be a craftsman and carve beautiful furniture like his Granddad. When he is not working, Miles loves to surf and finds solace away from his difficult home life in the same water whose depths he fears. He has close relationships with both of his brothers, often escaping with Joe on beach trips or spending time at home with Harry. Miles was in the car along with Harry during the accident that killed Mum, and now he cares for his little brother in their mother's absence. Miles feels abandoned and helpless when Joe leaves the island on his boat, as he is left alone to shoulder the burden of making sure Harry is safe and fed, despite lacking a stable parental figure. Miles tries his best to shield Harry from Dad's ire, displaying immense courage and self-sacrifice by diving in

after Harry when their father throws him overboard into the ocean. Although he cares deeply for Harry, Miles is tragically unable to save his little brother from drowning.

Joe Curren – The oldest of the three Curren brothers. Joe is a nineteen-year-old carpenter who is forced to look out for his younger siblings Harry and Miles after their Mum dies in a car accident and they are left in the inadequate care of their abusive, alcoholic father. When Joe was thirteen, Dad broke Joe's arm in a fit of drunken rage and Joe subsequently escaped the chaos of their household to live with Granddad. Rather than become an abalone fisherman like Dad and Uncle Nick, Joe follows in his grandfather's footsteps to learn carpentry. Granddad leaves Joe his house when he passes away, but Auntie Jean contests his will in order to take back the home and sell it. As a result, Joe spends years hand-carving a boat that he plans to live on as he sails around the world. He is unable to cope with the stress of being a father figure to his younger brothers and is desperate to escape Bruny Island, attempting to do so just as a terrible storm hits. While Joe is away trying to sail through the strait, Dad throws Harry to his death in the frigid ocean **waters**. As with Harry, it is implied that Joe may be Uncle Nick's biological son, as Dad reveals Mum was having an affair with their uncle and tells both boys that they are "just like [Nick]" before lashing out violently against them. After Harry drowns, Joe regrets running from his responsibilities as the oldest son of the family and returns to Bruny Island to comfort Miles. The novel ends with Joe and Miles setting off together on Joe's boat, leaving their painful past behind as they embark on a new adventure.

Dad/Steven Curren – The father of Harry, Miles, and Joe Curren. Although it is implied that Dad was once a typical father figure, he succumbs to an alcohol addiction and becomes terribly abusive after the deaths of Mum (his wife) and Uncle Nick (his brother-in-law). Throughout the story, Dad is the prevailing source of hardship in the lives of Harry, Miles, and Joe. Although Dad works hard as an abalone fisherman, he fails to fully provide for his three sons, ignoring Harry and Miles to spend evenings in the local pub and leaving them hungry and neglected at home. After his fisherman Martin is injured and forced to take a leave of absence, Dad is increasingly influenced by his other fisherman Jeff's sinister tendencies and begins risking his livelihood to illegally fish in protected waters as he spirals deeper into alcoholism. In addition to his neglect and impulsive actions, Dad is also physically abusive, breaking Joe's arm and encouraging Jeff to attack Harry and Miles. While his addiction and subsequent cruelty initially seem to be rooted in grief, it gradually becomes clear that Dad has been lying about the circumstances of Mum and Nick's deaths and that his own self-blame is what causes him to lash out. He confesses to Miles that Mum was having an affair with Uncle Nick and implies that Harry and Joe may be Nick's biological sons rather than his own. Dad's destructive behavior culminates in the ultimate act

of cruelty when he throws Harry overboard off the fishing boat to his death.

George Fuller – An old man whom Harry Curren inadvertently befriends. George, who is scarred by facial deformities, lives in a small woodland shack with his dog Jake. He is ostracized by the community due to his appearance and solitary nature, and local schoolchildren are convinced that he is a murderous, cannibalistic monster. After being led to George by Jake, however, Harry soon finds that George is a shy, sweet old man who was a friend of Granddad's and knew Mum when she was young. The pair become fast friends and George serves as a grandfatherly presence in the little boy's life, taking him along on adventures, teaching him wilderness skills, and even offering Harry and Miles a place to stay after a particularly horrific episode of abuse from Dad and Jeff. He and Harry seem to be kindred spirits whose deep understanding of each other transcends words. As Harry lacks a stable parental figure in his life, George is a positive male role model for the boy, treating him with the love and gentle kindness he craves but does not receive from his father. George is away on a fishing trip when Harry drowns near the end of the story but is ultimately the one to recover his young friend's body from a reef down the coastline.

Uncle Nick – The late husband of Auntie Jean and uncle of Harry, Miles, and Joe Curren. Before his death, Uncle Nick was an abalone fisherman who worked alongside Dad on the family fishing boat. In Nick's absence, Miles is forced to take his place and man the boat while his father and the other fishermen dive for abalone. Uncle Nick was a beloved relative of the Curren brothers, particularly of Miles, whom Nick taught how to surf. Dad convinces his family and the rest of the community that Uncle Nick drowned on the same night that Mum died in a car accident. He eventually reveals, however, that Nick and Mum had been having an affair and that they were leaving together with Miles and Harry in the car when they crashed. Dad confesses to Miles that he took Nick's body away from the scene of the accident and left Mum there to die alongside Miles and Harry, in fear of anyone finding out about the affair. It is implied that Harry (and possibly Joe) are Nick's biological sons rather than Dad's, a revelation that tortures their father to the point that he lashes out violently at the two boys, breaking Joe's arm and throwing Harry overboard from the fishing boat during a vicious storm.

Mum – The late mother of Harry, Miles, and Joe Curren and the wife of Dad. Harry and Miles were in the car during the crash that killed Mum but have blocked out most of their memories of the accident. Mum, a loving, nurturing mother, was a **light** in the lives of her three sons. Harry, Miles, and Joe (along with Mum's sister Auntie Jean) are left devastated by her absence. Harry, who was very young when Mum died, struggles to remember his mother and is glad to find out more about her from George Fuller, who was an old friend of Mum and

Granddad. Eventually, Dad confesses that Mum had been having an affair with Uncle Nick and that she was leaving him with Nick, Harry, and Miles in the car when they crashed.

Granddad – The late father of Mum and Auntie Jean and grandfather of Harry, Miles, and Joe Curren. Before he fell ill and died, Granddad was adored by his three grandsons. The Curren brothers have sweet memories of their grandfather, who was a skilled fisherman and master carpenter. When Joe was thirteen, Dad broke Joe's arm and Joe went to live with Granddad, who decided to leave Joe his house after his death. Auntie Jean contests Granddad's will in order to claim the house as her own and sell it for a profit, a betrayal that leaves Harry, Miles, and Joe heartbroken as they sort through Granddad's belongings. As they do so, they find the remnants of Mum's car (which was destroyed in the crash that killed her) in their grandfather's shed. Granddad's decision to hold onto this painful memory ultimately helps uncover the details of Mum and Uncle Nick's deaths, as the shark tooth that Miles finds between the car seats sparks Dad's memory and leads him to confess the truth about the night of the accident.

Auntie Jean – Harry, Miles, and Joe Curren's aunt. Auntie Jean is Granddad's daughter, Mum's sister, and Uncle Nick's wife, and is crushed with grief after these three loved ones pass away. Jean becomes resentful of Dad, whom she blames for Nick's death, forcing him to take out a loan to buy her late husband's share of the family fishing boat. Auntie Jean also takes out her pain on Joe, to whom Granddad left his house, contesting the will in order to take back the home that she believes is rightfully hers as Granddad's daughter. This selfish act creates a rift between Jean and the Curren brothers, who view their aunt as a mean-spirited, stuffy old woman and dread the time they are forced to spend with her.

Jeff – One of the abalone fishermen who works the boat with Dad, Miles, and Martin. After Martin is injured in a shark attack and takes a leave of absence from fishing, Jeff's influence takes hold of Dad as he reinforces his partner's already destructive behavior. Under Jeff's urging, Dad begins to poach in protected waters and is brought under the suspicion of Fisheries officers. Jeff also encourages Dad's alcoholism, with the pair indulging in a two-day bender that culminates in Jeff forcing Harry to drink whiskey and slamming Miles's head into a coffee table. Jeff ultimately plays a crucial role in Harry's death, as he intentionally trips the little boy and causes him to fall overboard after Dad shoves him.

Jake – George Fuller's puppy whom Harry Curren meets in the woods on the way back from Stuart Phillips's house. Jake initially leads Harry to George's shack and breaks the ice between the little boy and the old man, allowing them to begin a friendship. Harry learns that George saved Jake from an abusive owner, and the dog now leads a happy life and is a source of comfort for George and Harry.

Justin Roberts – A childhood friend whom Miles Curren used

to spend a great deal of time surfing with in the summers. Justin is the son of Mr. Roberts, whose newfound success as an abalone fisherman allows Justin to attend a private school where he loses touch with Miles. After Harry Curren's death, Miles runs into Justin on the beach and the two young men effortlessly fall back into a friendly rapport as they surf with one another, despite their time apart. This encounter gives Miles a momentary escape from the pain of his little brother's death and renews him with the same sense of lighthearted freedom he felt as a child.

Mr. Roberts/Brian – A successful abalone fisherman who is the envy of other men in the community. His son, Justin, was once a close friend of Miles Curren, and Mr. Roberts's role as a loving, supportive father is a stark contrast to Dad's abusive behavior. One evening, after Dad abandons Miles to drink at the local pub, Mr. Roberts helps the young man moor his fishing boat and gives him a ride home. Mr. Roberts seems to be aware of Dad's mistreatment of the boys, but although he encourages Miles to stand up to his father, he does not intervene to help the Curren brothers.

Stuart Phillips – A friend and peer of Harry Curren who lives in an old, run-down trailer on the outskirts of town. Stuart's mother runs a roadside berry stand for a living and allows Harry to stay with them after a particularly violent episode of abuse from Dad and Jeff. Stuart's company is a means of escape for Harry, who is eager to share his money and belongings with his friend.

Martin – One of the abalone fishermen who works on the boat with Dad, Miles, and Jeff. Despite his intimidating appearance, Martin is one of few adults in the story who treats Miles with kindness and respect. He is injured by a shark that is accidentally reeled onto the boat and is forced to take a leave of absence from fishing. Without Martin there to look out for Miles, Dad and Jeff's partnership becomes toxic as they encourage each other's proclivity for substance abuse, violence, and criminality.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Gary Bones – A local bully who steals the shark tooth necklace that Miles Curren finds in Granddad's shed amidst the wreckage of Mum's car. This cruel act causes Gary and Miles to get into a violent fight on the beach that knocks Miles's tooth loose.

Billy – Billy is the brother of George Fuller. Billy was a soldier who went missing in a war and never came home. Looking at a picture of Billy, Harry thinks about how horrible it would be if anything ever happened to his own brother Miles.

ocean waters of Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, Western North America, and Japan. Abalone is prized for its beautiful, iridescent shell. It is most commonly harvested as a luxury resource for jewelry and other decorative objects and is considered a delicacy in the cuisines of various cultures. *Past the Shallows* takes place on Bruny Island just off the coast of Tasmania, an Australian state that supplies 25% of the world's abalone harvest. The men in the Curren family are abalone fisherman, braving the frigid ocean to dive for this rare commodity.

Southern Lights – The common name for the aurora australis, a natural light display that occurs near Earth's southernmost regions. The southern lights are caused by disturbances in the magnetosphere due to solar winds and manifest as glowing streaks of color in the night sky.



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.



BROTHERHOOD, LOYALTY, AND HARDSHIP

Amidst the chaos of their Dad's alcoholism, brothers Harry, Miles, and Joe Curren are subject to rampant abuse and neglect. As their father's behavior grows increasingly erratic and their family structure deteriorates in the wake of their Mum and Uncle Nick's deaths, the Curren brothers are forced to become one another's support system, and they remain steadfastly loyal to one another. The infallible strength of their bond provides a level of solidarity and understanding that is unique to siblings, and the brothers are able to find solace in each other's company even in the midst of traumatic circumstances. The deeply loyal brotherhood between Harry, Miles, and Joe reflects the inherent resilience of the human spirit in the face of cruelty, while also highlighting how some burdens cannot be shouldered alone. With the three brothers at its core, *Past the Shallows* shows how hardship can strengthen sibling bonds, and how this brotherhood is a crucial element of enduring life's challenges.

Despite quintessential moments of conflict and sibling rivalry between Miles and Joe, Miles's relationship with his older brother serves as an escape from his troubled home life and the forced drudgery of his job on the family fishing boat. Joe (who, at thirteen, moved out of Dad's house to live with the boys' Granddad) is concerned for his brothers' wellbeing, and often takes Miles out to surf and fish in order to give his brother a temporary escape from his difficult life. These shared serene

TERMS

Abalone – A type of shellfish that is most abundant in the cold

moments with his older brother are a respite for Miles, providing him with a sense of comfort and stability that he does not receive from Dad at home or at work on the boat. While family is not purely a force of good in the novel—after all, most of the brothers' struggles stem from their father, an abusive alcoholic—the boys' relationships with one another show how family can also serve as a lifeline in the midst of pain.

Since quality time with Joe is what buoys Miles in an otherwise heartbreaking life, he is resentful and afraid when his older brother builds a boat and plans on leaving Bruny Island to escape the painful reality of their disintegrated family. Although Joe is nineteen and it is ostensibly normal for him to leave home, the value Miles places on their brotherhood turns this act into a personal affront that threatens to destabilize Miles's sense of security. Miles's deep distress surrounding Joe's departure speaks to how vital Joe's brotherly friendship has been in keeping Miles afloat emotionally, highlighting the way that family bonds can be a balm for pain and suffering.

Similar to his brotherhood with Joe, Miles's relationship with his younger brother, Harry, is in many ways characteristic of a typical bond between siblings. The abuse they both receive from Dad, however, creates a profound, unspoken loyalty between Miles and Harry that gives each of them a sense of purpose and a reason to persevere through their mistreatment. Though the youngest of the three brothers, Harry is mature beyond his years and often makes sweet gestures toward Miles such as buying him a goodie bag at the boat races, caring for him when he is sick, and even trying to defend him from Dad's ire. While Miles is sometimes impatient and frustrated by Harry's naïveté, his little brother's thoughtful treatment of him is a nurturing presence that helps fill the void of Mum's death and Dad's neglect.

Miles returns the favor of Harry's kindness, remaining loyal and protective of his little brother even under the looming threat of violence from Dad. After a particularly harrowing episode of drunken violence from Dad and his equally abusive friend Jeff, Miles tenderly packs a bag for Harry and leaves his little brother at his friend Stuart's house (where he knows he will be safe) and returns home alone to face the brunt of Dad's drunken wrath. Despite the abuse that the two younger Curren brothers continually face, their brotherly bond gives them the strength and resilience they need to endure their circumstances.

This strong bond of solidarity that Miles and Harry share culminates in Miles facing his phobia of the deep ocean to save Harry after Dad throws him overboard, a moment that parallels Miles's childhood memory of Joe saving him when he fell in the river. Although he is unable to save Harry from drowning, this act is the ultimate display of Miles's steadfast love, courage, and self-sacrifice as he risks his own life in an attempt to rescue his little brother. Although family is the cause of Harry and Miles's hardship in this circumstance, as Dad is the one to throw Harry

overboard, the brothers' close familial bond remains a source of resilience and comfort for them both as they desperately try to stay alive in the freezing **water**.

The novel resists a clean ending, as brotherhood ultimately does not save the day and vanquish evil. Instead, the ending is steeped in both heartache and hope, reflecting the realistic complexity of family life. While Dad's abusive nature wreaks havoc on the Curren family and eventually kills Harry, the unyielding loyalty between Miles and Joe is made even stronger by the tragedy of their little brother's death. Miles and Joe's brotherhood allows them to band together to continue the legacy of Harry's kind spirit, overcome the painful memories of their traumatic upbringing, and ultimately break free of Bruny Island.



ADDICTION AND ABUSE

After the deaths of his brother-in-law Uncle Nick and his wife Mum, Dad's guilt and grief spiral into alcoholism and the subsequent abuse of his three sons, Harry, Miles, and Joe. Much like the often-volatile natural landscape of Bruny Island where the Curren family lives, Dad's unpredictable, menacing behavior is a looming source of terror for his three boys. His presence is confusing, particularly for Miles and Harry, as they respect him as the family's provider and head of household yet resent the fear and instability he brings to their lives. Through Dad's character, Parrett illustrates how substance abuse can distort otherwise normal people into monstrous versions of themselves, and how the effects of addiction are far-reaching, extending well beyond the addict.

Although Dad is a predominantly negative force in his sons' lives, his sporadic tender moments throughout the novel show that he is not wholly, inherently evil. Rather, he is a complex, deeply flawed individual who is plagued by addiction and tortured by the demons of his past wrongdoings. Dad is implied to have once been an involved, caring parent, as evidenced by Miles's memory of his father taking care of Harry and brushing his hair when he was younger. While Dad's current patterns of cruelty could potentially be attributed to an innate character flaw, this dramatic shift in his demeanor suggests that there was a time when he genuinely cared for his family.

However, after Martin, one of Dad's fishermen, is injured and must take a leave of absence from working on the fishing boat, Dad's behavior progressively becomes more turbulent and criminal. Under the sinister influence of his other fisherman, Jeff, Dad begins frequenting the local pub more often and grows increasingly more neglectful and sporadically violent toward his sons. This progressive moral dissolution shows the complexity and malleability of Dad's character as he falls deeper into his alcoholism. Even in the midst of this mistreatment, Dad still shows slivers of compassion and concern for his sons, as when he apologetically brings Miles fish

and chips for dinner after an alcohol-fueled incident of violent abuse. This rare display of care further suggests that Dad is a nuanced character beneath his addiction.

The transformative power of Dad's alcoholism has a detrimental impact not only his own psyche, but on the entire structure of the Curren family. The fear of Dad's brutality redefines Harry, Miles, and Joe's lives, which were once safe and content, and all three boys are driven toward various outlets of escapism. When Joe is thirteen, he goes to live with Granddad after Dad breaks his arm in a fit of drunken rage. The fear and trauma Joe experiences at the hands of his father affect him to the point that he hand-carves a boat in hopes of leaving Bruny Island. The great lengths to which Joe is willing to go in order to escape Dad's mistreatment illustrate the profound, lasting impact of his father's addiction-fueled abuse.

Without their older brother in the house to watch over them, Harry and Miles are left to fend for themselves. Both boys' lives are fundamentally defined by Dad's abuse as they adapt to his unpredictable mood swings and unreliability, too afraid to ask their father for food or even to cross his path to use the bathroom in their own house. Amidst this instability, Harry and Miles both search for sources of escape from their home life. Miles's love of surfing and Harry's relationships with George Fuller and his dog Jake are attempts to fill the void left by their father's neglect and the subsequent collapse of their family. While the two younger boys can't carve a boat and sail away like Joe can, they clearly long for escape from their father and yet are forced to center their lives around him and his addiction.

Although once a typical father figure, Dad's alcoholism eats away at him until he becomes a different person altogether—a warped, twisted version of his former self, who instills a constant sense of dread in his three sons. Dad's abuse of Harry, Miles, and Joe shows the detrimental effects that addiction can have on the family structure. Though the silver lining is faint, Dad's relentless abuse ultimately serves as the catalyst for the three boys' unbridled thirst for adventure in the outside world.



TRAGEDY AND BLAME

Throughout *Past the Shallows*, the Curren family copes with the deaths of beloved family members Mum, Uncle Nick, and Granddad. Harry, Miles and

Joe are told that Mum died in a car accident and that Uncle Nick drowned on the same night. It is gradually implied, however, that Mum and Uncle Nick were having an affair, and that Dad has been lying about the night of the accident and the circumstances of Nick's death. The losses of these characters and the secrets and blame associated with their deaths have varying effects on the rest of the family. The Curren brothers are grief-stricken, Auntie Jean is resentful, and Dad is tortured by the blame he places on Mum for cheating on him. Additionally, he is wracked with the guilt of tampering with

Nick's body at the scene of the car crash and lying about his brother-in-law's fate, knowing that he did not actually drown. The dissolution of the Curren family as they cope with losing three of their loved ones suggests that assigning blame after a tragedy is destructive and unproductive, as it will only breed resentment and betrayal.

