Still Alice

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF LISA GENOVA

Lisa Genova was born November 22, 1970 in Waltham, Massachusetts. Genova earned her Bachelor of Science in biopsychology from Bates College, followed by a PhD in neuroscience from Harvard University in 1998. Genova has conducted research at Massachusetts General Hospital and Yale Medical School. Genova self-published her first novel, *Still Alice*, in 2007. It was later picked up by Simon & Schuster and adapted into an Oscar-winning movie starring Julianne Moore and Alec Baldwin. In 2015, Genova was awarded the Pell Center Prize for Story in the Public Square and a number of other awards and recognitions, primarily for her work in raising awareness of Alzheimer's disease and the importance of early detection. Genova has since published four other books and currently lives with her children in Massachusetts.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Still Alice is set in the early 2000s, an era which saw a massive boom in personal technology. This new technology plays a huge role in Alice's experience with Alzheimer's. Alice frequently uses her BlackBerry to set reminders for herself, but it also serves another purpose: it holds a daily quiz she takes in the morning. This quiz asks questions with answers that would be stored in her long-term memory, which is the last part of her memory that will be affected by Alzheimer's. There is a note attached to the quiz instructing her to go to her laptop and open a certain file if she struggles to answer the questions, and that file holds instructions for her suicide (her plan is to overdose on sleeping medication). These newer kinds of technology help her gauge how bad her symptoms have gotten, but the BlackBerry is also used for her to store pieces of information she wants to remember, such as the time of Lydia's play and important appointments. Furthermore, advances in technology allow Alice to get rapid genetic testing that helps confirm her diagnosis and then helps her children learn whether or not they carry the same mutated gene that results in Alzheimer's.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Lisa Genova's *Inside the O'Briens* features a family in which several members have Huntington's Disease—which, like Alice Howland's gene mutation that results in Alzheimer's, has a strong genetic link. The book examines how that disease impacts their relationships with one another, and with others outside of their family. Liane Moriarty's *What Alice Forgot* also features a woman named Alice with memory problems, although in this novel Alice's problems are temporary and have caused her to forget a decade of her life. After blacking out, Alice learns that 10 years have gone by and her life is not what she expected it to be, and she struggles to figure out what has happened and why. *The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat* by Oliver Sacks also focuses on strange and oftentimes inspiring stories of patients with unique neuropsychological issues and how he treated them. In *Still Alice*, Alice Howland strongly relates to Edna Pontellier, the protagonist of Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*, who chose to walk into the ocean and commit suicide rather than return to a stale and unhappy marriage. Like Edna, Alice considered drowning herself in the ocean near her family's beach house to put an end to her life before her Alzheimer's symptoms get any worse.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** Still Alice
- **When Written:** 2007
- **When Published:** Self-published in 2007; published by Simon & Schuster in 2009
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary
- **Genre:** Novel
- **Setting:** Cambridge, Massachusetts
- **Climax:** Alice recognizes John at their beach house and shares a final moment of lucidity with him.
- **Antagonist:** Alzheimer's disease
- **Point of View:** Third person

EXTRA CREDIT

Popular Demand. *Still Alice* spent 59 weeks on the *New York Times* Best Seller list. Genova's next three novels also spent a number of weeks each on the list.

High Praise. In 2016, Lisa Genova received the Alzheimer's Association's Rita Hayworth Award in recognition for the work she had done in bringing attention to Alzheimer's disease, its symptoms, treatments, and the importance of early intervention.

PLOT SUMMARY

Dr. Alice Howland is a distinguished tenured professor of psycholinguistics at Harvard University. Her husband, John, is also a tenured professor at Harvard and frequently spends long hours at his biology lab conducting research and working with

his graduate students. Together they have three kids, Anna (who is trying to conceive her first child with her husband, Charlie), Tom (a third-year medical student at Harvard), and Anna (who is pursuing acting in Los Angeles). Both Alice and John are very ambitious people and the demands of their careers have forced them to spend a lot of time apart over the course of their marriage, but they are still happy with one another and the life they've created together.

Alice has been away from home a lot over the summer and is preparing for a final presentation at Stanford University before the start of the school year. During her trip, she will also visit Lydia in Los Angeles, and John warns Alice not to argue with her too much. Alice and Lydia struggle to get along because Alice wants her to go to college, but Lydia refuses to give up acting for school. While giving her presentation at Stanford, Alice suddenly forgets a word she uses frequently. Unable to recall it, she moves on, but is embarrassed. Later, Alice goes to Lydia's home before taking her out to dinner. During dinner, Alice and Lydia have a minor argument over what Lydia's plans for her life, but they are unable to see eye to eye. As they leave the restaurant, the waiter runs after them to tell Alice that she forgot her BlackBerry. Lydia looks suspicious but doesn't say anything.

Returning to Cambridge, Alice is upset to see that John is not home even though she got in late and had told him she wanted him to be there when she arrived. Irritated, Alice decides to go for a run, something she usually does every day and always along the same route. When she reaches the end of it, however, Alice is suddenly disoriented and unable to figure out how to get back to her house. She panics, but after a few minutes remembers the way and goes home. John is there but tells her he's about to leave. Alice is still shaken up and tells him she wants him to stay, but he refuses and calls her "needy" before leaving. Once he's gone, Alice is overwhelmed by her earlier experience. The more she thinks about it, however, the more she wonders if it is just menopause. After looking up the symptoms, which match her own, she feels better and goes to bed.

Despite having convinced herself that her symptoms were just due to menopause, Alice becomes increasingly worried that there is something more serious going on. At her 50th birthday party, she has a small emotional breakdown in the bathroom because she is worried about what might be wrong with her. She makes and appointment with Dr. Tamara Moyer, her primary care physician of 22 years. Dr. Moyer asks her some questions about her symptoms and lifestyle, which leads her to tell Alice that she is very likely in the early stages of menopause. However, she does not believe that Alice's memory problems are due to menopause and wants to run some tests.

While she waits for her next appointment, Alice spends more time thinking over her career while she looks out of her **office window**. Her success did not come easy, and she doubts that John would have been able to do as much as she did: juggling children, work, research, and traveling for conferences. One day Alice receives an email telling her she's forgotten to send some important slides, then she forgets what lecture to deliver to her class despite having spent an hour going over the material. When she gets home John reminds her that she was supposed to fly out to Chicago that afternoon. Shortly thereafter, Alice returns to Dr. Moyer's office and is told that her tests came back clean. Alice requests a referral to a neurologist.

In December, Alice and John attend Eric Wellman's annual holiday party with the Harvard Psychology Department. While there, Alice's graduate student, Dan, introduces her to his new wife, Beth, and they chat for a while before Alice excuses herself. When she returns moments later, she fails to recognize Beth and reintroduces herself, causing those around her to raise their eyebrows. They believe Alice has had too much to drink, so John walks her out and they return home. Shortly before Christmas, Alice meets with a neurologist, Dr. Davis, who has her take some cognitive tests. At the end of the tests, he tells her he thinks her memory problems might have a serious underlying cause and he orders some bloodwork and other tests done. That Christmas, before Alice has received answers, she obsesses over what might be wrong with her. She devises a test for herself in which she randomly selects words from the dictionary, writes them down, and then sets a timer. When the timer goes off, she must remember the words. She does this all through the evening, never missing a word until later when her family has all gathered in the house and is making a lot of noise. Alice uncharacteristically snaps at both of her daughters and then pulls out the ingredients for the bread pudding she makes every year. To her horror, she can no longer remember anything about the recipe, even though she's made it every year since she was a child.

Alice returns to Dr. Davis's office the next month for her test results and he is upset that she hasn't brought a family member with her even though he had asked her to. He tells Alice that he believes she has early-onset Alzheimer's, which has a "strong genetic linkage." The progression can be slowed somewhat with medication, though the condition is degenerative and incurable. Alice is stunned and worried about her kids inheriting the disease. Dr. Davis gives her some paperwork and a booklet to bring home, and urges her to tell John. After a brief period of anger and depression, Alice does tell John about her symptoms and diagnosis. At first, John does not believe it, but soon accepts that something might be wrong and leaves her to go do research on possible treatments, causes, and clinical trials. John and Alice soon go to a genetic counsellor to have a test done on Alice that will definitively tell them if she has a PS1 gene mutation that could have been passed down to their children. The counsellor confirms that Alice does have this mutation. It takes some time, but eventually Alice and John get

Anna, Tom, and Lydia to come for a visit and tell them about Alice's diagnosis and the possibility that they will face the same thing one day. Anna and Tom decide to get tested to see if they carry the mutation, but Lydia decides not to. The results of Anna and Tom's tests come back and show that Tom has not inherited the mutation, but Anna has. As a result, Anna (who is undergoing in vitro fertilization) decides to have her and Charlie's embryos tested before implantation to make sure they do not carry the same mutation.

One day Alice secretly visits a care facility for dementia patients. She wears her mother's **butterfly necklace**. This necklace was once saved for special occasions, but Alice now frequently wears it since her diagnosis. Alice is horrified by what she sees at the facility and soon leaves. She gets ice cream and sits down by herself to consider what her future will be like. She wants more time to see her kids reach important milestones and to take another sabbatical year with John. However, she also devises a plan to commit suicide when the symptoms of her disease make her a burden on her family. This plan ultimately fails when she is unable to find the medication.

Alice's condition rapidly declines. She struggles to function without assistance from technology, John, and their children. John struggles to cope with all the help Alice needs, which causes some friction in their marriage. On the other hand, Alice determines to get closer to Lydia and soon they can talk to each other about plays and Lydia's acting without arguing. Lydia develops a knack for reading Alice and determining her needs and mood before anyone else can, which also helps bring them closer together. Alice tells Eric about her Alzheimer's when he calls her into his office to discuss the poor student reviews she received the last semester. Alice hadn't realized how much her work was being affected by her symptoms, so she steps down from her teaching and speaking duties. However, she keeps her office in order to help Dan finish his dissertation. Soon, Alice's colleagues start avoiding her and she spends less time at her office. To make up for the loss of her friendships at work, Alice forms a support group for herself and other local dementia patients looking to connect with someone who knows what they are going through.

Alice loses the ability to focus on books or movies, leaving her unsure of how to spend her days. Her kids—especially Anna, who is now pregnant with twins—frequently come by to spend time with her and help her, but she struggles with not having a busy schedule to follow. One day John comes home with the news that he's been offered a position in New York City. He and the kids argue about his decision to move Alice away from her home, and Alice resents that they talk about her while she is right there instead of asking her opinion. Alice herself does not want to move and resents the fact that John wants to even though he knows she wants to spend one more sabbatical year with him, which he won't get if he changes jobs. Frustrated, Alice realizes that she can't convince him to stay and gives up trying.

Alice's condition continues to worsen and she frequently struggles to recognize Lydia. She still goes to appointments with Dr. Davis and delivers a speech at the Dementia Care Conference, but otherwise her life has slowed down as she loses touch with everyone outside of her immediate family. In April, Anna gives birth to her twins, Allison Anne and Charles Thomas, and Alice is lucid enough to recognize her and asks if the babies will grow up to have Alzheimer's, too. Alice assures her that they will not. John ultimately decides to move to New York and leave Alice with the kids in Cambridge. Lydia is moving closer to home because she's decided to study theater at college, and is excited to be closer to Alice and Anna's new babies. Anna frequently brings the babies over to Alice's house so she can hold and play with them.

Shortly before he leaves, John brings Alice to their beach house for a final vacation. While there, Alice momentarily becomes lucid and tells him that she remembers him and that she was smart once. John tells her she was the smartest person he'd ever known, and she tells him that she misses herself. The next month, John leaves and finds out that the experimental drug Alice had been taking didn't pass the trial. A nurse, Carole, comes to take care of Alice, who no longer recognizes her children. Anna and Lydia help take care of her every day, and Alice enjoys holding the babies. In the final pages, Lydia acts out a scene of a play and asks Alice what it's about. Alice tells her it's about love, which makes Lydia happy, and she tells Alice that she's right.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Dr. Alice Howland – The story's protagonist. At 50 years old, Alice has achieved tenure at Harvard University, made huge contributions to the field of psycholinguistics, traveled all over the world, and is looking forward to taking another sabbatical in the near future. Alice is married to John, another Harvard professor, and they have three children together. Alice gets along with her oldest two (Anna and Tom), but struggles to get along with her youngest, Lydia, who chose not to go to college and is pursuing a career in acting in LA instead. Alice begins having memory problems just before her 50th birthday when she abruptly forgets a word during a presentation and then gets hopelessly lost just a mile from her home. After going to a doctor, neurologist, and genetic counsellor, Alice learns that she has early-onset Alzheimer's due to a mutated gene that she inherited from one of her parents and which she passed on to her daughter Anna, and possibly to Lydia as well. Alice tries to keep as much of her life together as she can, but as her memory and motor functioning worsens, she is forced to give up her job, speaking engagements, friendships, and even starts to realize

that her marriage was not as happy as she thought it was. Furthermore, Alice begins to believe that her sister, Anne, who died when Alice was a freshman in college, is actually alive. Despite Alice's ever-worsening condition, John decides to leave to take a new job in New York City, and she is mad that John chooses to leave her behind. In his absence, Alice is taken care of by her children and a nurse, Carole. Even though she doesn't remember her children or grandchildren, Alice enjoys holding Anna's babies and listening to Lydia rehearse plays.

Dr. John Howland – Alice's husband and father of Anna, Tom, and Lydia. Like Alice, John is also a tenured professor at Harvard, but he studies biology and spends many more hours working in a lab than Alice does in her office. Because of this and Alice's hectic speaking schedule, Alice and John have grown pretty distant and don't see very much of each other. Furthermore, Alice and John have taken to arguing over Lydia, who Alice learns is getting money from John for her acting classes in LA. Still, the couple is looking forward to taking a sabbatical year together in the near future, during which they may write a second book together. When Alice tells John about her Alzheimer's diagnosis, John immediately sets to work looking up clinical trials, possible causes, medications, studies, and what regimens will be most beneficial to her. What he doesn't do, however, is try to comfort her emotionally, which leaves Alice feeling more isolated. John tries to help take care of Alice, but frequently loses patience with the situation and struggles to be there for her the way she needs him to be, such as taking daily runs with her to make sure she doesn't get lost. In a brief moment of lucidity during the late stages of Alice's disease, Alice tells John she remembers him and that she used to be smart, to which he replies that she had been the smartest person he'd ever known. Shortly after that, John leaves Alice with their kids in Cambridge to go work at a new research position in New York City.

Lydia Howland – Alice and John's youngest child. Unlike her siblings Anna and Tom, Lydia does not immediately go to college after high school, instead opting for a gap year in Europe before moving to LA to pursue acting. Because of this, Alice and Lydia struggle to get along and frequently argue over Lydia's future. After Alice is diagnosed with Alzheimer's, it is revealed that Lydia was the only one who had noticed the changes in Alice's behavior over the past year, including forgetting words and repeating herself frequently, which highlights how insightful and observant Lydia is. Although Alice and Lydia frequently butt heads, they do start getting closer as Alice begins struggling more with her memory. Lydia is frequently the only one who really understands Alice, pointing it out to others when Alice is struggling to keep up with conversations and reminding her what things are when she can see that Alice is confused about an object. Although she knows she may have inherited a mutated gene that causes Alzheimer's from Alice, Lydia chooses not to get tested. Eventually, Lydia chooses to study acting at a university, which makes Alice very proud. Lydia chooses a school close to Cambridge that will allow her to be closer to the whole family and help care for Alice as her symptoms get worse.

Anna Howland – Alice and John's oldest child; Lydia and Tom's sister. Anna is a successful lawyer, has recently married a man named Charlie, and is actively trying to conceive their first child. Anna struggles with infertility issues, leading her to choose in vitro fertilization, which initially fails. When Alice is diagnosed with Alzheimer's, Anna gets genetic testing done and learns that she carries the same mutated gene and will inevitably develop Alzheimer's one day, as well. Because of this, Anna chooses to have fertilized embryos tested for the same gene before being implanted, resulting in her pregnancy with twins Allison Anne and Charles Thomas. Anna and Alice are drawn closer together after Alice's diagnosis, and Anna frequently spends the night at Alice and John's home when John is away. When John is offered a new position in New York City, Anna insists that Alice be left with her, Charlie, and Tom in Cambridge so they can take care of her. When John does leave, Anna comes over with the twins and Lydia every day to take care of Alice.

Tom Howland – Alice and John's second child and only son; Lydia and Anna's brother. Tom is a third-year student at Harvard Medical School and is specifically studying cardiothoracic surgery. Tom and John are very close because both study biology and share a number of common interests. As Alice begins reevaluating her priorities and what she wants to do with the time she has left, she notes that she wants to see Tom—who dates and breaks up with a number of women, but has never had a long-term relationship—finally fall in love. Tom goes to Stephanie Aaron to get tested for the same gene mutation that caused Alice's Alzheimer's and finds out that he did not inherit the gene. In the early stages of Alice's struggle with Alzheimer's, Tom argues that they should be discouraging her from trying to remember unnecessary things (such as what time Lydia's play is) so she can save her energy for remembering more meaningful things. When John is offered a job in New York City, Tom is against him taking Alice with him because it's too far from everything that's familiar to her.

Dan Maloney – A linguistics doctoral student who Alice is advising as he finishes his dissertation research. Alice and Dan are close friends in addition to their student-teacher relationship, and she insists on staying on as his advisor even after her worsening Alzheimer's symptoms force her to step down from teaching and speaking engagements. Alice attends Dan's graduation, but her memory has worsened and she no longer remembers him. Dan tells Alice how much he appreciates what she's done for him and that she is the best teacher he ever had. When Alice thanks him and tells him she's glad he'll have good memories of her, he gives her a paper printed with everything he said so she can read it and

remember him.

Eric Wellman – Head of the Psychology Department at Harvard University, where Alice works. Eric and Alice are friendly with each another because they have worked together for many years. At the start of the spring semester at Harvard, Eric calls Alice into his office to talk about her student evaluations, which show that the quality of her teaching the previous fall was the worst it had ever been. Eric asks Alice if she's struggling with drugs or having marital issues with John, and is very surprised when she tells him she has Alzheimer's. Because Alice wants to make it through the next school year so she can take a sabbatical with John the year after, Eric encourages her to just step down from teaching and speaking engagements, although she is welcome to attend faculty meetings, continue advising Dan Maloney, and work in her **office**.

Dr. Davis – The neurologist to whom Dr. Tamara Moyer refers Alice. Dr. Davis sends Alice to take some basic cognitive tests and performs a short one in his office before telling her she has Alzheimer's. Dr. Davis is the one who pushes Alice to both tell John about her disease and get him to come to the rest of her appointments. At each appointment, Dr. Davis administers the same short cognitive test to gauge changes in her memory. Dr. Davis also attends Alice's final speech at the Dementia Care Conference.

Stephanie Aaron – The genetic counsellor at Dr. Davis's office. Stephanie helps guide Alice and John through the process of having Alice genetically tested to see if her Alzheimer's has a genetic link. Later, after Stephanie tells Alice that she does have a mutated gene that inevitably results in Alzheimer's and that may have been passed on to her children, Stephanie sees both Tom and Anna to give them the same test, which reveals that Anna also has the gene mutation.

Dr. Tamara Moyer – Alice's primary care physician for the past 22 years. Tamara is the first doctor Alice goes to for advice about her memory problems. Alice believes that her problems are just severe symptoms of menopause, and Tamara agrees that she is menopausal, but conducts tests because she worries there might be another underlying cause. When Alice's tests come back negative for a stroke or brain tumor, Tamara gives Alice a referral to a neurologist, Dr. Davis. After Alice receives her Alzheimer's diagnosis, she goes to Tamara to get a prescription for sleeping medication. Although Tamara is a little suspicious because Alice is being pushy about getting strong sleeping pills, Tamara gives her the prescription.

Anne Lydia Daly – Alice's sister who died at 16 years old in a car crash caused by their father Peter's drunk driving. Alice had been very close to Anne and frequently thinks about what she would be like if she had lived. As Alice's Alzheimer's progresses, she forgets that Anne is dead and has to be reminded, causing an emotional breakdown. Alice, however, later forgets Anne's death again and often mistakes Anna for Anne because they look so similar.

Peter Lucas Daly – Alice's father, who suffered from alcoholism for most of her life. After he crashes the family car while driving drunk, killing Alice's sister, Anne, and mother, Sarah, Peter spirals deeper and deeper into alcoholism. Alice only occasionally visited her father when he was alive. He was always drunk and belligerent, and frequently forgot who she was, leading her to believe that he is the parent who passed on the mutated gene that caused her Alzheimer's. Peter died from liver disease about a year before Alice receives her diagnosis.

Beth Maloney – Dan Maloney's wife. Beth marries Dan during the final months of his doctoral research and is brought to Eric Wellman's holiday party, which takes place shortly before Alice receives her Alzheimer's diagnosis. Dan introduces Beth to Alice and they talk briefly, but then Alice walks off to use the bathroom, get more wine, and talk to some of the wives. When she returns to the group, she has forgotten Beth and asks if she's a new fellow for one of the faculty. This is the first time Alice's symptoms are publicly noticed, but the group believes the memory lapse is due to Alice drinking too much wine that night.

Marjorie Wellman – Eric Wellman's wife. Marjorie helps Eric put on an annual holiday party for the entire Harvard Psychology Department. Although Marjorie and Alice are friend with each another, there is some distance between them because Alice is one of the professors and spends more time with them while Marjorie typically spends time with the other wives.

Denise Daddario – The social worker assigned to work with dementia patients and their families at Dr. Davis's office. Denise frequently offers to refer John to a counsellor or therapy group that can help him cope with Alice's Alzheimer's diagnosis. Denise helps Alice get in touch with Mary, Dan, and Cathy after Alice asks her for help setting up a support group for patients with Alzheimer's.

Mary Johnson – A friend Alice meets through Denise Daddario, the social worker at the neurosurgeon's office where both Alice and Mary are patients. Mary is 57 and has frontotemporal lobe dementia, so she is able to sympathize with what Alice is going through as her Alzheimer's worsens. She is able to attend Alice's final speech at the annual Dementia Care Conference.

Cathy Roberts – A friend who Alice meets through Denise Daddario, the social worker at the neurosurgeon's office where both Alice and Cathy are patients. Cathy is 48 and, like Alice, is diagnosed with early-onset Alzheimer's. Alice and Cathy become fast friends, and Cathy is one of the last people outside of Alice's family to reach out and check on her before she forgets to keep checking her email and laptop. Cathy attends Alice's talk at the annual Dementia Care Conference.

Josh – An old classmate of Alice's from Harvard. Alice runs into him at the conference at Stanford and he playfully teases her for reusing old conference material. When Alice struggles to remember a word during her presentation, she sees John smile and whisper to the person next to him, leading Alice to believe that he noticed her struggling and was gossiping about her.

Leslie – A Harvard graduate student finishing her doctoral thesis under the guidance of Eric Wellman. When Leslie presents her research thesis and plan to the Harvard faculty, Alice makes a good suggestion for how to set up control groups. However, Alice forgets and then repeats this plan a short time later, making Leslie and the rest of the people in the room feel uncomfortable.

Allison Anne – Alice's granddaughter and Anna's daughter. Allison is the first of Anna's twins (the other being Charles Thomas) that Alice gets to hold. Alice frequently plays with her in the late stages of her Alzheimer's. Like Charles, Allison underwent embryonic testing to make sure she did not inherit the gene that caused Alice's Alzheimer's.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Charlie – Anna's husband. Like Anna, Charlie is a successful lawyer and he works at the same large firm as Anna. Alice remembers Charlie even after she begins to lose memories of Lydia, which greatly upsets Alice as her disease worsens.

Sarah Louise Daly – Alice's mother who died in the same car crash that killed Anne. Sarah was about 40 when she died, and Alice sometimes thinks about how Sarah missed being able to do with her, including meeting her grandchildren and seeing Alice achieve her goal of becoming a Harvard professor.

Dan Sullivan – A friend who Alice meets through Denise Daddario, the social worker at the neurosurgeon's office where they are both patients. Dan is 53 and is also suffering from early-onset Alzheimer's. Dan attends Alice's talk at the Dementia Care Conference.

Malcolm – Malcolm is one of Lydia's roommates in LA. When Lydia talks about him, she momentarily blushes, which indicates to Alice that Lydia might have feelings for him. Later, Alice reads Lydia's diary and learns Malcolm, like Lydia, is an actor, and they worked together before dating.

Gordon Miller – The head of Stanford's Psychology Department. Alice and Gordon are on friendly terms, and he is the one who introduces her and goes over her accomplishments to the audience before her presentation at Stanford.

Carole – The caretaker hired to help care for Alice after John leaves for New York. Carole takes Alice on walks, gets her ice cream, and stays with her while Alice's kids work during the day.

Charles Thomas – Alice's grandson and Anna's son. Alice frequently holds Charles and entertains him in the late stages of her Alzheimer's. Charles is Allison Anne's twin, and, like Allison, underwent embryonic testing which showed he did not inherit the gene mutation that resulted in Alice's Alzheimer's.