In reaction to the deaths of her sister, husband, and father, Auntie Jean spirals into a vicious cycle of bitterness and blaming others that leads to the destruction of her relationships with Dad, Harry, Miles, and Joe. After Uncle Nick's death, Auntie Jean forces Dad to take out a loan in order to buy Nick's share of the family boat, which puts a significant strain on their relationship. Although she does not know that Nick actually died in the crash with Mum, nor does she know the full extent of Dad's involvement, she blames Dad anyway because she believes that he encouraged Nick to go out on the boat on the night that he allegedly drowned. This bitterness destroys the rapport between Auntie Jean and Dad to the point that she refuses to even enter the family home.

The resentment Auntie Jean feels for Dad in the wake of Uncle Nick's death also spills over into her relationships with Harry, Miles, and Joe. After Granddad passes away and leaves his house to Joe, Auntie Jean contests the will and takes back the house to sell it, a betrayal that causes an unforgivable rift between her and the Curren brothers, who are sentimentally attached to their grandfather's home. Although Granddad wanted Joe to have the house, Auntie Jean feels that Joe is stealing the property that she believes to be rightfully hers as Granddad's daughter. Auntie Jean's shift in character suggests that assigning blame in the midst of tragedy can devastate both the individual and the family.

Like Auntie Jean, Dad also experiences a profound change in character after the deaths of Mum and Uncle Nick. While Dad's descent into violence is initially presented as a reaction to the loss of his wife and brother-in-law, it is eventually revealed that his self-blame surrounding the circumstances of their deaths is what fuels the rage that destroys his relationships with Harry, Miles, and Joe. Near the end of the novel, it is implied that Mum and Uncle Nick were having an illicit relationship, and that Harry (and possibly Joe) are actually Nick's biological sons rather than Dad's. Dad confesses to Miles that Mum was leaving him (with Nick, Harry, and Miles in the car) on the night of the accident, and that he "had to take [Nick] away" from the scene of the crash in order to prevent people from finding out about Mum's infidelity. Dad's full involvement in Nick and Mum's deaths remains something of a mystery for his sons, as well as for the reader, clouded by the secrets that he has long kept from his family. In the context of Dad's alcoholism-fueled abuse throughout the story, this revelation shows how grief, secrecy, and guilt form a destructive combination. In this case, Dad blames himself more than anyone else, but that blame still has devastating consequences.

Dad's destructiveness culminates at the end of the novel when he pins the blame for Mum leaving on Harry and throws the young boy overboard from the fishing boat in a fit of rage. Harry drowns to death in the ocean as a result of Dad's unbearable guilt, an action that epitomizes Dad's desperate attempts to rid himself of self-blame but ultimately proves to be futile and deeply destructive. Whereas Aunt Jean destroys her relationships by focusing on blame, Dad literally destroys his own son.

While the dysfunction that plagues the Curren family initially appears to be rooted in grief over the deaths of Mum, Uncle Nick, and Granddad, the true insidious nature of the family's dissolution becomes apparent as they begin to point fingers at one another. The gradual destruction of the relationships among Dad, Aunt Jean, and the Curren brothers reveals that hasty accusations in the face of tragedy are not just unhelpful, but also extremely harmful. Yet unlike other members of the Curren family, Miles and Joe maintain their sense of loyal solidarity by placing due responsibility on Dad as an oppressor, rather than allowing their struggles and grief to strain the close bond they share.



FATHER FIGURES AND RESPONSIBILITY

In *Past the Shallows*, brothers Harry, Miles, and Joe Curren cope with the ramifications of their alcoholic father's irresponsibility. After the deaths of Mum, Uncle Nick, and Granddad, the Curren boys are left without a trustworthy adult to understand and guide them. Each of the three brothers flounders without a stable father figure, as they are all forced to take on undue responsibility for one another and make sense of what it means to be men in the world without a consistent example. This ongoing struggle suggests the importance of positive male role models in the lives of young boys and the detrimental effects of forcing children to grow up too quickly.

Before their deaths, Uncle Nick and Granddad were instrumental nurturing, paternal figures in the lives of Harry, Miles, and Joe. Uncle Nick taught Miles how to surf and Granddad imparted his talents for fishing and carpentry to his grandsons. Joe fled Dad's house to live with his grandfather at age thirteen, and Miles hopes to grow up to be "just like" Granddad and emulate the old man's talent for crafting beautiful furniture. The unconditional kindness and understanding with which the Curren boys' uncle and grandfather treated them makes the loss of these two male role models all the more painful as Harry, Miles, and Joe try to keep that same love alive through their bond as brothers.

The boys are left in Dad's care after Mum, Uncle Nick, and Granddad pass away. Their father rapidly spirals into alcoholism, which manifests in the violent abuse of his three sons. He fails to be a supportive father figure for Harry, Miles, and Joe, forcing them to grow up before they are ready as they

take undue responsibility for themselves and each other. Other adults in town, such as Mr. Roberts and Stuart's mother, have inklings that Dad is abusive, but they fail to take initiative in saving the boys from their dismal circumstances. Thus, with no mother, an inept father, and no one to intervene on their behalf, the Curren brothers are forced to take care of one another as de facto parents despite their young ages.

While Harry, Miles, and Joe endure the painful, confusing journey of growing up in a dysfunctional family, they do their best to look out for one another. As the oldest and only legal adult of the three boys, Joe tries to set a positive example for his younger brothers. He often takes Miles out surfing and fishing to take his little brother's mind off of Dad's mistreatment. The responsibility becomes too much for Joe to shoulder, however, and he flees Bruny Island on his boat, pleading with Miles to understand that he is "only nineteen." Like Joe, Miles also has an unfair level of responsibility placed upon him, as Dad expects him to forgo his schooling to work on the family's fishing boat after their fisherman Martin (one of the few adults who is kind to Miles) is injured. Miles suffers at the hands of Dad and his other fisherman, Jeff, who only encourages Dad's irresponsibility and cruelty rather than looking out for the brothers. In addition, Dad's neglect forces Miles to take on the full burden of caring for Harry. These unfair circumstances place a huge amount of emotional stress on Joe and Miles, robbing them of the innocent childhoods they once experienced under the care of Uncle Nick and Granddad. Neither brother is ready to be a grown adult, but they must take on that role in order to survive.

Although Miles and Joe act as surrogate father figures for Harry, their little brother is still largely mistreated and left to his own devices without Mum or other relatives in his life to make up for Dad's neglect. He inadvertently befriends George Fuller, a misunderstood pariah of their small fishing community who quickly becomes a kindly, grandfatherly figure in Harry's life. He finds out that the old man had been a friend of Granddad's, and George offers Harry the goodhearted company and one-on-one quality time that he has been lacking from his own father. He even teaches Harry to fish, an activity that the little boy had always hoped Granddad would teach him before he died. Harry's willingness to befriend a complete stranger shows just how desperate he is for a caring, affectionate male figure in his life and how deeply Dad's abuse has impacted him.

Though Miles, Joe, and George all try to nurture and provide for Harry, the lack of a true father figure in the boy's life ultimately leads to his demise, as Dad throws Harry off the fishing boat to drown in the midst of a deadly winter storm. This callous, murderous act of cruelty shows just how irreplaceable a loving paternal figure is in a child's life and, conversely, the deadly impact of an abusive father despite other positive outside influences. No matter how much

responsibility his brothers try to take for Harry, they are unable to protect him in the end, which demonstrates that children can't become effective parental figures, no matter how much they might wish to. The novel ends on a bittersweet note, however, as their little brother's death causes Joe to return to Bruny Island to be with Miles. The loss of Harry gives Joe the necessary push to come into his own as a man and become exactly the strong male figure that his devastated, traumatized brother needs.



THE DUALITY OF NATURE

Past the Shallows takes place amidst the awe-inspiring and often brutal seaside landscape of Bruny Island off the coast of Tasmania, Australia.

The turbulent ocean **waters** and the rugged ecosystem of the island serve as both the means of the family's livelihood as abalone fishermen and as ever-present, unreliable dangers. For Harry, Miles, and Joe Curren, the natural world is simultaneously a foreboding, almost mythical presence and a beloved outlet of escape from their troubled home life. The stunning yet perilous setting of the novel reflects humanity's relationship with the environment more broadly. Parrett suggests that nature is both a comfort and a powerful threat for humans, while the natural world is wholly indifferent to the fates of the people who inhabit it.

As Harry, Miles, and Joe cope with the grief of Mum's death and the trauma of their alcoholic father and dysfunctional family, each of the three brothers finds solace in a deep reverence and connection with nature. For Joe, the water is literally an escape from his painful upbringing, as he hand-carves a wooden boat to live on and sail around the world after he is uprooted from Granddad's house. Miles is likewise drawn to the ocean, likening the surrounding cliffs to majestic "guardians standing tall" and acting as though he "could stay out in the water forever" even after his brothers have returned to shore. The ocean holds a sense of freedom and possibility for Joe and Miles, and the two brothers instinctively flee from Dad's wrath to the beach where they spend hours surfing, fishing, and camping. Similarly, Harry finds joy and purpose through his connection to animals, often combing the beach for "treasures" and small creatures even though he is afraid of the water. He is also drawn to George Fuller's dog Jake and is quick to befriend the animal, sneaking off to find respite from the loneliness of his house while Dad and Miles are gone at work. For all the boys, then, the natural world is a peaceful refuge from their otherwise chaotic lives.

Despite finding comfort in nature, the Curren brothers are also able to sense the immense power and enigmatic, ancient roots of Bruny Island. Although Harry, Miles, and Joe have grown up loving the beach, the wild indigenous landscape also poses a dangerous threat as it remains indifferent to the boys, who are small and insignificant in comparison. As the brothers have

been raised on the island, they have developed a sense of reverence and fear toward its grandiosity. Abalone, the region's main resource, symbolizes the generations of people who have lived and died on the island and serves as a reminder of humanity's fragility, as they depend upon nature's fickle cycles for their livelihood. Harry's solo explorations in nature also make him acutely aware of this reality despite his young age, as holding an abalone shell in his hand makes him confront his own mortality and place in the grand scheme of life. He realizes that, much like Dad's violent mood swings, nature is an incomprehensible, rampant force that impacts people's lives without rhyme or reason. Harry marvels at the mysticism of his homeland, remarking that the island is "as old as the world."

While the brothers grapple with this ongoing realization of Bruny Island's power, they are intimidated by nature even as they find joy in its beauty. Harry is terrified of the water and made seasick by excursions on the family's fishing boat, while Miles dreads the idea that he will one day have to venture into the dark, treacherous ocean to dive for abalone like his father. Despite their fondness for the surroundings they know and love, Harry and Miles both have an innate awareness of nature's dark potential and know that they risk self-destruction every time they journey into the beauty of the island's landscape. Nature is ultimately uncaring and indiscriminate in its actions, claiming Harry's life as the little boy is thrown overboard and drowns in the icy cold waters of a winter storm.

Although the Curren brothers find emotional comfort and safety in nature, its duality as a mysterious, dangerous force remains at the forefront of their minds and highlights their willingness to risk self-destruction in order to find escape in Bruny Island's environment. They value nature over their own lives, and they are willing to face their physical inferiority and human limitations through their love of surfing and exploring their precarious surroundings. The novel celebrates this sense of insignificance rather than fighting against it, advocating for a respectful attitude toward nature's grandiosity and a healthy balance of fear, awe, and admiration.



SYMBOLS

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



WATER

Although the Curren brothers come from a long line of abalone fishermen and have been raised on an island, they have a complicated attitude toward the water, which parallels their tumultuous relationship with Dad, an abusive alcoholic. Although water is the source of the family's livelihood and is an outlet of escape for Joe and Miles (who love to surf), it is also a powerful, mysterious force which the boys

believe took the life of their beloved Uncle Nick. As a result, Miles is afraid to dive in deep water and Harry refuses to set foot in the ocean altogether. Similarly, Dad's role as a father figure is to provide and nurture, yet he is also a violent force that continually threatens the family's safety. Whereas, for Miles, his father starts out as a normal, loving parent and the ocean begins as a lighthearted outlet of escape that is "just for fun," Dad and the water slowly become tandem sinister forces that ultimately claim the most important figure in Mile's life—his little brother Harry. Just as Miles is forced to protect Harry from Dad's cruelty and neglect, he also desperately tries to save his little brother from the ocean's bitterly cold grasp after Dad throws him overboard. Although Harry drowns to death, this harrowing experience does not scare Miles and Joe away from the water, and they are still determined to surf and spend time on Joe's boat after losing Harry. While the ocean is an ongoing representation of the boys' fraught relationship with Dad, it also comes to reflect Miles and Joe's inner strength as the brothers sail away from Bruny Island in Joe's boat. Ultimately, Miles and Joe are able to find freedom in the very thing that caused so much destruction, and they refuse to succumb to the blame, fear, and abuse that plagued their father.



THE SHARK TOOTH

While the Curren brothers clean out Granddad's old house, Miles makes a shocking discovery: their grandfather kept the wreckage of Mum's car left behind in the accident that killed her. Between the car seats, Miles finds a shark tooth on a string that puzzles and haunts him, as he believes that whomever left the shark tooth in the car could be a clue in understanding the circumstances of Mum's death. Just as Miles's hazy memory of the accident is gradually pieced together through the novel, the tooth's significance becomes clearer as the story progresses. Beyond its function as a simple necklace, the shark tooth holds much deeper meaning—it is revealed to be tangible evidence of Mum's affair with Uncle Nick and of the fact that Nick was in the car with Mum, Miles, and Harry during the accident. The shark tooth is especially significant for Dad, who views it as an externalized representation of Nick as Mum's true love (and, likely, the real father of Harry and Joe) as well as the jealousy and condemnation he still harbors toward his late brother-in-law. The shark tooth ultimately represents the fragmentation of the Curren family and the destructive potential of blame in the midst of tragedy, as the painful emotions of seeing the object around Harry's neck cause Dad to project his rage toward Nick onto Harry and throw the little boy overboard to his death.



LIGHT

While Harry, Miles, and Joe's trepidation toward Bruny Island's unpredictable **water** parallels their

fear of Dad's erratic behavior, the sun's rays are a bright presence that imbues the boys with happy memories of their Mum. They often notice the light and feel comforted by it as they endure the island's brutal elements, just as they are comforted by Mum's love even in her absence. This is particularly evident when Harry's fear of the dark is quelled by the sight of the southern lights outside his bedroom window as he remembers seeing them with his mother in the past. For the Curren brothers, the presence of the light that reflects off of the dark, turbulent ocean water serves as both a literal source of warmth in the frigid winter and a figurative reminder of optimism, strength, and renewal.



QUOTES


Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Washington Square Press edition of *Past the Shallows* published in 2011.

Chapter 1 Quotes

☹️ Water that was always there. Always everywhere. The sound and the smell and the cold waves making Harry different. And it wasn't just because he was the youngest. He knew the way he felt about the ocean would never leave him now. It would be there always, right inside him.

Related Characters: Mum, Dad/Steven Curren, Joe Curren, Miles Curren, Harry Curren

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 3



Explanation and Analysis

At the beginning of the novel, Harry spends a day on Cloudy Bay beach with his brothers Miles and Joe. Whereas his older brothers love to surf and spend time in the water together as an escape from the abuse of their alcoholic father, Harry is terrified of the water and easily made seasick. This passage is the first instance of water being used as symbolic representation of the boys' relationship to Dad. Joe and Miles have a more nuanced relationship with their father, as they fear Dad in his current state but still have memories of him prior to Mum's death as a relatively normal, functional parent. This ambivalence parallels Miles's attitude toward the water, as he loves spending time in the ocean but is horrified at the thought of diving for abalone in its unpredictable depths. Harry, on the other hand, is too

young to recall much of anything before Mum passed away and is utterly terrified of Dad's violent mood swings, just as he is wholly consumed by his phobia of the water.

☝ Harry picked up an abalone shell, the edges loose and dusty in his hands. And every cell in his body stopped. Felt it. This place. Felt the people who had been here before, breathing and standing live where he stood. People who were dead now. Long gone. And Harry understood it, right down in his guts, that time ran on forever and that one day he would die.

Related Characters: Miles Curren, Harry Curren, Granddad, Uncle Nick, Mum, Joe Curren

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 5

Explanation and Analysis


During a day on Cloudy Bay beach with his brothers Miles and Joe, Harry runs off by himself to collect “treasures” along the shoreline while his older brothers surf. He wanders into the sand dunes and finds an empty abalone shell that imbues him with an instant sensorial connection to his environment. Aside from serving as a trigger for Harry's personal connection with nature, the abalone shell is relevant as a broader representation of human beings' relationship with their natural surroundings. Abalone, considered a precious luxury resource, is the heart and soul of the small fishing town that calls Bruny Island home. The Curren family, along with the rest of the community, has depended upon abalone as their source of purpose and livelihood for generations. Harry's association of the shell with “the people who had been here before” suggests the timeless importance of abalone (and, more broadly, of nature) to humanity's survival.

In addition to its practical significance, the abalone shell also makes Harry acutely aware of his own mortality. This moment is striking relative to Harry's age—although he is just a young boy, he has a clear understanding of the immense scope and inevitability of death. Harry also has an awareness of his own relative insignificance in the grand scheme of the cycle of life on Bruny Island as he marvels at the infinite nature of time. This maturity of insight is likely due to the fact that Harry was forced to confront the realities of death at a young age, having lost his Mum, Uncle Nick, and Granddad in quick succession.

Chapter 2 Quotes

☝ First day of school holidays. First day he must man the boat alone while the men go down. Old enough now, he must take his place. Just like his brother before him, he must fill the gap Uncle Nick left.

Related Characters: Granddad, Jeff, Martin, Dad/Steven Curren, Uncle Nick, Joe Curren, Miles Curren

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 9


Explanation and Analysis

After the death of the Curren brothers' Uncle Nick, Joe and Miles are expected to begin working alongside Dad, an abalone fisherman, in their uncle's place. While Joe ultimately rejects this role in favor of becoming a carpenter like his Granddad, Miles is made to man the fishing boat while Dad and his fishermen Martin and Jeff dive for abalone. This obligation forces Miles prematurely to take on an adult level of responsibility, a particularly unfair expectation considering Dad's own poor example as an irresponsible, neglectful father figure. As the middle sibling in the Curren family, Miles is put in the unfortunate position of shouldering the work that Harry is not old enough to do, and that Joe can no longer be forced to do as a legal adult. Though lost without a stable male role model and reluctant to take on the burden of an adult job, Miles's acceptance of his obligation shows that he is willing to face his fear of deep water and essentially surrender his childhood innocence in order to support his family as they cope with the loss of Uncle Nick.

☝ There were things that no one would teach you—things about the water. You just knew them or you didn't and no one could tell you how to read it. How to feel it. Miles knew the water. He could feel it. And he knew not to trust it.

Related Characters: Jeff, Martin, Dad/Steven Curren, Uncle Nick, Miles Curren

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 12

Explanation and Analysis

In the wake of Uncle Nick's death, Miles is forced to fill the

void of his uncle, an abalone fisherman, on the family's boat. While aquatic activities like surfing and fishing bring Miles a sense of joyful escape from Dad's abuse, his relationship with the water is complicated. He is terrified at the notion that he, too, will one day have to dive into the deep ocean waters for abalone like Dad, Martin, and Jeff. Miles's ambivalence reflects the complicated relationship that Bruny Island's inhabitants share with the ocean—while it endows the small fishing town with valuable resources, the island's immense, treacherous environment is ultimately impartial toward the human beings who work amidst its violent waters and craggy coastline.

The water here additionally represents Miles's fraught relationship with Dad. Although he respects his father as the provider for their family, Miles is tormented by Dad's substance abuse and unpredictable bouts of alcohol-induced violence. Similarly, Miles has a deep reverence for the ocean but also distrusts it, knowing how destructive it can be. Just as a mastery of sailing and fishing can only come from intuition and first-hand experience, Miles and his brothers are only able to cope with Dad's abuse by gradually learning how to better predict, avoid, and endure the changing tides of their father's erratic behavior.

Chapter 5 Quotes

●● He used to feel sorry for the abs when he was young. The way they pulsed and moved in the tubs, sensing the bright light and heat. But he couldn't think about them like that now. He was only careful not to cut or bruise them, because once abs started to bleed, they kept on bleeding until all the liquid inside was gone. They just dried up and died.