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.

AMBITION AND SUCCESS

Dr. Alice Howland and Dr. John Howland are very ambitious, career-driven people. The married couple are both tenured professors at Harvard University, and they have devoted their lives to their research, Alice in psycholinguistics and John in biology. Their children—Anna, Tom, and Lydia—have inherited their parents' drive and stubborn determination to accomplish their goals. When Alice is diagnosed with early-onset Alzheimer's, however, she gradually loses her ambition and is soon confronted with the fragile nature of what she's always considered success to look like. In her portrayal of Alice's gradual decline from distinguished Harvard professor to dependent Alzheimer's patient, Genova provides a stern reminder that success is not always measured in how many accolades collected in one's career, but in how much happiness one has experienced in one's personal life.

Alice had always been ambitious, but her success didn't come easy. As a mother, Alice faced numerous obstacles that her male counterparts did not. In thinking about all she had to overcome over the course of her career and early motherhood, Alice also doubts "whether [John's] career would have survived" if he were the one who had to juggle raising children alongside his work. This provides valuable insight into how she felt about her own success: it's something that she had to work twice as hard as her husband in order to achieve. Alice compares her experience with that of her female colleagues who also had children early in their careers, many of whom "simply jumped the track entirely." This observation highlights the typical fate that awaits young mothers in academia, and gives the reader an idea of the immensity of the obstacles Alice had to overcome. Without her natural ambition, Alice may never have achieved as much success as she ultimately did. That success, however, came at a cost: she wrapped up so much of herself in her work that career-based success came to define her worth, making her Alzheimer's diagnosis far more difficult to accept.

Alice not only overcame obstacles, but eventually made an important mark on the field of psycholinguistics and as a

Harvard professor. These successes give her a sense of comfort even as she began to lose her memory of them. As she reviews the presentation she's going to deliver at Stanford University, Alice feels proud that "her contributions mattered and propelled future discovery." What this also means is that, in a sense, she'll continue to be a part of the academic world even as her disease prevents her from being active in it. This, it would seem, has always been her primary goal, as shown by her "belief that she had both a duty and opportunity to inspire the next generation in the field" as a professor. This is also the role she takes most seriously even as she gets sicker, insisting on staying on as advisor to her grad student, Dan. Furthermore, her students agree that she's made a lasting impact as a teacher, as shown by the way their end-of-year evaluations "had […] nodded in agreement" for the past 25 years. For Alice, the personal and professional impacts she's made on her students are her most important career successes.

There is no doubt that Alice's career-oriented ambitions have been met with more success that she could have foreseen, but Alzheimer's puts a halt to her career sooner than she expected. As a result, she's forced to reevaluate her definition of success and redirect her ambitions towards enjoying the time she has left with her family. When Alice's Alzheimer's begins to have a noticeable impact on her role as a professor and lecturer, she steps down from her teaching and speaking duties. As words gets out and her colleagues start avoiding her, Alice begins to feel "bored, ignored, and alienated in her office." This leads her to believe that all her hard work and academic success haven't been as meaningful as she believed. As she reevaluates her priorities, Alice realizes that all she really wants is to stay coherent long enough to meet her grandchildren, see Lydia act, and see Tom fall in love. It's her family, not her career, that she most wants to remember. With her ambitions taking a different direction, Alice finds a new kind of success: "a sense of relief and peace she hadn't known in a long time" as she meets her new grandchildren and grows closer to her adult children. This happiness stays with her long after she loses memories of her career.

In the final days of Alice's awareness, it's love for her family, and the love they have for her, that proves to be the ultimate success. This contradicts her former definition of success and sends the message that personal relationships, not career wins, constitute true success.

LOSS OF IDENTITY

At just 50 years old, Dr. Alice Howland has achieved tenure at Harvard University, published dozens of articles, given speeches all over the world, written and published a book with her husband, John, and made a real and meaningful impact on the field of psycholinguistics. In her personal life, she has raised three children (one a doctor, one a lawyer, one pursuing acting in Los Angeles), has a successful marriage, and enjoy a close family-like relationship with her colleagues. Alice takes great pride in her status as an independent, intelligent, physically-fit, and successful woman. Her diagnosis of early-onset Alzheimer's is unexpected and, in her mind, transforms her from "Alice Howland, brave and remarkable hero" to "Alice Howland, Alzheimer's victim." Over the course of this book, Genova illustrates, in painful detail, the myriad ways in which Alzheimer's strips sufferers of their identities, leaving them helpless to stop it or reinvent themselves as they lose their self-awareness.

For over 25 years, Alice has worked as a research scientist and professor, achieving the important career milestone of tenure at the prestigious Harvard University. This success is an important part of her personal identity, but it's also the first to fall victim to Alzheimer's. As Alice begins to really struggle with retaining memories and doing her work, she begins to feel "like a fraud posing as a Harvard professor." For Alice, this is the real beginning of the end of her professional identity because it shows she is beginning to doubt herself. Alice, however, is not the only one to notice that she is struggling, which is reflected in her below-average student evaluations. As a result, she is forced to give up teaching and lecturing, leading her to feel "like the biggest part of her self, the part she'd praised and polished regularly on its mighty pedestal, had died." Furthermore, she is gradually "cast out" by her colleagues, leaving her feeling "bored, ignored, and alienated," no longer respected as a professional or as a friend. This marks the true end to her identity as distinguished Harvard professor.

Perhaps the most tragic element of having Alzheimer's is that those who suffer from it gradually forget their own family, as Alice finds out all too soon. As Alzheimer's ravages her mind, she eventually loses her identity as wife and mother as her parental roles are reversed with her children. Alice and John have had a long marriage together, despite "bottomless argument[s]" over their daughter Lydia's acting and time spent apart due to work. However, as she struggles with Alzheimer's symptoms, Alice notices that John seemingly "[can't] bear to look at her," highlighting his struggle to see her as his wife and not a helpless Alzheimer's patient. Alice has enjoyed her role as a mother and is eagerly anticipating the birth of her two grandchildren so she can become a grandmother. However, her Alzheimer's flips the script and leaves her dependent on her children in much the same way they once depended on her. This is shown by the way they "[talk] about her as if she weren't sitting […] a few feet away," making decisions about how to care for her as she loses the ability to help herself. Alice's loss of independence thoroughly strips her of her capacity to fulfill her roles as a wife, mother, and grandmother.

Beyond her career and family, Alice's slowest—and most complex—loss of all is that of her self-awareness. Her sense of self outlives her ability to recognize her children, but she is

powerless to keep it safe from the ravages of Alzheimer's. Alice considers the life she's lived as "strange, competitive, cerebral, and privileged." This description shows that she is both proud and thankful for her experiences, which makes it harder for her to accept her graduate mental decline. Alice tells John that she is aware she doesn't "have much more time of really being [herself]," indicating that she can feel herself slipping away. This is confirmed by her feelings of "a growing distance from her self-awareness." Eventually, Alice even begins talking about herself in the past tense, such as when she observes that she "*used to be*" someone smart and independent. This shows that she has given up on that past self and now only exists in the moment, without her former qualities and personality.

Through Alzheimer's, Alice loses every facet of her identity, beginning with her hard-won identity as a tenured Harvard professor and research scientist, her identity as a supportive mother and grandmother, and, ultimately, her entire identity as Alice Howland. The true tragedy, however, is that she senses and feels this, but is powerless to stop it. This is shown during her last moment of true lucidity, when she momentarily discovers a "pristine place" in her mind, and is able to say, "I miss myself."

ILLNESS, MARRIAGE, AND FAMILY

Although *Still Alice* primarily follows Alice Howland's individual experience with Alzheimer's, her marriage, family, and the ways her illness changes her relationships are some of the most important elements of the book. Both Alice and her husband, John, have worked their whole lives to accomplish their goals and give their three kids the best possible life, even though sometimes they disagree about what that means for their youngest daughter, Lydia. As Alice starts showing symptoms of Alzheimer's, she's forced to confront some major unacknowledged issues in their marriage. However, while her illness puts a strain on an already strained marriage, it creates a new kind of closeness between Alice and Lydia. In portraying Alice's personal struggle with Alzheimer's, Genova also provides a compelling glimpse in the unpredictable effects of one family member's illness has on those closest to them—both positive ones that bring people together through the creation of a mutual understanding, and negative ones that drive others apart.

Alice has dedicated most of her life to her career, even at the expense of her relationship with her husband and time with her children. When faced with the knowledge that she's about to lose all these things, Alice realizes what she really values, is time with her family. When Alice is forced to accept that she has a limited amount of time as herself, she makes a list of what she wants to do before her condition worsens and is surprised to find that "nowhere in that list was there anything about linguistics, teaching, or Harvard." This reveals just how much importance she had formerly placed on her career, and how much she took her family for granted. Alice knows Alzheimer's will steal her memories over time, but she also believes that her love for her children is "safe from the mayhem in her mind, because it lived in her heart." Ironically, this means that the one thing she'll truly keep is the one thing she had taken most for granted in her quest for success: her family.

Alice and John have many qualities in common: they're ambitious, intelligent, successful, and love their children. However, even before Alice receives her diagnosis, it becomes clear that things aren't as they should be, and her deteriorating memory highlights deeper, unacknowledged issues. For years, Alice and John enjoyed a "relaxed intimacy" with one another. Using this term to describe their relationship makes it seem idyllic, but it also implies that they have stopped trying to impress each other, romantically or otherwise. When John finds out about Alice's Alzheimer's, he goes through a period of denial followed by anger and finally acceptance. But perhaps his most striking response is "humiliation" when Lydia tells him she had noticed something was wrong, and he, "someone so smart, a scientist, [could] not see what was right in front of him." This response reveals his dawning realization that he hasn't paid enough attention to his wife, and is interpreted by him as his failure as a husband.

Finally, when John is offered a job in New York City and decides he wants to go despite Alice's desire to stay and enjoy what time she has left with their kids, Alice realizes that "he'd always loved her, but she'd made it easy. This implies that this love for her, when truly challenged, isn't equal to the love she has for him, as shown by her willingness to sacrifice all and his unwillingness to do the same. Rather than coming to the same realization about the importance of family, Alice's diagnosis only seems to create more emotional distance between her and John, and ultimately to drive him away.

Although her marriage begins to deteriorate in stride with her mental health, Alice's relationship with Lydia goes in the opposite direction and they grow closer as she gets worse. Alice is a strong believer in formal education, but Lydia initially decides to pursue acting instead of going to college. This is something Alice interprets as "rebelling against who we are," as she tells John. As her condition worsens, Alice decides to read Lydia's diary to get to know her before she forgets. By doing this, Alice "saw Lydia. And she loved her," marking her readiness to understand and accept Lydia as she is and allowing herself to drop her walls so they can grow closer. Ultimately, it's Lydia who best understands Alice, interpreting her confusion and offering answers without making Alice embarrass herself by asking for them. By portraying Alice and Lydia's relationship this way, Genova highlights how an unexpected tragedy like an illness can bring formerly estranged loved ones together.

Alice's Alzheimer's has a profound effect on every member of her family, but not all those effects are negative. In *Still Alice*,

Genova illustrates the complexities of dealing with a loved one's Alzheimer's and its ability to simultaneously wedge people apart and draw others together.

ALZHEIMER'S, QUALITY OF LIFE, AND HAPPINESS

Alice Howland was, according to her own approximation, in the best physical condition of her life when she was diagnosed with Alzheimer's. She regularly takes long runs, eats healthy foods, never drinks to excess, and doesn't smoke. She feels "young, strong, and healthy," even at 50. Alice has enjoyed good health, so her Alzheimer's diagnosis takes her completely by surprise and leaves her wondering how much of her future will be worth living for as the disease takes away her memories, coordination, and, ultimately, her ability to control her own body. Despite her predictions, Alice's quality of life is not ruined by her disease—she experiences happiness even after she forgets the names and faces of her children, her husband, her career, and even her self-awareness. In *Still Alice*, Lisa Genova challenges readers' beliefs about living with Alzheimer's, and shows that there is still happiness and fulfillment to be had even the disease's advanced stages.

Alice is young, healthy, and looking forward to maintaining a high quality of life for many years to come, which makes her Alzheimer's diagnosis even more surprising and tragic. Alice loves taking runs and the exhilarating feeling she gets at the end of her typical route. In fact, she imagined running strong well into her sixties," which emphasizes how confident she was that she had many good, healthy years in front of her before finding out about her Alzheimer's. Intellectually, Alice carries her "memory burdens" with ease, enjoying her knack for remembering the details of certain psychological and linguistic studies off the top of her head faster than her Harvard colleagues. This further emphasizes Alice's potential for a long, productive, and fulfilling life—especially as regards her career—and deepens the sense of unfairness of her diagnosis. Furthermore, her "whole body looked strong and beautiful" at 50. This provides a striking contrast to her rapidly deteriorating mind and memory.

Alzheimer's also forces Alice to reevaluate her expectations of the future. Although she had planned on spending many years enjoying her children, grandchildren, and prestigious position at Harvard, she grapples with thoughts of suicide as a preferable alternative to losing her memories and control of her body. Among the many horrors of Alzheimer's, Alice is initially most terrified by a life with "[n]o more language" because all that "she did and loved, everything she was, required language." Alice foresees a future in which she has lost her identity, thus preventing her from enjoying a high quality of life. Alice has always been an independent woman, but as the risk of getting lost mere blocks from her home increases, she finds herself "at the mercy of John's availability." To her, the loss of independence reinforces her plan to end her life before she becomes a burden on her family. The most difficult part of Alice's disease is that she finds herself simply "sitting and waiting to get worse" without any hope of getting better. In essence, Alice is sitting and waiting for her condition to get bad enough that she can justify ending her life, and this effectively prevents her from truly enjoying what happiness her life still has to offer her.

Alice ultimately does not go through with committing suicide, though her mental health deteriorates beyond the point at which she planned to end her life. Despite the seriousness of her condition, Alice is still able to experience true happiness, which contradicts her previous beliefs about the late stages of Alzheimer's. Alice originally formulates her suicide plan while she eats an ice cream cone and realizes that she wants to enjoy life for as long as she can. According to Alice, it is only "when the burden of her disease exceed[s] the pleasure of [...] ice cream" that she wants to be allowed to die, meaning that it is only when she *can't* enjoy the simple things that life will not be worth living. Additionally, Alice's plan hinges on the belief that she will be *aware* of the burden of her Alzheimer's. However, the very nature of Alzheimer's ultimately prevents her from being aware of anything outside of her present moment. And, as Genova illustrates in the final pages of the book, Alice still experiences meaningful happiness in the moment as she savors the new-baby smell of her "delicious grandchildren" and is "moved [...] to tears" by Lydia's acting, even during the late stages of Alzheimer's.

Alice's continued happiness even after she loses her career and memories of her husband and children is meant to highlight the fact that people with serious diseases like Alzheimer's can still be happy, and, therefore, don't deserve to be treated simply as unfeeling Alzheimer's patients, but should be respected as human beings who are still capable of feeling human emotions and living meaningful lives.

SYMBOLS

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

THE BUTTERFLY NECKLACE

Alice inherited a beautiful blue butterfly necklace from her mother, Sarah, after she died during Alice's freshman year of college. This butterfly necklace symbolizes the beauty of life—namely Alice's life—and the importance of hanging on to those beautiful moments no matter how short or long they are. When Sarah was alive, she only wore the necklace during the most special occasions. After Alice's diagnosis, however, Alice begins wearing her mother's necklace all the time. Not only does it remind her of her mother,

but it reminds her of something Sarah told her about butterflies: "just because their lives were short didn't mean they were tragic." This message becomes increasingly relevant in Alice's own life as her Alzheimer's gradually robs her of her memory, reasoning skills, and independence. At 50 years old, Alice is much younger than most Alzheimer's patients, and she's considering the end of her life far before her time. But, as she soon realizes, that doesn't mean her life is tragic—she still has much more to celebrate than she does to mourn. Alice continues wearing the butterfly necklace all the time, and it reminds her of all the beautiful moments she can still enjoy even though she won't have long to remember them, including the birth of her grandchildren, eating ice cream, and spending time getting closer to her daughter Lydia.

ALICE'S OFFICE WINDOW

As a tenured professor at Harvard University, Alice enjoys the privilege of having an office with a large window that offers her a stunning view of the Charles River and surrounding area. Alice's office window symbolizes all that she's accomplished and her distinguished position at Harvard. Before being given an office with a window, Alice worked in the interior of William James Hall, with no window and no link to the outside world. As a result, Alice often inadvertently worked late into the night without realizing it had even gotten dark. With tenure, however, came an office with a window that gives Alice "a healthy awareness of life outside Harvard." Furthermore, it is a constant reminder to her that she no longer needs to spend long hours into the dead of night working because she has achieved tenure, a monumental milestone for any academic. Her work has paid off, and with the "healthy awareness" of what's going on outside comes the added bonus of knowing that she is now afforded greater freedom to take time off to enjoy life off campus, as well. However, when Alice's Alzheimer's forces her to step down from teaching and researching, her office window's ability to reminder her of all she accomplished becomes a source of pain. Alice slowly stops spending time looking out her office window as her condition gets worse—she soon forgets that she had a distinguished career, let alone an office with a window, at all.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Gallery Books edition of *Still Alice* published in 2007.

September 2003 Quotes

❝ How could he, someone so smart, a scientist, not see what was right in front of him?

Related Characters: Dr. John Howland, Dr. Alice Howland

Related Themes:

Page Number: 4

Explanation and Analysis

Alice asks herself this question as she knowingly goes into the kitchen to find John's missing glasses. Although she is specifically thinking about how often he loses his glasses or car keys, this quote takes on a much more significant meaning as the book goes on. Alice, too, has been misplacing items more and more often, but believes it is normal, related to her age and habit of multitasking. Still, the forgetting is there, and she is not recognizing it for what it is: a serious symptom of Alzheimer's disease. Like John, Alice is also a scientist. More importantly, she specifically studies a branch of psychology (psycholinguistics), and so her area of expertise is the human brain and what human behaviors say about the condition of their brain. She, however, lacks objectivity because these issues are her issues, and she is unwilling to admit what to an outside party might seem obvious: something is seriously wrong.

In a way, John is an outside party. He sees her external behavior every day, so presumably he would be the best authority on any changes, subtle or otherwise, in her behavior. But he's seemingly not paying attention—or, if he is, he is also unwilling to admit her memory problems might indicate a deeper issue. In this case, two extremely smart people studying different branches of science are failing to see what is right in front of them, showing just how insidious Alzheimer's can be in its earliest stages.

❝ They used to walk together over to Harvard Yard every morning. Of the many things she loved about working within a mile from home and at the same school, their shared commute was the thing she loved most. […] When they were first married, they even held hands. She savored the relaxed intimacy of these morning walks with him, before the daily demands of their jobs and ambitions rendered them each stressed and exhausted.

But for some time now, they'd been walking over to Harvard separately.

Related Characters: Dr. John Howland, Dr. Alice Howland

Related Themes:

Page Number: 5-6

Explanation and Analysis

After John leaves Alice to go to work, Alice thinks about how their marriage has changed recently. They used to be very close and they both truly enjoyed each other's company. Alice in particular values these quiet walks to work together when it is just them, no kids or experiments or paperwork between them. They are perfectly comfortable with each other and confident in their relationship and the happiness they share, but that comfort also means they no longer feel as if they need to *try* to make the marriage work since it has lasted for so many years. While they are still happy with each other and aren't openly struggling with their marriage, it seems as if they have gradually lost that emotional connection that characterized the early days of their relationship.

These walks were also important because it was the only time of day when they prioritized each other over their work. Both Alice and John are very ambitious and driven people, and continual success helped both of them justify devoting more and more of their time and attention to work instead of to each other. When they stopped walking to work together, they also stopped prioritizing their relationship, instead single-mindedly pursuing success in their careers independently of each another.

October 2003 Quotes

❝ Time and again she'd watched with dread as the most promising careers of her reproductively active female colleagues slowed to a crawl or simply jumped the track entirely. Watching John, her male counterpart and intellectual equal, accelerate past her had been tough. She often wondered whether his career would have survived three episiotomies, breast-feeding, potty training, mind-numbingly endless days of singing "The wheels on the bus go round and round," and even more nights of getting only two to three hours of uninterrupted sleep. She seriously doubted it.

Related Characters: Dr. John Howland, Dr. Alice Howland

Related Themes:

Page Number: 31-32

Explanation and Analysis

Alice knows her daughter, Anna, is trying to have a baby, which worries Alice because she knows how hard it is to juggle a new family, marriage, and career when you're still young and just starting out. Alice's memories of her own experience perfectly capture the immense obstacles women face in their careers that their male counterparts don't typically worry about. Due to prevailing gender roles, it is women who generally find themselves giving up their career ambitions to raise young children. While in some cases it is a priority shift, for many women it is simply that they cannot overcome the immensely difficult task of being both a mother and a working woman. Not only is it emotionally difficult, but Alice's memories also reveal the physical toll motherhood takes.

What is interesting about Alice's thoughts is that she asks herself whether John could have done as much as she did. Her conclusion that he could not shows that, to an extent, she sees herself as his superior. She was able to do what she believes he would never have been able to do. This is also something of which she is immensely proud. However, these struggles are not something she looks forward to Anna having to face, which is why Alice hesitates to encourage her to start a family so early in her career.

❝ She was clearly older than forty, but she wouldn't say she looked old. She didn't feel old, although she knew she was aging. Her recent entry into an older demographic announced itself regularly with the unwelcome intrusion of menopausal forgetting. Otherwise, she felt young, strong, and healthy.

Related Characters: Dr. Alice Howland

Related Themes:

Page Number: 35

Explanation and Analysis

During her 50th birthday celebration, Alice goes to the bathroom and studies her reflection in the mirror. Although she's been having memory problems, she does not associate them with a disease that would typically affect elderly people, such as Alzheimer's. Alice logically knows that she is getting old, but she is in great physical shape and she feels she has no reason to believe that she is anything other than healthy and with a long life ahead of her.

Alice's thoughts about her physical health and appearance reveal one of the darkest elements of Alzheimer's disease, particularly the early-onset type: there is often no physical indication of what is going on until it is almost too late. Although Alice doesn't know it yet, there is a harsh difference between her physical appearance and the health of her mind. While her brain is being ravaged by an unstoppable disease, Alice is still feeling "young, strong, and

healthy." This increases the sense of unfairness in her diagnosis and her surprise that she has developed an "old person's" disease.

November 2003 Quotes

The emphasis Alice placed on teaching was in part motivated by the belief that she had both a duty and the opportunity to inspire the next generation in the field, or at the very least not to be the reason that the next would-be great thought leader in cognition abandoned psychology to major in political science instead. Plus, she simply loved teaching.

Related Characters: Dr. Alice Howland

Related Themes:

Page Number: 45

Explanation and Analysis

After her first doctor's appointment and learning that her physician was concerned that she might have had a stroke or even a brain tumor, Alice thinks about her identity as a prestigious Harvard professor as she prepares to deliver a lecture to her class. Although it was Alice's research that really propelled her career, it's her role as a teacher that is most important to her. She feels a "duty" to pass on her knowledge and findings, which indicates that she recognizes that she is one of the most important living researchers in the psycholinguistics field, and so numerous people look up to her and rely on her for guidance in their own related research. Alice also sees teaching as an "opportunity," which means that she genuinely loves the responsibility of being the one to pass on this knowledge and expand the field.

Alice also recognizes that the guidance and inspiration she gives to her current students will help cement her as an important figure in the field even after she is no longer able to actively contribute to it. Her love for the subject and for her role as a teacher have played a major role in the development of her identity as a person, so the knowledge that this is also a part of her identity that will continue to exist even after she can no longer contribute to the field through research or teaching is deeply important to her. For that reason, she always prioritizes her ability to do her job to the best of her ability over her own desire to stay active in her role. She knows she'll eventually have to step down in order to ensure that the field she loves so much thrives and that she is not the reason someone turns away from it.

December 2003 Quotes

But most of all, they shared a passionate quest to understand the mind, to know the mechanisms driving human behavior and language, emotion and appetite. While the holy grail of this quest carried individual power and prestige, at its core it was a collaborative effort to know something valuable and give it to the world. It was socialism powered by capitalism. It was a strange, competitive, cerebral, and privileged life. And they were in it together.

Related Characters: Dr. Alice Howland

Related Themes:

Page Number: 51

Explanation and Analysis

Alice attends the holiday party that the head of Harvard's psychology department throws at his house every year. As she heads toward the party, Alice thinks about her colleagues, all that they have in common and how much they have been through together over her 25-year career as a professor. In describing the group's common goals, Alice also reveals the reason she chose to devote her life to psycholinguistics. She sees her research and accomplishments in this field as her way of bettering the world by helping all the people in it understand themselves and their minds a bit more. Alice's measure of success, therefore, is not a list of accolades awarded to her, but the knowledge that she has done something meaningful with her life.