Related Characters: Granddad, Uncle Nick, Mum, Harry Curren, Jeff, Martin, Dad/Steven Curren, Miles Curren

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 30-31

Explanation and Analysis

During Miles's winter break from school, he is expected to man his family's boat for the first time while Dad and his fishermen Martin and Jeff dive for abalone. As he gathers the "abs" to be sorted and processed, Miles reflects on the sympathy he once had for the creatures that are so abundantly harvested in the small fishing town he calls home. His transition away from feeling sorry for the abalone marks a loss of innocence as his newfound responsibility forces him to take on the impartiality of a fisherman. Seeing the shellfish so nonchalantly caught and killed causes Miles


to confront the unromantic reality of nature as a cold, indiscriminate force. Just as the ocean claimed Uncle Nick as its victim, so too the fishermen claim the abalone.

Miles's detached view of the abalone also holds implications about his self-concept—his transition away from empathy for the shellfish mirrors his own reality, as he is forced to suppress any concerns for himself in order to fulfill Dad's expectations and take care of his little brother Harry. Additionally, this moment evidences how Miles, once a child full of compassionate sensitivity, has taken on a casually jaded attitude toward death after the tragic losses of his beloved family members Mum, Uncle Nick, and Granddad.

Chapter 7 Quotes

●● And if you didn't know better, you'd think that no one lived here anymore. That all these places were abandoned. But people were in there somewhere, hidden and burrowed in. They were there.

Related Characters: Dad/Steven Curren, Harry Curren, Joe Curren, Miles Curren

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 41

Explanation and Analysis

After a day of hard work on the fishing boat, Miles accompanies his older brother Joe on a surfing trip. On the van ride to the beach, Miles notices the familiar barren landscape of his hometown peppered with ramshackle houses and rusty farm equipment. The Curren family, along with the rest of their small fishing community on Bruny Island, are implied to be a working poor family constantly teetering on the brink of destitution. This bleak socioeconomic reality takes on a sense of injustice considering the brutal conditions that Dad and the other local abalone fishermen endure to make a living. The root cause of this collective financial struggle, however, is entrenched in random natural forces rather than human oppression. While the waters of Bruny Island sometimes yield an abundant abalone harvest, the natural ebbs and flows of the ocean result in periods of diminished success for the island's fishermen. This reality reflects the inherently fickle temperament of the natural environment as both a nurturing source of livelihood and an indifferent presence alongside the human race.

Chapter 9 Quotes

☝☝ It was fully formed, more than half a yard long, maybe only days away from being born. It would have survived if Jeff had just let it go, let it slide off the back of the boat. It had made it this far, battling its siblings, killing and feeding off them. Waiting. It would have been born strong, ready to hunt, ready to fight.

Related Characters: Dad/Steven Curren, Martin, Jeff, Miles Curren

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 51

Explanation and Analysis

When Dad accidentally reels a shark onto his line, the enormous animal nearly capsizes the boat, ruins their equipment, and injures Martin. Despite protests from Martin, Jeff shoots the shark with a rifle in order to prevent it from causing further damage. Jeff goes on to needlessly decapitate the shark and cut into its pregnant womb, stabbing the baby that was still alive inside its mother and tossing it at Miles. This passage exemplifies Jeff's irrational, emotionally-charged behavior and proclivity for violence. His presence is distinctly opposite the level-headed, fatherly responsibility of Martin, who threw himself over Miles in order to protect him from the shark attack.

This incident also demonstrates the harsh reality of nature for fisherman on Bruny Island. Although the ocean provides men like Dad, Martin, and Jeff with their sense of purpose and livelihood, it is an unpredictable force that harbors dangers like the shark beneath its depths. Miles also notices that the one live baby in the shark's womb had attacked and eaten its siblings in order to survive, a brutal contrast to the unflinching love and loyalty that the Curren brothers have for one another. In spite of these bleak realities of nature, Miles still has sympathy for the shark and its babies, likely due to the losses of Mum, Uncle Nick, and Granddad that have made him acutely aware of death and its tragic consequences. Miles's reflection that the baby shark was strong and "would have survived" without Jeff's cruel intervention suggests that underneath the jaded exterior he sometimes displays, Miles's grief has actually made him exceptionally sensitive toward the preventable death of any living creature.

Chapter 11 Quotes

☝☝ "Don't you get stuck here with your dad," he said. "Don't you let him...You're too young to be out there working, Miles. It's not right."

Miles felt the words sink down right inside him.

"You've had it rough enough," he said.

Related Characters: Mr. Roberts/Brian (speaker), Justin Roberts, Dad/Steven Curren, Miles Curren

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 72

Explanation and Analysis

After a day of fishing, Dad leaves Miles alone to clean the boat and take the abalone to the cannery while he goes off to drink at the local pub. Mr. Roberts, the father of Miles's childhood friend Justin Roberts, sees Miles struggling and offers to help him moor the boat and give him a ride home. As Mr. Roberts drops Miles off, he warns him not to become trapped in his current life trajectory. This incident is an early indication of how serious Dad's alcoholism is becoming, as he opts to spend his evening drinking rather than helping his son. While Dad shows very little care toward his sons, Mr. Roberts is able to perceive just how deeply the deaths of Miles's loved ones have affected him and extend his sympathies to the young man as if he were his own son.

The kindness of Mr. Roberts highlights just how dysfunctional the relationship between Miles and Dad is. Mr. Roberts extends fatherly compassion toward Miles without question, whereas Miles's own father abandons him to fend for himself. Mr. Roberts's comments to Miles also imply that he (and likely other adults in town) are at least vaguely aware of Dad's abusive behavior, yet he fails to actively intervene on Miles's behalf by standing up to Dad or contacting authorities about his unfit parenting. This reality shows that, although the Curren brothers are able to glean slivers of paternal love in their relationships with other men in the community, these adults fall short of taking full responsibility for helping the boys, and their support is no substitute for a genuine father figure.



Chapter 13 Quotes

☝☝ "What am I meant to do? What am I meant to do?"

And he heard her voice rise up, familiar tears.

"I grew up in that house, Miles. Don't I deserve something?"

Related Characters: Auntie Jean (speaker), Joe Curren, Harry Curren, Mum, Granddad, Miles Curren

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 78

Explanation and Analysis

Auntie Jean, Mum's late sister, occasionally looks after the Curren brothers. One afternoon, after feeding Miles and Harry lunch and giving them haircuts, she has an emotional breakdown in front of the boys. Auntie Jean's outburst is in reference to the fact that she contested Granddad's will in order to take back her childhood home, which her father left to Joe. Her emotionally-fraught decision to do so suggests that she has let her grief consume her to the point that she is willing to betray her own family in order to feel vindicated in the losses of her sister, father, and husband. By letting her grief transform into a need for vengeance, Auntie Jean shows how focusing on blame after a tragedy will only make things worse. The description of Auntie Jean's tears as "familiar" implies that she is often inappropriately vocal about her perceived grievances. This passage is also additional evidence of how Miles and Harry have been forced to grow up and take responsibility beyond their years, as Auntie Jean tries to involve the young boys in her familial drama and force them to choose sides.

Chapter 14 Quotes

☛☛ But Harry stayed where he was. He stayed among the piles of Granddad's things left on the lawn—all the things that were no longer needed, no longer useful—and he wished that Joe would stay.

Related Characters: Auntie Jean, Miles Curren, Joe Curren, Granddad, Harry Curren

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 85

Explanation and Analysis

After the death of the Curren brothers' grandfather, their Auntie Jean takes back the house that Granddad had left to Joe. This displaces Joe out of his home and pushes him to leave Bruny Island and live on his boat as he travels the world. As the boys clean out Granddad's house so that it can be sold, they feel sentimental toward the belongings that their grandfather left behind. The situation itself is wrought with pain and indicates the destructive force that blame can

have on a family unit in the wake of tragedy. Auntie Jean's resentment over the untimely deaths of her father, sister, and husband causes her to unfairly take Granddad's house away, a decision that ultimately ruins her relationship with the boys and separates Harry and Miles from their older brother Joe, who is their closest approximation to a father figure.


Harry's reaction toward Granddad's empty house and discarded belongings show how deeply the little boy has been affected by the deaths of his loved ones. Standing among Granddad's things, he is struck by how loss renders once important things irrelevant, and therefore how easily a person's memory can be erased from the world they once inhabited. This realization is deeply upsetting to Harry, who worries that Joe will similarly vanish from his life once he has left the island to live on his own.

Chapter 17 Quotes

☛☛ Maybe that's why Joe and Miles liked it so much. And he knew that Granddad would have taken him. It was just that he was too little, too small to go, when Granddad had been alive. And if Granddad hadn't died then he definitely would have taken Harry fishing, too. And it would have been good, like this was.

Related Characters: Uncle Nick, Dad/Steven Curren, Miles Curren, Joe Curren, George Fuller, Granddad, Harry Curren

Related Themes:    

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 102

Explanation and Analysis

In lieu of a close relationship with Dad, Harry forms a relationship with George Fuller, a local hermit who turns out to be a sweet, grandfatherly figure for the little boy. George teaches Harry many of the skills that Dad has failed to teach him, and that his uncle and grandfather were unable to impart upon him before they passed away. Despite Harry's deep fear of the water, George takes him fishing and Harry is surprised to find that he enjoys the tranquility of the experience. This moment serves as Harry's realization of nature's dual capacity as both a destructive force and a source of peace and comfort, a conclusion that his older brothers Miles and Joe have also arrived at through their shared love of surfing and fishing.


The simple joy of this scene also underscores the trauma Harry has experienced in his young life. The deaths of Uncle Nick and Granddad have had a significant impact upon him, as they passed away before he was able to learn important lessons from them. Despite his entire family being abalone fishermen, Harry was never given the chance to develop a similar affinity for the water. This passage also holds significant insight about Dad's addiction, as it implies that, although he is a career fisherman, his violent alcoholism has prevented him from taking the time to teach his youngest son how to fish. While Harry has only known George for a short time, George has already taken more of an interest in the little boy than his own father does.

Chapter 22 Quotes

☞ He lived for this, for these moments when everything stops except your heart beating and time bends and ripples—moves past your eyes frame by frame and you feel beyond time and before time and no one can touch you.

Related Characters: Dad/Steven Curren, Joe Curren, Miles Curren

Related Themes:    

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 124

Explanation and Analysis

After having a difficult argument about the future, Miles and Joe decide to go surfing at a notoriously dangerous beach called Southport Bluff. Miles is hesitant to enter the water, feeling that he is childish and pathetic compared to Joe, who surfs the intimidating waves with expertise. He eventually convinces himself to surf and Joe cheers him on enthusiastically from the shore, showing the strength of their close brotherly bond despite their conflict earlier that day. Miles's attitude toward surfing in this passage reflects his complex relationship with nature—although he dreads working on the family fishing boat and is terrified of diving into the deep ocean for abalone, the water takes on an entirely different context when he is experiencing it freely in the company of his beloved older brother. In this passage, the power of the ocean is not a source of fear, but one of empowerment that allows Miles to feel temporarily invincible and free. The time he spends with Joe in the water is his sole outlet of relief from grief over his lost loved ones as well as his troubled home life with Dad, an abusive alcoholic.

Chapter 24 Quotes

☞ Then they heard Dad yelling from inside. Yelling at them, at everyone. Yelling at no one. And Miles could hear the words. They came through the brown walls, through the air, and cracked open the night: "I never wanted you."

Related Characters: Dad/Steven Curren (speaker), Mum, Uncle Nick, Joe Curren, Jeff, Miles Curren, Harry Curren

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 135

Explanation and Analysis

After indulging in a two-day alcohol bender, Dad and Jeff are holed up in the Curren family living room. When Harry sneaks out of his bedroom and crosses their path to use the bathroom, Jeff forces Harry to drink whiskey at Dad's encouragement and the incident quickly spirals into a violent episode of Jeff slamming Miles's head onto the coffee table. Harry and Miles flee the house and hear Dad yelling that he "never wanted" them as they frantically climb out of their bedroom window and into the night. This disturbing scene highlights just how severely Dad's moral character has been degraded by the self-blame he feels over the death of Uncle Nick and his subsequent descent into alcoholism. While it is implied that Dad was once a positive father figure, his addiction has transformed him into a monstrous version of himself who encourages another man to hurt his sons.

This moment also serves to show just how significant the loss of Mum has been in Harry and Miles's lives. Whereas they once led normal childhoods with loving parents, Mum's death has left the two boys without a functioning parental figure to take responsibility for them. In the absence of Joe, who has just left Bruny Island on his boat, Harry and Miles are left with no one to help them and nowhere to go, causing them to internalize Dad's words and believe that they are truly alone and unwanted.

Chapter 27 Quotes

☞ And it nearly made Harry cry now, the way Miles's eyelid was all purple and cut—the bruise on the side of his face coming up bad. Harry put his hand in his pocket and felt for the sock that held his leftover money. He pulled it out.

"You should take this," he said. "You might need it."

Miles shook his head. "You keep it," he said and he tried to smile.

Related Characters: Miles Curren, Harry Curren (speaker), Aunty Jean, Mum, Stuart Phillips, George Fuller, Jeff, Dad/Steven Curren

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 152-153

Explanation and Analysis

After fleeing Dad and Jeff's violent abuse, Harry and Miles stay at George Fuller's house. Miles eventually decides to leave Harry with his schoolmate Stuart Phillips, knowing Harry will be safe there with his friend and his mother. Harry offers Miles the last of his pocket money, but Miles insists that his little brother keep it. This passage indicates just how strong a bond Harry and Miles share, as they display selfless concern for each other even in the aftermath of a traumatic incident. Their brotherhood is a source of comfort as they cope with the trauma of Dad and Jeff's mistreatment. The exchange also suggests how difficult a position Dad's addiction places his sons in, as they are forced to look out for each other as pseudo-parental figures in lieu of a caring father. Harry's concern for Miles is especially noteworthy considering his young age and is almost maternal in its sensitivity, reinforcing Aunty Jean's sentiment earlier in the novel that Harry's kind, thoughtful nature reminds her of Mum.

☛ ...Harry didn't see him come back. There was just the backpack with some clothes left by the door of the trailer and inside, near the top, were some chocolates and the bright orange dart gun from his Bertie Beetle goodie bag.

Related Characters: Harry Curren, Miles Curren, Stuart Phillips, George Fuller, Jeff, Dad/Steven Curren

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 153

Explanation and Analysis


Miles and Harry run away from the Curren family house in order to escape Dad and Jeff's violent mistreatment. After spending a night at George Fuller's shack, Miles drops Harry off to stay at his friend Stuart Phillips's house, knowing that his little brother will be safe from Dad's ire there. This act, though simple, is deeply courageous and selfless—Miles knows that, without Harry, he will have to return to Dad's house alone and bear the brunt of his abuse. He makes this sacrifice solely out of concern for Harry's

safety, placing his little brother's wellbeing above his own. This passage shows that Miles and Harry have developed a father-son relationship out of necessity, despite their relatively close proximity in age as brothers. Although this situation is disturbing and unfair, it brings out the best in Miles, whose deep-rooted love and sense of loyalty for Harry allows him to find strength and motivation in overcoming the hardship of Dad's cruelty.

Chapter 31 Quotes

☛☛ Harry leaned his head back against the chair and thought that if Miles got lost, if Miles never came home, Harry's insides would go wrong and they might never come right again. If Miles got lost.

Related Characters: Mum, George Fuller, Miles Curren, Harry Curren

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 173



Explanation and Analysis

Having wandered off alone to George Fuller's shack, Harry waits for his friend at the kitchen table and senses the portrait of George's younger brother Billy staring at him. Billy was a soldier who was lost in battle and never returned home, a story that has haunted Harry since George told it to him. Since Miles has been Harry's closest companion and only consistent source of care and affection since Mum died, he seemingly had not confronted the terrible possibility that he could lose his older brother until he heard about Billy's disappearance. Harry's distress over the thought of losing Miles suggests that their brotherhood is a source of immense comfort for him and even necessary for his survival. Without a traditional family structure to support him, Miles is the sole source of stability that Miles can rely upon. While this passage is touching in its implication of the strong bond between Harry and Miles, it also foreshadows that the two brothers may potentially be separated as the story progresses.

Chapter 35 Quotes

☛☛ ...he looked so young and small, like no time had ever passed by since he was the baby in the room and Joe had told Miles to be nice to him and help Mum out. And Miles had thought he wouldn't like it. But Harry had a way about him. A way that made you promise to take care of him.

Related Characters: Jeff, Dad/Steven Curren, Mum, Joe Curren, Harry Curren, Miles Curren

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 187

Explanation and Analysis

One morning, Dad inexplicably wakes Miles and Harry up before dawn and forces the boys to come out on the fishing boat with him and Jeff in the midst of a violent winter storm. As they prepare to leave, Miles gives Harry his own coat to make sure that his little brother is warm and safe from the frigid weather. He is struck by how small Harry looks and remembers feeling unsure of how he would feel about having a little brother when Harry was born. This memory shows how significantly Miles's relationship with Harry has changed over time, as he has been forced to take on a much more paternal, protective role toward Harry since the innocent days of his youth when he had a more conventional relationship with his brothers. His reflection that Harry possesses "a way that made you promise to take care of him" suggests that, although caring for his little brother is stressful, Miles love Harry and is more than willing to sacrifice his own wellbeing to keep him safe.

around Harry's neck as the one that belonged to Uncle Nick. It is implied that Harry is actually Uncle Nick's biological son, as Dad tells him that Mum was leaving "because of you." This realization causes him to lose control of himself entirely and commit the ultimate act of violence by throwing Harry overboard from the boat and into the deadly winter storm waves. Dad's cruelty in this instance is the final shift in his ongoing descent into violent addiction and subsequent transition from a typical father into a warped, twisted version of his former self.

This passage also marks a shift in Dad's ongoing struggle with self-blame in the wake of Mum and Uncle Nick's deaths. He soon confesses to Miles that Mum and Nick had been having an affair, that Nick had been in the car with them when it crashed, and that he had removed his brother-in-law's body from the scene of the accident to cover up the shame of Mum's infidelity. In spite of his clear admission of guilt, Dad projects his own self-blame onto Mum and Uncle Nick's actions, as well as onto Harry for being the implied illegitimate son of Mum and Uncle Nick. He opts to literally destroy the boy he raised as his son by throwing him into the water (where he proceeds to drown to death) rather than fully come to terms with his own involvement in Nick's disappearance.

Chapter 36 Quotes

☝☝ He just kept starting at Harry. And his hand moved away from Harry's hair, moved down to the string around his neck. And he cupped it in his palm—a white pointer's tooth.



"It's his," he said, and his face went pale. "His."

He let the tooth go. He stared down at Harry.

"She was leaving, because of him. Because of you."

Related Characters: Dad/Steven Curren (speaker), Jeff, Miles Curren, Uncle Nick, Mum, Harry Curren

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols:  

Page Number: 198



Explanation and Analysis

After a near-death incident in which Dad and Jeff's air supply is cut off as they dive for abalone, Dad irrationally lashes out—first at Miles, then at Harry for attempting to defend his older brother. This moment leads up to the climax of the novel, as Dad recognizes the shark tooth

Chapter 37 Quotes

☝☝ But ultimately it wasn't up to you. This ocean could hold you down for as long as it liked, and Miles knew it.

Related Characters: Uncle Nick, Mum, Dad/Steven Curren, Harry Curren, Miles Curren

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 204-205

Explanation and Analysis



After Dad throws Harry overboard into the frigid water and confesses the truth about the circumstances of Mum and Uncle Nick's deaths, Miles jumps in after Harry in an attempt to save his little brother. This moment marks Miles's confrontation with his ultimate fear: diving into deep water. Although Miles finds great joy in surfing and fishing, water in this dangerous, unpredictable context terrifies him. His surrender to the ocean's vast power suggests the duality of the natural world he loves, as the water has always served as a great comfort for him but now

indiscriminately holds him under as he desperately tries to save Harry from drowning. Miles's willingness to face his utmost fear suggests just how deeply his loyalty for Harry runs, as he is quick to risk his own life for his little brother despite knowing that neither of them are likely to survive the bitterly cold storm. In this way, their deep brotherhood is a source of strength and personal growth for Miles, even as it puts him in harm's way.

☝ There was a black emptiness inside him and it was all that he could see. He tried to imagine a fire in the darkness, and at first it was just one blue flame too small to feel. But he willed it on, felt the first flicker of warmth as it grew. Then it raged, turned into a ball of fire, orange and red and hungry. It devoured his stomach, moved up to his lungs, his back. Moved into his heart. He shared it with Harry through his skin.

Related Characters: Mum, Dad/Steven Curren, Harry Curren, Miles Curren

Related Themes:     

Related Symbols:  

Page Number: 208

Explanation and Analysis

As Miles attempts to save Harry from drowning in the freezing cold ocean, he begins to succumb to the vast expanse of the water whose strength threatens to pull him under. He imagines a fire moving through his body and into Harry in the vague hope that his persistence will imbue them both with the warmth and strength they need to survive. This moment is a testament to Miles's undying dedication to keeping Harry safe, as he is more concerned for his little brother in this dire moment than he is for himself. It also represents the ongoing ambivalence that Miles feels toward natural elements, as even under the immediate threat of drowning, he finds comfort in an image of fire.

Beyond its more literal implications, this passage also illuminates Miles's disparate relationships with his parents. As water is an ongoing metaphor for the boys' tumultuous relationship for Dad and light represents the legacy of Mum's loving presence, the meeting of these two natural elements is deeply symbolic. Just as Mum's memory has given Miles hope throughout Dad's unpredictable bouts of cruelty, so too does the image of a bright fire allow Miles to feel somewhat optimistic even as he is adrift in the ocean's


violent grasp.

Chapter 39 Quotes

☝ He had been drifting for a lifetime and his mind had lost its way. It was dissolving and he had forgotten about Harry, forgotten about all the things that came before. There was only this vastness, the swing of a giant pendulum—water receding then flooding back. And he was part of it. Part of the deep water, part of the waves. Part of the rocks and reefs along the shore.

Related Characters: Uncle Nick, Mum, Dad/Steven Curren, Harry Curren, Miles Curren

Related Themes:     

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 213

Explanation and Analysis


After Dad throws Harry overboard from the fishing boat into the winter storm, Miles jumps in after his little brother and tries desperately to save him from drowning. After a long struggle to keep himself and Harry afloat, Miles begins to drift into a hypothermic delirium where he hears voices and feels himself starting to lose consciousness. This passage shows the ripple effects of Dad's self-blame over Mum and Uncle Nick's deaths, his subsequent addiction, and the violence that stemmed from his alcoholism. All of these factors have culminated in Miles and Harry's precarious fight to stay alive. Although Harry is the one thrown into the water, it is because of Dad that Miles is also put in harm's way as he feels a moral obligation to save Harry. The situation is also a struggle between two powerful forces—the unfeeling natural world and Miles's deep love for Harry. As Harry ultimately drowns to death (and Miles nearly does, as well), this moment is a testament to nature's ultimate indifference toward humanity. Notably, Miles does not experience distress as he confronts this indifference; rather, he feels calm as he surrenders to its overwhelming inevitability.

Chapter 41 Quotes

☹☹ He listened to Joe talk about all the places they would go, the tropical islands and clear warm water, the big bright lights of new cities. The free open space of ocean. And he knew that Joe was going to take him with him, now. Wherever he went. He leaned his head down against his brother's shoulder. And he let himself cry.

Related Characters: Granddad, Dad/Steven Curren, Harry Curren, Joe Curren, Miles Curren

Related Themes:     

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 224-225



Explanation and Analysis


After Dad throws Harry overboard to his death, Miles and Joe are left devastated by the loss of their beloved little brother. Unsure how to proceed in the wake of the trauma, they stay in Joe's boat moored close to Granddad's old house. Miles, who has been in shock since Harry's death, finally allows himself to cry when he and Joe go to Dad's house to gather their little brother's belongings. In this passage, Joe's presence is distinctly paternal—a stark contrast to the abuse Miles and Harry suffered at the hands of Dad in the same house. Although Miles harbors guilt over not being able to save Harry from drowning, it is clear that Joe does not blame him, and that their brother's death has brought Miles and Joe closer together. It is also evident that the two older Curren brothers have maintained their reverence for nature and plan to use the ocean as a means of escape from Bruny Island, even though this powerful natural force is what claimed Harry's life. Rather than allowing themselves to be overcome by hardship, guilt, or fear, this moment is a clear representation of how Miles and Joe's brotherly bond and shared love of the water help them cope with tragedy in a way that fosters healing rather than further destruction.

Chapter 42 Quotes

☹☹ Miles let the rip that ran with the bluff carry him. He enjoyed the ride, felt his hands slipping through the cool water, body floating free. And there was this feeling in him like when it had all just been for fun, the water.

Related Characters: Uncle Nick, Mum, Dad/Steven Curren, Harry Curren, Miles Curren

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 228

Explanation and Analysis

One day, a short while after Harry's death, Miles stands out on the deck of Joe's boat and observes the coastline that was wrecked in the violent swell that took his little brother's life. Despite the harrowing sight of this ravaged landscape, Miles decides to go surfing on the beach. Though surfing has always been a beloved pastime for Miles, returning to the water so soon after Harry's death and his own near-drowning is a subtle act of courage and rebellion. He is now deeply acquainted with the ocean's destructive potential, yet he still finds joy and freedom in its waves. Miles's ability to find a small moment of happiness in the midst of his grief is also a testament to his moral character. Whereas Dad's internalized self-blame over Mum and Uncle Nick's deaths transformed him into a violent, murderous individual, Miles's strength of character prevails as he refuses to succumb to guilt over failing to save Harry.

Chapter 43 Quotes

☹☹ And Miles loved that light.

It made the dark water sparkle, turned the white spray golden—made the ocean a giant mirror reflecting the sky. Even the leaves on the crack wattle shone in the light.

It made everything come to life.

Related Characters: Mum, Harry Curren, Jake, George Fuller, Joe Curren, Miles Curren

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols:  

Page Number: 233

Explanation and Analysis

Miles and Joe meet George Fuller and his dog Jake at Cloudy Bay to have their own personal funeral ceremony for Harry. As Miles and Joe make their way to the beach in Joe's boat, Miles notices the sunlight sparkling on the ocean's surface. As the novel draws to a close, this passage is a crucial moment in which the narrative is brought full circle. Having struggled with a phobia of deep water

throughout the story and nearly drowned to death trying to save Harry, Miles has faced his ultimate fear and can now appreciate the ocean's beauty.

The passage is also significant in its underlying symbolism of Miles's relationships with his parents. Having suffered the ultimate loss of Harry's life at the hands of father, Miles and Joe ironically feel a sense of cathartic freedom knowing that Dad cannot do any more harm to them than he has already done. After all this pain, they are free from his grasp. This reality is symbolically reflected in Miles's observation of the revitalizing light (akin to Mum's loving spirit) reflecting off of the deep, unpredictable water (akin to Dad's chaotic nature), reflecting how even the darkest and most chaotic of forces can be made better by focusing on fleeting glimmers of positivity.


●● Out past the shallows, past the sandy-bottomed bays,
comes the dark water—black and cold and roaring. Rolling
out an invisible path, a new line for them to follow.

To somewhere warm.

To somewhere new.

Related Characters: Dad/Steven Curren, Jake, George Fuller, Harry Curren, Joe Curren, Miles Curren

Related Themes:     

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 238

Explanation and Analysis

After holding a makeshift funeral ceremony and burying Harry's beach treasures in Cloudy Bay's sand dunes, Miles and Joe say goodbye to George Fuller and Jake, then set off in Joe's boat. Since Dad has seemingly disappeared in shame after Harry's death, Miles and Joe are setting off to travel the world and live on their own, free from their father's sinister influence. The first sentence in this passage is a repetition of the novel's opening line, reflecting the narrative's full-circle journey from beginning to end as the two older Curren brothers are vindicated in their suffering. It is only when the ongoing struggle between the Curren brothers and their abusive father comes to a tragic close that the inner strength of Miles and Joe is able to fully manifest.

Although the fates of Miles and Joe are left open-ended, the imagery of the "black and cold and roaring" water leading the brothers out to warmth and newness represents their ability to overcome the darkness of Dad's horrible deeds in order to forge a new path for themselves. Rather than succumbing to a fear of the unpredictable ocean or to their own guilt over not being able to save Harry, Miles and Joe are ultimately brought closer by the trauma of their father's abuse and their little brother's death. The novel ends optimistically, as Joe makes peace with his responsibility as a father figure for Miles and the two brothers are able to commiserate with each other as they grieve for Harry. The comfort and support of Miles and Joe's brotherly bond allows them to endure their shared hardships and brave the unknown as they set off on a new adventure.



SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

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

CHAPTER 1

Joe, Miles, and Harry Curren are brothers living in a remote fishing town on Bruny Island off the southeastern coast of Tasmania, Australia. One day, Joe and Miles are preparing to surf on Cloudy Bay beach while Harry looks out at the ocean. Harry, the youngest of the three, reflects on the omnipresent, persistent nature of the **water**. He asks his brothers what he should look for on the beach that day and Miles teases him about finding a shark egg. Unsure if his brother is joking, Harry runs off down the beach.

As he runs along the shoreline, Harry observes a cormorant bird gliding close to the **water**'s surface, noticing the peculiarity of seeing a solitary bird without its family. He resists the urge to touch the bird and worries that it might be sick or lost. Harry then ventures into the dunes to hunt for driftwood or other treasures.

Picking up an abalone shell, Harry experiences a sudden awareness of Bruny Island's rich history and of his own mortality, reflecting on all the people who have stood in the same spot before him and since died. This realization unsettles Harry and he drops the shell and runs back to the beach.

Back at the beach, Harry waits for his older brothers to come back in from surfing. Joe returns to shore first and they have a picnic together. Eating his sandwich, Harry reflects on how ancient the natural landscape of Bruny Island is. Joe does not pay attention to him, his mind still focused on surfing with Miles.

As the story begins, the Curren brothers are characterized as a tightly-knit trio who enjoy their time together at the beach. Harry is revealed to be especially insightful despite being the youngest of the three, as he is deeply perceptive about the power and breadth of the ocean's waters. Although clearly mature for his age, Harry's skittish reaction toward Miles's comment about the shark egg reinforces his relative innocence and naïveté compared to his older brothers.



Harry's concern for the cormorant indicates his compassion for animals as well as an awareness of family's importance for the individual. While he, too, has voluntarily separated from his family (having dashed away from his brothers to wander the beach on his own), Harry associates the bird's solitude with a state of illness or confusion.



Harry's appreciation for his own personal lineage and that of his environment is another indication of his unusually mature mindset. Whereas his brothers are content to surf, Harry is preoccupied by the deeper, metaphysical significance of the beach. Additionally, his concern for his own mortality implies that he may be more well-acquainted with death than the average young child.



Harry is awestruck and unsettled by the grand power of the environment that surrounds them, but his older brothers are more focused on the entertainment value and escapism that nature allows. Their tendency to ignore Harry suggests that they gravitate more toward their external lives, while Harry's focus is inward.



CHAPTER 2

On the first day of his winter break from school, Miles prepares to man his family's fishing boat, *Lady Ida*, alone for the first time while Dad and his two fishermen, Martin and Jeff, dive for abalone. Miles has grown old enough to follow in his older brother Joe's footsteps and help out in the aftermath of his Uncle Nick's death. Miles and the men pile into a dinghy boat and venture off to *Lady Ida*.

The dinghy reaches the point where Miles believes Uncle Nick must have drowned. He recalls the night his uncle died, remembering that Nick was worried about the then-new fishing boat during the winter swell. One especially dark night, Dad grew frustrated with Nick's fretting and told him to either check the boat's mooring or stop talking about the boat. Uncle Nick went out to check on the boat and presumably drowned. No traces of his body or clothing were ever found. The night Uncle Nick died was also the night of "the crash" when "everything changed," causing nearly everyone in town to forget about his disappearance. Dad, however, never forgave himself for Nick's death.

Martin encourages Miles as the young man prepares to steer the fishing boat. Miles watches the sun rise over the island and notices how angry and sinister the current looks as it surges into the hidden, menacing rocks below the **water's** surface. He muses that the large Bruny Hazards rocks may be former islands worn away by the elements. Reflecting on the mysteries of nature, Miles believes that the water is inherently untrustworthy, and that one can only learn about it through direct experience and intuition.

CHAPTER 3

The brothers' Aunty Jean takes Harry to a boat race festival, although Harry wishes that Joe would take him instead. The car ride makes Harry uneasy and carsick, so he tries to focus on the radio. They arrive at the boat races in Fern Tree and Harry marvels at the fair rides and game stalls set up to celebrate the boat races.

Miles, forced to work on the boat rather than enjoy his vacation, is beginning his initiation into manhood against his will. The death of Uncle Nick has clearly had a deep impact on the structure of the Curren family, as Miles is forced to surrender the freedom and childhood innocence a school break usually fosters in order to take on an adult role in his uncle's place.



This passage reveals the tragic circumstances of Uncle Nick's death as well as the self-blame Dad feels surrounding the loss. The water is portrayed as a dark, sinister force that took Nick away before his natural time, perhaps explaining Harry's awe and trepidation toward the ocean's power in the first chapter. "The crash" that Miles remembers happening on the same night Uncle Nick drowned is an unexplained detail that foreshadows further mysterious circumstances at play in Nick's death.



There is a fatherly element to Martin's encouragement, implying that Miles may have a closer relationship with the fisherman than with Dad, who is essentially forcing Miles to work on the boat against his will. Miles's skepticism toward the water's danger suggests that fishermen on Bruny Island have had to develop an acute awareness of nature's brutal potential in order to survive. His frank awareness of this reality despite his inexperience makes sense, given that his uncle drowned to death.



Fern Tree is a suburb of Hobart, Tasmania's capital city. The change in scenery from small-town Bruny Island to a large city leaves an impressive impact on Harry as he takes in this exciting new environment. His wish to have Joe accompany reflects their close brotherly bond.

Harry longs to go on a ride called the Gee Whizzer but knows that Aunt Jean will not want to accompany him. Instead, he tries a game involving throwing coins into glass bottles. Harry gets upset when the man running the stall tells him that his winning toss did not count because it bounced off another bottle. Embarrassed, he walks away from the stall and happens to find a twenty-dollar bill on the ground. Aunt Jean tells him to pocket the money before someone claims that they dropped it.

After Harry takes the money, he fantasizes about the goodie bags he will spend it on as he reluctantly accompanies Aunt Jean to a wood-chopping competition at the fair. The noise and commotion of the event make Harry feel anxious and nauseous, so Aunt Jean allows him to leave for some fresh air. Able to relax and enjoy himself away from the crowd, Harry decides to spend all but \$4.50 of the twenty dollars on goodie bags and treats for Miles, his friend Stuart, and himself.

On the way back to the wood-chopping competition, Harry stops by an animal show and sees a Best in Show display of a mother goat and her babies. He remembers a past year coming to the show with Mum when they had played with baby goats and laughed. The man running the stall offers to let Harry hold one, but he declines.

CHAPTER 4

After the boat races, Harry and Aunt Jean go out to lunch in Fern Tree. Harry offers to pay for their meal with the \$4.50 he has left from his twenty-dollar bill. Touched at the offer, Aunt Jean muses that Harry is just like his mum and begins to cry. Her emotional reaction makes Harry uncomfortable, so he goes to the bathroom and takes his time washing his hands to let Aunt Jean compose herself.

After arriving back on Bruny Island, Aunt Jean leaves the groceries on the porch and refuses to go inside to visit. She and the boys' father have been feuding since Uncle Nick died and she forced Dad to take out another loan in order to buy Nick's share of the boat. Dad pays no attention to Harry when he comes inside the house and tells him about the groceries.

Harry's reluctance to be at the fair with Aunt Jean, as opposed to his brothers or friends, suggests that he is dissatisfied with his aunt as a caregiver. Although Jean should presumably set a responsible example for Harry, she encourages her nephew to take money that doesn't belong to him. This moment subtly suggests that Aunt Jean may have an ingrained sense of entitlement.



Harry's anxious reaction to the wood-chopping competition further shows that he is out of his element amidst the unfamiliar sights and sounds of a festival in a big city. This sensitivity seems to be an innate quality that also makes Harry unusually thoughtful and selfless, preferring to spend his money on his brother and friend rather than saving it all for himself.



This passage suggests that Mum is inexplicably absent in the Curren brothers' lives, since she was the one to bring Harry to the festival in previous years. Beyond this implied trauma, Harry's memory of playing with the baby goats is further evidence of his intrinsic love of animals and nature.



As Aunt Jean weeps at the memory of her sister, the reader can deduce that Mum died at some point in the past, perhaps tragically. Jean's public display of emotion suggests that she has raw, unresolved feelings about Mum's death, while Harry would prefer not to confront the pain of losing his mother.



Having lost both her sister and her husband, it is clear that Aunt Jean harbors hard feelings toward Dad and that grief has had a significant impact on the Curren family. Dad's cold behavior toward Harry suggests that the loss of Mum and Uncle Nick likely had detrimental effects on him, as well.



Harry is ecstatic to give Miles the goodie bag from the fair, but Miles warns him to keep his voice down since Dad has a headache. Harry notices that Miles's hands are swollen and blistered from his day on the fishing boat. After the boys unpack the groceries in the kitchen and Miles offers Dad another beer, Harry excitedly digs into his own goodie bag. Miles is too exhausted to open his and tells Harry that he is lucky he gets seasick because he will never have to work on the boat.

Harry's sweet gesture shows his thoughtfulness and deep love for his older brother. Miles, however, is unable to muster up innocent joy over the goodie bags, as he has been forced to sacrifice his own youthful pastimes to work on the fishing boat. Miles's sentiment that Harry's seasickness makes him lucky emphasizes the dismal working conditions he is made to endure and brings the boys' father's judgment into question.



CHAPTER 5

During a day of fishing, Miles struggles to steer the boat while Dad, Martin, and Jeff dive for abalone. As he looks out at the **water**, Miles marvels at how sublime and ancient the surrounding landmarks are. He retrieves a catch bag full of the "abs" that floats up to the surface and reflects on how he used to feel sorry for the creatures when he was a young boy.

Miles dreads working on the boat and fears diving, but he is also able to appreciate the stunning natural beauty of his environment. Miles's shift from sympathy to indifference toward the abalone suggests that the losses of Mum and Uncle Nick have left him jaded, and that his newfound responsibility forces him to suppress his emotions.



Martin resurfaces from the dive and skillfully separates the abalone from their shells using a shucking knife. Jeff resurfaces as well, and Miles begins to worry because Dad has been underwater for a long time. Miles dreads the day that he, too, will have to venture into the ocean's depths, remembering the terror he felt from "the weight of all that **water**" during his one and only dive. Finally, Dad comes back up with two full catch bags of abalone, panting with exhaustion but exhilarated at his successful catch.

Miles's admiration of Martin's skill implies that he looks up to the fisherman as a male role model. His paranoia over Dad's lengthy dive indicates that Uncle Nick's death has made him constantly aware of the ocean's dangerous potential and afraid of prematurely losing yet another loved one.



CHAPTER 6

Harry sneaks out of the house to give his friend Stuart the goodie bag he had gotten for him at the fair. Stuart lives in an old trailer with his mother, who sells berries from a roadside stall. When Harry arrives at his friend's trailer, he realizes that Stuart and his mother have gone out to Huonville to watch over the stall (which is usually left to run on the honor system) amidst the busy traffic before and after the boat races. He leaves Stuart's goodie bag by the front door and heads back toward home.

In the same vein as Harry's loyal brotherhood with Miles and Joe, Harry also values Stuart enough to trek through the woods to deliver the goodie bag to him. It is implied that Stuart's mother is a single parent working to support her son and that the young boy likely lacks a stable father figure. This reality could explain the bond between Stuart and Harry, who also lives in a single-parent household.



On his way back, Harry finds a dead bandicoot along the side of the road and wonders if he should take it to his brother Joe, who has a hobby of collecting roadkill and reassembling the animals' skeletons. He is interrupted by a friendly puppy who comes to sniff the bandicoot carcass. The dog is "unable to hide its joy" and seems to beckon Harry to follow as it walks away from the road.

Joe's hobby of reassembling roadkill skeletons is similar to Miles's detached attitude toward the abalone in the previous chapter. His unusual nonchalance toward roadkill suggests that the losses of his loved ones have desensitized him toward death. The contrast between this dead bandicoot and the lively puppy represents nature's dual forces of death and rebirth.