Alice lost her mother and sister when she was a freshman in college, so she didn't have a family to witness her achievements or comfort her during her failures. In place of that, Alice has developed a familial relationship with her colleagues. Alice notes that at times can become "competitive" with one another. However, her description of their work as a "collaborative effort" and her belief that, despite occasional conflicts, they are "in it together" is reminiscent of a family. It is within this group that Alice is most proud of herself and where she enjoys the greatest sense of belonging.

They'd played this scene out together before, and this was how it ended. John argued the logical path of least resistance, always maintaining his status as the favorite parent, never convincing Alice to switch over to the popular side. And nothing she said swayed him.

Related Characters: Dr. John Howland, Dr. Alice Howland

Related Themes:

Page Number: 61

Explanation and Analysis

When Alice went to Los Angeles to visit Lydia, she learned that John had been sending Lydia money to pay for her acting workshop despite knowing how strongly Alice objects to Lydia's choice to pursue acting instead of getting a traditional college degree. For John, the "logical path of least resistance" means trusting Lydia's judgment and insisting that he and Alice allow her to make her own decisions. John's deference to the wishes of his children, particularly Lydia, means that he is considered the "favorite parent." This puts Alice in the position of being the strict or even overbearing parent by default, making it difficult for her to connect with their children the same way John does.

Additionally, this view of Alice and John's argument provides a glimpse into a deep tension between the two that prevents them from being able to truly connect. Alice can't help but notice how close John is with their children and how much easier it seems for him to connect with each of them, and Alice resents him for this. In Alice's view, she pushes her children to succeed because she wants what is best for them and believes she has a better understanding of what that looks like than they do. This is not the "popular side," but Alice sees it as the right one. Much of her frustration lies in the fact that John never seems to back her up, making her look like the bad guy.

January 2004 Quotes

She thought about the books she'd always wanted to read, the ones adorning the top shelf in her bedroom, the ones she figured she'd have time for later. *Moby-Dick*. She had experiments to perform, papers to write, and lectures to give and attend. Everything she did and loved, everything she was, required language.

Related Characters: Dr. Alice Howland

Related Themes:

Page Number: 73-74

Explanation and Analysis

During her second appointment with the neurologist, Alice is told that she has early-onset Alzheimer's disease, which is incurable, irreversible, and will gradually rob her of even the most basic cognitive functions eventually. As a psycholinguistic research scientist, Alice values language above all things, so as she reads through a pamphlet of symptoms and sees that she will lose the ability to read, write, and even speak, she is confronted with the fact that she will one day lose the very function she's devoted her life to researching. It is a key part of her identity, without which Alice doesn't believe she will be able to maintain her sense of self, shown by her belief that language constitutes "everything she did and loved, everything she was."

Alice's thoughts also reveal the danger of the mindset that one will have "time for [something] later." Alice believed she would have time to read classics like *Moby-Dick* at some future period, and so she put it off. Her Alzheimer's diagnosis means that, even though Alice is only 50, she will not have time to do even these small things for which she thought she had time. Of all the things Alice will lose, one of her greatest regrets will be that she put off doing so much, reading so much, because she believed she was too busy or too devoted to her work to do them.

She'd rather die than lose her mind. She looked up at John, his eyes patient, waiting for an answer. How could she tell him she had Alzheimer's disease? He loved her mind. How could he love her with this?

Related Characters: Dr. John Howland, Dr. Alice Howland

Related Themes:

Page Number: 78

Explanation and Analysis

After Alice is told that she has Alzheimer's disease, she struggles with the idea that she will have to tell John. That same day he brings her to the cemetery to put flowers on the graves of her mother, sister, and father, Alice uncharacteristically bursts into tears when she starts thinking about what her life is going to be like. Faced with the knowledge that she will lose her sense of identity and independence, Alice views physical death as preferable to the slow intellectual death that awaits her: "She'd rather die than lose her mind." Losing her mind, of course, also means losing her ability to continue in her career and being able to fulfill her role as a mother to her children, especially as her oldest daughter is hoping to start a family.

Alice's fears are exacerbated by the idea that what John loves most about her, "her mind," is the very thing she is

going to lose. Alice knows that much of what originally attracted John to her is intelligence academic brilliance, so while she struggles to consider what she will be like without these things, she also worries about how John's perception of her will change. She sees his love for her as contingent on her intelligence and ability to live up to what she believes is his perception of her, which is why she wonders how he can continue loving her once she stops living up to his image of her. More than anything, Alice fears that one day John will only see her as a dependent Alzheimer's patient, not as Alice Howland, his wife.

March 2004 Quotes

In the month since their visit to the genetic counselor, he'd stopped asking her for help finding his glasses and keys, even though she knew he still struggled to keep track of them.

Related Characters: Dr. John Howland, Dr. Alice Howland

Related Themes:

Page Number: 91

Explanation and Analysis

After Alice tells John about her Alzheimer's diagnosis, he insists on going to see a genetic counselor who might be able to confirm the diagnosis by running a test to determine if Alice has any genetic mutations that could account for it. When the results come back, they show that Alice has a mutation called the PS1. The mutation is something she can pass on to their children but, more importantly, also leaves no room to doubt that Alice herself has early-onset Alzheimer's disease. The change in their dynamic as a couple is almost instant, but thus far it only shows itself in small ways, such as John no longer asking her for help finding things. This is a stark contrast to the beginning of the book when Alice listened to John looking for his missing glasses, knowing that he would inevitably call to her for help, as he always did.

The tacit admission in John's decision to stop asking Alice for help is that he will no longer depend on her to help him, even with these small tasks, and their marriage will therefore be imbalanced. It could be that John no longer thinks Alice is capable or reliable given her memory impairment, but it could be a desire on his part to spare her the additional memory burden of having to keep track of his stuff as well as her own. The lack of communication on this point, however, leaves Alice feeling insecure about her role in their relationship.

John had agreed to walk with her to Harvard every morning. She'd told him she didn't want to risk getting lost. In truth, she simply wanted that time back with him, to rekindle their former morning tradition.

Related Characters: Dr. John Howland, Dr. Alice Howland

Related Themes:

Page Number: 92

Explanation and Analysis

After her diagnosis, Alice no longer has to hide some of her fears about getting lost close to home like she did during one of her runs in Harvard Square earlier in the book. Alice and John used to walk to Harvard every morning together but dropped the practice at some point. This is the "morning tradition" she wants to get back to because it helps her feel closer to John. Because of their careers, both John and Alice find themselves spending a lot of time away from each other, and with only limited free time to spend talking and enjoying each other's company like they used to. Alice knows she only has a limited amount of time before she will start to forget John, which adds a sense of urgency to her desire to spend more time with him.

Alice uses her Alzheimer's to justify asking John to walk to work with her in the morning. This reveals a troubling disconnect in her marriage and begs the question, why does she feel like she needs to tell half-truths to get John to spend this time with her? Alice, it appears, doesn't think John would want to walk to work with her just because she wants to spend time with him. Although it's clear the couple has communication issues, this belief of Alice's could indicate a much deeper fear on her part: that John has no interest in trying to "rekindle" the emotional intimacy they used to share on these walks.

And although the thought of staying on too long terrified her, the thought of leaving Harvard terrified her much, much more. Who was she if she wasn't a Harvard psychology professor?

Related Characters: Dr. Alice Howland

Related Themes:

Page Number: 96

Explanation and Analysis

After a rough day at work shortly after Alice receives her

Alzheimer's diagnosis, she decides to go on a run to try and clear her mind and think objectively about what her diagnosis means for her future. Alice is afraid of "staying on too long" as a Harvard professor because, objectively, she knows that eventually her symptoms will prevent her from being able to teach to the best of her ability. Alice doesn't want to say on so long that she becomes a poor teacher, since having a bad experience in her class could potentially discourage new students from exploring the field of psycholinguistics further. The longer Alice stays at Harvard, especially without telling anyone else about her diagnosis, the riskier it gets for her. This is something she knows and acknowledges, but Alice is still struggling with how to determine the point at which she must step down from teaching duties.

Alice has spent most of her adult life in academia, so her career at Harvard has become an integral part of her overall identity. When Alice thinks about the necessity of leaving Harvard at some point, she is also facing the loss of that key part of her identity and sense of self-worth. Alice is highly successful at Harvard, both as a professor and as a research scientist, and without her work there, she has a difficult time thinking about what she will do with her life or how she will fill the void it is sure to leave. By focusing so much on her career, however, Alice is failing to account for other parts of her identity, including that of wife and mother.

May 2004 Quotes

❝ She remembered being six or seven and crying over the fates of the butterflies in her yard after learning that they lived for only a few days. Her mother had comforted her and told her not to be sad for the butterflies, that just because their lives were short didn't mean they were tragic. Watching them flying in the warm sun among the daisies in their garden, her mother had said to her, *See, they have a beautiful life*. Alice liked remembering that.

Related Characters: Sarah Louise Daly, Dr. Alice Howland

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 111

Explanation and Analysis

One day after telling the rest of her family about her diagnosis, Alice visits a nursing facility called Auburn Manor, which has a floor dedicated to the care of patients who are in the late stages of dementia. When she goes, Alice wears a butterfly necklace that used to belong to her mother, who only wore it on the most special occasions. Alice associates this necklace with her mother and what she told her about the life of a butterfly, and it also helps remind her of the beauty of her own life. After receiving her diagnosis, Alice tends to see only the tragedy that looms over the end of her life, but the necklace helps her remember all the beautiful moments she has experienced in her lifetime.

The concept that the shortness of a life does not necessarily make it tragic becomes particularly important to Alice, who was only 50 when she was diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease. By all accounts, Alice should have had many more years of life ahead of her, but having Alzheimer's means she has to plan for the end of her life before she's even old enough to consider retirement. One might tempted to see this as the ultimate tragedy, but in hanging on to this necklace, Alice actually shows a determination to hold onto the beauty of her life, both in the past and in the future because, as she knows, she still has time to be herself and experience happiness.

❝ She laughed a little, surprised at what she'd just revealed to herself. Nowhere in that list was there anything about linguistics, teaching, or Harvard. She ate her last bit of cone. She wanted more sunny, seventy-degree days and ice cream cones.

And when the burden of her disease exceeded the pleasure of that ice cream, she wanted to die.

Related Characters: Dr. Alice Howland

Related Themes:

Page Number: 118

Explanation and Analysis

After visiting the Mount Auburn nursing facility, Alice goes out for a large ice cream cone to eat while she thinks about what comes next for her. While she thinks, Alice asks herself what it is she really wants out of life before she's no longer truly herself anymore and realizes that what she most values is meeting Anna's babies, seeing Tom fall in love, and seeing Lydia in a play. Alice has spent much of her life devoting all of her time and energy to succeeding at work. In fact, she tends to measure her success by how much she has been able to accomplish in her field. While she loves her family, now that her children are adults, she has the tendency to prioritize her work over anything else. Like her

attitude toward books, Alice always assumed that she would have time to spend with her kids later on, but now she faces an uncertain future in which she only has a limited amount of time before she forgets them. What Alice's list shows her is that her priorities are changing, but so is her definition of success. At the end of her life, she wants her relationship with her children to be stronger more than she wants to add to her massive pile of awards and publications.

More importantly, Alice believes that there is still a lot of happiness in store for her, even though she will struggle to remember it. As long as she is able to experience happiness, Alice wants to be around to experience it. However, this is only on the condition that the joy she experiences outweighs the emotional pain of her disease. Once that ratio shifts, Alice sees living as more of a burden than a blessing, meaning she should be allowed to die on her own terms.

July 2004 Quotes

Moonlight reflected off her right wrist. SAFE RETURN was engraved on the front of the flat, two-inch, stainless steel bracelet. A one-eight-hundred number, her identification, and the words *Memory Impaired* were etched on the reverse side. Her thoughts then rode a series of waves, traveling from unwanted jewelry to her mother's butterfly necklace, traversing from there to her plan for suicide, to the books she planned to read, and finally stranded themselves on the common fates of Virginia Woolf and Edna Pontellier. It would be so easy. She could swim straight out toward Nantucket until she was too tired to continue.

Related Characters: Dr. Alice Howland

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 146

Explanation and Analysis

During the Howland family's annual vacation at their summer home in Chatham Cape, Alice takes a walk on the beach and spontaneously decides to take a swim in the ocean. While she swims, she notices the Safe Return bracelet on her wrist, which makes her think of her mother's butterfly necklace. While the butterfly necklace gives Alice hope and happiness, the Safe Return bracelet represents the deterioration of her identity as an independent woman. The bracelet is an admission of tragedy in a life that Alice is trying to find the beauty in, which leads to her to think of her suicide plan and question whether or not she should wait to carry it through or allow herself to drown in the ocean right then instead.

Alice also finds herself relating to Virginia Woolf, whose famous suicide was her escape from a worsening mental illness that she no longer wanted to combat, and Edna Pontellier, who felt trapped by society and saw suicide as a way to save herself from becoming a moral burden on her family. Both of these women chose drowning as their method of suicide, which is why Alice's nighttime swim makes her think of them in particular. Although she sees this as a safe choice, even a poetic one, Alice does not follow through because she is still able to experience happiness and appreciate her life.

August 2004 Quotes

Lydia reached out across the dishes and glasses and years of distance and held her mother's hand. Alice squeezed it and smiled. Finally, they'd found something else they could talk about.

Related Characters: Lydia Howland, Dr. Alice Howland

Related Themes:

Page Number: 162

Explanation and Analysis

Lydia travels to Chatham Cape to spend time with Alice and John and to perform in a play that summer. While there, Lydia and Alice start to have more and more conversations that do not end in fights and frustration, which is uncharacteristic for their strained relationship. Lydia asks Alice to tell her what having Alzheimer's is like, and the discussion draws them together. Lydia proves to be the one person in the Howland family with whom Alice feels she can truly open up and talk to about her experience with Alzheimer's, which is the "something else" they have found to talk about.

This experience reverses the desire Alice had in Los Angeles to reach across the table and hug Lydia, which reflects the changing roles in their family as Alice slowly finds herself becoming more dependent on her children. Lydia displays a great amount of emotional intelligence and maturity in being the one to "reach out across the [...] years of distance" that have long stood between her and Alice. Alice is able to recognize this for what it is, and her responsive squeeze is both an acknowledgement of the importance of Lydia's

gesture and to express her happiness that they are finally able to talk to one another without hostility and irritation. In this way, Alice's Alzheimer's disease has shown its capacity to bring people together: Alice and Lydia may never have found this common ground without it.

September 2004 Quotes

She had no classes to teach, no grants to write, no new research to conduct, no conferences to attend, and no invited lectures to give. Ever again. She felt like the biggest part of her self, the part she'd praised and polished regularly on its mighty pedestal, had died. And the other smaller, less admired parts of her self wailed with self-pitying grief, wondering how they would matter at all without it.

Related Characters: Dr. Alice Howland

Related Themes:

Page Number: 187-188

Explanation and Analysis

On the first day of the fall semester, Alice is called into the head of the department's office to go over her student evaluations, which reveal that her teaching performance has suffered more than she thought it did and prompting her to tell the head of the department about her Alzheimer's diagnosis. Although she cannot be fired, Alice agrees to step down from teaching and lecture duties, although she stays on in her office as her graduate student's dissertation advisor. With so few responsibilities, Alice finds herself spending most of her time sitting alone in her office with nothing to do. Thus, Alice is faced with how little all of her career success matters, now that she no longer has as much of a position to fill at Harvard. She had built so much of herself up on her sense of worth in her career, but as she's now finding out, she formed this part of her identity on too fragile a foundation, leaving her weaker and more vulnerable than she is accustomed to feeling.

Alice is also faced with the monumental task of trying to figure out who she is now that the "biggest part of her self" no longer truly belongs to her. She struggles to determine how she can be important or mean anything now that she can no longer actively contribute to the world as a professor and research scientist. This thinking brings out the "smaller, less admired parts of her self," which also means she must face the things about herself that she doesn't like, such as self-pity.

In the beginning, they did. They lived their lives together, with each other. But over the years, it had changed. They had allowed it to change. She thought about the sabbaticals apart, the division of labor over the kids, the travel, their singular dedication to work. They'd been living next to each other for a long time.

Related Characters: Dr. John Howland, Dr. Alice Howland

Related Themes:

Page Number: 188

Explanation and Analysis

After a long day of doing nothing alone in her office, Alice goes to talk to John and tells him that she wishes they had spent more quality time together. John rather obliviously reminds her that they have spent most of their lives together already. John does not seem to grasp what Alice is saying: she wishes that they had prioritized each other more and their careers less, especially now that she's seen how little career success means in the end. Alice knows they once "lived their lives together," which was back when they talked to each other about their research and their kids, or just chatted about their day. However, as she thinks back through their marriage, Alice also sees that they became complacent and, at some point, failed to maintain their marriage the way they should have. In Alice's words, they had "allowed it to change," perhaps without even realizing what was happening.

As Alice mourns the fact that she and John had "been living next to each other" rather than *with* each other for far too long, there is also a noticeable shift in her attitude toward marriage. She realizes that she has been successful in her work, but not in her relationship. Therefore, she has not been as successful at life as she previously believed. She has placed too high a value on prestige in her "singular dedication to work" and not enough on success in her personal life, which is essentially all she has left after stepping down from teaching at Harvard.

October 2004 Quotes

She'd authored well over a hundred published papers. She held this stack of research articles, commentaries, and reviews, her truncated career's worth of thoughts and opinions, in her hands. It was heavy. Her thoughts and opinions carried weight. At least, they used to.

Related Characters: Dr. Alice Howland

Related Themes:

Page Number: 194

Explanation and Analysis

As Alice sits alone with nothing to do in her office, she pulls out a pile of her publications that she keeps in a cabinet near her desk. These papers are the tangible results of years and years of hard work, research, dedication, and the respect she commanded from others in the field of psycholinguistics. When Alice stepped down from teaching and lecturing, it was also an admission that she was no longer capable of being the same person who wrote these publications. Perhaps more importantly, these papers are a reminder of all that she was supposed to still do in her career that now will never get done.

Alice notes that her stack of published material is "heavy," which is a reflection of the figurative weight that her opinions and findings carried. Now that she has Alzheimer's, however, her opinions no longer seem to matter. The stigma of Alzheimer's prevents others from taking her seriously, and her circle of influence has significantly narrowed. For Alice, this also means that she has lost her identity as an individual worth listening to, who could make a positive contribution and help others. Instead, she is the one who needs help and her opinions are given little value.

❝ She tried to be understanding. He needed to work. But why didn't he understand that she needed to run? If something as simple as regular exercise really did counter the progression of this disease, then she should be running as often as she could. Each time he told her "Not today," she might be losing more neurons that she could have saved. Dying needlessly faster. John was killing her.

Related Characters: Dr. John Howland, Dr. Alice Howland

Related Themes:

Page Number: 197-198

Explanation and Analysis

Whether Alice is at work or not, she has nothing to do and so looks forward to being able to run with John. Running, as both she and John know, can help slow the progression of Alzheimer's, so she takes it very seriously. This is why she becomes so angry when John tells her that he is at work and needs to stay there for a while longer. Alice, however, is beginning to question why John keeps prioritizing work over her. Since stepping down from her position, Alice has come to see how hollow career success can be when once you're deemed unfit to partake in that world, and it is difficult for her to understand why John doesn't see it that way himself. In her mind, John would rather spend extra hours at work than take time off to do an activity that could give her extra days or weeks of full lucidity. Furthermore, running simply makes Alice happy, so John is also prioritizing his work over her happiness.

Alice projects much of her frustration with her situation and helplessness on John. Alice is a proud woman, and dependence does not come naturally to her. Still, John is unavailable when Alice needs him most, yet another example of his frequent emotional unavailability on the occasions she needs emotional support, such as the day she told him about her diagnosis and he chose to leave her alone on the couch to go read articles on his computer.

December 2004 Quotes

❝ They talked about her as if she weren't sitting in the wing chair, a few feet away. They talked about her, in front of her, as if she were deaf. They talked about her, in front of her, without including her, as if she had Alzheimer's disease.

Related Characters: Anna Howland, Tom Howland, Dr. John Howland, Dr. Alice Howland

Related Themes:

Page Number: 225

Explanation and Analysis

While the family is gathered at the Howland house for Christmas, John announces that he has been offered a once-in-a-lifetime job at Sloan-Kettering in New York City. While both Tom and Anna are appalled that he would think of taking this position given Alice's condition, John insists it will not matter because by the time they move to New York Alice won't have enough self-awareness to understand the change. Although Alice initially struggles to keep up with the conversation, she does become aware that her family is talking "about her, in front of her" without giving any thought to her or the opinions she might have. Instead, they are arguing over making a decision for her as if she were a child, reflecting the changing parent-child roles in the family.

For Alice, this experience is dehumanizing. She still has her sense of self and personhood, so in Alice's mind it is offensive that they could talk "about her, in front of her" this way without actually thinking about her. To Alice, this sends

the message that they no longer see her for herself, but only see an Alzheimer's patient who is incapable of truly forming her own opinions and ideas about big decisions like this one.

February 2005 Quotes

More and more, she was experiencing a growing distance from her self-awareness. Her sense of Alice—what she knew and understood, what she liked and disliked, how she felt and perceived—was also like a soap bubble, even higher in the sky and more difficult to identify, with nothing but the thinnest lipid membrane protecting it from popping into thinner air.

Related Characters: Dr. Alice Howland

Related Themes:

Page Number: 242

Explanation and Analysis

Alice returns to Dr. Davis's office for neuropsychological testing and to check in about her condition. This time, the tests exhaust her and leave her feeling drained and helpless. Part of this emotional drain is that these tests reveal to her just how fragile her sense of self-awareness is becoming. Alice has lost her career and is struggling to remember the names of all her children, and now she is confronted with the disorienting knowledge that she is losing her sense of self, which she also knows will be the final step in her descent into the late stages of Alzheimer's disease. What makes this situation harder is that she can sense that this is happening to her but is helpless now to slow the progress of her disease. She is less and less able to reclaim her selfhood in everyday life.

Alice recognizes that she is Alice but struggles to internalize that knowledge and understand all its various meanings. This is why she also has a hard time remembering her likes and dislikes (this is first shown in her insistence on ordering coffee even though John tries to tell her that she prefers tea with lemon) or identifying her emotions for what they are. Instead she sees her selfhood as a thin bubble floating farther and farther away from her, knowing that once it pops it can never be gotten back.

March 2005 Quotes

"My yesterdays are disappearing, and my tomorrows are uncertain, so what do I live for? I live for each day. I live in the moment. Some tomorrow soon, I'll forget that I stood before you and gave this speech. But just because I'll forget it some tomorrow doesn't mean that I didn't live every second of it today. I will forget today, but that doesn't mean that today didn't matter."

Related Characters: Dr. Alice Howland (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 253

Explanation and Analysis

Alice is invited to give a speech at the annual Dementia Care Conference. During her speech, she shares her unique perspective on Alzheimer's as an patient, thus giving a voice to the innumerable other patients who can no longer speak for themselves. Early on in her diagnosis, Alice struggled to imagine what she could possibly live for once her disease robbed her of her career and some of her most treasured memories. It would seem, then, that she has found the answer: she lives "for each day [...] in the moment." Alice once considered her work essential to her happiness, but this shows that she has since learned that happiness can be found by simply being present and leaving yourself open to experiences as they come. Rather than being discouraged by the knowledge that she will forget these things, Alice now accepts them as a part of her reality.

Interestingly, Alice has lived far beyond the point at which her past self would have chosen to commit suicide. Although she has lost her memories, this shows how Alice is growing as a person. In letting go of the need to have a definite future, Alice has learned to truly appreciate what she has in her present and to recognize that forgetting the present moment does not actually lessen its value. This is a lesson in happiness she was not able to foresee for herself in the early stages of her diagnosis, suggesting that one can still grow as a person and come to new realizations even while suffering from Alzheimer's disease.

June 2005 Quotes

What she saw in them, she recognized in herself. This was something she knew, this place, this excitement and readiness, this beginning. This had been the beginning of her adventure, too, and although she couldn't remember the details, she had an implicit knowing that it had been rich and worthwhile.

Related Characters: Dr. Alice Howland

Related Themes:

Page Number: 276

Explanation and Analysis

John brings Alice back to Harvard so they can attend the commencement ceremony and see Alice's graduate student, Dan, receive his PhD. At this point in her illness, Alice struggles to recognize all of her children and has lost her independence entirely. Although she can't remember what she did the day before, Alice has become adept at reading human emotion and she is quickly able to pick up on the sense of "excitement and readiness" that is pervading the campus at Harvard. More importantly, the emotions around her restore to her a vague sense of herself. Alice recognizes something fundamental about her personality and life experience in these surroundings, and it helps her feel that the person she was still exists within her on some level.

When Alice was forced to walk away from teaching, she felt the loss perhaps more strongly than any she experienced, since this was the one she was most conscious of. In that moment, all of her success and her identity as a professor and research scientist brought her more pain than it had joy, but only because she found herself losing it. Now that she has forgotten the details, however, she is left with the emotions she still has that are connected with Harvard, shown by her "implicit knowing" that whatever her life had been before, it was "rich and worthwhile," and now it continues to bring her a comfort she hadn't been able to predict before.

Summer 2005 Quotes

She wanted to tell him everything she remembered and thought, but she couldn't send all those memories and thoughts, composed of so many words, phrases, and sentences, past the choking weeds and sludge into audible sound. She boiled it down and put all her effort into what was most essential. The rest would have to remain in the pristine place, hanging on.

"I miss myself."

Related Characters: Dr. Alice Howland (speaker), Dr. John Howland

Related Themes:

Page Number: 285

Explanation and Analysis

During the summer break after Harvard's commencement ceremony, John brings Alice back to their summer house for a vacation. While he sits there reading, Alice picks up a book and he helps her recognize it as the one they wrote together, which has the unintended effect of clearing a path in her mind that leads her to a "pristine place" where her fundamental memories of who she is and what her life has been remain unscathed. Alice wants to express everything she finds in that place but is unable to carry those thoughts out into words for John to hear. This means she has to trust him to understand her with whatever she does manage to say.

What Alice considers most essential is herself, but by that she doesn't just mean her sense of self, but her intelligence, the relationship she had with John, her role as a mother and grandmother, and her career as a teacher. In this brief moment of lucidity, Alice feels the full weight of losing these things all over again. However, this passage does give both her and the reader a sense of hope. The "pristine place" Alice finds is "hanging on," and presumably it is maintaining her sense of self even when she can't access it. So long as it is "hanging on," Alice's self is still intact and it creates the possibility of future periods of brief lucidity in which she will be able to truly experience her sense of self again and communicate that to her family.

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.

SEPTEMBER 2003

The narration states that, "more than a year earlier," neurons in a woman's head began dying without a known reason. Some believed it was either "molecular murder or cellular suicide." There was no way for these neurons to send a warning of what was happening.

This description of dying neurons conveys to the reader both how dramatic the progress of Alzheimer's within the brain is, and how it is something that can gradually sneaking up on an individual with no warning or early indication of what's happening.

Alice is sitting in her bedroom trying to finish a peer review of a paper that was submitted for publication in an academic journal. She is distracted by the noise her husband, John, is making downstairs as he prepares to rush out the door. The clock next to her says it's 7:30, but she knows it's fast and continues to watch it while she waits for the inevitable: John will call to her to ask if she knows where whatever he's lost is.

The first indication of Alice's career success in academia is that she is working on a peer review, a task relatively few people qualify for, and only if they are absolute experts in their field. Her intuitive knowing that John has lost something and that he will ask her for help also indicates that she knows him on a very deep level, as is typical with couples who have been married for a long time.

Alice goes downstairs when John calls her and he tells her that he's lost his glasses somewhere. Alice finds his glasses in the kitchen and wonders how John, "someone so smart, a scientist" could "not see what was right in front of him." Alice, however, has also recently taken to losing things and finding them "in mischievous little places." This isn't something she shares with John, but assumes it is the result of "excessive multitasking and being way too busy" and age.

Alice wonders how "someone so smart, a scientist" isn't able to see what's going on "right in front of [them]." This thought takes on a deeper meaning later when she is told about her diagnosis and learns that she may have displayed signs and symptoms for longer than she believed. However, this observation also places partial blame on John: he isn't really looking at his wife and paying attention to what is different about her, even if they are still minor differences. Even though she doesn't realize it, her struggle with losing things is an early warning sign of what's to come.

Alice brings John his glasses and follows him as he hurries to the door. Alice asks him if he will be home when she gets back on Saturday and he tells her he doesn't know because he has work to do in the lab. He tells her to have a good trip and warns Alice to "try not to battle with [Lydia]." Alice looks at John's reflection in the mirror and considers whether or not to enter the "same, bottomless argument" over his warning. Instead, she tells John it's been a long time since she's seen Lydia and asks him to try to be home, and he says he'll try.

Like Alice, John is also clearly busy with his own academic work in a lab. John's comment about not fighting with Lydia and Alice's description of it as the "same, bottomless argument" also reveals tension between them: this is something they can't effectively talk about despite their long marriage. It also reveals that Alice has a tense relationship with Lydia and struggles to get along with her.

John gives Alice a lingering kiss before heading out the door. Alice thinks about "romanticiz[ing]" the kiss, but doesn't because she knows it's his way of preemptively apologizing for not being home when she gets back from her trip. Alice thinks about the time earlier in their relationship when they would walk to Harvard together and talk about the classes they're teaching, research they're doing, and their children. Although Alice "savored the relaxed intimacy" of these walks, it has also been a long time since they walked to work together, partially because Alice has been away at research conferences for the past few months.

Although Alice fights to urge to "romanticize" the kiss between her and John, there is no indication that John means it to be romantic. What this says about their marriage is that Alice might be missing a sense of intimacy and romance with her husband, but likely doesn't recognize that in herself. This is yet another instance of a struggle with communication in their marriage. Work, it would seem, has come between them in a rather insidious way as they both go their own way to pursue their ambitions.

Alice returns to her room to finish the peer review she had been working on, but her "fragmented state of mind and lack of time" prevent her from living up to "her typical standard of excellence." She sends off the peer review, anyway, blaming John for having distracted her with his warning not to argue with Lydia. Alice hurriedly repacks her suitcase and prepares to go to Stanford, where she will give a speech and then see Lydia, her youngest daughter.

That Alice's mind has become "fragmented" so easily after saying goodbye to John could be another early indication of her disease, and she is allowing it to get in the way of her work performance. It is also telling that she blames John rather that stepping back to examine the potential underlying causes of why her mind is so easily "fragmented." This is a form of denial that protects her from having to admit that something more serious might be going on in her mind.

Alice arrives at Stanford and finds the conference room full of people already, including an old classmate named Josh. Josh and Alice talk about her time teaching at Harvard and he tells her she should teach at Stanford instead. The head of Stanford's psychology department, Gordon Miller, interrupts their conversation and passes out champagne to toast a professor who just received tenure, an important achievement in any professor's career.

This scene highlights how at ease Alice has become in the academic world. Both Harvard and Stanford are Ivy League schools—the fact that she is respected at both highlights just how successful she has become.

Once the group is done toasting the professor and everyone has finished eating and drinking, Gordon introduces Alice as "the eminent William James Professor of Psychology at Harvard University." He praises her work she's done over the past 25 years in the field of psycholinguistics and her interdisciplinary work in studying "the mechanisms of language." Gordon calls Alice up to the stage to deliver her speech, and she thinks of how—unlike so many other people, her husband included—she has no fear of public speaking.

It is a further indication that Alice has truly achieved something great in her career that she has been asked to speak at Stanford and that others consider her "eminent" in the field. Her ease with speaking publicly—especially to a crowd of other well-respected professors at Stanford—demonstrates her comfort within her role, as well as the enjoyment she gets from talking about her research and findings.

Alice opens up her 50-minute presentation on "the mental processes that underlie the acquisition, organization, and use of language." This is information she has been presenting on for years, but it is also information that she herself had discovered and pioneered. She is comforted by the knowledge that her "contributions mattered" and would continue to matter for many years. However, as she goes over this familiar information, she becomes stuck on a word and "simply couldn't find" it, what it sounded like, or what letter it began with in her mind.

Alice has made a permanent mark on the field of psycholinguistics, and she is aware that her influence will be felt for years. Although this is the result of many years of hard work and long hours, it also shows that this is a field she truly thrives in and is passionate about. This is not a career she entered solely for money, but to contribute something that "mattered." It is ironic, then, that she, who has helped pioneer discoveries in a language-based field, suddenly loses a word. Furthermore, this is a word that she is familiar with and uses in her work. The loss of language, no matter how much, is thus far more alarming thing than misplacing keys or glasses for Alice.

As an unfamiliar sense of panic arises, Alice wonders if the champagne she drank is to blame for this "lost" word. She doesn't usually drink before speaking because she wants to stay sharp when answering questions and engaging in "rich, unscripted debate" with the audience. Alice's mind "scour[s] its corners for the word and a rational reason for why" she can't find it, but she is unable to find one and instead focuses on breathing to ease her panic.

Alice's panic further reveals just how comfortable she had become with public speaking and how good she is at it: this is an unfamiliar problem for her, and the unfamiliar scares her. This is the first time Alice is shown trying to understand why she has forgotten something, which is the first step to admitting something serious might be going on.

Alice "replace[s] the still blocked word" with "thing" and moves on to another slide in her presentation. Although the pause she took to find the missing word seemed awkward to her, she sees no sign that the audience took much note of it until she sees Josh whispering and smiling to the woman next to him. It's not until her plane is landing at LAX that Alice remembers the word she had "lost": lexicon.

In this case, Alice's forgetfulness also makes her self-conscious and keenly aware that those around her will judge her based on her performance. She has a strong reputation, so having to replace "lexicon" with "thing" is humiliating to her. The fact that Alice is still thinking about losing a word when she's at the airport much late also shows that this experience stuck with her and cannot be ignored or put aside in the same way she brushed off misplacing items around the house.

Alice's daughter Lydia has been living in Los Angeles, California for the past three years. She should have graduated college by now, but after taking a gap year in Europe Lydia had decided to pursue acting in LA instead of formal education. Alice is disappointed, especially because she thinks Lydia is smarter than her other two children, both of whom went to college and went on to become a doctor and a lawyer. Part of Alice's anger is directed at herself for having allowed Lydia so much freedom growing up. To Alice's surprise, John supports Lydia's decision.

Lydia is clearly the rebel of the family, choosing traveling and acting over intellectual achievement at a prestigious university like the rest of the Howlands. Because Alice has dedicated so much of her life to academics, it is difficult for her to understand why Lydia would not want to do the same. Unlike John, who supports Lydia, Alice cannot understand her daughter's choices, which is at the root of the tension between them.

Alice arrives at Lydia's Los Angeles apartment, but is greeted with confusion because Lydia thought Alice was supposed to arrive at 8:00 and it's only 5:45. Lydia looks "indecisive and panicky," but invites her mother in and they share an awkward hug. Alice notes that Lydia has lost weight and worries that it was on purpose to get roles, but doesn't say anything. Lydia tells her mother that she made reservations at a restaurant for 9:00 and excuses herself to call them.

Lydia's "panicky" look when Alice arrives reveals that she, too, is aware of the tension and is worried about whether or not they will, as John said earlier, "battle" over something. The mother and daughter are clearly not comfortable with each another, but Alice's attention to changes in Lydia's weight also reveals how concerned she is for her daughter—in spite of their differences, she loves her deeply.

Alone in the living room of the apartment, Alice notices that it is freshly cleaned and there is a pile of men's shoes by the door. Lydia comes back into the room and Alice asks her about her roommates. Lydia tells her that they are at work and that their names are Doug and Malcolm. Alice notices a peculiar look in Lydia's eyes when she mentions Malcolm, but Lydia changes the subject and says they should go. Alice first excuses herself to the bathroom, where she takes note of what's on the counter. The sight of Lydia's tampons reminds Alice that she hasn't had a period in several months. She isn't alarmed by this because she's near 50 and is likely menopausal. Before leaving the bathroom, Alice sees a box of condoms and decides to ask Lydia more questions about Malcolm.

Despite their struggling relationship, Alice knows Lydia well enough to be able to tell just by looking at her that something is going on between her and Malcolm. It is also telling that Alice spends so much time looking around Lydia's bathroom: this is how she feels most comfortable getting to know her daughter and what is going on in her life. The sight of condoms also forces Alice to confront a new worry: what if Lydia gets pregnant? Between the look on Lydia's face when she mentioned Malcolm and the condoms in the bathroom, Alice has a sense that her daughter is having a serious relationship with him and wants to know what kind of person he is and what this could mean for Lydia's future.

Alice and Lydia go to a "trendy" place in downtown Los Angeles for dinner and order dinner and some drinks. Lydia asks a few mundane questions about the family and Alice asks her where she met her roommates. Lydia begins to tell her she met them while working at Starbucks just as a waiter comes and takes their orders. As the waiter walks away, Alice repeats the question, which irritates Lydia and makes her ask Alice why she doesn't "ever listen to anything" she says.

This early part of Alice and Lydia's conversation reveals that they only safe topics of conversation between them are those that have to do with other people, not themselves. Lydia's immediate jump to irritation with Alice having to repeat her question indicates that she feels misunderstood by her mother. Lydia asks Alice why she doesn't "ever listen," indicating that this is an issue that has been simmering between them for some time.

Lydia and Alice discuss how much Lydia is working and Alice notes that Lydia's schedule doesn't leave her "a lot of time for acting." Lydia explains that she isn't cast in anything at the moment, but is taking an acting workshop and auditioning for parts. Alice asks Lydia "what exactly is [her] plan" in LA, and Lydia responds that she's not going to stop what she's doing. This leads to a "dangerously familiar conversation" between them. Alice tells Lydia eventually she will "need to be [financially] responsible," but Lydia argues that she might make enough from acting. They argue over Lydia not going to college, but suddenly Lydia reveals that John is paying for her acting workshops. Alice doesn't respond because "[w]hat she wanted to say next wasn't meant for Lydia."

Alice perceives the fact that Lydia is not cast in any plays and is simply taking workshops as a sort of failure, which is why she wants to know Lydia's "plan." Alice wants nothing more than for all of her children to succeed like she and John have, so it is both frustrating and concerning to her that Lydia seems to be failing by their family's standards. Like her argument with John over Lydia, this argument with Lydia is "dangerously familiar," something they have tried and failed to resolve between them more than once in the past. When Lydia reveals the fact that John is financially supporting her workshops, Alice sees this as a betrayal. John knows Alice's feelings about Lydia's choice, and, to Alice, it seems as if he has gone behind her back to do something that he knows she wouldn't agree with.

Lydia accusingly says to Alice, "You've never even seen me act." Alice admits to herself that Lydia's right and remembers the time John had flown to LA to see Lydia in a play while Alice stayed behind with some "urgent things" that had to be done, although she no longer remembers what they were. Alice worries about what will happen to Lydia if acting doesn't "pan out." Remembering the condoms in the bathroom, Alice also worries about what might happen if Lydia gets pregnant and finds herself "trapped" in an unfulfilling life. In Lydia, Alice sees "so much wasted potential, so much wasted time" and tells her, "Life goes by too fast." Lydia agrees.

Lydia's accusation highlights a specific stubbornness on Alice's part. Not only does she not like Lydia's decision, she has not made an effort to see her act and therefore cannot possibly know whether Lydia is good at it or not. This also shows that Alice's bias against Lydia's acting has no basis other than the fact that Lydia has chosen it over college. Lydia recognizes this and believes that if Alice would come to see her act, then Alice would admit that she is good at it and stop pressuring Lydia into going to college. Alice sees the potential for greatness in Lydia, but doesn't like that Lydia won't achieve this greatness in the way Alice wants her to.

The food Alice and Lydia ordered is brought to the table, but neither of them can eat at first. Alice mourns that they "always fell into the same battle" and never reached a compromise. She wants to hug Lydia, but there are "too many dishes, glasses, and years of distance between them." A few tables away, Alice and Lydia notice a sudden commotion as photographers start snapping pictures of a woman. Alice asks who the woman is and Lydia, embarrassed, tells her it's Jennifer Aniston.

Alice wants to be closer to Lydia and does not enjoy the "years of [emotional] distance between them," but her pride prevents her from backing down and accepting Lydia's choices, which is the only way they'll be able to grow closer. In the midst of this is Alice's failure to recognize Jennifer Aniston, who is a well-known celebrity, particularly in the early 2000s when Still Alice *is set. This could be another indication of Alice's forgetfulness progressing without being noticed.*

As they eat dinner, Alice and Lydia carefully stick to "safe" topics of conversation. Alice recognizes that Lydia is still mad, and so she puts off asking questions about Malcolm. They finish dinner and begin walking to the car, but on the way a waiter comes running out after them to give Alice back her BlackBerry, which she had forgotten at the table. Alice doesn't remember using it at the table and decides she must have taken it out while searching for her wallet. Lydia looks at her "quizzically," as if she wants to say something, but doesn't and they go back to her apartment without talking.

Once again Alice experiences a disturbing lapse in her short-term memory. This is something that she, again, is easily able to brush off because it is such a seemingly minor thing, but Lydia's quizzical glance shows that she harbors a different suspicion. For most of the dinner, however, they have stuck to "safe" topics, and Lydia's choice not to say something to Alice when she clearly wants to is yet more evidence of their difficulty with being honest and open.

Alice returns home and, as she predicted, John is not there. She searches the kitchen for a note or message from him explaining his absence, but there is none and she becomes angry at him. In a bid to fight off her irritation, Alice decides to take a run. This is something she used to do every day, but she had "neglected" the habit in the past few months. Even though she tries to tell herself that the reason she didn't bring her running shoes to LA is because she knew she wouldn't have time, the truth is that she forgot.

Alice's irritation at John this time is about his failure to be there for her in the way she wanted him to be—he has chosen work over being available to her. Once again Alice also talks herself out of being concerned about her faulty memory, instead finding excuses instead of admitting that she wasn't able to remember her shoes for an activity that she is used to doing every day.

Whenever Alice goes for a run, she "invariably follow[s] the same route," which is about five miles long. She imagines running in the Boston Marathon one day and running "well into her sixties." Although the first portion of her run is through a crowded area where she needs to stay focused, the rest of it is spent "completely in the zone" and she is able to let go of her worries over Lydia and anger with John.

Alice's thoughts about running for years to come shows just how sure she is that that she is healthy: she is planning for a happy future that involves her being able to do the things that bring her joy. Alice's life is all about thinking, worrying, and planning, but running gives her an escape from all that because it gives her something to focus on other than work, family, and even herself.

Alice stops running when she gets to JFK Park. She feels more relaxed and prepares to walk home, but at a crosswalk she is grabbed by "someone selling God" and it startles her. Alice escapes across the street, but suddenly finds that she doesn't know where she is. She recognizes different buildings and is having no problem reading signs, but "they somehow didn't fit into a mental map that told her where she lived relative to them." In what "felt like panic," Alice continues walking without knowing where. The noise of the traffic becomes "unbearable," so Alice closes her eyes for a moment. When she opens her eyes, she just as suddenly remembers how to get home.

Alice's feeling of being lost even in the most familiar of places is reminiscent of her early experience losing a word during her presentation: the subject matter of that presentation and the geography of this place are both extremely familiar to her, but she is inexplicably lost in them. Once again, Alice panics, unable to account for what is happening and confronted with a memory lapse that she cannot explain away or ignore. The description of the noise around her as "unbearable" also implies that she is becoming more sensitive to sound and at least part of her confusion is due to sensory overload, something she might not have been as prone to before.

Alice walks back home as quickly as she can. John is home when she gets there. John asks about Lydia, which reminds Alice that she had been mad at him. She confronts him about funding Lydia's acting workshops, but John refuses to stay and talk because he has to go back to work. John asks Alice if she wants to walk with him and talk on the way, but she tells him she needs to stay home to talk to him. John tells her she's being "awfully needy," which puts an end to the argument. John kisses her goodbye and walks out the door.

When John tells Alice that she is being "needy," he unwittingly makes her feel ashamed of herself and unwilling to share her experience in Harvard Square with him. Alice has always been strong and independent; she does not want to lose that part of her identity in John's eyes. This situation also highlights John's lack of emotional intelligence. He is unable to see that Alice has just been through something traumatic and is craving his presence and possibly some reassurance. Instead, he again chooses to go back to work and leaves her alone.

Now that Alice is alone, "with no one to confess to or confide in," she feels "the full emotional impact" of the disorientation she experienced on her run. Shaking, Alice thinks back to the "lost" word during her presentation and her missed periods and looks up the symptoms of menopause. Among them are "disorientation, mental confusion, memory lapses" as well as mood swings and irritability. Alice accepts this explanation for what happened but makes a note to see a doctor. Comforted, Alice reads some articles and goes to bed before John makes it back home.

Without John there, Alice feels freer to vent to her emotions, showing just how unwilling she is to show weakness around her husband. However, John's departure also leaves her free to really think about her recent memory problems. She is able to find something that she accepts as a solution (menopause), allowing her to continue to live in denial of how serious her problems may be for a little longer.

OCTOBER 2003

Alice enters her office with one of her graduate students, Dan, right behind her. Dan is working on his thesis research and Alice is helping him edit and revise his research paper. Alice gives Dan his rough draft with handwritten notes in the margins and he asks her what the reference is for one of her notes. Alice is typically very quick to remember the details of the different scientific studies, but she struggles to remember this one. Eventually, however, she does remember it and Dan leaves her office to go revise his paper.

The fact that Alice has been chosen by Dan as his thesis adviser shows that she's not only successful at research, but also as a teacher. The fact that she is able to remember details of various scientific studies offhand also highlights just how knowledgeable she is in the field of psycholinguistics. She does not just know the general findings, but details that one only learns from closely studying and getting to know them over time.

Alice turns to her to-do list and sees the next item says "Eric," but she can't remember what it means. She searches her email for a clue but can't find one. Frustrated, she throws out the to-do list and makes a new one that includes calling the doctor. These types of "disturbances" with her memory are happening more frequently now and she decides she can no longer put off seeing a doctor.

Alice's decision to see a doctor is a good sign that she's ready to admit something is wrong, but her earlier internet search has also convinced her that the only thing that's going on with her is menopause. She does not yet suspect that her memory problems might be indicative of something serious or abnormal.

Alice and John walk together to a restaurant for Alice's 50th birthday dinner. Their daughter, Anna, and her husband, Charlie, are already there. Both Anna and Charlie are successful lawyers at a major law firm. Alice notices that Anna is holding a martini, which means that Anna is not pregnant yet even though she's been trying to conceive. Alice thinks Anna should wait because pregnancy might disrupt her career, but Anna insists on starting a family right away.

At this point, Alice is able to take a more detached view of Anna's attempt to get pregnant. Because Alice has no reason to suspect she won't be healthy and alert for many years to come, she feels no anxiety to meet her grandchildren as soon as possible. In fact, she worries about all the consequences of a pregnancy for Anna, who is just beginning to achieve success in her career just as Alice was when she had Anna.

Alice's worry for Anna's career if she gets pregnant is rooted in her own experience. She thinks back to the time when she was starting her family and how difficult that made it for her to succeed at work. Alice had seen other women with "promising careers" lose them when they started having children and remembers how difficult it was for her to see John, her "intellectual equal," flourish in his career while hers slowed down. Alice doubts that John would be as successful as he is if their roles were reversed.

Alice's early struggle to juggle young children, her career, and her marriage shows just how much she has had to overcome to achieve her level of success. Furthermore, these are not problems which John had to face to the same degree as a father. Because of Alice's experience and the experience of her female colleagues, she sees motherhood almost as a threat to a woman's career, which further explains her anxiety over Anna's decision to start a family so early in her law career.

Alice, John, Anna, and Charlie all exchange pleasantries while they wait for Tom, to arrive. Tom, Alice's son, is in his third year of medical school at Harvard, studying to become a thoracic surgeon. Once Tom arrives, they are seated and talk turns to Lydia. Anna takes "transparent pleasure" in the fact that Lydia is not in college because it makes Anna "the smartest, most successful Howland daughter." She asks if Lydia's been cast in anything yet and John tells her about a play he'd seen her in. This reminds Alice that John is paying for Lydia's acting workshops and reminds herself to talk to him about it later.

Alice and John are both ambitious people, and it becomes obvious in this conversation that they've passed this quality down to their children. Success for them, however, is measured in tangible achievements, which is why Anna believes she is more successful than Lydia, who has chosen emotional fulfillment over more traditional definitions of success. This also further highlights how different Lydia is from the rest of the Howland family.

Tom asks John about a "tagging experiment" John is working on. John immediately dives into the conversation and Alice remembers back to when John used to talk this enthusiastically to her about his research. It has been a long time since he's talked with her in so much detail about his job, and she realizes she only knows the "barest skeleton" of what he is doing. She wonders who got bored with these discussions first, "he in the telling, or she in the listening."

John's enthusiastic conversation with Tom further emphasizes how distant Alice and John have grown in their marriage. For Alice, the fact that John doesn't talk with her like this anymore is proof of lacking something they had in the past but have gradually lost. However, she also admits her own culpability when she admits to becoming bored by his research somewhere along the line.

Dinner is brought out and they all enjoy it together, ending with an "off-key" performance of "Happy Birthday" and Alice blowing out the candle in a piece of warm cake. John wishes Alice a happy birthday and toasts her "next fifty years."

John's final toast to Alice's "next fifty years" shows that, like Alice herself, he is confident that she has many healthy years ahead of her. The fact that they are so comfortable and confident in the future contrasts with Alice's growing unease about her memory problems and implies that Alice's forthcoming years may not be as healthy as they assume.

Alice goes to the restroom and looks in the mirror. At 50 years old, Alice doesn't feel like she is "old" yet, but notices that her "golden brown eyes appeared tired even though she was fully rested, and the texture of her skin appeared duller, looser." She knows she is aging, but she feels "young, strong, and healthy" aside from the memory lapses. Her image in the mirror makes her think of her mother, who died when she was only 41, and her sister, who would have been 48 now.