Harry entices the puppy to play fetch and begins to chase it as it runs into a clearing. He stops in his tracks when he sees a wooden shack and realizes it belongs to George Fuller, a man whom the local schoolchildren believe to be a monster who eats people and may have murdered his own parents. Suddenly, the door to the shack creaks open and Harry sprints away in terror, looking back to see George waving at him. Harry trips over something sharp and hears someone call his name as he falls to the ground. Once he gets up and is a safe distance from the shack, he wonders how George could possibly know his name.

While Harry finds joy and escapism in his environment, this passage shows the complexity of nature and the risk of placing trust in its unpredictability. Despite the puppy's lighthearted innocence and instant companionship with Harry, the animal leads him to a potentially dangerous situation. George's unsettling recognition of Harry is a mystery that implies he is somehow connected to the little boy and may be a different person than what rumors suggest.



CHAPTER 7

After Miles finishes his day of work on the fishing boat, Joe is waiting to pick him up. Miles gets into Joe's van and the two brothers take off to go surfing. During the car ride, Miles looks out the window at the grim rural landscape with its familiar worn-down shacks and rusty farm and fishing equipment. The brothers arrive at the beach and Miles gleefully runs ahead to rush into the **water** and surf, with Joe cheering him on from shore.

For Miles, Joe's presence is an escape from the drudgery of working on the boat, which shows how crucial brotherhood is for his overall sense of well-being. Beyond the impact of the fishing industry on Miles as an individual, it also takes a toll on the community. The economic depression of the small fishing town reflects the high risk of enduring nature's unpredictability in order to earn a living. Although the ocean is the source of livelihood for Bruny Island's fisherman, the unreliability of the abalone harvest also creates collective financial instability for the community.



After their surf session, the brothers go fishing and Joe tells Miles that the boat he has been building is almost finished. Joe, who has lived with Granddad since he was thirteen, is being forced to leave the house that Granddad left to him because Auntie Jean contested the will. Miles is upset because the boat will "take Joe away" and comments that Auntie Jean is a "fucking bitch." Joe agrees but assures Miles that Auntie Jean will set aside money for him and Harry.

This passage further develops the conflict that exists among members of the Curren family. In addition to blaming Dad for Uncle Nick's death, Auntie Jean also takes out her grief over the loss of Granddad on Joe. Jean's decision to take back her father's house threatens to uproot the Curren brothers' sense of stability. As Joe is Miles's only source of relief from his unwanted responsibilities, the notion of his older brother moving away is distressing.



Knowing that it is time for Joe to leave Bruny Island, Miles decides not to confide in his brother about his and Harry's troubled home life or the bad conditions of working on the fishing boat. Instead, he offers to help Joe pack because he wants to stay at Granddad's house over the weekend.

The narration implies that Miles and Harry are mistreated by Dad at home, a revelation that suggests Joe may be a stand-in father figure for his two younger brothers. This moment also introduces the idea that Dad's behavior may be more sinister than has previously been revealed, a change that will later be linked to his substance abuse.



CHAPTER 8

Early one morning, Miles is coughing “from somewhere deep” as he gets ready to leave the house for a day of work on the fishing boat. Noticing his dark circles and puffy eyes, a concerned Harry asks Miles if he is sick in hopes that his brother will stay home so that Harry can take care of him and they can watch television together.

Miles ignores Harry and heads out with Dad, still coughing. After Miles leaves, Harry is unable to fall back asleep and resolves that he will soon go out looking for the puppy who approached him along the road and led him to George Fuller’s house.

Harry’s concern for Miles’s wellbeing is yet another example of his mature, thoughtful nature. Although Harry wants his brother to stay home and keep him company, Miles’s adult responsibilities force him to work on the boat even at the risk of his health.



The fact that Miles is made to work when he is sick implies that Dad either does not know about Mile’s illness or does not care, hinting at his indifference and lack of responsibility as a parent.



CHAPTER 9

One day on the boat, the men have finished their fishing early and Miles daydreams about surfing with Joe after they get back to the wharf. He is interrupted when Martin spots Atlantic salmon in the **water** and they stop the boat to catch the fish. Dad and Jeff amass a large catch while Miles scrambles to unhook the salmon and Martin kills each fish one by one.

Suddenly, Dad reels in a giant mako shark that has bitten onto the salmon on his line. The shark crashes onto the deck and throws the fishing boat off balance, sending Miles flying into the railing and causing **water** to pour into the boat. Martin tries to yank Miles away from the shark as it thrashes up against the young boy and pins him to the railing, but the animal’s enormous tail hits Martin’s legs and he falls on top of Miles. Miles can feel the shark’s teeth brushing against his skin and is sure that he will be bitten.

Dad yells that the boat is going to capsize, but Jeff shoots the shark in the head to prevent the animal’s wild thrashing from tipping them over. Jeff laughs hysterically even as the shark’s teeth rip into his shins, shooting the animal again. The sound of the rifle temporarily deafens Miles, and he stands in shock as he watches Dad scrambling to rescue the abalone, salmon, and fishing equipment that had fallen off the boat amidst the chaos. He looks down at his body and realizes that the shark has not hurt him at all.

While Dad, Jeff, and Martin are clearly skilled at their work, Miles struggles to keep up with the experienced fishermen and does not receive much guidance from them. Miles again finds a sense of comfort and escapism from his work in both his relationship with Joe and their shared love of surfing.



The sudden shock of this shark encounter exemplifies the duality of nature, as the fishermen rapidly shift from rejoicing in their high-yield salmon catch to a state of frenzied panic over the shark. In spite of this terror, Martin puts himself in harm’s way to defend Miles in a strong display of protective responsibility.



The shark attack causes immense chaos and destruction to the fishing boat, highlighting nature’s ability to wreak indiscriminate havoc on humanity. Whereas the ocean is the source of the fishermen’s livelihood, it is also their undoing, as they lose their catch and sustain serious damage to their equipment in the midst of the mayhem.



Miles watches in disgust as Jeff unnecessarily guts and mutilates the dead shark. He is especially disturbed when Jeff cuts into the pregnant animal's womb and stabs the live baby shark inside. Miles catches the dead baby and holds it in his arms, thinking of how strong it must have been to have killed and fed off its other two siblings in the womb and how it would have survived if Jeff had just let it go into the **water**.

Miles's disgusted reaction to Jeff's unnecessary brutality reflects his deeply held reverence for animals and nature, as he clearly does not feel the same blind vendetta against the shark despite the damage it caused. Miles seems to have an ingrained respect for life, likely due to the tragic losses he has experienced, and he is deeply disturbed by how nonchalantly Jeff disposes of the shark and its baby.



Miles, still deaf from the gunshots, suddenly feels Dad hit him from behind. His father flings the baby shark into the water and slaps Miles in the face, forcing him to take the wheel of the ship and steer them back to shore. Miles looks over to see Martin slumped against the wall of the boat's cabin, his leg broken and mutilated by the shark.

Dad's callous violence toward Miles is a stark contrast to the behavior of Martin, who sacrificed his own safety and sustained a serious injury in order to protect Miles. Dad, it seems, has no instinctive drive to comfort his own son. Martin's wounded leg is significant on several levels—it highlights Dad's own unwillingness to protect Miles, viscerally represents Martin's role as a responsible father figure, and serves as a reminder of nature's impartiality toward human beings.



Back on land, Jeff goes off to a pub while Miles and Dad take Martin to the hospital. Miles realizes that he will have to skip school next term and work on the boat with Dad and Jeff until Martin can return, and Martin cryptically warns him to “watch Jeff” before trailing off. When they arrive at Huonville Hospital, Miles reflects on seeing Granddad in the same hospital when he was sick. He regrets that he was too afraid to approach the bed or hold Granddad's hand during his one visit before the old man died.

Jeff's casual abandonment of his fellow crew, in tandem with Martin's warning to Miles, foreshadows further reckless, negligent behavior on Jeff's part and hints that Dad will not be a sufficient protector against him. Along with a sense of dread at having to fill in for Martin, the experience of being at the hospital reawakens a sense of guilt in Miles for his own perceived lack of courage during Granddad's illness.



CHAPTER 10

Harry goes looking for the puppy he met on the road near George Fuller's house. He calls out to the dog but does not find it and decides to venture farther into the woods. Reaching the end of the trees, Harry spots the puppy on the veranda of George's shack. George steps outside, waking the puppy and causing it to bark and run toward Harry. Harry is afraid that George will notice him and considers sprinting away but relents and allows puppy to pull him toward the shack.

Harry is generally an anxious, skittish little boy, yet he is willing to brave the uncertainty of nature in order to search for the puppy. His love and inherent trust of animals is so deeply ingrained that he is even willing to let the dog pull him toward the rumored danger of George's shack.



The puppy leads Harry to George, who tells him that the dog's name is Jake and that he is six months old. George's deformed face makes speech and facial expression difficult, but Harry is able to understand him. George invites him inside and Harry is surprised to find that the inside of the shack is not scary, but bright and clean—even nicer than his own house. He notices a vase of fresh white lilies on the table. Harry talks to George about dogs and his family over tea and the man seems to listen and understand. He finds out that George knew Granddad years ago when “everyone knew everyone around here.”

The town's characterization of George as a monster is revealed to be baseless, as Harry finds out that he is a kind old man who was a friend of his grandfather. The fact that Harry is quick to share personal details with George, along with George's willingness to listen, implies that Dad does not provide him with the same understanding and that the little boy is desperate for a compassionate paternal figure.



George tells Harry that he found Jake abandoned and nearly dead on the road near the house of Daryl Jarratt, a man who lives nearby. Daryl's dogs lead neglected lives chained up outside where they viciously bark at passersby. Harry thinks about how lucky Jake is that George saved him. After their conversation, Harry leaves but tells George that he might come back another day.

George further subverts the assumptions that have been cast upon him by the town, revealing that he shares Harry's love of animals. George's behavior is the opposite of Dad and Jeff's cold indifference toward the shark in the previous chapter. By contrast, his gentle goodwill toward Jake serves as a positive example of manhood for Harry.



CHAPTER 11

The day after the shark incident, Miles washes down the fishing boat after work. He muses at how normal the day seems aside from Martin's absence, with his sore ribs and the bullet hole in the deck the only remnants of yesterday's chaos. Miles points out to Dad that the boat's engine is sputtering, secretly hoping it is broken so that they will be prevented from going out the next day. Dad, frustrated at an unsuccessful day of diving, snaps at Miles that he does not have a choice of when they go out. He storms off to a nearby pub, leaving Miles to moor the boat alone.

Miles's disbelief of the previous day's events speaks to the cyclical nature of the environment, as the mayhem of the shark attack has passed just as quickly as it occurred. Dad, however, seems to be frustrated at yesterday's setback. His decision to go out drinking rather than help Miles suggests that he relies on alcohol as a crutch and prioritizes this habit over his son.



After struggling to move the fishing boat to the mooring site, Miles cannot get the dinghy to start up. Mr. Roberts, another abalone fisherman, pulls up in his new, luxurious dive boat and helps him tow the dinghy. Miles lies to Mr. Roberts and tells him that he had asked to finish up on his own, rather than admitting that Dad's erratic behavior forced him to do so.

Whereas Dad leaves Miles to fend for himself, Mr. Roberts takes it upon himself to help the young boy. This moment characterizes Mr. Roberts as a stand-in paternal figure, making it obvious just how neglectful and irresponsible Dad is by comparison.



Back at the wharf, Miles accepts a ride from Mr. Roberts because he does not want to go into the pub to find Dad. Most of the other locals resent Mr. Roberts because of his success as a fisherman and his relatively affluent lifestyle, but Miles admires him for his savvy business strategies. As they drive, Miles asks about Mr. Roberts's son Justin (who now attends private school), remembering how they used to be friends and surf together.

Again, Mr. Roberts takes responsibility for helping Miles, serving as a de facto father when Dad abandons him. Mr. Roberts's success as a fisherman and reliability as a father only further highlight Dad's abuse and neglect.



Passing a tight bend near the river, Miles sees fresh white lilies tied to a tree and the sight causes him to choke on the breath mint in his mouth. Mr. Roberts pulls over and they sit in the car while Miles recovers. He tells Miles that he never passes this spot without thinking of Miles's mum, sympathizing that "it must have been bloody terrible."

This passage provides hints as to the circumstances surrounding Mum's death, as it is implied that she was killed in a car crash and that Miles was in the car during the accident.



Miles replies that he does not remember the accident, but he spends the rest of the drive reflecting on how amazing it is that the tree has survived the crash that left a permanent scar in its bark. When Mr. Roberts drops Miles off at his house, he tells the young man that he should not let Dad force him to work.

Mr. Roberts acknowledges the trauma Miles has experienced and seems to be at least vaguely aware of Dad's abuse, but he does not take responsibility in helping Miles, beyond the ride home and a few words of encouragement. This speaks to the general complicity of many adults in the Curren brothers' lives, who witness Dad's mistreatment but fail to intervene on the boys' behalf.



CHAPTER 12

Harry is worried about Miles, who looks tired and is coughing "all the time." Although Aunty Jean says that milk is not good for a cold, he decides to make Miles hot cocoa to comfort him. Harry looks forward to lighting a fire and watching afternoon cartoons with Miles, but his brother is fast asleep and will not wake up when he brings him the cup of cocoa.

The forced responsibility of working on the family fishing boat has taken its toll on Miles, as his health and energy levels are clearly suffering. Harry's perception of this shows the unusually mature and thoughtful concern he has for his beloved older brother, and his actions suggests that without a strong father figure to care for Miles, even a small child like Harry has to take on responsibilities far beyond his years.



CHAPTER 13

Miles and Harry visit Aunty Jean, whose house is completely white and pristine. Miles is frustrated as Harry picks over his food, impatient to finish and leave so that there will be time to surf with Joe. After lunch, Harry accepts Aunty Jean's offer of tea and she tells the boys that they both need a haircut. Miles realizes that he and Harry are stuck there.

Harry and Miles have a close bond, but Miles's frustration with his little brother shows that they also have an element of sibling rivalry. Miles's desire to rush through lunch to go surfing with Joe is a testament to how his relationship with his brother, in tandem with their shared love of the outdoors, is a universal escape from all of life's unpleasant obligations.



As Aunty Jean cuts Harry's hair, Miles thinks about how she is "like an old lady" and nothing like Mum, even though they were sisters. He resents his aunt and hopes that her arthritis causes her to suffer. Aunty Jean tells Miles to get a towel from the linen closet and inside he uncovers a big wooden box full of baby clothes and blankets that he has never seen before. As Aunty Jean talks on and on about selling Granddad's house, Miles wonders about the box and keeps thinking about how the baby things were "perfect and clean and never used."

Aunty Jean's decision to contest Granddad's will and sell the house has created a rift between her and her nephews. Her resentment surrounding the deaths of her father, sister, and husband has strained the bonds between the remaining members of the Curren family to the point that Miles dreads being around his aunt, which shows how fixating on blame can make tragic circumstances even worse. The unused baby clothes vaguely imply that Jean may have also experienced hardship related to infertility or miscarriage, further compounding the other tragedies she has experienced.



After Aunty Jean gives both the boys awful haircuts, Miles is amused at how they both look like "freshly shorn sheep." Unlike Aunty Jean, Mum had believed Harry's distinctive curly hair was lucky and never cut it short. Miles remembers that Dad had even brushed Harry's hair years ago, and he vows that this is the last time he will let Aunty Jean give them haircuts.

Miles's memory of Dad brushing Harry's hair suggests that he was likely a typical, loving father before Mum and Uncle Nick passed away. Like Aunty Jean's changed behavior, Dad's current abusive, neglectful state seems to be rooted in tragedy.



CHAPTER 14

Miles and Harry help Joe clean out the shed at Granddad's house. The "keep" pile of things grows much larger than the "throw away" pile as Miles fights Joe to hold onto most of Granddad's belongings. Harry agrees with Miles but stays quiet and waits timidly for instructions on what to move. When Joe goes to drop off the first load at the dump, Harry notices that Miles has not come out of the shed for a long time and goes in to look for him.

Inside the shed, Harry finds Miles sitting on the detached backseat from Mum's wrecked car. Although Harry was young when the accident happened, he has fond memories of the old car's interior. Between the seats, Miles finds a white pointer **shark's tooth** attached to a string. When Joe returns from the dump, they show him the seats and the other parts Granddad kept from Mum's car, but they hide the shark tooth.

Overwhelmed by the discovery, Joe suggests that they should take a break and have lunch. Harry asks what they should do with the remnants of Mum's car, knowing that Miles will insist on keeping them. On their way to the house, Joe pauses on the veranda and comments that Granddad should not have kept the car parts. While Miles and Joe go inside to have lunch, Harry stays outside among Granddad's old things and wishes that Joe would stay on Bruny Island.

Since Joe went to live with Granddad at the age of thirteen, he was likely closer to his grandfather than his younger brothers were. Miles's greater sentimentality over Granddad's belongings is likely rooted in the guilt he feels over not visiting with his grandfather when he was sick in the hospital.



The discovery of the car seats and shark tooth necklace adds an additional layer of mystery to Mum's death—it is unclear why Granddad kept the car parts or where the tooth came from. This passage suggests that there is more to the car accident than the Curren brothers (or the reader) are presently aware of.



Given that Harry has memories of riding in Mum's car, he likely remembers his mother and grandfather well but does not know how to express his grief. Joe's decision to leave Bruny Island on his boat threatens to further destabilize Harry's life, as he adores his older brother and Joe's protective presence helps to uphold a sense of normalcy.



CHAPTER 15

The brothers continue the process of cleaning out Granddad's shed and Harry rides along with Joe to take a load of junk to the dump. As they pull out of the driveway, Miles sits forlornly on the porch and Harry knows that he will not go through Granddad's belongings while they are gone because he wants to keep the house, whereas Joe is not as sentimentally attached. Auntie Jean is set on selling Granddad's house because the family "could all do with the money."

On the way to the dump, Joe senses that Harry is upset and assures him that he will be coming back to Bruny Island after he travels around on the boat he is building. He tells Harry that his first stop will be Samoa in the South Pacific. Suddenly, Harry has the urge to tell Joe about the afternoon he spent with George Fuller and his dog Jake. He wants to ask Joe if he knows George, since George knew Granddad.

This passage shows the complex and varied reactions of different members of the same family toward tragedy. Whereas Joe and Harry are reluctant to express their feelings, Miles is openly upset about Granddad's death and resentful of Auntie Jean for taking the house away from Joe. Jean, on the other hand, is consumed by bitterness, claiming her father's house not out of sentimentality, but for the sake of earning a profit.



Harry's desire to confide in Joe reflects his older brother's role as a fatherly confidante figure. As the oldest Curren brother, Joe knows that leaving Bruny Island will mean forfeiting the parental responsibility for his two younger brothers that has been forced upon him by circumstance.



Instead, Harry suggests to Joe that Granddad may have kept Mum's car because "he thought he might find something." Alarmed at this suggestion, Joe pulls over the van and asks Harry what he means, and Harry replies that maybe there had been a man in the car. Joe rationalizes that Harry suffered head trauma during the car crash that killed Mum, and that he must be talking about the paramedic at the scene of the accident.

This passage is significant in the piecing together what occurred on the night of Mum's death. Harry, like Miles, was in the car during the accident that killed Mum. Although Miles brushes off Harry's comments about Granddad, this revelation implies that their grandfather may have had unresolved suspicions about the accident's circumstances.



CHAPTER 16

Rather than work on the task of cleaning out Granddad's house, Miles walks down to Lady Bay beach and looks at the **shark tooth** he found between the seats of Mum's wrecked car. He mulls over whether he has ever seen the tooth before or to whom it could have belonged but cannot come up with any memory of it.

Miles does not remember the night of the car accident; finding the car seats and shark tooth in Granddad's shed seems to have made him suspicious of the crash and Mum's death. His instinctive fixation on the tooth implies that this object may hold an answer.



Suddenly, a bully named Gary Bones approaches Miles on the beach and snatches the **shark tooth** out of his hand. Miles impulsively sprints after Gary and jumps onto the larger boy's back, sending Gary crashing down on top of him. They both fall into the **water**, and Gary's forehead slams into Miles's face and bloodies his nose. Gary's father's fishing rod is broken in the tussle.