Alice is willing to admit that she is aging, but she doesn't feel it. Her body is in good shape, and she still finds herself attractive and feels "young." This image of herself stands in stark contrast with what is happening in her mind, which seems to be aging and degenerating in spite of her physical body's condition.

When Alice sits on the toilet, she notices she's started her period and she begins to consider the possibility that her symptoms are not menopause-related, but potentially something much more serious. Terrified, Alice begins sobbing in the bathroom. Anna hears her, knocks on the door, and asks if she's okay.

Again, once Alice is alone, her mind drifts to the problems she has been having. The arrival of her period signals that she may have been mistaken in her self-diagnosed menopause, which forces her to truly confront the possibility that something serious is causing her short-term memories to disappear.

NOVEMBER 2003

Alice goes to see Dr. Tamara Moyer, who has been her regular physician for the past 22 years. Alice tells her that she's been having memory problems and thought they were normal symptoms of menopause, but now she wants Dr. Moyer's opinion because her period has since come back. Alice describes the memory problems she's been having and is comforted by the fact that Dr. Moyer doesn't seem worried.

Although Alice is finally seeking medical advice about her forgetfulness, her choice to start the appointment off by describing her most mild forgetfulness instead of bringing up the more concerning events indicates that she's not quite ready to come to terms with the extent of her memory problems. Dr. Moyer's lack of apparent concern is what gives Alice the courage to then describe the most serious memory problems she's had.

However, when Alice tells Dr. Moyer about becoming disoriented on her run, Dr. Moyer looks up and is apparently concerned. Dr. Moyer asks Alice if she experienced any other physical symptoms, like dizziness or numbness, and some other questions about aspects of her lifestyle like sleeping habits, medications, and illnesses Alice tells Dr. Moyer that she hadn't experienced any other physical symptoms and describes her healthy lifestyle. As Dr. Moyer asks more questions, Alice struggles to follow "the reasoning behind them."

Becoming disoriented in a familiar place is obviously not normal, which is why Dr. Moyer becomes suddenly interested. Her questions are designed to root out potential causes that could explain it (numbness might indicate a stroke, for example, and disorientation could be a side-effect of a new medication). The fact that Alice, a highly intelligent woman, is struggling to understand why these questions are being asked could be due to the rapid deterioration and death of her neurons, or simply rooted in a denial of the problem.

Dr. Moyer's questions turn to Alice's mental state and she asks Alice if she's feeling anxious or if she could be depressed. Alice had experienced a depressive episode after the deaths of her mother and sister, so she knows she'd be able to recognize it if she was: "This was entirely different. This wasn't a job for Prozac." Dr. Moyer asks Alice a few final questions about her drinking habits (Alice only drinks socially) and drug habits (Alice doesn't use drugs) before Alice asks if she's in menopause. Dr. Moyer tells her that she is in menopause, but that she doesn't think menopause is the cause of her memory problems.

As Dr. Moyer's questions turn to Alice's mental state, there is a small shift in Alice's attitude. Her mental assertion that "This wasn't a job for Prozac" indicates that she's aware of how serious this could possibly be: it's not going to be a simple explanation and a pill won't make it go away. Yet even though she admits that her symptoms are not the kind that will have a simple solution, Alice is not ready to have it confirmed that they are not attributable to something normal like menopause.

Dr. Moyer's answer worries Alice. With "her tidy and safe explanation shattered," Alice begins to fear hearing what is actually wrong with her. Alice asks if her memory problems would clear up with more sleep, but Dr. Moyer doesn't think this will help. Instead, Dr. Moyer tells Alice she needs to have bloodwork, an MRI, and other tests done. This will reveal if she's had a stroke or if she has a tumor, which is something Alice hadn't considered before. Alice asks Dr. Moyer what happens if the test comes back clean, but Dr. Moyer avoids answering the questions, which makes Alice suspicious.

Both of Dr. Moyer's primary concerns (a stroke or a tumor) pose a real physical threat to Alice, which does concern her very much. However, Dr. Moyer's refusal to directly answer Alice's question about what happens if the tests are clean indicate that Dr. Moyer might actually be concerned that Alice's memory problems are even more serious than a brain tumor.

William James Hall is not a very pretty building like those found in Harvard Yard, but the view from Alice's **office window** is stunning. It looks out over the Charles River and the window "also provide[s] her with a healthy awareness of life outside of Harvard." Before she achieved tenure, her office was in the interior of the building, and because she couldn't see outside, she would unwittingly work until well into the night.

The fact that Alice has an office with a window further emphasizes how successful she has become in her field. It is clear that Alice sees her office and the window as her natural reward for having spent so many years buried in her work for long hours with little awareness of life outside of her office. The fact that Alice can now look out a window also means that she is free to enjoy more of life outside of the confines of her work.

Alice walks away from her **window** to check her to-do list. She is scheduled to go to a conference in Chicago that afternoon, but first she has a cognition class to teach. Although she is familiar with the material she's covering, Alice enjoys taking an hour before teaching to go over the material, both new and old. The addition of newer things into older lectures "ke[eps] her passionate about her course subjects and mentally present in each class." Teaching is Alice's favorite part of her job because it gives her the opportunity to "inspire the next generation in the field."

Although Alice's research is what helped her achieve so much success, it is her role as a professor that means the most to her. By inspiring the next generation of psycholinguists, Alice is also cementing her place in the field for generations to come. This also shows that her reputation is very important to her. It's not just a big part of her identity in the moment, but what she will be known for even after she's retired and no longer actively participating in research.

Before going to the classroom, Alice checks her email and finds a message from a colleague named Eric at Princeton, telling her that he is still waiting for her to send some slides for a presentation, which reminds Alice that this is what "Eric" meant on her to-do list several week before. Alice quickly sends the slides off, reassuring herself that there is "no harm done."

This is the first time Alice has been confronted with the danger her memory problems pose to her work. Sending slides is something Alice would normally never have forgotten to do, and while she is able to shake it off by telling herself there's "no harm done," the implication is that harm might have been done to her professional relationship with Eric. More importantly, this might happen again, but next time it could actually cause a problem.

Alice gets to her classroom and opens her laptop to find the file with her lecture material in it. There are several files: "Acquisition, Syntax, Semantics, Comprehension, Modeling, and Pathologies." Looking at them, Alice finds that she can't remember which one she is supposed to be covering even though she has just spent an hour studying it.

This forgetting is even more concerning than forgetting to send the slides because, like the lost word from her Stanford presentation, there is an audience this time. This experience is also more serious because she's not just forgetting a word, but a whole lecture that she had been studying moments before. It is also a memory problem that has a direct effect on her role as a professor, which, as has been seen, is the role of which she's most proud.

Since her appointment with Dr. Moyer, Alice has become increasingly anxious about her memory lapses and decides that they are not "normal." She believes she has a brain tumor, but still hasn't told John about it because she doesn't want to "freak out or worry" him until she has answers, which she will not get until after the conference in Chicago. Frustrated, Alice asks the class what they're scheduled to cover that day and they tell her it's "Semantics." Alice reassures herself that her students believe she was just too busy to remember the syllabus and have no way of knowing she had just been studying the material.

Alice's choice not to talk to John about her memory problems or her fear that she might have a brain tumor is yet another example of how averse she is to showing weakness in front of him. This is also suggests just how scared Alice is of what might be wrong. Although she is afraid that John will "freak out," she's also worried she won't be able to hide her own fear. In her classroom, however, Alice is more at ease and is confident in her ability to hide the panic and confusion she feels at not being able to remember studying the lecture material just minutes before entering the classroom.

Outside, Alice enjoys a relaxed walk home in the crisp autumn weather. As she arrives home, Alice calls out to let John know she's there. John emerges from his study and is visibly confused, but says nothing. Panicked, Alice believes something has happened with their children and waits for an answer. John asks her, "Aren't you supposed to be in Chicago?"

After a long day of making seemingly small but concerning mistakes at work, Alice's forgetting to get on a plane to Chicago is the most dramatic. Alice enjoyed and savored the walk home, which shows just how entirely she had forgotten that she had a flight at all. More importantly, this is an experience that John is seeing for himself—there is nothing Alice can do to hide it from him.

At her next appointment, Dr. Moyer tells Alice that her bloodwork and MRI came back normal. She tells Alice that they can "wait, see how things go" over the next three months, but Alice tells her that she wants to see a neurologist.

Alice's immediate decision to see a neurologist shows that she recognizes that her memory problems are only intensifying rather than getting better—she can no longer deny the severity of the issue.

DECEMBER 2003

Alice is looking forward to the first snow of the season as she and John walk to Eric Wellman's annual holiday party for Harvard's psychology department. Nothing very "extraordinary" happens at these parties, but Alice loves going to them because the people there all feel like family. Not only are they close in their personal lives, but they share a common ambition: "to understand the mind, the know the mechanisms driving human behavior and language, emotion and appetite." It can be a stressful and "strange" life, but "they were in it together."

Alice sees her colleagues as extended family, and this holiday party is their chance to socialize and enjoy their friendship without discussing work or deadlines. Alice has spent half of her life buried in work and raising children, and her colleagues likely fill the void of not having time for much of a social life. This passage hints that Alice may not have a close relationship (or any relationship) with her extended family, since it seems she only has John and her colleagues to share her experiences with.

At the party, Alice grabs a cream puff and goes in search of John. As soon as she finds him, Dan comes in with his new wife, Beth, who is wearing a bright red dress. Alice says she'll have another glass of wine even though the one in her hand is still half-full. Alice excuses herself to go to the bathroom, finishing her wine on the way. Before going back to John, Alice stops in the kitchen to listen to the wives talk and get another glass of wine.

Earlier in the story, Alice mentioned that she usually only drinks socially in small doses, so it seems out of character for her to be drinking as much wine as she is. She may even be drinking more than she normally would because she has forgotten how much she's already had to drink, illustrating the fact that her memory problems are starting to manifest in even more aspects of her life.

Alice finds John having a conversation with Eric, Dan, and a woman in a red dress. When the conversation between John and the others comes to a pause, Alice introduces herself to the woman in the red dress. The woman looks at Dan before nervously answering that she's Beth. Alice doesn't recognize her and asks Beth if she's a new postdoc fellow. Beth tells Alice that she is Dan's wife and Alice congratulates her and tells her how nice it is to "finally meet" her. Nobody replies to this, but Alice notices Eric looking from her wine glass to John. John tells Alice they should leave, leading her to the door. Alice means to ask what happened but forgets when she sees that it's snowing.

In this case, the fact that Alice had been drinking is used to excuse her forgetting Beth so soon after being introduced to her. What is alarming, however, is that Alice does not quickly recover her memory of this as she has with other memory disruptions in the past. In fact, she forgets the fact that she had forgotten something in the first place after leaving the party. This brings up the possibility that there are other things she's done (or not done) and completely forgotten about.

Three days before Christmas, Alice goes to the Memory Disorders Unit at Massachusetts General Hospital to see Dr. Davis, a neurologist. Alice explains her memory problems to Dr. Davis, who asks her how long she's been having these issues and advises her to bring a family member with her in future because her memory problems might prevent her from being a "reliable source" of what's happening. Embarrassed, Alice agrees to bring someone with her next time.

When Dr. Davis tells Alice that she needs to bring someone with her because she might not be a "reliable source," it chips away at Alice's identity as an independent person who is capable of taking care of herself. It sends the subtle message that she might no longer be in control of her own life and needs someone else to answer for her. Furthermore, the fact that Dr. Davis is so quick to tell her he wants her to come back is the first indication that he thinks she has a serious condition that will require follow-up.

Dr. Davis asks Alice many of the same questions about her lifestyle, eating habits, sleeping habits, and mood that Dr. Moyer asked. Dr. Davis then asks questions about her family history and Alice tells him about the premature deaths of her mother and sister and her father's more recent death due to liver failure as a result of his lifelong alcoholism. Alice only has "limited knowledge" of her extended family's history.

Alice's mother's abrupt death at such a young age makes it difficult to judge whether or not she had a condition that might have been passed on to Alice. Additionally, her father's alcoholism makes it difficult to differentiate between symptoms of a serious disease and typical behavior of a lifelong alcoholic.

Dr. Davis tells Alice that he is going to give her an address to remember. After that they will "do some other things" and he is going to ask her the address again. The address he gives her is "John Black, 42 West Street, Brighton." Dr. Davis then asks Alice to answer some simple questions about her age, the date, the season, where they are, the time of day, and gives her some simple cognitive tasks, and Alice is able to do them without trouble. When Dr. Davis asks her to repeat the address, however, she is only able to remember "John Black" and "Brighton." Dr. Davis gives her some options to fill in the rest of the information, but he does not tell her if she guesses right or not.

When Dr. Davis began asking questions, Alice was confident in her ability to sail through it because remembering an address is something she's never had trouble with in the past. She takes for granted the idea that she can recall such a simple thing without actively trying to keep it in her mind, which accounts for her bewilderment when Dr. Davis asks her to repeat it and she finds she only remembers half of the address. Alice is now confronted with undeniable evidence that she can't implicitly trust her short-term memory, causing her to question her mental faculties, which are the foundation of her identity as a professor and researcher.

Dr. Davis tells Alice that he has the results of her recent bloodwork and MRI, but he wants her to get some additional bloodwork and a lumbar puncture before coming back in a month. At her next appointment, she will have "neuropsychological testing" beforehand. Alice asks him if he thinks her problem is "just normal forgetting" and he tells her he doesn't think it is and wants to "investigate it further." Alice suspects that Dr. Davis knows what is wrong but doesn't want to tell her.

Once again, Alice asks a question that the doctor is unwilling to answer, preferring instead to tell Alice that she must wait and take more tests without explicitly telling her what they are looking for or what they are afraid they'll find. Just as she's afraid to show too much fear or weakness to John, Alice doesn't actively press her doctors for more answers because she is afraid of seeming "needy" (something John once called her) or too hysterical to handle the truth.

On the morning of Christmas Eve Alice looks through family photo albums. She hasn't labeled any of the pictures when she put them in, but that doesn't matter because Alice's "diligence" and strong mind is able to recall who is in the pictures, when they were taken, where, and what was going on that day. As she looks through her children's childhood photos of vacations and dance recitals, the photos "prompted other, unphotographed memories from that day." John, however, struggles to do the same.

Further proof of Alice's strength of mind is that she can look at a photograph and remember all the details about the day it was taken, which is something not even John can do. This also reveals just how much Alice loves her family—she is so easily able to remember even the most mundane details about their infancies and childhoods. Alice's long-term memory is seemingly still untouched by the issues plaguing her short-term memory.

Alice brings up Lydia's acting classes and tells John she wants to talk to him about paying for them "behind [her] back." John apologizes and tells her she's right, but that he disagrees that he shouldn't pay for it at all because they paid for their other two children to go to college. Alice tells John this is different because Lydia is not going to college, and Alice worries that not going to college will hold Lydia back. The conversation ends when John realizes he has to get to work before going to get Lydia from the airport. Before leaving, John tells Alice that Lydia is "going to be fine," but she doesn't answer. They have had this conversation before and have never reached an understanding. John keeps "his status as the favorite parent" while Alice remains the strict one.

This argument resembles the "bottomless" one Alice and John have had over "battling" with Lydia. Like that argument, this one ends with John running off to work, entirely oblivious to how important it is to Alice that they really hash out the problem and reach an understanding. While both John and Alice are naturally concerned for the future happiness and well-being of their children, this argument also reveals that Alice has a very clear idea of how they achieve that happiness while John prefers to trust them to judge for themselves. This is why John is considered the "favorite parent" and further explains the tension between Alice and Lydia. It also implies that Alice likely holds herself to the same standards of success to which she holds her children.

Alice becomes more "relaxed" in John's absence and looks back through the photo albums, which gives her "a renewed and reassuring confidence in the strength of her memory." However, she also knows that these pictures and the memories related to them are stored in her long-term memory, not the short-term memory with which she is struggling. Without the ability to retain short-term memories, Alice knows she will not be able to create new long-term ones.

It is notable that John's absence makes Alice feel "relaxed," much like it did after her first disorienting episode in Harvard Square during her run—it was only after John left that she could allow herself to feel the full weight of what had happened. In this situation, John's absence gives Alice the space and determination to really explore her ability to retain new memories. Much as she loves John, his presence is somewhat oppressive, as shown by how much more at ease she is when he's no longer there.

Alice hears the mail get dropped into the slot and gets an idea. She looks at each piece of mail (a holiday greeting card, an ad from a gym, phone and gas bills, and an L.L. Bean catalog) and then sets it down. She waits five minutes and then repeats to herself what each item is. She successfully remembers each item, but then realizes that the experiment in the doctor's office took longer and she needs is an "extended delay interval."

This first memory test Alice conducts on herself shows how resourceful and intelligent she can be. She is capable of reasoning and analyzing her situation and quickly devise a way to measure her own capacity for retaining new memories, which could also mean that she's also already devised ways to help supplement her failing memory. This would help explain why she waited so long to see a doctor at first—given her sharp mind, she may believe she can handle the problem herself.

Alice grabs her dictionary to pick a random word and lands on "berserk." Alice sets a timer and starts making the holiday dinner. The timer goes off and Alice correctly remembers the word. Alice continues "playing this game," increasing the number of words to remember and the time between picking and remembering them. The added difficulty does not prevent her from remaining "error-free."

This exercise gives Alice a renewed confidence in her mind and its ability to make new memories, which in turn helps alleviate some of the stress she feels over the other tests Dr. Davis will have her do at her next visit. However, she fails to account for the fact that she can retain these new memories because she is consciously trying to do so, unlike in Dr. Davis's office when she was so confident in her ability to remember the address that she didn't make a conscious effort.

Anna, Charlie, Tom, and John are in the living room and Lydia is talking to Alice about her acting classes. Even though Alice doesn't like Lydia taking these classes, she does not interrupt because she is so focused on making dinner and remembering her next round of words. But as Lydia continues to talk, Alice finds she can't "resist being interested" in what she has to say.

Thus far, Alice's pride has prevented her from accepting Lydia's choice to pursue acting. What is most notable in this scene is that when Alice instead chooses to listen to Lydia talk about her passion, Alice finds that she enjoys this and is more interested in it than she has ever been willing to admit before. This could help pave the way for them to become closer in the future.

Alice's timer to remember the words goes off, but instead of reciting the words she opens the oven and looks at the roast, which is obviously still undercooked. Suddenly, she realizes the timer was to tell her to remember her words, but she can't remember all of them. Lydia is still talking, and Anna calls in to ask Alice where the wine opener is. Alice tries to ignore the noise to remember the word, but to no avail. Lydia is still talking, so Alice snaps at her and tells her she doesn't want to hear about it. Lydia, "obviously hurt" turns away and then goes to help Anna. Once Lydia leaves, Alice remembers the words.

Unfortunately, Alice seems to have become so engrossed in what Lydia is saying that she forgets to keep the words she's trying to remember in her mind. Her anger at Lydia is actually just a projection—the person she's really angry at is herself since this failure on her part might mean that her short-term memory really is failing. There is also a similar feeling of sensory overload between this experience and her earlier one when she became disoriented in Harvard Square. Without truly realizing it, Alice has become extremely sensitive to noise and is no longer able to split her focus and multitask like she used to.

Alice grabs the ingredients for the white chocolate bread pudding she makes every Christmas Eve. When she grabs the eggs, she becomes confused: there are a dozen, but she doesn't think the recipe calls for a dozen eggs and no longer has her mother's handwritten recipe card for it. Furthermore, Alice "hadn't needed to refer to it in years" because she's been making it since she was a child. Still, Alice cannot remember how many eggs she's supposed to use. Instead, she turns to the other ingredients, but doesn't know where to start. Frustrated, Alice starts throwing the eggs into the sink.

This is the first instance of a disruption in Alice's long-term memory. The bread pudding recipe is something that has been with her most of her life, so the fact that she suddenly can't remember it shows that her forgetfulness is also starting to invade her long-term memories without her even realizing it. Furthermore, Alice becomes uncharacteristically emotional and angry over this situation, which is another sign that she is losing some mental equilibrium in her frustration and fear of what her symptoms might mean.

Alice turns to see a confused Lydia in the doorway. Lydia asks her what she's doing and Alice tells her that the eggs were expired and there won't be any bread pudding. Lydia tells her she will go to the store for eggs and make the pudding herself, and that Alice should go sit down with everyone else. Alice goes into the living room still "shaking," but no longer overcome by anger. Before she leaves, Lydia looks into the room and asks Alice how many eggs she needs.

Lydia is the only witness to Alice's emotional outburst, and Lydia is just as confused by this as she was when Alice forgot her BlackBerry at the restaurant in LA earlier. This is also the first situation in which Alice must turn to one of her children to take on her usual maternal role (making the bread pudding, in this case), needing to be calmed down and urged to rest in much the same way one might coax a child to calm down and rest.

JANUARY 2004

Alice is very nervous about her next appointment with Dr. Davis because the appointment is on January 19th, which is the same day her sister and mother died and "she'd never received good news on that day." Still, she goes in and takes some neuropsychological tests, many of which she is familiar with and involve simple recall and naming tasks, before being taken into his office. When Dr. Davis comes in, he is upset that Alice still has not brought a family member with her and insists that she brings someone with her next time.

The fact that Alice comes to this appointment alone, even though she had agreed to bring someone with her last time, indicates that she still has not talked to John about what has been going on. There is still a lack of trust on Alice's part, and fear of what John might think if she admits her fears to him. Unfortunately, the fact that Dr. Davis says there will be a next time also indicates that she is about to receive bad news.

Dr. Davis tells Alice that her physical tests had come back clean and ruled out cancer or a mitochondrial disease. He also tells her that she scored well in most of the neuropsychological tests but has a "recent memory impairment that is out of proportion to [her] age." She scored low on her memory tests "down to the sixtieth percentile in one." Dr. Davis says this indicates that Alice has "probable Alzheimer's disease." When Alice asks if the word "probable" means she might not have it, Dr. Davis explains that it requires a sample of brain tissue to study and that this is a clinical diagnosis.

Although Alice's worst fear (a brain tumor) has been ruled out, she is absolutely blindsided by her "probable Alzheimer's" diagnosis. However, the word "probable" leaves a small amount of room for doubt, which is shown when Alice directly asks Dr. Davis if that means she might not have it. The fact that a true confirmation of the diagnosis can only come from a sample of the actual brain tissue highlights how difficult Alzheimer's can be to identify and diagnose.

Alice denies that she could have Alzheimer's because she's only 50 but Dr. Davis explains that she has early-onset Alzheimer's, which typically occurs in people under 65 and usually has a "strong genetic linkage," which makes Alice think of her children. Alice asks what's next and Dr. Davis explains that there are medications she can take that will slow the disease's progress, but it can't be cured or stopped. He gives her a list of vitamins and other medications to start taking. Dr. Davis also asks her if her family knows about her appointment and she says no. He makes her promise to tell her husband. Dr. Davis tells her to come back in six months and encourages her to get in touch with Denise Daddario, a social worker who can help her with resources. Alice again reflects that nothing good happens on the 19th.

Although she was surprised by the diagnosis, Alice seems quick to accept it as truth. This could mean that, on some level, she knew Alzheimer's was a possibility. Alice continues to associate the 19th of January with the deaths of her mother and sister, but now this date is also associated with the death of her long-term hopes for the future. As Dr. Davis says, Alzheimer's cannot be reversed, nor can the progression stopped. Even though Alice will not physically die and may in fact live for decades to come, her mind will gradually die away and destroy her sense of self with it.

Back at her office, Alice looks through some of the literature Dr. Davis gave her and studies the descriptions of various symptoms. Alice realizes that, for her, eventually, there will be "no more language." This makes her think of all the books she had planned to read, papers she wanted to write, and experiments she wanted to perform. Alice looks back at her pamphlet to read about other symptoms, which include hallucinations, depression, irritability, problems sleeping, and apathy.

In the immediate aftermath of Dr. Davis's news, Alice is left by herself to consider all that is going to happen to her in the near future. In fact, she doesn't see much of a future for herself, especially with "no more language." Furthermore, language is something she's devoted her career to studying, so losing language means she will lose that major aspect of her identity.

Alice realizes that her knowledge of Alzheimer's is slim, but what she does know is that her hippocampus will be "mired in plaques and tangles" and that one day she won't recognize her own family. She decides to look up more information on the Internet, but just then John comes into her office and asks if she's ready to go. Looking at him, Alice feels that she's not "ready to turn herself in" and tell him yet because then it will "become real." She gets up and leaves the office with him.

The phrase Alice uses to describe telling John about her diagnosis, that she will have to "turn herself in," further illustrates her fear of admitting weakness or vulnerability to him. Not only will the diagnosis "become real" once she tells John, but she feels she will be changed in his mind because she is no longer as strong as he believes she is.