Miles is generally a kind, respectful young man, yet this incident of impulsive violence shows that he has been deeply affected by Mum's death, to the point that he is willing to lash out when the potential clue as to what happened to her is taken from him. Miles's behavior here also has echoes of Dad's violent ways, which suggests how powerful father figures can be in shaping a person's identity.



Fearing that Gary will lash out about the broken rod and beat him up, Miles tells Gary about finding the **shark tooth** and how he wants to keep it because it may have something to do with his Mum. Gary relents and drops the tooth in the sand.

Although Gary is a bully, the tragic, mysterious circumstances of Mum's death seem to evoke his sympathy.



After the fight, Miles inspects his bloody, swollen face and plays with a tooth that has come loose from the impact of Gary's head. Joe returns from the dump with Harry and asks what happened to Miles's face, not believing his brother's lie that he fell. Upset, Miles exclaims that the crash that killed Mum was not an accident—he says that she wanted to die and crashed on purpose.

Joe and Miles, while extremely close, still have typical moments of sibling conflict. Having found the shark tooth, Miles is deeply unsettled by the idea that Mum's death may not have been as straightforward as he thought, and the young man grasps for someone or something to blame.



Joe is furious and refutes this accusation, telling Miles that Mum had a high blood pressure condition and that a sudden heart attack caused her to lose control of the car. Harry overhears this argument, but Miles does not care and tries to pretend that his little brother does not exist.

Joe, unaware of the shark tooth, does not feel the need to blame the tragedy on anyone or anything—rather, he seems to believe that the crash was truly an accident. This gap in understanding causes such an emotional rift between the two brothers that Miles has a rare moment of forgoing his concern for Harry.



CHAPTER 17

One day while Miles and Dad are working on the fishing boat, Harry goes to visit George Fuller. George is not home when he arrives at the shack, so Harry decides to look around the property for him. Finally, he hears Jake and is lead down to the bay by the sound of the dog's bark. George climbs into his dinghy boat and invites Harry to come along, but the young boy is afraid of the **water** and gets seasick easily.

Harry remembers the first time he went out on Dad's fishing boat. Harry clung to the railing and threw up from the motion of the boat, and Uncle Nick joked that he would never be a fisherman. George decides not to go out in the dinghy, after all, and instead teaches Harry how to fish.

Harry is reluctant to join George because he is afraid of breaking the rod or embarrassing himself. Despite being raised by a family of abalone fisherman, no one has ever taught him how to fish. He takes a rod but hopes that he will not catch anything. When a fish does bite his line, Harry is afraid, but George helps him reel it in.

George catches four more fish while Harry is content to hold onto his own fishing rod and look out at the **water** while George hums songs. Amidst this peace, Harry understands for the first time why Joe and Miles like to fish. Harry believes that if Granddad were still alive, he would have taken him fishing when he was old enough. Back at the shack, George makes a meal out of their catch and Harry thinks that the fish is the most delicious thing he has ever tasted.

CHAPTER 18

After a day of fishing, Dad leaves Miles alone to clean the boat and take the abalone to the cannery. Since Martin has been out of commission after the shark incident, Jeff has been persuading Dad to come with him in the afternoons to illegally poach for abalone outside of the designated fishing zone. As Miles goes to the cannery on his own, he remembers Dad's warning that if they lose the boat, he will end up like most of the other kids in town who drop out of high school to work at the cannery.

Though Harry has come to trust George and enjoys the old man's company, his phobia of the water makes him hesitant to go out on the boat. This mindset contrasts with the obligatory routine of Dad and Miles, who must brave the dangerous ocean on a daily basis in order to earn a living.



Harry's relationship with nature again contrasts with how his family views the ocean. Whereas the water is a source of anxiety and physical illness for Harry, it provides his male elders with their livelihood and sense of purpose. These difference perspectives highlight the ocean's inherent duality.



Harry's ignorance of fishing shows the lack of a strong male role model in his life. Despite abalone fishing being his family's multigenerational vocation, no one has ever taken the initiative to teach him. George, in this instance, fills in as a surrogate father figure and gently encourages Harry to face his fear of the water.



Experiencing the serenity of fishing with George, Harry is able to understand the sense of peace, freedom, and escape that Miles and Joe find in their outdoor adventures together. Again, Dad's incompetence coupled with the loss of Uncle Nick and Granddad have left Harry without a father figure, a role that George is content to fill for his young friend.



Harkening back to Dad's prior abandonment of Miles, he again shirks his fatherly duties and leaves his young son alone to finish their afternoon chores. Jeff's presence has clearly had a detrimental effect on Dad without Martin there to balance out the situation, and he forgoes his responsibilities while slipping further into degeneracy.



Later that evening, Dad picks Miles up and begins driving erratically down the center of the road. Miles sees an oncoming truck and is afraid they will collide with it, but its headlights suddenly vanish. He wants to yell at Dad to pull over, but his father remains unfazed and continues speeding ahead. As they fly past the truck, Miles sees that its headlights seemed to disappear because it had hit an enormous bull. He is disturbed that neither the truck driver nor Dad attempted to slow down.

The surreal, dreamlike quality of this passage emphasizes Miles's terror and disbelief at Dad's erratic behavior. Since Miles was in the car during the accident that killed Mum, Dad knows that his son has lingering trauma surrounding car crashes. His decision to drive recklessly in spite of this knowledge shows his negligence and complete lack of concern for Miles's wellbeing, while also suggesting that he may be driving under the influence of alcohol.



CHAPTER 19

Harry goes on a hike with George Fuller and Jake and they pick apples from an orchard. From their vantage point atop a small hill, Harry spots the dilapidated remnants of the small farm where George grew up. As they enjoy a picnic, Harry asks George whether he remembers his parents. George answers yes and Harry admits that sometimes he can't remember his own Mum and that he does not think Dad likes him very much. George shares memories of Harry's mother from when he knew her as a young girl.

Harry's preoccupation with George's parents and confession of his own familial struggles reveals how deeply the deaths of Mum, Uncle Nick, and Granddad have affected the Curren family, and particularly how Dad's grief has ruined his relationships with his sons. George further establishes himself as a grandfather figure for Harry, patiently listening to his young friend and indulging him in stories of the mother he struggles to remember.



After their picnic, Harry, George, and Jake return to George's shack. George offers Harry a bag of the apples they picked earlier that day, but Harry turns them down because he knows Dad will ask where they came from. George slips two apples in Harry's jacket pockets and the young boy enjoys one on his way home. He is glad that George showed him where he grew up and reflects that he and George must be "real friends" now.

Harry's hesitance to accept the apples implies that Dad's abuse is extremely volatile behind closed doors, to the point that he would lash out if Harry came home with the fruit. As a surrogate grandfather to Harry, hiding the apples in the little boy's pockets is George's act of rebellion against Dad's cruelty.



CHAPTER 20

Two Fisheries officers come to the Curren family's house looking for Dad. Harry hesitantly answers the door and the officers ask if his parents are home. Harry replies that his Mum is dead and that his Dad is working on the fishing boat, and the officers seem surprised that such a young boy is home alone. They inform Harry that they need to speak with Dad because his fishing license is invalid due to fines and infringements. After the officers leave, Harry decides that he will go out until Miles gets home from work.

While the Curren brothers view Dad as an infallible force, he is not exempt from scrutiny, as his irresponsibility has put the family and their livelihood at risk. Harry's decision to go exploring after the visit suggests that he is stressed and confused by the officers' accusations, and that the outdoors are an outlet of escape from his difficult home life.



CHAPTER 21

After a day of work on the boat, Miles goes to Granddad's house. The boys' sorting has left the house nearly empty, but Miles notices personalized signs of wear that their family has left behind—scratched floorboards, stains, and Harry's beach specimens lining the windowsills. Joe had told Harry to choose three "treasures" for the boat, but Harry had been unable to part with any of them.

Miles's observation of the marks and wear around his grandfather's house have significance beyond his grief over Granddad. They represent the innocent times before tragedy struck the Currens, reminding Miles of the functional family he used to have before it was fragmented by resentment, bitterness, and blame.



Miles notices the notches carved into the kitchen door that had marked the growth of Mum, Auntie Jean, Miles, and his brothers. He goes out to Granddad's workshop and, seeing the supple wood collected in the corner, remembers the furniture that Granddad used to carve. Miles resolves to become a craftsman who makes beautiful furniture rather than a carpenter who builds houses and boat fixtures like Joe.

Miles has a flashback to collecting wood with Granddad before he died. As they loaded timber into the back of his Granddad's truck, he told Miles about the huon pine trees that "used to be everywhere" when he was young, and Miles thought how the huge trees would never grow back the same way. Miles spotted a small piece of celery top wood that he planned to sculpt as a good luck token for Joe's boat. Back in the present, Miles realizes that whoever buys Granddad's house will probably think that the lumber in the workshop is just firewood.

CHAPTER 22

Miles watches from a cliff as Joe surfs the dangerous, rocky **waters** of Southport Bluff and remembers seeing Joe get pummeled by the waves here in the past. Miles thinks to himself that he cannot surf in this difficult area because he is small, immature, and "nothing" compared to his older brother.

Earlier that day, Joe had yelled at Miles, telling his younger brother that he was going to get stuck on Bruny Island working for Dad and taking care of Harry. Miles feels that he is "screaming on the inside" with frustration. He decides that he will surf after all and Joe cheers him on as he paddles into the ocean. Miles feels invincible as he surfs the main break of a steep wave, forgetting his troubles and resolving that it is time to break free and "make something of his own."

After their surf session, Miles and Joe feel lighthearted and laugh as they get changed to return home. But once they are back in the van, Joe becomes serious and tells Miles that he is planning on leaving Bruny Island on his boat the next day to avoid the approaching swell. Miles is speechless as Joe asks him to tell Harry for him. Joe begins to cry, and Miles wonders why his older brother should be the one to feel emotional since he does not have to stay behind to live with Dad, work on the boat, and take care of Harry.

Miles mourns Granddad not merely because he was a loving presence in his life, but because his grandfather was his primary role model. It is clear that Miles idolized Granddad's talents and that he now lacks a male figure in his life to look up to and emulate.



Again, Granddad is portrayed as a wise and competent paternal figure for Miles. Granddad's childhood memories of the dense huon forests on Bruny Island parallel Miles's own memories of his grandfather and the rest of the family. Just as pine trees have dwindled and will never grow back the same way, so too has the Curren family been irreparably diminished by tragedy.



Miles is acutely aware of own insignificance relative to both nature's supreme power and the competence of his older brother. He clearly looks up to Joe and envies his brother's superior abilities, despite their close relationship.



Miles and Joe have a tight-knit brotherhood, but the dissolution of their family combined with Dad's ongoing mistreatment strains even their close relationship, showing that brotherhood is not necessarily a cure-all. Once again, Miles turns to the ocean as a means of escape and is able to feel safe and clear-headed as he surfs, demonstrating how nature can be peaceful even at its most powerful.



Despite their different reactions, this moment is emotional for both Miles and Joe, as the brothers are distraught at the thought of separating from each other. Whereas Miles feels as though he is losing his closest companion, Joe is guilty knowing that he will be leaving Miles and Harry to fend for themselves in the neglectful care of Dad.



Joe drops Miles off at Dad's house and tells him that he will be leaving early the next morning. Miles realizes that Joe is already prepared to leave that night and that his brother had planned their afternoon together as a way of saying goodbye. Joe assures Miles that he will be back and pleads with him to realize that he is "only nineteen." Miles feels as though he and Harry will never get away from Bruny Island.

Although Joe cares deeply for Harry and Miles, he feels conflicted toward the de facto father role he has been forced to take on due to Mum's death and Dad's unfit parenting. He ultimately cannot bear the pressure of caring for his younger brothers and decides he must flee his unwanted responsibilities. That even Joe isn't able to solve Miles and Harry's problems shows just how devastating this kind of tragedy and neglect can be.



CHAPTER 23

Miles searches through the meager contents of Dad's kitchen cupboards, looking for something to prepare Harry for dinner. He decides to make mashed potatoes and remembers when Mum used to take them up to Huonville to get hot potatoes with cheese, coleslaw, herbs, and butter from the Potato Man.

The juxtaposition of Dad's empty cabinets with Miles's memory of the delicious hot potatoes shows just how severely their lives have deteriorated since Mum's tragic death. Since Dad has clearly neglected to make sure his sons are provided for, Miles must take on the responsibility of feeding himself and Harry.



Miles carefully splits their portions equally and serves Harry on a small plate so that the meal looks more substantial. He plans to let Harry use the last of the milk for cocoa after dinner. While they eat, Harry tells Miles about the Fisheries officers who came to the door looking for Dad.

Miles's painstaking efforts to make sure Harry is fed and happy shows just how deeply he cares for his little brother. The love he has for Harry seems to imbue Miles with a sense of purpose on which he focuses amidst the chaos of their home life.



CHAPTER 24

Miles and Harry stay out of the house past midnight to avoid Dad and Jeff, who have been drinking for two days straight. Back in their bedroom, Harry needs to use the bathroom but is afraid to cross Dad and Jeff's path in the living room. He ducks out quickly in hopes that they will not notice him.

Harry's fear to use the bathroom in his own house indicates just how severe Dad's addiction has become under the influence of Jeff, as the little boy risks abuse just by crossing their paths.



As Harry passes into the kitchen, Jeff calls him "the littlest retard" and tells him to have a drink. Harry assumes that Jeff is offering him a glass of Coke but realizes it is alcohol. Dad tells Harry to drink it anyway as Jeff traps the little boy in a headlock. Miles dashes out of their bedroom to defend his brother but Jeff pushes the glass of whiskey against Harry's mouth and forces him to drink.

Dad's alcoholism has progressed to the point that he has lost all sense of what it means to be a father. He has begun to emulate Jeff's disturbing behavior, which Martin previously warned Miles about. Rather than defending Harry against Jeff, Dad forfeits all responsibility and encourages the violence against his son.



Miles tries to lunge at Jeff, but Jeff trips him and his head crashes into the coffee table. Miles feels blood running into his eye socket and Jeff steps on his hand, crushing it with his heavy boot. He cries out for Dad's help, but his father does not respond.

Miles's unflinching loyalty for his brother is a stark contrast to Dad's complacency. Whereas Dad is indifferent to Jeff's violence, Miles is willing to put himself in harm's way to defend his little brother.



Harry, sick from the whiskey, vomits on Jeff's arm that is still holding him in a headlock. The distraction frees Miles's hand from under Jeff's foot. Dad stands up and focuses on Miles, giving his son the same look that he gave Joe six years ago on the night he broke Joe's arm. Dad had told Joe that he was "just like him" and Joe had replied, "I'm glad," prompting Dad to throw him across the kitchen. That was the last night Joe ever spent in Dad's house, going to live with Granddad instead.

Based on Miles's memory of Dad breaking Joe's arm, it is clear that their father's descent into alcoholism has been long and arduous. Joe's reasoning for going to live with Granddad is revealed, further solidifying the brothers' grandfather as a stand-in father figure amidst Dad's violent abuse. It is unclear who Dad was referring to when he told Joe that he was "just like him," but it is clear that there are secrets being kept in the Curren family and that Dad harbors inexplicable, destructive blame toward Joe.



Miles looks down at the bloodstains on the carpet as the wound on his head continues dripping. Dad and Jeff both seem to lose interest and slump back down into their respective seats, and Miles takes the opportunity to escape with Harry out their bedroom window. As they run away from the house and into the woods, they hear Dad angrily yelling "I never wanted you."

Again, Dad seems to blame his sons for the pain that tortures him and drives him to drink. He confirms that he has no desire to be a father and clearly does not feel any sense of responsibility for Harry and Miles.



Miles and Harry continue to run away from Dad's house along the riverbank. Harry suggests that they go to George Fuller's shack and Miles incredulously asks how Harry knows the man. Harry explains that he has been visiting George to play with Jake, and that George had been friends with Granddad and knew Mum when she was young. Miles at first rejects Harry's idea to go to George's house but does not know where else to go since Joe is gone. Harry pats Miles's shoulder and assures him that they will be all right. Eventually Miles gives in and allows his little brother to lead him to George's.

In lieu of a kind, caring father, Miles and Harry are forced to rely on each other. They find solidarity and comfort in each other's company as they cope with the horrific abuse they just suffered. Harry's suggestion that they stay with George shows just how integral a role the old man has come to play in the little boy's life. Harry essentially views George as a grandfather to whom he can turn in times of trouble.



CHAPTER 25

Miles and Harry hear Jake barking as they approach George Fuller's shack. George waves the boys inside and Harry enters without hesitation as Miles follows slowly. Seeing George's face up close for the first time, Miles realizes that his deformities are not shocking and that he is "just an old man." He is surprised to see how neat and clean the inside of George's house is. Harry acts as though he is comfortably at home, tending the wood heater and sitting with Jake as if their terrible night with Dad and Jeff had never happened.

George is rumored to be a monstrous person, yet Harry's love of the old man allows Miles to see past his appearance. The warm, welcoming atmosphere of George's home is a stark contrast to the horrors of the house Miles and Harry have just fled, and George does not hesitate to take responsibility for keeping the boys safe.



George gently disinfects and dresses the cut on Miles's forehead, then serves tea to the two boys. Harry notices that George's teacups look like the ones Mum used to have, which Auntie Jean now displays in a cabinet but never uses.

George's tender care of Miles's wound further highlights how terribly Dad and Jeff treated the boys, and how simple gestures of kindness stand out significantly in the lives of Harry and Miles.



After they drink their tea, George lays out a pillow, sleeping bag, and sleeping mat for Miles and Harry. Miles notices that Harry seems to have “an understanding” with George that transcends words, as the old man has difficulty speaking due to his facial deformities. Miles, Harry, and Jake burrow together in the sleeping bag and George lights his pipe. The smell of the tobacco transports Miles back to a childhood memory of playing with Matchbox cars in Granddad’s house as his grandfather listened to the radio and puffed on his pipe.

George’s loving treatment of Miles and Harry reminds Miles of their grandfather, who was also a warm paternal figure in their lives before he died. George happily creates a safe environment for the boys to sleep, likely because he knew Granddad and feels an inherent protectiveness toward his old friend’s grandsons.



CHAPTER 26

As he and Harry sleep on George Fuller’s floor, Miles dreams about the wooden toolbox Granddad carved for him when he was a little boy. In the dream, Granddad tells him that he will be old enough to have his own tools soon, when he turns five. Still dreaming, he cradles the toolbox on the drive home as Mum sings along with the radio. Suddenly, Mum pulls over and leaves Miles in the car as she walks into the dark forest. He chases after Mum and finds her leaning against a tree, crying. She tells him: “I left here once. But I came back,” and Miles takes her hand and leads her back to the car.

Miles’s dream starts out as a comforting memory of Granddad, but it quickly turns to a distressing scene where Mum behaves bizarrely. It is unclear whether this part of the dream is based on a memory or is merely a figment of Miles’s imagination. In any case, the image of Miles leading Mum back after she abandoned him reflects his deep desire to have her back in his life, as Dad and Jeff’s abuse has seemingly made Mum’s absence even more painful for him. Granddad’s mention of Miles growing old enough to use his own tools also reinforces the idea that strong role models are necessary as children mature and gain agency.



In the morning, Miles wakes up and cannot find George or Jake anywhere around the property. Harry helps himself to bread and butter for breakfast and tells Miles that his eye looks bad. Miles wonders how George’s milk was left on the rural property with no icebox outside and wishes that Dad would get groceries delivered so that he and Harry could know when food is coming.

Harry’s eager devouring of the bread causes Miles to realize just how deprived their everyday lives are. His simple desire for a reliable food supply indicates Dad’s irresponsibility as a father, as he fails to meet even the basic needs of his sons.



After Harry eats his bread, Miles straightens up the house and tells him that they should be going, although Harry replies that George would not mind if they stayed. On Miles’s way out the door, Harry asks if Joe is gone and Miles cannot bring himself to answer his little brother.

Miles is reluctant to confirm Harry’s suspicion because he knows just how significantly Joe’s absence will affect Harry. This reality is a testament to the close bond that the three brothers share.



CHAPTER 27

Harry follows Miles out of George’s house and up the road. He asks Miles where they are going but Miles continues on without answering, so Harry stops and waits for his brother to notice and turn back. Harry expects Miles to be angry, but instead he looks scared and tells Harry that he is taking him to Stuart’s house.

Miles’s decision to leave Harry at Stuart’s house is a selfless act of love, as he knows that leaving his little brother with Stuart will ensure his safety but will leave Miles alone to bear the brunt of Dad’s mistreatment.



When they arrive at Stuart's house, Miles lies to Stuart's mother and says that he hit his head on the boat when she asks about the lump above his eye. Miles tells Harry that he will bring him some clothes later and Harry offers him the few dollars leftover from the money he found at the boat races with Aunty Jean. Miles tells him to keep it and later drops off a backpack full of clothes, chocolates, and the dart gun from Harry's goodie bag.

This passage is a clear example of Miles and Harry's loyalty for each other, as they are both more concerned with each other's wellbeing than they are with their own. Miles also takes on more of a paternal role in this instance, perhaps to make up for Joe's absence. His thoughtful packing of Harry's bag shows that he is dedicated to alleviating as much of his little brother's suffering as possible.



CHAPTER 28

Miles walks slowly on his way back to Dad's house, observing the worn-down remnants of houses and farms that sit away from the road. Dad's pickup truck is gone when Miles arrives at the house and he stands in the living room looking at the full ashtrays, the empty alcohol bottles, and the carpet still stained with his own blood.

Though Dad's absence is a brief reprieve for Miles, being alone in the house forces him to confront the evidence of Dad and Jeff's alcohol bender and the subsequent abuse he and Harry suffered. The fact that Dad left the house in disarray shows that he is avoiding the consequences of his actions rather than admitting culpability.



Miles notices a ray of **sunlight** from the window reflecting off a framed photograph of Mum. He picks up the photo and remembers the day it was taken on Cloudy Bay. Mum and Uncle Nick had brought him to the beach and Nick took Miles surfing on his longboard. Miles remembers Uncle Nick telling him that he was safe and feeling nothing but the **water** rolling gently beneath them. Miles waved to Mum and she waved back as he and Uncle Nick came out of the wave. Snapping out of the memory, Miles sets down the photo and gets started cleaning the house before Dad returns home.

Like Granddad, Uncle Nick was somewhat of a paternal figure in Miles's life. Nick's presence was particularly significant for Miles because he was the one who introduced him to surfing, a pastime that Miles now relies on for mental clarity and relief from Dad's mistreatment. The image of this lighthearted photograph amidst the remnants of Dad and Jeff's violence highlights the destructive impact of Mum and Uncle Nick's deaths on the Curren family, as well as the symbolic connection between Mum and the beauty of the natural world.



CHAPTER 29

Dad brings home fish and chips for dinner. Miles tells him that Harry is staying at Stuart's house, but Dad does not respond or even look at Miles. He checks in the refrigerator for beer but finds that he and Jeff have already drunk it all. Dad nonchalantly tells Miles that there are potato cakes to eat with their meal, but Miles is reluctant to take any food because Dad usually never gets him expensive fish.

Although Dad has been terribly cruel to his sons, this passage shows that he is not wholly evil, but rather has been ravaged and morally degraded by addiction. His peace offering of fish and chips, coupled with his inability to look at Miles, suggests that he is remorseful for his actions.



Miles hesitantly puts some fish and chips on his plate and sits down in the living room to eat with Dad. His father is still unable to look at him, averting his eyes from the bandage on Miles's forehead. They watch a gameshow together and Dad makes small talk about the fishing boat. Miles wants to ask about the Fisheries officers who came to the house but decides not to, in hopes that Harry's absence will diffuse Dad's anger over the next few days.

Dad's nonchalance toward Miles seems callous, but his refusal to look at his son implies that his behavior is rooted in guilt rather than indifference. Despite this, Miles is still afraid of his father and avoids pressing the issue of the Fisheries officers, as he is acutely aware of Dad's potential for volatility.



CHAPTER 30

Harry goes shopping with Stuart and his mother and considers spending the last of his money on some ice cream. He figures that the storeowner, a strict woman named Mrs. Martin, probably knows of him and Dad even though he has never had enough money to shop here by himself. He ducks behind a shelf to avoid her and sees a shelf full of different teas.

Harry spots the same variety of English breakfast tea that he knows George Fuller likes. He decides he wants to buy it for George although the \$3.25 price is nearly all the money he has left. Harry tells Stuart's mother the tea is for Auntie Jean and buys the tin along with two bags of candy for himself and Stuart.

After they finish shopping, Harry rides with Stuart and his mother back toward their trailer. Harry tells Stuart's mother that she can drop him off near the bridge, and she looks concerned and suggests that he come home with them. Harry declines, telling her that Dad has probably left lunch for him at home. He gives Stuart his dart gun to hold onto and gets out of the car. After waving goodbye, Harry runs down the road toward George's house.

CHAPTER 31

Running down the familiar path to George Fuller's house, Harry is excited to give George the tea he bought for him and have lunch in the warm shack. But when he arrives at the house, George and Jake are nowhere to be found. The house feels to Harry as if it has been empty for a long time and will be forever, and he worries that he might never see his friends again.

Harry dismisses his own worry as he sees George's pipe, Jake's blanket, and their other belongings around the house. He thinks that George is probably down at the jetty and will be back soon. In the meantime, Harry decides to take some of the kindling from outside and build a fire in George's wood heater. He reflects on the times he tried to help Miles chop kindling with a hatchet and how useless he would feel when his brother seemed disappointed in his abilities.

Stuart's mother's willingness to take Harry in and include him in their day-to-day activities suggests that she may be aware of his troubled home life. Despite this, she (like Mr. Roberts) does not take active responsibility in protecting the boys from Dad's mistreatment.



Harry's consideration of George amidst his own troubles exemplifies his thoughtful nature and shows that the old man has become a beloved friend and grandfatherly figure for Harry. This moment makes it clear that having loving guidance can also lead children to behave lovingly themselves.



Again, Stuart's mother seems to have an inkling as to Harry's troubles, yet she does not push the issue beyond offering to let him stay. This passage is another example of how adults outside of the Curren family are somewhat complicit in Dad's abuse, as they fail to take proper responsibility for helping the boys out of their toxic situation.



Harry immediately jumps to the conclusion that George and Jake have left permanently, suggesting that the little boy does not feel secure even in his closest relationships. The tragic deaths of Mum, Uncle Nick, and Granddad have made Harry somewhat paranoid over losing other loved ones in his life.



Miles and Harry clearly adore each other, but Harry is still worried that he does not live up to his older brother's expectations. This is similar to Miles's relationship with Joe, as Miles often feels inferior in his older brother's shadow. Despite these anxieties, the brothers still find warmth and security in one another.



After piling the kindling and some newspaper in the wood heater, Harry sweeps the floor, sets the tea on the table, and sits waiting for George and Jake. He looks forward to lighting the fire and helping George carry his fishing gear inside. Sitting at the table, Harry feels the framed photograph of George's brother Billy "staring" at him as he eats some candy. George had told him about how Billy was a soldier who went missing in a war and never came home. After hearing this story, Harry had walked to the town war memorial on his own and found Billy's name.

Looking at the photo of Billy, Harry thinks of how he would never feel right again if anything ever happened to Miles. Still sitting at the table, Harry begins to drift off to sleep and wishes that he had the company of his brother or George. When he wakes, it is late, and he decides to give up on waiting for George. Harry runs out of the house toward the road and knows that George will be glad he was there when he sees the firewood in the heater and the tea on the table.

CHAPTER 32

Miles and Dad drive home from a day of fishing on the boat. That day, Miles realized that Joe was right about the swell coming and that his brother will be lucky to make it across the strait before the storm hits. Few boats had gone out, but Dad made them stay on the **water** all day. Exhausted from the long day, Miles is lulled to sleep by the warmth and soft rumbling of Dad's pickup truck.

Asleep in the passenger seat, Miles dreams that he and Harry are snugly tucked into the backseat of Mum's car with bags of clothes packed all around them. He tries to stay awake to see the city lights as they drive through Hobart, but he falls asleep in the comforting warmth of the car. Suddenly he feels something pull tight around his neck and chest as the bags of clothes crash down around him.

Miles is abruptly awoken from his dream as Dad blares his car horn. Harry is standing frozen in the middle of the road in front of Dad's pickup truck, having just run out from George Fuller's place. Dad slams on the brakes and the truck slides to a stop on the gravel road. He gets out of the car and shakes Harry as he yells at him, demanding to know what he is doing out in the middle of nowhere. Harry replies that there was a dog he wanted to play with and braces himself to be hit. Instead, Dad goes quiet, looks at Harry with a dead expression, and lets him go.

Billy's disappearance may partially explain why George was so open to befriending Harry when the little boy first came to his shack. The loss of his younger brother likely created a lasting void in George's life—one that he was glad to fill with Harry's company. The time George spends with Harry is an outlet for him to express the brotherly love that was taken away from him when Billy went missing, which indicates that brotherly love and parental love, though different, share some important similarities.



Though Harry is young and relatively naïve, the painful losses of his loved ones have given him a deep awareness of life's fragility. He is able to recognize the importance of his relationship with Miles, as their bond is what allows him to feel safe and motivates him to persevere in the face of hardship.



The incoming storm foreshadows destruction for Bruny Island's fisherman as well as for Joe, who is likely trying to cross the formidable Bass Strait that separates Tasmania and Australia. Dad's decision to force Miles to work in spite of the violent swell is further evidence of his irresponsibility and carelessness toward his son's safety.



This dream is based on Miles's memories of the car accident that killed Mum, as it was previously revealed that he and Harry were in the car during the crash. The bags of clothes (as opposed to luggage) imply that Mum, Miles, and Harry may have been leaving in a hurry, or for a long period of time.



Rather than showing concern for why his young son is alone and wandering in the woods, Dad's first instinct is to lash out at Harry. He seems to be in denial of the fact that his own violence is what drove Miles and Harry to flee in the first place. This behavior shows the transformative nature of Dad's addiction, as his alcohol abuse has caused him to forfeit any semblance of responsibility and compassion as a father.



Miles rushes over to ask Harry if he is okay. His little brother says nothing but grabs onto his arm. On the drive home, Dad remains silent with a blank expression. He makes eggs on toast for the boys when they arrive at home and goes to watch television, saying nothing to Miles and Harry for the rest of the night.

As usual, Miles is willing to take responsibility for Harry when Dad is not. Although Dad seemed somewhat remorseful for his actions when Miles first returned home, his cold behavior indicates that he is still harboring blame toward his sons and that this blame is part of what interferes with his ability to be an effective father.



CHAPTER 33

Harry looks out his bedroom window, but it is too dark outside to see anything but his own reflection. No one ever bothered to put curtains back up after they fell down long ago, despite Aunty Jean continually saying something needed to be done. Harry does not mind because he likes to see the sky as soon as he wakes up.

Although seemingly insignificant, the lack of curtains on Harry's window actually reflects the much deeper problem of parental neglect that Miles and Harry face. Like Mr. Roberts and Stuart's mother, Aunty Jean does not intervene on Miles and Harry's behalf beyond empty platitudes.



After Miles finishes washing the dinner dishes, he sits on the edge of Harry's bed and asks why he did not stay at Stuart's like they agreed. Harry apologizes and suggests that they go see if George Fuller is back the next day, if the **water** is too rough for Miles and Dad to go out on the boat. Miles lectures Harry that he is lucky Dad did not "go crazy" and that he should stay home instead of spending time with George. He tells Harry that George is probably gone because he is fishing down the coast, and Harry agrees to stay home.

Miles's stern attitude toward Harry comes from a place of love. Knowing that no one else will step in to take care of Harry, Miles is willing to take on a fatherly authority over his little brother. Harry, sensing that his brother is looking out for his best interests, heeds Miles's warning.



CHAPTER 34

Harry lies awake in bed, afraid of the darkness that seems to be closing in around him. He looks for the sky out his bedroom window and focuses on the soft **light** emanating from the stars. As Harry continues to look outside, he marvels at the southern lights that begin to "breathe life" into the sky. He had forgotten about this natural occurrence, having not seen the lights since Mum died. The bright colors light up the sky until Harry falls asleep.

Harry previously admitted that he struggles to remember Mum, yet the southern lights remind him of her presence. Whereas older members of the Curren family are caught up in cycles of blame and bitterness surrounding Mum's death, Harry focuses on the few pure, untainted memories he has of his mother. The lights, much like her love and kindness, comfort Harry and show him how to experience peace even in the midst of turmoil.



CHAPTER 35

Miles wakes up to find Dad sitting at the end of Harry's bed. It is still pitch-black outside, but he tells the boys to get up and Miles quickly gets dressed and goes out into the living room where Dad is waiting. His father asks where Harry is, and Miles replies that he is still sleeping. Dad goes back into the bedroom, turns on the lights, and rips the duvet off of Harry, repeating his command to get up.

Dad has not had a change of heart since finding Harry alone in the middle of the road. He clearly does not see the error of his ways and still refuses to accept his responsibility as a father, hence his decision to wake up his young son at an unreasonable hour.



Miles tells a groggy Harry that he thinks he will have to come out on the fishing boat with them today. He gathers warm clothes for Harry as his little brother begs him to convince Dad not to make him go on the boat because he is afraid of the **water** and prone to seasickness. Miles assures him it will be okay and gives him his own jacket when Harry starts to cry that he left his parka at Stuart's house.

Miles gives Harry the **shark tooth** he found in Mum's car seat for good luck. He notices how young and small Harry looks and reflects on when his little brother was a baby, musing that something about Harry made Miles feel compelled to take care of him.

The boys hurry outside into the rain and violent wind, but Harry hesitates outside the door of Dad's pickup truck. He suggests that he stay behind but Dad orders him to "get in the bloody car." As they drive to the wharf, Miles wonders how long Dad had been waiting in their bedroom at the foot of his brother's bed. Harry suddenly begins to hiccup until Dad slams the horn with his fist and yells at him. Terrified, Harry squeezes close to Miles and stays quiet for the rest of the drive.

When they arrive at the wharf, Miles sees Mr. Roberts but cannot wave because Dad is watching. Jeff appears and comments to Dad that the ocean is "wild." Miles helps Harry into the dinghy and holds onto him as they ride through the rough **water** and icy cold winds from the incoming swell.

Miles, Harry, Dad, and Jeff reach the fishing boat and seem to be inside a "bubble of fluorescent **light**" that bounces off the deck as they move away from land. Jeff comments to Harry that he will have to be tied up on the outside of the boat's railings if he gets seasick and that he had better hold on tight. Miles tries to comfort his little brother, telling him to focus on the stars to take his mind off the **water**.

As usual, Miles is forced to step in as a parental figure for Harry as Dad leaves the boys alone to get themselves dressed and ready. Whereas working on the boat is a normal routine for Miles, the mere thought of the ocean petrifies Harry, showing the very different relationships the two brothers have with the water. Harry's terror here also reinforces the idea that nature can be unpredictable and violent, even though it's also a supportive force in both boys' lives.



Miles is forced to take on an unfair level of responsibility for Harry, but he does not mind helping to raise him. Their brotherly bond makes Miles feel as though he is being called to take care of Harry, and fulfilling that duty imbues him with a sense of purpose.



The violent storm outside parallels Dad's volatile abuse—just as Harry and Miles are forced to endure their father's mistreatment, they will have to brave this brutal winter swell. The different roles that Dad and Miles play in Harry's life are especially clear here, as Harry leans on his brother (literally) for comfort while Dad forces them into dangerous weather and lashes out in anger.



It is not clear exactly why Dad and Jeff decide to go out on the water in the middle of a raging storm, nor why Miles and Harry need to come along. This reflects Jeff and Dad's irresponsibility and impulsivity, as they are willing to risk the boys' lives and their own safety without clear rhyme or reason, even though they know how unpredictable the ocean can be.



Miles, like Harry, is terrified of deep water, but he puts his own anxieties aside to focus on easing his brother's nerves. His advice to focus on the stars shows that nature can simultaneously be a source of both fear and comfort. At the same time, the mention of light as a protective force recalls the boys' mother and their struggle to regain some semblance of the security they felt when she was alive.



As the sun rises, Miles can see that they are headed toward the three figures of The Last Islands on the horizon. Noticing the rough cliffs and rocky beaches, he feels that they are moving toward “the end of the earth.” Dad anchors the boat on the side of the Flat Witch, the smallest of the three islands. While Dad and Jeff dive for abalone, Miles tells Harry a folktale about a lady who supposedly fled society to live in the wilderness on Flat Witch. He muses that there was enough shellfish for a person to survive on the rustic island. Harry remarks that the lady “must have just had enough of everything.”

Miles’s story is interrupted by the sound of metal screeching and the smell of smoke. Miles realizes that the air pumps and engine on the boat have stopped, meaning that Dad and Jeff’s air supply has been cut off. He tries and fails to start the boat and rips the red-hot metal cover off of the engine, feeling his skin burn and blister. Realizing that the air supply has been cut off for at least sixty seconds, Miles is still unable to start the engine or the emergency generator for the air pumps.

Feeling helpless, Miles realizes that there is nothing he can do to save Dad and Jeff. He considers fleeing the boat and swimming for land because he knows Dad and Jeff will blame him for the engine if they are able to come back up alive. But Miles knows that he and Harry would be swept away by the strong current and hurled against the rocks if they jumped overboard. Distraught, Miles throws up over the side of the boat while Harry tugs on his arm, telling him, “it’s Dad.”

CHAPTER 36

Dad and Jeff resurface from the ocean and Miles helps his father drag Jeff onto the deck. Having been deprived of oxygen in the deep **water**, blood pours out of Jeff’s nose and ears and one of Dad’s eyes is full of blood and bulging out of its socket. Miles tries to explain that the engine gave out, but Dad shoves him against the boat’s railing in a fit of rage.

Miles falls overboard into the freezing water and struggles to pull himself up, but Dad is holding him under. The swell rolls back and Miles gasps for air with Dad’s hand still clenching his throat. Dad tells Miles “that’s what it feels like” and shoves him under again. Just as Miles begins to feel lightheaded, something pulls him out of the water.

The intimidating landscape of The Last Islands seems otherworldly in its grandeur, but Miles and Harry feel a sense of freedom rather than fear as they gaze out at the coastline. The abuse they suffer from Dad allows them to commiserate with the lady who fled society, understanding that nature, while brutal, can offer a complete break from society and its associated hardships. This realization foreshadows a possible escape for Miles and Harry.



Though Dad and Jeff have hurt Miles terribly, he does not let blame consume him. Rather than taking the opportunity to enact revenge, Miles still has inherent respect for Dad and Jeff’s lives and desperately scrambles to save them, even severely burning his hands in an attempt to start the engine.



Having already lost Mum, Uncle Nick, and Granddad, the thought of Dad drowning overwhelms Miles. His distress shows that, despite Dad’s cruelty, he still cares for his father and does not allow resentment to cloud his feelings. Dad, by contrast, would undoubtedly blame Miles for the engine failing, and that blame would only make a bad situation more destructive still.



Dad seemingly blames his sons for all of his life’s tragedies and failures. As a result, though Miles is clearly not at fault for the boat’s engine failing, Dad is quick to condemn him. His ongoing addiction and abusive nature have made his default temperament one of impulsive anger rather than reasonable objectivity.



Miles frantically tried to save Dad and Jeff while they were underwater, but Dad’s temper does not allow him to consider the possibility that the incident was a random accident. Instead, he blames Miles to the point that he wants his son to experience the same horrifying feeling of drowning. Again, senseless blame leads to further pain.



Back on the deck, Harry furiously punches and kicks Dad, demanding that he let Miles go. Dad is laughing as though the terrifying incident is funny. Once Miles is back up, Harry runs for the radio in the boat's cabin to call for help. Dad picks Harry up and shakes him as he drags him out to the deck, calling him an idiot for making their presence known in protected waters and telling him that "you always fuck everything up." Dad slams the Harry against the boat rails and pulls his hair until he stops resisting.

As Dad pins Harry against the railing, he notices the **shark tooth** around his neck that Miles gave him to wear earlier. Realizing whom the tooth once belonged to, Dad tells Harry that "she was leaving, because of him. Because of you." In a rare moment of provocation, Harry responds: "I'm glad."