Alice and John go to Mount Auburn, the cemetery where her family is buried. She stops in front of three headstones: Anne Lydia Daly, Sarah Louise Daly, and Peter Lucas Daly. Neither John nor Alice speak while they stand in front of the headstones, and Alice wonders what he's thinking about. She also asks herself how she could have Alzheimer's and which of her parents may have had it. Peter had always been an alcoholic, especially after the night when he drove drunk and caused the car accident that killed Anne and Sarah. Later in his life, Alice remembers that he became belligerent and "nonsensical," which leads her to believe he may have had Alzheimer's.

Unfortunately for Alice, two of the people she might have confided in at this moment, her mother and Anne, are buried in the graveyard in front of her. Dr. Davis told Alice that her form of Alzheimer's (the early-onset variety) is strongly connected to genetics, which means at least one person in her family may have had it themselves and passed it onto her. Because of Peter's alcoholism, Alice never had reason to suspect that his belligerence or strange behavior was the result of Alzheimer's. So, by a cruel twist of fate, the same alcoholism that indirectly led to the deaths of Anne and Sara may have also prevented him from finding out about his possible Alzheimer's. Therefore, Alice would also have been unable to take precautionary measures for herself, such as taking medications or making dietary changes to designed to slow its progress.

In her mind, Alice blames Peter for her Alzheimer's and begins crying hysterically. Surprised, John holds her and lets her cry. Alice realizes that "no amount of crying would cleanse her contaminated brain" and John is probably worried, but she continues until she can't anymore. John asks her if she's okay and she nearly tells him about her Alzheimer's but doesn't. She worries about what he'll think because he "love[s] her mind" and she might lose it: "How could he love her with this?" She tells him she's just having a bad day and decides "she'd rather die than tell him."

John's surprise at Alice's sudden outburst highlights how unused he is to seeing her cry, although he is able to be there for her in the way she needs him to be. Still, Alice is unable to believe John will still love her when her mind no longer works the way it used to, which is why she is still unable to come clean about her diagnosis when he asks her. Not only would Alice "rather die than tell [John]," she would rather die than live to see the day he no longer loves her the way she loves him.

Alice experiences "impulsive thoughts of suicide," but is unable to act on them because she's not ready to die. However, she does decide to tell John about her diagnosis. When she tells him, John asks who she had seen and when. She tells him about Dr. Davis and that she's known for ten days. John tells her that Dr. Davis is wrong, and they argue over whether her forgetfulness is normal or not. John has trouble believing her, so she tells him about forgetting the bread pudding recipe and her disorientation in Harvard Square. When Alice tells him she's afraid of what she doesn't realize what else she's forgotten, John suddenly remembers the incident with Dan's wife. He tells her needs "to do some reading" and walks out of the room.

When Alice finally tells John about her diagnosis, he is predictably shocked by it. He is unable to reconcile his beliefs about Alice with his beliefs about Alzheimer's patients, which is why he doesn't believe Dr. Davis was right about the diagnosis. In fact, it isn't until John remembers having seen Alice forget something she should have known (the incident with Dan's wife) that he is willing to accept her diagnosis as a possibility. However, what Alice needs most is emotional support, which John doesn't give her, instead leaving her alone to go "do some reading" in another room without trying to comfort her.

FEBRUARY 2004

Stephanie Aaron, a genetic counselor, greets Alice and John with "a warm smile." John explains Alice's diagnosis and tells Stephanie that they want her screened for genetic mutations related to Alzheimer's. Stephanie asks Alice what she is "hoping to learn" and Alice tells her she wants to confirm her diagnosis and John tells her they think "it's a real possibility" that the diagnosis was incorrect. Stephanie then explains that a positive result is a confirmation, but a negative result isn't necessarily proof that she doesn't have Alzheimer's. Stephanie asks Alice if this makes sense, which Alice knows is a reasonable question given the "context," but is still mildly insulted. She tells Stephanie she understands.

In this scene, it is notable that John and Stephanie do most of the talking. In fact, only Stephanie bothers to ask Alice questions and to share her own thoughts while John takes charge when it comes to explaining her diagnosis and what kind of genetic mutations John wants Stephanie to look for. For Alice, this situation is somewhat humiliating because Stephanie asks her if she understands what's happening as if she were a child or incapable of understanding basic concepts. This treatment takes a heavy toll on Alice's identity as an intelligent and capable woman and foreshadows the struggles she will have to face as her illness worsens and people increasingly treat her differently.

Stephanie asks about Alice's family history, and Alice explains the issues her father experienced in his later years, including the fact that she doesn't "think he recognized [her] at all for the last several years." Alice also explains that Peter had never been to a neurologist. Upset by the conversation, John explains that Peter died of liver failure, not Alzheimer's, to which neither Alice nor Stephanie replies. After providing a few more details of her family medical history, Alice is taken back to have some blood drawn.

Unlike Alice, John struggles to hide his frustration and is still strongly in denial about even the possibility that Alice has Alzheimer's. This is shown by John's lack of patience with the questions about Peter: he knows that if they establish that Peter had Alzheimer's, it would increase the likelihood that Alice's diagnosis is correct, making the disease real for him as well as Alice.

Alice stares out the window as John drives. He tells her, "It's going to be negative," which prompts Alice to tell him that that wouldn't change anything. Although John thinks there's still room for doubt, Alice accepts her diagnosis from Dr. Davis. John has talked to him and believes that Dr. Davis only thinks Alice has Alzheimer's because "that's what he's trained to see." John tells her he thinks she's just "exhausted and stressed" and that it can be fixed. Alice thinks he "sound[s] right" and considers that she might actually be depressed and that the diagnosis is wrong.

Though Alice has accepted her diagnosis, it's clear that she doesn't want to do so. This is why it's so easy for John to convince her that her symptoms might be due to exhaustion, stress, depression, or anxiety. It is comforting to Alice to believe these things. Like her earlier belief that her symptoms were due to menopause, these causes could be easily treated and fixed, unlike the incurable Alzheimer's.

Stephanie does not smile at Alice and John when they walk into her office. She offers to go over the same information as in their last visit, but Alice tells her she doesn't need to and that she still wants the results. Stephanie tells Alice she's "positive for the PS1 mutation," confirming the Alzheimer's diagnosis. John questions the "false positive rate" at the lab that ran the test, but Alice tells him the test is positive and he goes quiet.

Stephanie's unsmiling expression when they see her confirms the results of Alice's tests even before Stephanie shares the findings. Still, John wants to believe that it could be wrong, that there is still a wide enough margin for error that he can hang onto the belief that Alice doesn't have Alzheimer's. This leaves Alice in the difficult position of having to convince him to give up hope in the idea that she is actually healthy, when she is the one who needs his *reassurance and support in this moment.*

Alice asks what this means for her kids, all of whom are in their twenties. Stephanie explains that they are all too young to be symptomatic, but they can have a test done that will tell them whether they carry the mutation, which results in Alzheimer's for all carriers. Stephanie asks if Alice has told them about her diagnosis yet, and Alice tells her she hasn't. Stephanie urges her to tell them soon, especially because Anna and Charlie are trying to conceive.

Alice's genetic mutation is one that guarantees the carrier will develop Alzheimer's, which further confirms her belief that her father must have had it. However, that also means she might be responsible for giving the carrier mutation to at least one of her children, and that child might pass it on to their children. However, this finding also gives her the ability to warn her children and, perhaps, to stop the pattern from continuing in her grandchildren.

Stephanie asks Alice and John if they have anymore questions and tells them she's sorry they didn't get the results for which they were hoping. On the way home, Alice and John are silent. Alice waits for him to say something, but instead of talking John "crie[s] the whole way home."

Once again, Alice wants some kind of comfort or conversation from John, but he wraps himself up in silence and cries to himself. This, again, leaves Alice in the role of comforter when the roles should be reversed, creating an additional emotional burden for her.

MARCH 2004

Ever since their visit to Stephanie, John struggles with seeing Alice take her medication and has stopped asking her for help finding things when he misplaces them. Alice wonders if this is because he's "too embarrassed to ask for help from an Alzheimer's patient" and listens to him search for whatever he's lost.

Alice has always been the one John turns to for help when he loses things, so the fact that he now stubbornly refuses to ask for her help chips away a little at her identity as his wife. It makes her self-conscious, but still she chooses not to help him, perhaps as an unconscious means of punishing him for not treating her like herself.

John finally finds what he's looking for and asks Alice if she's ready to go. He has agreed to walk with her to work every morning because she told him she was afraid of getting lost again. The real reason, however, is that "she simply wanted that time back with him." However, they do not walk next to each other and don't talk much.

Alice sees in her Alzheimer's the opportunity to get "that time back" with John that they've been lacking in their marriage. This shows that, in a way, her diagnosis has the potential to bring about positive changes.

Alice and John stop at Jerri's, a well-loved café near Harvard Square. Alice orders coffee, but John turns to her and tells her she doesn't like coffee before telling the barista to get Alice a tea with lemon. Alice insists on coffee and John doesn't argue, but when they leave the café, he asks her if she likes it. Alice doesn't like it's "acrid and unpleasant" taste but tells John it is "wonderful." Alice sips at the coffee until she gets to her office and can throw it away.

Like in the office with the genetic counselor, John tries to take control of this situation by reminding Alice she doesn't like coffee and trying to order for her. This subtly hurts Alice's pride, which is why she insists on getting the coffee even though John insists she doesn't like it. Furthermore, her refusal to admit that she forgot that she doesn't like coffee prevents her from admitting it tastes terrible because, again, she is not ready to appear incapable in John's eyes.

In her office, Alice reads an email from Anna rescheduling a dinner they planned to have together. Alice struggles to think of how to reply until her phone rings. Alice believes it is Anna calling her, but it is actually Lydia, who is excited to tell her about part she just got in a play. Lydia asks if Alice and John can come see it, but she's talking quickly and Alice struggles to keep up even after she stops. In fact, Alice has been struggling to understand what people are saying without "the aid of visual cues." Misconstruing Alice's silence as an effort to find an excuse not to go, Lydia becomes angry and ends the call.

Just like when Lydia got mad at Alice for repeating a question during their dinner in Los Angeles, Alice's symptoms are confused with long-standing issues between Lydia and Alice. In this situation, Lydia believes it's only natural that Alice would try to find a way out of having to see her act because she's done so in the past, so Lydia doesn't see Alice's silence as unusual. This highlights just how little faith Lydia has that Alice truly values her.

Alice regrets that Lydia hung up so quickly because what she wanted to say is that she had to check with John and be sure he could go. Since her diagnosis, Alice has been afraid to go far away from home without John to help her. So, while she wanted to see the play, she is "at the mercy of John's availability." Alice considers calling Lydia back, but thinks better of it and tries, unsuccessfully, to work. Alice doesn't "have time for Alzheimer's today."

The fact that Alice considers herself "at the mercy of John's availability" shows just how much things have changed in such a short time. Alice spent most of the summer traveling away from home, so this fear of traveling alone shows how much of her independence has already been surrendered to her disease. Still, Alice sees the necessity of life going on as usual for as long as she can, and her busy lifestyle leaves little time for her to struggle with symptoms of Alzheimer's.

Alice still goes on runs, but it's becoming "less and less effective at clearing her thoughts." Alice is preoccupied with thoughts about what she should be doing to be healthier but knows that, no matter what, "her functioning w[ill] deteriorate" more and more, leaving her unable to continue working at Harvard. She asks herself who she actually is, "if she [isn't] a Harvard psychology professor."

There is nothing Alice can do to completely stop her Alzheimer's from progressing, and one of the many cruelties of this situation is that she is aware that it means she'll lose her identity to a disease. More importantly, it means she will have to be the one who calls it quits on certain elements of her personality. This is particularly true of her identity as a Harvard professor: due to her tenure, she cannot be fired, so she will have to be the one to give up her position before her symptoms prevent her from being a good teacher.

Alice also wonders if she should spend every available moment with her kids and how she is going to tell them there's a 50 percent chance they're going to develop Alzheimer's too. Alice also worries about John and how much time he could devote to her without losing his own career because, as she knows, it's possible that she will live for decades, but will be entirely dependent on someone else to help her get dressed, eat, and even clean her. She worries she'll be such a burden that her kids will be relieved when she does die.

Alzheimer's will also have a profound impact on Alice's identity as a wife and mother, transforming her from a capable and responsible leader of the family into a burden that they will have to care for. More importantly, Alice fears the resentment her family might feel for her when she does become entirely dependent on them. This shows that Alice is starting to struggle with her sense of self-worth.

Alice briefly stops at a church even though she's not religious and thinks of who she should turn to for advice. She decides to go home to John but is "unarmed for the attack she faced when she walked through the door." John is upset with her because they were supposed to have dinner with friends. Alice can smell "booze on his breath" and tells him that she forgot about the dinner, blaming Alzheimer's. John insists that she must always carry her phone with her so he can find her if needed.

John's anger at Alice for not having her phone with her reveals his own latent fears of what life is going to be like with her as her symptoms worsen. However, it also further deteriorates Alice's sense of independence because what he's insinuating is that she can't be trusted to go places by herself anymore.

John walks away and sits on the living room couch, but Alice follows him. She sits on his lap and tells him that she's "so sorry [she has] this" and hates to think of how much worse it will get. She wipes away his tears and tells him she "can barely breathe" when she thinks about forgetting him, but they need to talk about what's going to happen. John downs the rest of his drink and tells her, "I don't know if I can."

Alice is trying to get closer to John and to have a real conversation with him in which they directly address the problems they will face in the near future. It is clear that Alice loves John deeply, but he still is unable to rise to the challenge in the way she needs him to, instead saying he is unsure in his ability to talk honestly with her about this.

APRIL 2004

Alice and John struggle to come up with a definitive plan for the future, especially because they are both a year away from being eligible to take a sabbatical year. They do decide to keep her diagnosis a secret from everyone except their children, and they plan on telling them about it when they are all home for Easter.

Because both Alice and John have achieved tenure, they can take a sabbatical year with each other soon. For them, this year symbolizes what might be the final time they are able to truly live with each other as husband and wife, after which Alice will likely have deteriorated to the point where she needs round the clock care and might not even remember John or their kids anymore.

With all the kids arriving home, Alice notes that Anna is turning down mimosas and a Bloody Mary in favor of water. However, she tells them that it's just because she is preparing for an insemination the next week. Alice is excited but worries about what might happen. She asks herself if she would have chosen to have children if she knew about her PS1 mutation and what Anna will choose to do when she finds out.

Although Anna is thrilled at the possibility of being pregnant with her first child soon, for Alice this means that the PS1 mutation might get passed down to one more generation. This thought terrifies her because, as a mother, she doesn't want to be the reason her children or grandchildren develop Alzheimer's for themselves in the future.

When Alice tells Tom, Anna, and Lydia about her Alzheimer's, and that she had been formally diagnosed several months before, nobody knows what to say. Tom asks if she's sure, so John tells him about the PS1 mutation. Tom asks if it's "autosomal dominant" and John says it is. They share a meaningful look and Anna frantically asks what that means. Tom explains that they each have a 50 percent chance of getting Alzheimer's, which means if Anna carries it then her baby will face the same odds.

Like John, their children have trouble believing Alice can have Alzheimer's. However, they are quicker to accept the diagnosis and the concern shifts from her to themselves—and, for Anna, her future children. As a biologist and medical student, Tom knows an autosomal dominant mutation means that all carriers will develop the disease.

Anna asks if they can get tested and Alice says that they can, but Anna is still worried about her baby inheriting it. Tom explains that there will "probably be a cure by the time any of our kids would need it." Anna, however, is upset that this cure might not come in time for herself and her siblings, and Alice explains that one of the bonuses of getting tested is that if they do carry the mutation then they could start preventative care early, should such care be discovered in time.

Although it isn't spoken, there is a deep sense of anger coming from Anna. For her—someone so dedicated to the idea of motherhood—this means that if she does get pregnant, she might soon find herself facing the same terrifying future as Alice, who she knows will one day forget them all and be unable to care for herself.

Lydia asks Alice what medication she is taking and if it will stop the Alzheimer's, so Alice explains her new regimen and that it will only slow down its progress. Tom observes that she must have caught it early because he hadn't noticed any changes in her yet. Lydia replies that she knew something was wrong because Alice "doesn't make any sense on the phone" and frequently repeats herself. John asks Lydia how long she's noticed these things and Lydia tells him it's been going on for about a year. Alice "sense[s] John's humiliation."

Ironically, it is the one child Alice is most distant from, both physically and emotionally, who has taken notice of the small changes in Alice's life that indicated something was wrong. In fact, Lydia had noticed changes even before Alice herself had. This forces John to confront the fact that he has not been as good a husband as he could be, since he failed to notice anything at all despite being around Alice on a daily basis.

Anna announces that she wants to get tested and Tom agrees that he wants to, as well. Lydia, however, stays quiet and seems to zone out before announcing that she "[doesn't] want to know."

Lydia's choice not to get tested shows that what she really wants is to enjoy and embrace life as much as she can, something she believes she'll have difficulty with if her test comes back positive, since it will force her to go on with the knowledge that one day she'll forget all of her experiences.

Anna sends Alice an email telling her that the insemination has failed, and she isn't pregnant. However, she's "not [...] upset" and hopes the genetic test she had done will also be negative. The day that Anna and Tom are supposed to get their results rolls around, and Alice becomes certain that one of them has tested positive when they don't arrive at her house on time. When they do come home, they are somber and quiet. Tom tells her that he tested negative, but Anna announces that she does have the mutation. However, she is still going through with in vitro once her embryos have had genetic testing to be sure they do not carry it. Alice envies the fact that Anna is able to make this decision for her children.

Although Alice is understandably upset that Anna has inherited the mutation, there is comfort to be had that modern technology can stop the pattern from continuing with Anna's future children. For Alice, this is bittersweet: she was unable to save her daughter the heartache of knowing she will develop Alzheimer's, but, in a sense, Alice's diagnosis will be the reason her grandchildren never suffer the same fate.

Although Tom tested negative, he looks "pale, shaken, fragile." Anna's news has dampened the relief he must have felt over his results because "they [are] a family, yoked by history and DNA and love," and he's always been close with Anna. Anna tells them that she will tell Lydia herself.

Although it isn't always made obvious, this shows that the Howlands are very close and love each other very much. What one of them suffers, they all suffer. On the other hand, it means they will always help each other get through these hardships.

MAY 2004

That May, Alice pays a secret visit to the Mount Auburn Manor Nursing Center to see what kind of care dementia patients receive there. A nurse there asks if she wants to look into it for a parent. Alice tells her yes and they go up to the dementia ward. On the way up, the woman compliments Alice's **butterfly necklace**. The necklace had belonged to Sarah, who had only worn it on special occasions, but Alice has recently started wearing it every day. It reminds her of her mother and something she had told her about a butterfly's "beautiful" life: "just because their lives were short didn't mean they were tragic."

Alice's butterfly necklace doesn't just remind her of a butterfly's "beautiful life" or her mother—it is also a reminder of the beauty she experienced in her own life. At just 50, Alice is very successful and has done incredible things. For Alice, this means that her life, like that of a butterfly, has not been tragic despite being shortened.

In the Alzheimer's ward, the nurse tells Alice that patients there are allowed to wander around the floor as much as they want and are never tranquilized. Alice notices that the patients there do not talk with one another, and the only sounds there are of eating and one woman singing the same line of a song over and over again. The nurse tells Alice that family members are always welcome, but Alice notices that only one patient has a loved one with them, "no wives, no children or grandchildren, no friends." Furthermore, the youngest patient there is 70. The cost of keeping a family member there is $100,000 a year, which worries Alice. She leaves quickly, deciding that "[s]he didn't belong here."

Alice is visiting this ward to see what kind of place she might have to live in one day, and it gives her is a sobering glimpse of her own future. She knows that there is nothing she can do to stop herself from deteriorating to the same condition as the men and women in this ward, but what scares her most is that there is only one person visiting a family member here. This seems to confirm her earlier fear that one day she'll be too much of a burden for her kids and they will resent her; she, too, will be shut away in a facility like this and her children will have no interest in visiting her.

On a beautiful spring day, "the kind of mythical day that New Englanders dreamed about," Alice goes to Ben & Jerry's to get a "triple-scoop Peanut Butter Cup in a cone." Alice had replaced ice cream with frozen yogurt years ago and is surprised at how much she missed the taste of ice cream. She sits down and thinks about Mount Auburn Manor, how much she never wants to arrive at the point where she needs to live there and considers how frequently she finds herself "making mistakes and struggling to compensate for them."

Aware of her bleak future, Alice's decision to get this rich, heavy ice cream shows how badly she wants to get simple joy from life while she can. She no longer sees the need to be cautious by choosing frozen yogurt over ice cream, instead getting what will make her happiest. This simple pleasure also helps her navigate her thoughts about the mistakes she is making and the increasing struggle to keep up with her old lifestyle.

While she sits and eats her ice cream, Alice notices the smell of flowers, the sweetness of the ice cream, and the smell of curry from a nearby restaurant. This, however, reminds her that "at some point, she would forget how to eat an ice cream cone" and that, "[a]t some point, there would simply be no point." Alice wishes she had cancer because that would be something to fight against, there are "no weapons that could slay [Alzheimer's]."

Despite the happiness Alice experiences while eating a giant ice cream cone and smelling the flowers nearby, Alzheimer's and all the pain yet to come loom over her. Most painful to Alice is that she can do nothing to stop this disease, and, ironically, finds herself wishing it was cancer even though cancer had been her worst fear just a few months earlier.

Alice considers what she wants from the life she has and realizes what she really wants is to hold Anna's baby, see Lydia act, see Tom fall in love, and have another sabbatical with John. She is surprised by the fact that "[n]owhere in that list was there anything about linguistics, teaching, or Harvard." Instead, she wants more beautiful spring days and ice cream cones, and "when the burden of her disease [exceeds] the pleasure of that ice cream, she wante[s] to die."

Alice's realization that what she really wants to do with the time she has left is spend it with her family is the beginning of her process of redefining success. At the end of the road in front of her, she sees herself surrounded by her family, not accolades and degrees. This also shows that her identity as a mother and grandmother truly is more important to her than her identity as a Harvard professor.

Alice decides she must make a suicide plan that she can follow through with when her disease gets to be too much. She doesn't want to ask John or the kids for help, so she pulls out her BlackBerry and creates a quiz that will test her long-term memory. It contains questions about the month, her home and office addresses, Anna's birthday, and how many kids she has. A daily alarm will remind her to take the quiz, and it includes a note that if she struggles to answer the questions then she should open the "Butterfly" file on her laptop.

Alice bases her daily quiz on the key aspects of her identity, long-term memory, and self-awareness. These are the things that she most fears losing, and so once she begins to lose one, she feels she'll be ready to die rather than risk becoming a burden to her family. Naming the file with her suicide plan "Butterfly" also ties in with her mother's message about living a beautiful life: Alice no longer wants to continue living once her life risks becoming tragic rather than beautiful.

Alice runs back to her classroom, afraid that she's late. She sits in an aisle seat and looks over her syllabus and to-do list. She notices that it's 10:10 and waits patiently. The students are "becoming restless" and talk about what the delay is about. Alice remembers that if a teacher is 20 minutes late, then the students can leave. She looks at the time (10:21 now), puts her stuff away, and stands up to leave. A couple of girls smile at her and she tells them, "I don't know about you guys, but I have better things to do" and walks out.

This is an alarming sign of how rapidly Alice is losing key aspects of her identity and signals that she may be having more difficulty living up to her usual standards than she realizes. With how seriously Alice takes her role as a professor, it can be assumed that if she were to become aware of this incident, she would feel obligated to step down from her position. However, this also highlights a flaw in her plan to stay on at Harvard for at least another year: because her problems are with awareness as well as memory, she might not be able to recognize her own shortcomings.

JUNE 2004

Alice goes to Dr. Moyer's office complaining of "difficulty sleeping." She tells Dr. Moyer that it takes her a long time to get to sleep and then she struggles to stay asleep due to the anxiety she's experiencing over her Alzheimer's. This is only half true because "she'[s] been sleeping like a baby." Dr. Moyer offers her an antidepressant or Restoril, but Alice says she wants a "stronger" sleeping medication. Dr. Moyer is hesitant and wants to talk to John, but Alice insists on getting the prescription. Dr. Moyer and Alice study each another for a minute before Dr. Moyer agrees to give her the prescription.

Although it goes unsaid, in this scene it is clear that Alice wants the sleeping pills to carry out her suicide plan when it is time. It is implied that this is something that Dr. Moyer understands. What Dr. Moyer also understands is that if she were in Alice's position, this might be what she would want for herself, too, which is why she ultimately writes the prescription.

Alice returns to Mass General Hospital for her checkup with Dr. Davis. She performs many of the same neuropsychological tests that she took during her last appointment, answering basic questions about her age, the season, the date, and her birthday. She is also asked to write a sentence, identify what's in some pictures, and name as many words as she can that begin in "s" and then "f." Alice is then given a newspaper story to read and then summarize. She answers some more questions, but when the neuropsychologist asks Alice for details about the newspaper story, Alice says she doesn't "really remember much" and is embarrassed.