Furious at Harry's defiance, Dad shoves him overboard just as an enormous wave swells over the boat. Harry tries to run but Jeff pulls him down by his leg. The boat tips violently as a giant surge of **water** crashes over the sides and onto the deck. Miles is thrown into the railing and tries to hold on until the boat regains its balance. But when he looks back, he only sees Dad and Harry is nowhere to be found.

CHAPTER 37

After Harry tumbles overboard, Miles stands in shock before he is able to scream Harry's name. He sees Harry's arm reach out of the current and he tries to climb the railing to jump in after his brother, but Dad holds him back.

Harry is well aware of Dad's potential for violence, and his decision to retaliate against his father in defense of Miles shows his infallible loyalty to his older brother. Dad is more culpable for the engine failure than anyone else, since the boat belongs to him and he was the one who decided to go out in the middle of a storm. Despite this obvious fact, he projects his own self-blame onto Miles and Harry, lashing out in violence against his sons who have done nothing wrong.



This passage is a significant piece of the puzzle in making sense of Mum's death. Dad suggests that the tooth belonged to another man who caused Mum to leave. This coincides with Miles's memory of being in Mum's car surrounded by bags of clothes—she was likely leaving Dad permanently on the night of the accident. His addition of "because of you" subtly implies that Harry is likely the other man's son rather than Dad's. Harry's response of "I'm glad" is the same response that Joe delivered to Dad when his father told him that he was "just like him" and broke Joe's arm. This parallel could signify that Joe, too, is the son of the other man.



The water parallels Dad's emotions here—just as his violent anger has reached its climax, so has the storm finally taken hold of the boat. His decision to throw Harry overboard is the culmination of his internalized self-blame and abusive behavior, as he risks irreparably fragmenting his family by putting Harry's life in jeopardy.



Miles's eagerness to jump overboard after Harry is a testament to the unbridled love and loyalty he has for his little brother, as Miles is willing to risk his own life to save him.



As Dad restrains Miles, he asks him if he remembers the night of Mum's accident. He tells Miles that Mum was leaving him for another man and says that "they were dead when I found the car." Miles is sickened by the victimized look on Dad's face. He pleads with Miles, saying: "I had to take him away" because "everyone would have known." Miles screams Harry's name again and tries to break free of his father's grip. Dad tells Miles "you're my son" and finally lets him go.

This revelation explains the true reason why Dad has been so tortured over Mum and Uncle Nick's deaths—he is guilty, rather than grief-stricken. Dad's admission implies that Mum and Nick were having an affair. Nick (who was presumably the one to leave the shark tooth in Mum's car) did not drown, but rather died in the car crash with her. It is unclear whether Dad had any involvement in the accident beyond taking Uncle Nick's body away, nor is it certain whether Nick was already dead when Dad found him or if Dad killed him after the fact. The fact that Dad was already there at the scene could suggest that he was the one to force Mum's car off the road. Additionally, it seems that Miles may be Dad's only biological son out of the three Curren brothers. The idea that Miles may not be biologically related to Harry and Joe adds a layer of complexity to their brotherly bond, suggesting that true brotherhood is based on love and trust rather than blood.



Miles leaps into the ocean and the freezing cold **water** robs him of his breath. He finds Harry's limp body and pulls them both up to the surface. Miles clutches his little brother with one arm and tries to act as a buffer between Harry and the jagged rocks of Flat Witch. He tries to swim under the water with Harry to get through the channel and back to land, but the rough waves throw them off course and cause Miles to lose his grip on his brother.

Again, Miles displays immense courage and loyalty in his willingness to jump in after Harry. Although he is well aware of the danger that the frigid water and sharp rocks pose, he sacrifices his own safety in order to shield Harry.



Harry regains consciousness and calls out to Miles as he bobs above the water. Miles spots a new set of massive waves forming and swims toward his brother as fast as he can. Harry grabs onto Miles as his brother tries to swim past the break, sobbing and pleading with him not to take him underwater.

Though Miles is able to face his fear of deep water for the sake of his younger brother, Harry's phobia of the water is only intensified by his direct exposure to its powerful depths.



Miles can see the six-foot wave that ravaged their fishing boat growing in size and strength. Having swum out farther to sea, he cannot see any land. Miles tries his best to keep himself and Harry afloat, treading the freezing **water** as slowly as possible to conserve energy and stay awake. Harry, worried about sharks, tells him he is scared, and Miles reassures him that they just have to wait.

Miles feels utterly insignificant and helpless compared to the giant storm wave and vast ocean that threatens to engulf the brothers. Miles is terrified of drowning and realizes that he must work hard to stay conscious, yet his love for Harry allows him to stay calm and focus on reassuring his little brother. This moment shows that while brotherhood may not solve all problems, it can nonetheless be a source of strength even in the most devastating situations.



Harry asks whether Dad is coming for them and Miles can feel his little brother shivering violently as they float in the bitterly cold ocean. Miles realizes that Harry did not put on the warm woolen sweater he laid out for him that morning and berates himself internally for not checking to make sure he was wearing it before they left. He assures Harry that they will be all right and tries to imagine a flame welling inside him and dispersing its warmth throughout his body, through his skin, and into Harry.

The freezing **water** causes Miles to fall into a delirious, dreamlike state. He remembers falling into the river as a young child. Joe saved him, carried him home, and brought him hot cocoa as Mum tucked him in by the warm fireplace. Miles hears Mum's voice softly in the distance, telling him not to go to sleep, as he feels himself sinking down into a warm **light**. Her voice comes back louder and asks where her baby, Harry, is. Miles then hears Harry's voice telling him he is no longer afraid of the water and visualizes his brother's forehead touching his. A cold splash of water shakes Miles out of his dream and he wakes to find Harry gone.

CHAPTER 38

In a reality separate from Harry and Miles's perilous position adrift in the ocean, Harry chases after Jake through a forest. They follow George up a hill and Harry can see a rich, untouched landscape below full of forests, mountains, and valleys. He sees **water** that seems to go on through "the whole world," flowing into rivers, lakes, and oceans that look white and gold in the **light**. Harry feels that he is flying like a bird, and that he is free.

CHAPTER 39

Miles enters into a state of total delirium as he floats alone in the **water**. He perceives himself to be suspended in an orange **light** that will soon dissipate into darkness. Miles feels that he has "been drifting for a lifetime" as Harry and the rest of his material life dissolve into the vastness of the deep water. He senses himself becoming incorporated into the ocean and can no longer perceive the boundary between his consciousness and his surroundings. Miles stops resisting the waves, feeling ready to succumb to drowning as he sinks away from light and air.

Even though Dad was the one to push Harry overboard, the little boy still remains naively hopeful that his father will save him and Miles. Miles, who knows that Dad will not be rescuing them, focuses all of his energy on trying to keep his little brother alive. This conviction shows that Miles is more of a parental figure to Harry than their own father. The fact that Miles immediately blames himself for Harry's being cold also demonstrates how tempting it is to look for blame even within senseless tragedy.



Miles's regression into memories of his youth and hallucinations of Mum's voice show that he has been affected by her death on a deep, subconscious level. Even in the direst circumstances, he finds comfort in his mother's loving presence. Additionally, the memory of Joe saving him from the river parallels his own heroic attempt to save Harry and reflects the deep bond that links all three of the Curren brothers.



It is unclear whether Harry, like Miles, is dreaming, or if this passage implies that Harry has passed away and is transitioning from life into death. Regardless, George's presence in this vision suggests that his friendship has thoroughly filled the void in Harry's life left by grief and mistreatment. Harry's observation of the ocean's beauty is also significant, as he is finally able to make peace with the water he has feared for his entire life.



Throughout the story, Miles has struggled between a phobia of deep water and a beloved pastime of surfing. This passage marks the end of his polarized relationship with the water, as he is forced to surrender himself into a passive state, wherein he is unable to fear or love the water. Rather, he is only able to recognize its immense, all-encompassing presence. In this moment, Miles feels that he has been integrated with the ocean as opposed to fighting against it.



CHAPTER 40

Miles suddenly feels **water** spew from his mouth as he is lifted out of the ocean. He cannot open his eyes because he feels that the world is “too far out of reach.” Miles wakes up in a hospital bed, feeling incredibly thirsty and twitching as spasms of cold and pain ripple throughout his hypothermic body. He sees Joe looking down at him and tries to make sense of his brother apologizing and telling him that “he looked peaceful,” and that “they found him on one of the reefs out near Acton.”

In his delirium, Miles suddenly understands that Joe is talking about Harry—that his little brother drowned in the **water** before he could be saved with Miles. Thrown into shock, Miles begins screaming uncontrollably and feels as though he is having an out-of-body experience where he can see and hear a boy lying on the bed, who cannot be him. The sound of his own screams becomes gradually fainter as he loses consciousness and falls into a warm sleep.

Miles has another dream that is infused with his own memories, visualizing the night of the car accident that killed Mum just as he did when he fell asleep in Dad’s truck. He again sees Harry in the seat next to him and the bags of clothes around him as he feels himself drifting off to sleep.

The memory takes a diversion from his prior dream as a man gets into the car and strokes Harry’s cheek. Miles realizes that the man is Uncle Nick, whom Mum refers to as “my darling.” He then goes through the same experience of falling asleep before he can see the city lights, feeling something tighten around his neck and chest, and feeling crushed under the weight of the bags. Everything becomes “quiet and black” until he hears Harry cry.

Miles awakens from his nightmare to see Joe asleep on the chair next to his hospital bed. Joe asks if he needs anything, but all Miles can say is “you came back.” Joe tells him that he had been unable to leave because the wind was too strong and prevented his boat from getting through the strait.

The reader is able to understand Joe before Miles does and infer that Harry drowned in the ocean and was found on a reef. Joe’s apology suggests that he does not blame Miles for Harry’s death, although Miles will likely blame himself for being unable to save their little brother.



Miles’s intense reaction to the news of Harry’s death shows how important a role his little brother played in his life. The magnitude of this tragedy disrupts Miles down to the core of his being, to the point that he cannot even begin to blame himself because he loses touch with his own body and sense of reality.



This is another iteration of the dream Miles had in Chapter 32 when he fell asleep in the passenger seat of Dad’s car. The repetition of this memory implies that it holds deep significance for Miles which his subconscious is grasping to interpret.



In light of Dad’s harrowing confession about Mum and Uncle Nick’s illicit relationship and his involvement in their deaths, Miles’s memories of the accident finally come into focus. He realizes what the reader likely picked up on several chapters before but that he was too preoccupied to fully comprehend—that Nick was in the car with them during the crash. Nick’s kindness toward Miles, even though Miles was not his own son, also shows how important loving father figures can be even in the absence of a biological relationship.



The violent storm was ultimately what claimed Harry’s life and took him away from his brothers, yet those same rough waters were also what caused Joe to turn back and be reunited with Miles when his younger brother needed him the most. Again, the narrative underscores the inherent duality of the natural world.



Still reeling from his disturbing, memory-infused dream, Miles tells Joe that Uncle Nick was in the car on the night of the crash and that Dad was at the scene of the accident. He remembers that their father took Nick away and left him, Mum, and Harry there. Miles called out for Mum, but she never answered, and Miles wrapped Harry with a blanket and tried to stay awake amidst the wreckage.

Miles verbally confirms what the reader has already inferred and shares this revelation with his older brother. Joe's own absence from the car on the night of the accident remains a mystery. That Miles cares for Harry even in the immediate aftermath of the crash shows how their brotherly bond turns into a somewhat parental one as soon as their mother is gone.



CHAPTER 41

After Miles is released from the hospital, he stays with Joe on his boat. Unsure of what to do or where to go, they moor Joe's boat close to Granddad's now-empty house at Lady Bay and spend time on the veranda. Miles enjoys the feeling of the boat that Joe has spent years building since he first started his carpentry apprenticeship.

In the wake of Harry's death, Joe gives up on his notion of sailing away alone and instead commits to staying with Miles. His willingness to do so reflects that Joe no longer feels the need to run from his responsibilities as an older brother and stand-in father figure.



Joe sits at boat's kitchenette table, charting their path away from Bruny Island. Miles tells Joe that he is coming with him to Dad's house and feels sick on the van ride there. Harry's funeral is that Friday and he will be buried in the same cemetery as Mum and Granddad. Harry dreads seeing Aunty Jean and other relatives there, knowing that they will cry and offer up empty condolences.

Having lost Mum, Uncle Nick, and Granddad prior to Harry's death, Miles is cynical at the idea of attending a funeral for Harry. He feels alienated by his close proximity to the tragedy, having desperately tried to save Harry from drowning before he ultimately died.



As they pull up to Dad's house, Miles wonders what happened to Dad. Joe answers that he does not know, but that he hopes their father is dead. They enter the house and Miles feels that it has been a long time since anyone was there. He takes the photo of Mum from the day at Cloudy Bay when Uncle Nick first took him surfing. Miles knows now that he was right to feel suspicious on that day the photo was taken, when he saw Nick hug Mum, and Mum laugh and push him away. Miles asks Joe if he looks like Mum and his brother replies that he does.

Joe does not hesitate to assign blame to Dad. Their father seems to have fled the house in shame, though it is unclear whether he feels guilty over causing Harry's death or is just afraid that he will be held responsible. Having thrown Harry overboard to his death, Dad committed the ultimate act of violence and irreparably fragmented the Curren family. His avoidance of facing Miles and Joe shows that Dad has not changed his ways—he is still the same cruel, negligent father he has been for a long time.



Miles enters the bedroom he shared with Harry and finds that it is exactly how they left it. He collapses on Harry's bed and tells Joe that he does not want to go to the funeral. Joe encourages him to go anyway, telling him that George Fuller, Stuart, and Harry's classmates will be there. Miles tells Joe that he is staying here with Harry. He feels that Joe cannot understand that Harry might come back the way Mum did sometimes when he and Harry could not sleep.

Again, Miles feels utterly alienated in his grief over Harry, as he was the last one to be with his little brother before he drowned. Although George and Stuart were close with Harry, Miles is convinced that they (nor Joe) cannot fully understand the trauma he is experiencing.



Lost in a moment of grief, Miles says that he did not mean to fall asleep. Joe puts his arm tightly around Miles and tries to distract him by telling him about all the tropical islands and big cities they will travel to, now that they are free to roam. Miles knows that Joe will take him along on the boat everywhere he goes from now on. He leans against Joe's shoulder and allows himself to cry.

Joe seems to regret his previous decision to leave Bruny Island. It is possible that he blames himself, as well as Dad, for Harry's death, since Miles and Harry may have left their father's house to stay with Joe if he had remained in town. Joe is now fully committed to taking responsibility for Miles, delivering an unspoken promise to his younger brother that he will not abandon him again and also demonstrating how blame, when handled maturely, can also be a way to work toward healing.



CHAPTER 42

Miles looks out over the bay from the deck of Joe's boat, marveling at the destruction of the storm that took Harry's life. Joe says it was the biggest swell he had ever seen and that it altered the entire coastline. Miles sees small waves starting to form around the reef and can feel the **water** within him.

Miles is intimately aware of the recent storm's destruction, having nearly drowned as he lost Harry in the waves. Still, the sight of the ravaged coastline is humbling. Despite this destruction, Miles still feels inherently pulled toward the water and does not shy away from its magnetism.



Miles runs down the beach with his surfboard and spots the silhouette of his old friend Justin Roberts surfing amidst the bright **light** reflecting off the **water**. Miles surfs alongside him, remembering the countless summer days of his youth he spent at the beach with Justin and how the water had been "just for fun" back then. He remembers Mum and Harry waiting in the car to pick them up at sundown each evening and dropping Justin off at his house, only to meet up again the next day.

Miles's decision to surf suggests that his traumatic experience has diminished, rather than deepened, his fear of the water. Though he is fully aware of the ocean's violent potential, he still finds happiness and escapism through surfing. Additionally, reconnecting with Justin allows him to feel at peace with his past memories rather than haunted by tragedy.



As they surf together, Miles and Justin pick up where they left off years ago with no awkwardness, talking about the waves "just like always." Justin lets Miles ride the new board his father got for him and they reminisce about their past adventures.

Again, Justin's presence helps Miles feel connected to the positive aspects of his past as opposed to solely focusing on his traumatic experiences.



As they part ways at the end of the day, Justin tells Miles he is sorry about Harry. Miles wants to say goodbye and thank Justin but finds himself unable to do so. He waves as Justin walks away and he can feel the memory of Mum and Harry waiting for him in the car, telling him to hurry up so they can get fish and chips for dinner. Miles wants them to stay with them but is interrupted by the sound of a car horn. He turns to see Joe waiting for him in his van.

This passage marks Miles's acceptance of Mum and Harry's deaths. Though he wishes that he could have them back, he recognizes that he must move on from the past in order to survive. The juxtaposition of Mum and Harry waiting for Miles with Joe doing the same in the present suggests that, while the brothers have experienced immense tragedy, they have not lost everything. Although Harry is no longer with them, the two older Curren brothers remain strong in their loyal bond and may forge a happier family life going forward.



CHAPTER 43

A morning fog hovers around the trees and rolls out over the **water** around Bruny Island. Miles admires the winter **light** that sparkles and reflects off the surface of the dark water, feeling that it revitalizes everything. Miles and Joe meet George Fuller and Jake at Cloudy Bay, where they walk together to the dunes and dig a hole in the sand, preparing to bury Harry's beloved collection of beach treasures that he kept on the windowsills, mantelpieces, and veranda at Granddad's house.

Miles looks at the dried shark egg in Harry's collection and remembers the day he teased Harry about finding one on this very beach. While Harry had run off to the dunes, Miles stayed in the water for ages until he finally found a shark egg floating at the surface. As Miles and his brothers ate their picnic on the beach at the end of the day, he pulled the shark egg from under his towel and gave it to Harry.

Joe touches Miles's arm and pulls him away from his memory. Miles puts Harry's treasures—shells, rocks, driftwood, bones, and petrified sea creatures—into the hole in the sand but keeps the cuttlefish cartilage into which Harry carved his name. Joe fills the hole and marks the spot with "ancient" white shells that they collected from the dunes along the way.

After their makeshift ceremony, Joe and Miles shake George's hand goodbye. The old man pulls Miles into a hug and tells him not to look back. Miles understands, knowing that he will not come back to Bruny Island for a long time. George offers Miles the **shark tooth** necklace that Miles gave to Harry as a gesture of good luck, and Miles realizes that George had been the one to find Harry's dead body.

George waves goodbye and Jake barks as Miles and Joe set off for their boat in the dinghy. Miles looks back at Cloudy Bay and reflects that this beach is the only place on Bruny Island he will miss, since it has always seemed special and brighter than the rest. He is comforted by his belief that Harry will be free to stay on Cloudy and "run along this beach until the end of time." Past the shallows, the dark, roaring **water** forges a new path for Miles and Joe as they embark on a new adventure.

This makeshift funeral ceremony is a somber occasion, yet Miles seems to feel relatively lighthearted and accepting of his circumstances. This is a stark contrast to how Dad coped with the tragedy in his life, having harbored immense self-blame and resentment that manifested in violence. The surrounding natural landscape serves as an additional comfort for Miles rather than a source of anxiety, suggesting that he has made peace with Bruny Island's harsh environment and the duality it represents.



This passage is a flashback to the novel's first chapter, this time told from Miles's perspective rather than Harry's. It is now clear that Miles spent so much time in the water that day not out of selfishness, but in an effort to find a precious treasure for his little brother.



Miles's sentimental attachment to the cuttlefish suggests that while he is willing to face the reality of Harry's death, he wants to hold onto positive memories of his little brother. The ancient shells used to mark the burial site signify the mortality of human beings in contrast with the seemingly infinite cycles of the natural world.



Though the thought of George discovering Harry's body is tragic, Miles seems comforted by the notion that his little brother was found by someone who cared deeply for him. George's warm hug and offering of the shark tooth show that he is glad to be a grandfatherly figure for the older Curren brothers in Harry's absence, if only for a fleeting moment.



The novel ends on an ambiguous yet optimistic note. While Harry's death is undeniably tragic, the loss has brought Joe and Miles closer together as brothers and allowed them to overcome their hardships together. Joe and Miles refuse to be broken by Dad's cruelty or scared away by the destructive potential of the ocean. Rather than running from his responsibilities the way his own father did, Joe is committed to taking care of Miles as the brothers set off to find a new path in life.





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