Alice is used to considering herself an extraordinarily intelligent woman, which explains her embarrassment when she fails to repeat the newspaper story after hearing it moments before. She is being confronted with the fact that her above-average intelligence is not enough to save her from forgetting information shortly after hearing it for the first time.

Alice is led into Dr. Davis's office, where he and John are waiting for her. Alice does not feel like herself, but like "a character in a play." She sits next to John and wishes she could talk to him about what happened while she was away. Alice discusses the problems she's been experiencing, including night wandering, with Dr. Davis, who advises her to register with a program that sends her a personal ID bracelet that can be used to find her family's contact information if she gets lost.

Dr. Davis's suggestion that Alice get an ID bracelet echoes John's earlier insistence that she always keep her phone with her: it implies that she is rapidly losing the freedom of movement because she might be incapable of finding her way back home and needs others to take care of her. This intensifies the sense Alice has that she's "a character in a play" rather than herself.

Dr. Davis asks Alice about any other issues she's been having and if she's still running regularly. She says she runs daily, so Dr. Davis tells John he should run with Alice, especially because exercise has been shown to help slow the progress of Alzheimer's. John agrees to, but Alice "doubt[s] that he [can] commit to it" because he hates running.

Alice's doubt in John's ability to "commit" to running with her reflects her growing doubt in his ability to be there for her in the way she wants him to be, let alone the way she needs *him to be as her illness worsens.*

Dr. Davis asks Alice if she's informed anyone at Harvard of her diagnosis and she tells him she hasn't. Alice also shares that although she was able to perform her usual duties, "it took a lot more out of [her] than it did last semester." Dr. Davis warns her that she will have to make a plan for telling someone at Harvard about her Alzheimer's and that she needs to consider obtaining a living will and a power of attorney.

Dr. Davis's advice to Alice about letting someone at Harvard know about her condition and the need to get a power of attorney are additional reminders to Alice that the loss of her identity, independence, and ability to speak for herself is something she will soon face. Alice has always been successful at her job, but she knows that once she tells someone at Harvard about her Alzheimer's, it will mark the end of that period of her life.

John asks Dr. Davis about clinical trials for which Alice qualifies. Dr. Davis shares some information about a clinical trial for a drug called Amylix. It is a placebo-controlled, double-blind study, so there is no guarantee she would get the medication. John asks about different medications and therapies, but Dr. Davis isn't confident about most of them and they would prevent Alice from being able to take part in a clinical trial. John wants her to take a combination of different medications, but when Dr. Davis asks Alice what she wants to do, she decides to take part in the Amylix trial.

Alice takes a certain amount of pleasure in the fact that this is one thing about her life that she gets to make a decision about, especially because soon she will not be allowed to choose for herself because she'll lack the awareness necessary to do so. Alice's choice to take part in a risky trial also reflects her love of research and highlights how much her life has changed in just a short amount of time—rather than overseeing studies as an academic researcher, she is now participating in one as a subject.

JULY 2004

In July, Alice and John go to their home in Chatham Cape, leaving the hustle and bustle of their professional lives back in Cambridge. Alice knows that John has left somewhere but can't remember where, so she walks through the house and thinks. Typically, Alice would be completely relaxed and enjoying her free time, but this year she finds she is struggling. The rigid schedule she followed at Harvard had "provided a structure [...] that was familiar and comforting." Without this schedule, she loses track of the time and day, and sleeps too much.

Ironically, this vacation to get away from stress creates a new one: without a consistent schedule to help keep her oriented, Alice enters a rapid decline. Furthermore, at their beach house Alice lacks the same level of mental stimulation she had back at Cambridge. This stimulation likely helped keep some neurons alive, and without it, these neurons die quicker.

Alice leaves a note for John saying she's on the beach and heads out. Standing in front of the ocean, Alice spontaneously removes her clothes and wades into the water. As she swims, her Alzheimer's bracelet catches the moonlight and she finds herself thinking about her mother's **butterfly necklace**, her suicide plan, and all the books she wanted to read. She thinks about Edna Pontellier and Virginia Woolf and how they had also chosen to die by drowning. However, "in this moment, she didn't feel desperate. She felt alive and happy." She sees John on the beach, and, without a word, he removes his clothes and joins her in the water.

Both Edna Pontellier and Virginia Woolf died by drowning themselves. More importantly, they committed suicide when they felt trapped—Virginia by the sense of an oncoming depressive episode (something she struggled with all of her life) and Edna by the knowledge that the society she lived in would never let her live her life as an independent woman. These women mirror Alice's own feelings of impending doom and the loss of her independence, success, and lifestyle. However, Alice finds happiness in this moment because she also has the knowledge that she can make that choice for herself when she wants to, before her life becomes too tragic.

John is preparing to leave for a few days and Alice asks him to remind her when: he will leave Monday, but on Sunday night Lydia will fly in. Lydia has been cast in a play at the local Chatham theater and so will stay for the summer. John asks Alice if she's ready to run and she says she just needs to go grab a jacket. Inside, Alice gets distracted by her book and picks it up. When she runs into John, he reminds her about their run. Alice says she has to go to the bathroom first, but she becomes disoriented and can't find it. John finds her just as she wets herself. Embarrassed, Alice starts crying and John comforts her just as "she'd seen him calm their children."

Alice gets lost in her own summer home, which shows that more of her long-term memory is being impaired by her disease. Furthermore, she loses control of her own body and wets herself. When John finds her in this situation, she knows it also means that she can no longer hide the extent of her vulnerability from him. John comforts her like she is a child, which sends the message that this is how he sees her now: she is childlike and dependent, nothing like the capable woman he's known as his wife.

When Lydia comes, John gives her detailed instructions for how to care for Alice, and Alice notes that this is reminiscent of leaving a babysitter instructions and realizes that "[n]ow she needed to be watched. By her own daughter."

John's instructions to Lydia for how to care for Alice is a confirmation of some of Alice's worst fears when she first got her diagnosis: she is no longer capable of looking after herself like a healthy adult and must be taken care of by her own children.

On their first night together, Alice and Lydia take a walk on the beach after dinner at a local restaurant. While they walk, Alice apologizes for missing Lydia's last play. Lydia tells her it's okay because she "know[s] it was because of Dad this time." Lydia asks if John has gone to this conference to "find a better treatment there" and Alice tells her that's what he's looking for, but that she doesn't think he'll find one.

Alice's lack of faith that John will be able to find someone who can help Alice at the conference he's at shows that she, too, has given up all hope of being able to get better and has accepted the inevitable mental decline that will soon come. Alice's apology for missing Lydia's play and Lydia's answer that she knows it wasn't Alice's fault shows that Lydia is beginning to understand her mother better and is even moving on from the disappointment she felt at Alice not attending her first play.

Back home, Alice is getting ready for bed and thinking about her new-found ability to "recognize the difference between days that would be fraught with difficulties [...] and days that her Alzheimer's would lie silent and not interfere." Alice asks Lydia when John will be home and then when Anne will be home. Confused, Lydia tells Alice that Anna is in Boston, but Alice says she's asking about Anne. Lydia is forced to tell Alice that Anne had died years ago. This takes Alice by surprise and she starts crying. John comes home and asks what happened, so Lydia explains that Alice "thinks [Anne and her mother] just died." Alice becomes mad at John, believing that he's been keeping this from her.

This event is the first time Alice loses such track of time and her life history that she confuses her past with her present: she has forgotten Anne's death and the weight of it that she's carried with her for decades. Alice's anger at John over this is due in part to her perception that he only didn't tell her because he didn't think she was strong enough to handle the news, reflecting her earlier determination to never show weakness in front of him.

AUGUST 2004

Alice knows that Anne and Sarah are dead and have been for many years—in fact, she cannot imagine them as being any older than they were when they died—but "she'd been so sure that they were about to walk through the front door." Although this scares her, she is more scared that this thought "scare[s] her only somewhat."

Alice has already accepted that she is going to perpetually decline and never get better, which is why she is not as scared by the fact that she thought her dead sister was going to come for a visit. This acceptance scares Alice because, just months before, it would have been very uncharacteristic of her. This shows how much she is becoming resigned to her disease.

At breakfast, Alice, John, and Lydia gather outside to eat. Lydia and John discuss Lydia's upcoming play but struggles to keep up and form the words she needs to ask questions before they move on to the next topic. Instead, she feels like she's watching them "as participants on stage from her seat in the audience." While they talk, she cuts a bagel in half and looks at the various toppings they have for it. She notices some "white butter," but knows it isn't butter. She points at it and asks John to pass it to her. Still confused, Alice spreads it on her bagel and then stares at it. Lydia tells her that it's cream cheese and Alice thanks her.

Although Alice has lost words in the past, her inability to identify cream cheese is the first time she's struggled with identifying something that is right in front of her. Although John doesn't notice her struggle, Lydia is able to notice it, hearkening back to the day Alice told her kids about her diagnosis and Lydia told everyone she had noticed something was wrong even though John had failed to. This also highlights just how much more emotionally intelligent Lydia is, particularly compared to John: she is able to read Alice's body language and facial expressions and identify what she needs better than anyone else in their family.

The phone rings inside, so John gets up to answer it. While he's gone, Alice asks Lydia if she would consider going to college for a degree in theater, which might open new doors for her. Lydia asks her to explain, so Alice tells her that it would help qualify her as a teacher in case the day ever came when would "like to slow down a bit but still stay in the business" and that it would also lead to numerous "networking opportunities." Alice tells her just to think about it and maybe talk to her fellow actors about it, which Lydia agrees to do.

This is the first time Alice and Lydia have been able to discuss college without fighting with each another, but it is also the first time Alice has presented her case in favor of college by acknowledging Lydia's ambition and passion as legitimate at the same time, suggesting she go for theater instead a more "practical" major. Because of this, Lydia lets her guard down instead of becoming automatically defensive and shutting the conversation down.

Encouraged by the fact that they didn't argue, Alice silently thinks of what to ask next. Lydia abruptly asks her, "What does [Alzheimer's] feel like?" Alice explains that she knows when she's not confused, but still has difficulties. She also tells Lydia, "[E]ven when I feel completely normal, I know I'm not. It's not over, it's just a rest. I don't trust myself." To Alice's surprise, Lydia seems unfazed and asks what it feels like when she is confused. Alice describes bargaining with her own mind to remember a word or keep up with a conversation but notes that it is a losing battle. Suddenly, "Lydia reache[s] out across the dishes and glasses and years of distance" to comfort Alice.

When Alice was in Los Angeles with Lydia, she wanted to be the one to reach out and bridge the distance between herself and her daughter, but pride prevented her from doing so. Lydia, however, is now able to do just that. Because of her acute emotional intelligence, Lydia makes a better listener than John and is able to be there for Alice in a way John has never been able to. Rather than trying to change the subject, Lydia listens, accepts, and empathizes, thus paving the way for her and Alice to finally grow closer.

Alice wakes up from a nap later to discover that Lydia is gone to rehearsal and John has left a note saying he's on a drive. Alice picks up a book to read, but has a hard time focusing on it. Instead, she goes to Lydia's room to see if she has any books there. In the room, Alice realizes that out of "her three children, she knew Lydia the least." So, she decides to look around the room for some clues about who Lydia is. She finds Lydia's collection of plays, decides they might be easier to read than novels, and grabs one.

Although Alice and Lydia have taken a positive step forward in their relationship, Alice still chooses to look around Lydia's space in order to get to know her and understand what is going on in her life better. Interestingly, this also leads to her taking an interest in something Lydia is passionate about: plays.

Alice notices Lydia's journal on her nightstand and decides to read it. In it, she reads "about a young woman's passion and tenacity," and the story of how Lydia had fallen in love with Malcolm during a play. John comes home and calls out to her, so Alice puts the journal back and goes downstairs to him.

Alice uses her Alzheimer's to justify reading Lydia's journal to herself. Although it is a problematic decision, it is understandable—Alice is likely desperate to get to know her estranged daughter better before Alzheimer's prevents her from doing so.

Downstairs, John is waiting for Alice with one bag full of movies, mostly adaptations of the books she's been reading, and another bag full of popcorn and Milk Duds. John explains that he thought it'd be easier for Alice to watch movies and so had run out to buy some. Thrilled, Alice gives him a big hug. She wants to tell him what he means to her, but can't "find the words," but he hugs her tighter to let her know that he knows.

John's thoughtful present of movies and popcorn shows Alice that he does still think of her as her old self on some level, and that he loves her and still wants to be close to her. Furthermore, he understands her enough to know that her hug had a deeper meaning behind it and is confident in her ability to understand his own unspoken communication. This shows how much he still values Alice as a wife and partner even though she is struggling more and more with her disease.

Early in the morning, Alice does some yoga and observes that her "whole body looked strong and beautiful." She believes she's in "the best physical shape of her life." On the other hand, her mind is "[u]nresponsive, disobedient, weakening." Although taking her medicine and running every day isn't "add[ing] up to visible, measurable results," she fears what will happen if she stops trying to keep these things up.

Once again Genova contrasts Alice's physical fitness with her deteriorating brain. Just as when she looked in the mirror on her 50th birthday, Alice struggles to reconcile her outward appearance of youth and health with the knowledge that something is ravaging her brain in a way that she has only ever associated with old age and ill health.

John accompanies Alice on a run that morning even though he doesn't like running. Alice appreciates his effort and tells him so when they get home. Alice then finds Lydia on the porch drinking coffee. Lydia and Alice have developed a new routine where they discuss what play Alice is reading together over breakfast. Alice enjoys this because it shows her "the depth of her daughter's intellect, her rich understanding of human need and emotion and struggle." As they discuss *Angels in America*, Alice asks Lydia about acting a certain scene with Malcolm. Confused, Lydia asks Alice if she had read her diary. Alice realizes that this wasn't something Lydia had told her in conversation and apologizes, but Lydia storms off.

Not only have Alice and Lydia learned to talk to each other without fighting, but they have found a shared interest they can bond over in plays. For once, Alice is able to recognize in her daughter all the ambition, passion, and desire for success that Alice formerly only associated with pursuing a college degree. This contributes to Alice's ongoing recharacterization of what she considers successful—she now recognizes the importance of emotional intelligence, maturity, and meaningful relationships rather than focusing solely on tangible results and accolades.

John comforts Alice and tries to take her mind off Lydia's anger by bringing her to the beach for a swim. That evening, however, Lydia doesn't come home for dinner, leaving Alice convinced that Lydia hates her. Alice tries to stay up until Lydia comes back but falls asleep watching a movie with John. When he wakes Alice up to bring her back to bed, she finds Lydia's journal on her pillow.

When Alice finds Lydia's journal on her pillow, she also realizes that, once again, she has underestimated Lydia's character. Lydia clearly understood why Alice read her journal—both recognize that this is Alice's way of understanding Lydia better. Lydia clearly wants to connect with Alice, too, while there's still time, which is why Lydia gives Alice her journal to finish reading if she chooses to do so.

Tom walks into the house and apologizes for being late. With everyone gathered around, Anna announces that she is pregnant with twins. Everyone is thrilled even though Anna warns them that it's still early, but Alice notices that Charlie looks nervous and wonders if he's "terrified about the prospect of having two kids in college and, at the same time, a wife with dementia." Lydia and Tom stand next to Anna and talk excitedly. Alice thinks to herself that "her children were beautiful."

Ever since she's realized how much she values her life outside of work, Alice takes the time to appreciate her family more, shown by her observation that they are all "beautiful" together. This also shows how proud she is of them and how much she truly loves and values her time with them. Excitement over the possibility that one of her greatest wishes will be fulfilled (seeing Anna's babies) adds to Alice's happiness in spite of her worsening Alzheimer's symptoms.

Tom asks Alice how she's feeling, stating that she seems "too quiet." Lydia tells him it's because there are "too many of us talking at once and too quickly," which makes Tom stop smiling. Alice repeatedly asks Lydia what time her play starts. This starts an argument between Tom (who thinks Alice should not worry about remembering anything) and Anna (who thinks Alice should be trying harder to remember everything), while Lydia argues that they should let Alice make that decision.

The argument between Alice's children over whether or not she should be responsible for remembering what time Lydia's play is highlights how well Lydia is able to understand Alice. Instead of arguing over what Alice should do, Lydia accepts Alice's choice to put the play in her BlackBerry and encourages Tom and Anna to let Alice decide what to do as a capable adult instead of making choices for her as if she were a child.

The next night at the play, Alice becomes completely absorbed in watching the characters and is easily able to follow the story. After the play, Alice and her family go backstage to see the actors. Alice meets the actress who played Catherine and compliments her performance before asking if she'll be in anything else that summer. There is an uncomfortable silence, but the actor answers her questions. Finally, Anna tells Alice that this actress is "Lydia, your daughter."

Ironically, just as Lydia and Alice start getting closer, Alice begins forgetting Lydia. The entire family is present to witness the moment Alice is unable to recognize Lydia, and it signifies to them all that the real beginning of the end has come for Alice. Soon she will begin to forget the rest of them, too.

SEPTEMBER 2004

It is noted that the "well-being of a neuron" is dependent on "its ability to communicate with other neurons." Without this communication, neurons atrophy: "Useless, an abandoned neuron will die."

Neurons, like people, need communication in order to survive. The more opportunities for communication are lost, the faster neurons die off, and the faster people lose their sense of self.

It is the beginning of the fall semester at Harvard and Alice heads back to her office for the first time. When she gets there, Eric asks her to come to his office to talk. In his office, Eric tells her he wants to talk to her about the student evaluations from the previous semester. Usually Alice would read these as "a vanity check" because they were always positive. However, this is the first time Eric has wanted to talk about them with her and she worries that, "for the very first time in her career," she won't like what the evaluations say.

Alice has always been proud of the fact that she is a great professor, and her aptitude for teaching is reflected in the glowing student evaluations she typically gets. However, it is unusual for Eric to want to look through them with her, and his request that she talk with him about them is her first indication that something has gone wrong and she has failed to live up to her own high standards.

Eric gives Alice the evaluations to look over: they are not the usual high ratings she receives. Alice has never received such poor evaluations, forcing her to accept that her "teaching performance had [...] suffered more" than she thought.

Alice sees that her performance "suffered more" than she thought, indicating that she knew she had been off her game. However, she had been able to convince herself that she committed only minor slips that students would not think too much of.

Eric expresses his surprise over the results of the evaluations and then shows Alice the written student responses, which show that many students felt her class "was a waste of time" and one notes that she had once come to class, sat among the students, and then abruptly left. Eric asks her if there are problems at home, if she's depressed, and if she has a drinking problem. Worried about the stigma alcoholism carries, Alice tells Eric about her Alzheimer's.

Above all, Alice values her reputation because it will solidify her place in the field of psycholinguistics. If her reputation sours, she will be phased out of the field and all of her hard work will soon be forgotten because of the mistake she made at the end of her career. The only way Alice can save herself from this is to come clean about her diagnosis, even though that will also mean having to step down from teaching and research.

Alice tells Eric that she "[doesn't] want to be a bad teacher," but had hoped to make it through to her sabbatical year. Eric suggests she take medical leave for the year to reach her sabbatical. Because of her tenure, Eric cannot fire her, but she knows he doesn't want her teaching anymore. She agrees to his plan with the caveat that she be allowed to stay on as Dan's adviser and continue attending meetings. Eric agrees, but tells her she also shouldn't speak at other universities, either. Alice agrees and prepares to tell her colleagues.

Although Eric can't fire Alice, it's clear that he wants to sweep her under the rug before her behavior reflects badly on Harvard as a whole. Alice's desire to stay on as Dan's advisor reflects how desperately she wants to hang on to as much of this part of herself as she can without causing more widespread damage in the department, by continued to teach or travel for lectures.

Alice sends an email to the rest of the psychology department to tell them about her Alzheimer's. At first, her friends and colleagues all make a point of telling her how sorry for her they are, but "they [leave] her alone as quickly as possible." Alice knows that this is because "[f]acing her meant facing her mental frailty and the unavoidable thought that [...] it could happen to them."

Alice thought of her colleagues like family, so it is both surprising and extremely difficult to see them all avoid her. She treasured the relationship she had with them, believing they treasured it, as well. Their avoidance of her reveals how fragile those relationships were and how greatly she overestimated their depth.

At the first lunch seminar of the semester, Leslie (Eric's graduate student) is scheduled to share her research idea. As people filter in, Alice knows that many are choosing to stand rather than sit by her. Suddenly Dan comes running in, sees her, and sits next to her himself.

Dan's decision to sit by Alice reaffirms her belief about the power she had as a professor. By sitting next to her, Dan sends the message that her diagnosis does not change the gratitude and genuine friendship he feels toward her because she had always been such a good teacher and mentor to him.

Leslie's presentation runs on for an hour before opening the floor for discussion. Alice, who has managed to follow the whole thing, raises her hand and makes a suggestion for a new kind of control group that Leslie needs. Many people nod in agreement and Leslie takes "vigorous notes." This makes Alice feel "victorious and a little smug," since "the fact that she had Alzheimer's didn't mean that she no longer deserved to be heard." However, when she repeats the same advice she gave before, Alice notices that nobody seems impressed, that their "body language suggested embarrassment and dread." Leslie thanks her, but doesn't take notes, leaving Alice confused.

This is Alice's first slip-up since sharing her diagnosis with the department. Before her news, they may have looked over it, believing she had a lot on her mind and had forgotten that she'd said that already. As an Alzheimer's patient, however, the mistake makes everyone embarrassed and uncomfortable as it seems to reaffirm their belief that she is incapable of really contributing to the department and is even a liability for them.

With no work to do, Alice feels "like the biggest part of her self [...] had died." She looks out of her **office window** and tells John that she wishes they'd "spent more time together." John incredulously tells her that they've "spent [their] whole lives together." Alice thinks about this and realizes they've "been living next to each other for a long time" and tells him that they shouldn't have spent so much time apart. John tells her that he likes their lives and their "balance between independence to pursue our [...] passions and a life together." Alice thinks about this and "wishe[s] she'd been his passion."

Without work to do, Alice is forced to confront the question she asked herself once earlier: who is she if she's not a researcher and professor at Harvard? She sees that her achievements at Harvard ring hollow after her colleagues gradually drop her from their lives, leaving her with only her family to fall back on. Alice begins to wish she had devoted more of her time and energy to her marriage and family, which is what she means when she tells John that she regrets not spending more time together. John, however, can't understand this because he is unable or unwilling to view the situation from Alice's perspective. Alice's wish that she had been John's "passion" echoes her earlier temptation to romanticize their parting kiss before her trip to Los Angeles in the beginning of the book.

Alice sits alone in her office and looks out the **window**, thinking about the empty day in front of her. Her BlackBerry alerts her that it's time to take her daily quiz. Although she is able to answer the questions, she leaves out key details, including part of her address and the year Anna was born.

Alice's office window seems to be one of the last ties she has to her former success now that she has been stripped of her identity as a Harvard professor and research scientist. Meanwhile, her inability to remember all the details of the questions for her quiz shows a new decline in her long-term memory, although that does not seem to trouble her as much as she initially believed it would—perhaps because her self-awareness is also declining.

OCTOBER 2004

One night in October Alice abruptly awakens, confused about "what to do" and aware that she should be asleep like John. Alice has been having trouble sleeping at night and believes this is because she naps so much during the day. She tries to stop this cycle, but ultimately fails. Alice suddenly remembers her prescription for sleeping pills and goes looking for them downstairs. She empties the contents of drawers and cabinets until John walks downstairs and talks her into going back to bed and resuming her search the next day. In bed, Alice remembers what she was looking for and gets back up and goes downstairs.

This event echoes Alice's earlier observation about how difficult it was becoming to maintain a regular sleep cycle while she was at Chatham. Alice remembers she has a prescription for sleeping pills, but she does not associate them with her suicide plan, implying that she has actually forgotten the plan on the "Butterfly" file entirely.

Alice once again sits alone in her office looking out her **window** with nothing to do. She opens her filing cabinet and looks at her pile of published works, including over 100 articles and dozens of reviews and commentaries. Holding them, Alice feels how heavy the pile is and realizes her "thoughts and opinions carried weight. At least, they used to." She misses her work and being asked to share her thoughts. She grabs the book she and John wrote together, *From Molecules to Mind*, which she considers "her proudest written achievement," but decides she doesn't feel like reading it.

With no work to continue doing, Alice turns to her past accomplishments and symbols of her former identity as a successful psycholinguistic research scientist. Because of her Alzheimer's, Alice feels that her thoughts no longer carry weight like they used to. Although she is still capable of analytical thinking, the stigma of Alzheimer's prevents others from recognizing this in her and treating her with the same respect she is used to receiving.

Alice decides to take a run home by herself and happily doesn't get lost. She walks into her kitchen to make some tea but is confused when she reaches into the cabinet that usually holds her tea tin and instead sees stacks of plates. She takes everything out and puts them on the counter and opens another cabinet, but that one doesn't have her tea, either. She opens every cabinet and empties it without finding her tea. The door opens and, believing it's John, Alice walks out to ask him why he reorganized the kitchen. Instead, she runs into her neighbor, who tells her she's in the wrong house. Confused and embarrassed, Alice admits to her that she has Alzheimer's.

Alice mistakes which house is hers, which becomes an embarrassing situation that forces her to tell a neighbor about her condition. This event also reveals one of the most insidious sides of Alzheimer's: Alice had been completely confident in her belief that she was in her own house, but she wasn't. And if she can mistake which house is hers, then she can—and inevitably will—forget which house is hers entirely and become hopelessly lost in her own neighborhood.

From then on, Alice always checks the refrigerator to make sure it's hers. There is a large note on the door from John, telling her not to go running alone. Alice "hate[s] depending on him to go running" because he rarely has the energy at the end of the day. She decides to call him to ask if they will run today, but John tells her he's busy and hangs up. Alice tries "to be understanding," but is angry that he won't make time to run with her because it helps "counter the progression of [Alzheimer's.]" From Alice's perspective, "John [is] killing her" by not running with her more often.

Both Alice's insistence on checking the refrigerator and John's note reflect the growing mistrust they both have in Alice's ability to recognize her own house. Alice also now depends more on John to be able to go places and do things than she ever has before, to the further detriment of her independent nature. However, John struggles to juggle Alice's new-found dependence and his career, which reaffirms Alice's earlier doubts about whether his career would have survived if he had been the primary caregiver of their kids. Alice, however, is not a child, which makes it even more difficult for John to accept her as a dependent. Furthermore, John does not seem to understand how important running is to Alice, especially because she sees it as a way to slow down the progression of Alzheimer's.

Still upset that John won't be going on a run with her, Alice considers walking somewhere "safe," like her office. However, she feels "bored, ignored, and alienated in her office." As a "cognitive psychology professor with a broken cognitive psyche," Alice believes there isn't "room" for her at Harvard. So instead, Alice sits in a chair at her house and watches the shadows move until she falls asleep.

Alice no longer feels she has a place at Harvard, but after John's refusal to come home and run with her she is also beginning to feel like she has no place at home because, like at her office, she is bored and alone, unable to do many of the things she used to love doing.

Alice sits across the table from a young woman who she knows is Lydia, but she has "a disturbing lack of confidence in this knowledge." On the other hand, when she looks over at Tom and Anna she can "automatically connect them" with her memories of them. She remembers Lydia's childhood, but struggles to connect this with the woman in front of her. Alice realizes she can also remember Charlie and wonders why her Alzheimer's has made her forget her own daughter but not this man she's only known for a couple of years.

Alice is beginning to experience a serious disconnect between what she knows in her mind and what she sees in reality, and this is particularly illustrated in the "lack of confidence" she has in the knowledge that the woman in front of her is her daughter. More frustratingly, Alice doesn't struggle to connect the sight of Charlie with her knowledge of him despite being much less close with him, emphasizing the impartiality with which Alzheimer's destroys the sufferer's deepest and most personal memories and connections.

After eating dinner, Lydia tells Alice they want to give her a birthday present: DVDs full of stories told by Anna, Tom, Lydia, and John about their memories of her and each other. There is even an empty disc for Alice to record her own memories so she can watch them whenever she wants to. Alice thanks them and then blows out the candles on her cake.

Alice's family rightly guesses that what Alice now treasures most is her memories of who they are. But perhaps more importantly, they acknowledge how important it is to Alice that she remember who she really is by including an empty "Alice" disc for her to make her own recording.

NOVEMBER 2004

Alice now struggles to follow the plot of movies but enjoys watching the video interviews her family made for her. One day, after watching one, Alice suddenly realizes she should be at her office. She frantically grabs her things and goes to the door to leave but is surprised to see a big hole in front of the door. She can't remember when or how it was made, but then Anna calls and tells her she'll be over later to bring her dinner because John is away. Alice agrees and hangs up the phone, deciding to go to her study rather than the office.

Alice has experienced what it is to forget what word is used to identify an object already (such as when she couldn't identify "cream cheese" during breakfast with Lydia and John at Chatham), but her inability to recognize what to most would be obvious as a rug shows that she is now losing her ability to recognize what objects are. In this case, this inability leaves her imprisoned in her own home because she's afraid of falling into the "hole" by the door.

Alice sits alone in her study waiting for Anna, but soon realizes she is "sick of just sitting and waiting." She gets online to "find her new colleagues": other people with early-onset Alzheimer's. She only finds forums and resources for caregivers online, so Alice decides to call Denise Daddario and ask if there's support for people her age with dementia. Denise tells her there are no support groups for patients but offers to see Alice herself. Alice declines and hangs up.

The lack of support groups for people with early-onset Alzheimer's highlights one of the unacknowledged attitudes towards people with dementia. Alzheimer's patients are seen merely as incapacitated, not as people who might appreciate support and a connection with other people who know what they are going through in the same way their caregivers do. For Alice, this means she has nothing with which to replace the loss of her work identity and colleagues.

Alice wakes up from a nap when she hears the door open. She goes out to see who it is and sees Anna "standing on the hole!" Confused, Alice bends down to feel the hole and realizes it's her hallway rug. Anna asks her what she's doing, but Alice is "too tired to endure the humiliating answer to Anna's question." Instead, Alice yells at Anna to leave her alone and tells her to get out of her house. Angry and hurt, Anna struggles to achieve "calm resolve" and tells Alice that she's staying, and that she will eat dinner and then go to bed. Furious at the situation, Alice grabs the rug and throws it out the door.

Alice is a proud person, and the humiliation and frustration she feels with herself is taken out on Anna because she is the one who catches Alice in this embarrassing situation, much like the time John found Alice after she wet herself in their summer house because she couldn't find the bathroom. This situation also forces Anna to take on a more maternal role towards Alice, once more reminding them both that Alice will soon be in a state of total dependence on her own children.

When Alice takes her "butterfly" quiz on her BlackBerry, she can no longer provide her full address or the day of Anna's birth, but remembers what month it is and that she has three kids.

Alice is failing to provide even half the answers to her quiz, but at this point it is clear that she has either forgotten that she planned to end her life when she reached this point or that she is still not ready to follow through on her plan even though she is declining more and more each day.

DECEMBER 2004

In December, Alice struggles to read through Dan's thesis when she gets an email from Denise, who tells Alice that she's talked to other young patients with early-onset dementia, several of whom showed interest and shared their contact information. Their names are Mary Johnson, Cathy Roberts, and Dan Sullivan. Alice sends them an email inviting them to her house for "tea, coffee, and conversation" on Sunday.

Denise's email with the names of other patients Alice's age suffering from dementia restores a sense of personal identity in Alice because she will once again have the opportunity to talk to and be heard by people who won't treat her as just *an Alzheimer's patient.*

Alice soon forgets Dan's "thingy" as she thinks about what her new group of friends will be like. Alice can "feel herself declining […] slipping into that demented hole. Alone." Her thoughts are interrupted by a beeping but can't identify the source. She wonders if she's having a hallucination, a typical symptom of Alzheimer's. She wonders if the beeping could be her cell phone, but it is turned off when she finds it. She sits back on the couch to read Dan's thesis.

Alzheimer's progresses quickly, but as Alice's thoughts show, it doesn't move so fast that those who suffer from it are spared the painful feeling of declining over months of time. Alice recognizes everything that is happening to her, and one of the scariest parts of this is that the stigma of her disease has put an end to many of the connections she has with other people, which had helped her feel more like herself. She is also learning to doubt more of her senses, shown by her confusion over whether the sounds she hears are real or just in her mind.

John comes home and tells Alice to get ready to go out to dinner with their friends. Alice tells him she's "having a hard day" and doesn't want to go to dinner, but John insists, telling her they want to see her. Alice, however, thinks they'll be relieved she's not there. Alice hears the beeping again, but this time John hears it, too. He goes into the kitchen and finds a mug of cold tea in the microwave. John asks her if she's sure she doesn't want to go before telling her he won't stay long. He leaves and she stands in the kitchen holding the mug "for a long time."

Despite Alice's decline, John is carrying on with life as normal. He fails to recognize how much Alice is struggling with her symptoms and the loss of so much of her identity, and this instance serves as another example of how he lacks the emotional intelligence to recognize that what Alice really wants and needs is quality time with him because he is one of the few people left with whom she has a meaningful connection.

John has not returned home when Alice decides to go to bed. On her way, she sees that she has three new emails, all from Cathy, Mary, and Dan Sullivan telling her they'd love to come to her house to meet. When the day comes, all three show up and the group quickly connects with one another. They take turns sharing their stories and experiences with dementia. As they laugh and share stories of "lost keys, lost thoughts, and lost life dreams," Alice feels "unedited and truly heard."

Although Alice tries to hang on to her former self when she's with John and her children, she finds spending time with Cathy, Mary, and Dan liberating because with them there is no need to pretend to be better than she is. She is able to talk about her symptoms and problems without worrying about the emotional toll it will take because, unlike her family, these listeners understand from experience exactly what she's going through.

That Christmas, with all the kids back at home, John announces he's be offered a new job at Sloan-Kettering in New York City. There is a silence before Anna asks him if he's actually thinking of taking it and he says he is. Anna asks what this means for Alice, and John insists that he'll be able to take care of her. John also argues that Alice soon won't be able to tell the difference, which upsets Tom. Both Anna and Tom argue that Alice will decline rapidly if taken away. Although Alice is sitting right there, they talk about her "without including her, as if she had Alzheimer's disease."

The argument John has with Anna and Tom is reminiscent of the one Anna and Tom had with each other over whether or not Alice should be responsible for remembering what the time of Lydia's play . Just as she did then, Alice finds herself in the awkward position of being talked about and argued over without anyone stopping to give her a voice or a say in what she wants for herself. This further reduces Alice's sense of self-worth because it sends the message that her family no longer thinks it necessary to allow her a say in making decisions about her life.

Lydia appears in the doorway and tells them she might be in New York City because she's applied to several colleges in the area and will be able to help no matter where Alice lives. Before Alice can tell Lydia how proud she is of her decision, but before she can form the words, the conversation about John's job continues.

Lydia's surprising choice to go to college adheres more to Alice's early definition of what success and ambition looks like, since going to college will yield a tangible result. It also sends the message to Alice that her opinion—at least on this matter—carried weight and Lydia took it seriously, even though came from an Alzheimer's patient. Although many aspects of Alice's motherly role are slipping away, it's clear that Lydia still values her mother's input and wants to make her proud.

John tells the family that he's made "plenty of sacrifices." Alice knows he's "always loved her, but she'd made it easy for him." She doesn't know "how much longer she [can] hang on to herself" and desperately wants to have another sabbatical year with John, something she "wouldn't trade [...] for anything." However, he clearly would. She realizes that one of them would "have to sacrifice everything."

Alice has made it "easy" for John to love her by always living up to his own estimation of her: never showing weakness, allowing him independence, and taking on the role of primary caregiver to their children so John would be free to pursue his own career in the early years of their marriage. Now that Alice needs him, however, he fails to reciprocate by giving her what she so desperately wants. Once again, Alice finds that she will have to sacrifice something she holds dear (a sabbatical year with him) to make John's decision to move easier on him.

In her daily quiz, Alice is able to remember the month and how many children she has but fails to correctly answer the other three questions.

Although Alice is forgetting nearly everything else, she still remembers what is most essential, which is her identity as the mother of three children.

JANUARY 2005

Alice can hear Lydia and John talking about her. John says she's been asleep for about 18 hours, something she's done a couple of times before. Lydia is worried, but they leave Alice alone to get dinner. While she sleeps, Alice has a dream that she is harnessed to a parasail. John asks if she's ready before letting go of her. She flies into the air at "exhilarating speed," but has no control over direction. She looks back at her family and wonders "if the beautiful and spirited winds would ever bring her back to them."

Alice's dream about John sending her flying off into the sky reflects her own feeling that he's letting go of her, perhaps precipitated by the announcement of his intention to move to New York with her for a new job. She is losing her sense of place within her family as she flies off with the "spirited winds" in her dream. Although the feeling is "exhilarating," it also emphasizes how alone she is as she leaves her loved ones and former life behind her.

When Alice wakes up, Lydia is lying in bed with her and tells her she's been asleep for a "couple of days." Alice apologizes and studies Lydia but has a "hard time identifying Lydia as a whole." Alice tells her she's "afraid" of now knowing who she is one day. Alice wonders if her love for Lydia is powerful enough to remain "safe from the mayhem in her mind" and decides it is because it exists "in her heart."

Alice's fear of forgetting Lydia reflects a deeper question: once she forgets her family, does that mean she ceases to feel the deep love she has for them? Alice believes her love for her children is more integral to her sense of self than any other element of her identity and resides in her heart, which is a safe distance from the ravages of Alzheimer's in the mind.

Alice tells Lydia she doesn't want to move to New York because she wants to be in Cambridge when Anna's babies are born. Alice says that she feels "safe" in Cambridge and worries she'll lose John in New York, and Lydia urges her to tell John this. Then Alice tells Lydia she is proud of her and that, in case she forgets, to "know that I love you."

Lydia rather naïvely believes that if John knows how much Alice wants to stay in Cambridge, the choice for him will be easy. However, this contradicts what Alice knows about him and her earlier realization that either Alice or John will have to make the ultimate sacrifice—realistically, that sacrifice will certainly fall to her.

Alice tells John she doesn't want to go to New York and expresses anger over the situation. She asks him if there's any way for him to still take his sabbatical, but he says he can't, and this is his "one shot at discovering something that truly matters." Alice argues that he will have other shots because he's "brilliant" and doesn't have Alzheimer's, but this next year is her final shot at "living [her] life and knowing what it means." John assures here they would still have time together, but Alice tells him moving takes all she has left away. Alice begs him to take the year off, but he says he can't spend a year "just sitting and watching" her change. Alice tells him she's the only one dying.

For the first time, Alice confronts John with the unfairness of how he's treating her disease and the choices he is making, particularly the one to move to New York. Like with so many of their arguments, John is not able to look at the question from Alice's perspective, instead showing that he is primarily thinking of himself by saying that he *can't sit and watch Alice decline. Alice's point that* she *is the one dying shows that even though she is rapidly losing her awareness of many things, she is still able to recognize John's selfishness in thinking only of his own struggles and ignoring hers.*

John takes Alice to the cemetery, but there's so much snow that they can't get to her family's plot. Alice wants to stay but becomes uncomfortable and they leave. John tells her they can try again later. At home, John gets ready to make their dinner and opens the freezer. While he searches for chicken, he suddenly says, "Oh no, Alice" and pulls out her BlackBerry. It's gotten water in it, so John doubts it will work again. This makes Alice cry even though John tells her they can get her a new one. Alice is not able to identify why she feels "an inconsolable grief over the death of the Blackberry itself."

Alice's BlackBerry was one of her final connections to her old life: it had her calendar, schedule, and even the quiz she takes every day to determine how much she is forgetting and which is supposed to determine when it is time for her to follow through on her suicide plan. However, she seems to be misplacing her grief over deaths of her family (the fact that they went to the cemetery means it's January 19th, the anniversary of Anne and Sarah's deaths) and projecting it onto the death of her organizer. Additionally, Alice was diagnosed with Alzheimer's on this same date the year before, so the death of the BlackBerry also echoes the gradual death of Alice's former life and identity that started as soon as she received her diagnosis.

FEBRUARY 2005

Back in Dr. Davis's office, Alice feels "emotionally weary and intellectually trapped" after finishing the neuropsychological tests. She had struggled to make sense of what she was being told and asked to do and isn't looking forward to talking with Dr. Davis. He asks her to spell "water" backwards, which is something she used to do easily. Now, however, it takes a lot of effort. Although she is proud and Dr. Davis looks pleased, John only manages a "dispirited smile." Alice struggles through the rest of the tasks, some of which she cannot do.

The emotional toll the neuropsychological tests take on Alice stand in stark contrast with the confidence she had in her ability to pass them just six months before. Her inability to successfully complete so many of the tasks, and the childlike joy she experiences at being able to complete just one of them, also show just how low a bar she currently sets for her mental performance compared to just a few months prior. John, however, is unable to celebrate these small accomplishments with Alice, as he's clearly still struggling with the idea of her intellectual and mental decline.

John asks Dr. Davis if Alice should "be like this" already. Dr. Davis explains that her symptoms had probably been present for a long time, but because she is "incredibly bright," she has many more synapses that lead to the right piece of information than the "average person." Now, however, Alice has almost completely lost her short-term memory and is "losing self-awareness."

Alice had always prided herself on her above-average intelligence, but, ironically, it was this very thing that prevented her from developing noticeable symptoms of Alzheimer's for a long time. Time, of course, is extremely precious for Alzheimer's patients because early intervention can delay the start of symptoms and slow progression of the disease. In Alice's case, high intelligence was more of a curse than a blessing.

Dr. Davis asks Alice if she still goes on runs, but she tells him she doesn't because she's too uncoordinated and John has a busy schedule. Before excusing them, Dr. Davis asks Alice about her upcoming presentation at the Dementia Care Conference, which draws in a large crowd of doctors, neurologists, and social workers. Dr. Davis says he will be there and tells Alice she's a "brave and remarkable woman" in a "genuine and not patronizing" way. John, however, only offers a "clenched smile that confuse[s] her."

Dr. Davis's compliment boosts Alice's sense of pride in herself, something which John is unable to do because, at best, he can only muster a "clenched smile" that Alice recognizes as disingenuous. This shows how poorly John has adapted to Alice's condition. He is unable to adjust his expectations of her capabilities, which means he does not recognize her small victories as victories but sees them instead as signs of defeat and of all that she can no longer do.

MARCH 2005

Standing at the podium to give her presentation, Alice looks out into the crowd and notices John, Anna, Charlie, Tom, Mary, Cathy, Dan Sullivan, and Dr. Sullivan. She touches her **butterfly necklace** and begins her talk.

Touching the butterfly necklace reminds Alice that this moment is one of those that confirms the continued existence of beauty in her life. She's lost much of her identity and independence, but she still doesn't succumb to viewing her life as tragic.

Alice tells the audience that she is there to speak with them as "an expert on Alzheimer's disease" because she is living with it. Alice tells them that those in the early stages of dementia "feel like we are neither here nor there" and that it's "very lonely and frustrating." Alice says she struggles to "understand what you are saying, what [she is] thinking, and what is happening around [her]," that she is "losing [her] yesterdays" and has no control over which ones she gets to keep. Alice says she "fear[s] tomorrow" because she doesn't know if she will lose her "me-ness" or if that is something that is "immune to the ravages of Alzheimer's."

This speech is Alice's chance to give a voice to those with Alzheimer's who might not be able to speak for themselves. In using the term "we," she aligns herself with other Alzheimer's patients, showing how much she's changed her perspective since the earliest stages of her disease when she struggled to reconcile her mental image of Alzheimer's with herself. Alice's fear of losing her "me-ness" echoes the greatest fear that's been looming over her since her diagnosis: the ultimate loss of her self-awareness which will render her completely dependent on her family.

Alice says that she is not "someone dying," but is "someone living with Alzheimer's." She encourages early intervention by physicians and not simply writing symptoms off as depression or menopause. Alice expresses hope for a cure even though she "may never be able to retrieve what [she's] already lost." She pleads with the audience not to "write [...] off" Alzheimer's patients, but to talk, work with, and listen to them. Alice says she "live[s] for each day" now and assures the audience that just because she'll forget this moment, "that doesn't mean that today didn't matter." Alice receives a standing ovation and notices her family crying and smiling, including John, who has "unmistakable love in his eyes and joy in his smile."

At the end of Alice's speech, the overwhelmingly positive reaction from the audience gives her back a sense of success and accomplishment that has been lacking in her life since she was forced to stop teaching and lecturing at Harvard. Most important is the reaction of John, who, in that moment, recognizes Alice as he remembers her before her disease. Alice's statement that "today" matters even though one day she'll forget it also echoes her mother's words about the life of the butterfly and how the shortness of its life doesn't make it any less meaningful or beautiful.

APRIL 2005

For a time after her speech, Alice feels like "Alice Howland, brave and remarkable hero." However, "the high wasn't sustainable" and she loses confidence as she makes more and more mistakes and the memory of the speech fades. Before she knows it, she becomes "Alice Howland, Alzheimer's victim."

Alice's prediction that she will lose her memory of her speech comes true all too soon as she finds herself entering another rapid decline and making more and more mistakes that she hadn't made before. For her, becoming "Alice Howland, Alzheimer's victim" means once again losing her identity as a gifted public speaker whose opinions matter.

One day, John wakes Alice up and gets her dressed. They go to the hospital and enter a room with a woman sleeping on a bed. Alice asks what's wrong and John tells her the woman is just tired. A young man comes in and John congratulates him. The man tells them he'll go get "the babies" and leaves the room. A short time later, he walks back in with two wheeled carts, each of which has a baby in it. The man wakes the woman up and she becomes excited when she sees Alice and John. Alice realizes the woman is Anna.

One of the items on Alice's earlier list of things she wanted to live to see was that she wanted to meet Anna's babies. Although she struggles to recognize Anna at first, Alice has successfully kept enough of her self-awareness and identity to recognize the importance of the event.

Anna introduces the babies as Allison Anne and Charles Thomas. The young man hands one baby to John and the other to Alice. Cuddling the new baby, Alice finally says, "Anna, you had your babies" and recognizes them as her grandchildren. She asks if they will get Alzheimer's "like I did" and Anna says they won't. Alice takes a deep breath and feels "a sense of relief and peace she hadn't known in a long time."

Alice's sense of relief when Anna tells her that the babies will not develop Alzheimer's when they grow up echoes her earlier peace of mind when she learned that Anna had had her embryos genetically tested to make sure they didn't carry the PS1 mutation. That sense of relief, however, is heightened now that Alice has had more experience with the intermediate stages of Alzheimer's, highlighting the deep love she has for her family and the lingering fear that, because she carried and passed on the mutation, she might be responsible for their future suffering.

A woman tells Alice that she got into both NYU and Brandeis University, meaning she can choose whether to live near New York City or Cambridge. The woman says she likes Brandeis better, partially because it means she can stay near Cambridge and close to Alice if she stays. Alice is confused and asks why she would move away. Alice encourages her to make a choice "based on what's right for [her] life." The woman agrees and tells her that they have "come a long way." Alice is confused but talks to her about studying acting and her love of Shakespeare's tragedies. Suddenly the woman hugs her and it "penetrate[s] Alice much like her peanut butter eyes had." Alice feels "close to her." The woman asks her not to move to New York, and Alice asks why she would do that.

Although the reader can recognize the woman Alice is talking to as Lydia, Alice herself is no longer able to recognize her. More importantly, Lydia continues to show her mother the respect for her opinions that Alice has been missing from others, shown by the fact that Lydia is turning to Alice for advice about which college she should go to. Although Alice does not recognize Lydia, she still feels an indefinable sense of closeness with her that confirms Alice's earlier thought that the love she has for her children is so inherent in her as a person that it will remain safe from the destruction Alzheimer's is creating in her brain.

John walks into the kitchen where "the actress" and "the mother" are talking about how tired they are. "Lydia" asks John how he's going to take Alice to New York and care for her on his own. He says he'll "hire a home health aide," but "the actress" doesn't like this idea, nor does "the mother." John argues that they won't have time to take care of her either and that Alice wouldn't "want to be a burden." "The mother" says she wouldn't be a burden.

Alice can no longer recognize Anna, who she simply refers to as "the mother" because she does know that she is the mother of the babies who are in the house. Although Alice had once feared that her children would see her as a burden, both Anna and Lydia are insisting that Alice isn't a burden, something that would have made her extremely proud if she were able to follow the conversation and recognize them.

Distracted by the fussy baby she's holding, Alice has a hard time following or understanding the conversation. She can tell it's a "serious argument," though. "The mother" asks why "Mom" doesn't get a say here, and "the actress" says she doesn't want to live in New York. John argues that Alice doesn't know what she wants, but "the actress" says he's "choosing to dismiss what she wants because she has Alzheimer's." Alice realizes they are arguing about her. John says that Alice doesn't always get what she wants and "wouldn't want to be here like this." "The mother" asks what that means, but John doesn't answer. They argue about the decision until Johns says he has to go, slamming the door behind him. This makes everyone but Alice—who isn't "sad or angry or defeated or scared," but hungry—cry. Alice asks what they're having for dinner.

With Alice only able to keep up with the sky-high emotions in the room, she struggles to understand the purpose of the conversation. A few moths before, she felt irritated and dehumanized by the fact that her family was discussing her right in front of her without allowing her a voice. Now, however, the knowledge that they are arguing over her doesn't inspire any strong emotion in her. This shows a further loss of identity and sense of self-worth that has happened so rapidly that Alice has not been able to understand or mourn it.

MAY 2005

John and Alice get ice cream cones and sit down to eat them together. John asks her if she knows what month it is and Alice knows it's spring but hasn't looked at a calendar in a long time, so she's unable to answer him. John asks her about Anna's birthday, but she isn't able to answer that either. Alice looks at a building across the river and asks what it is. John tells her it's part of Harvard and asks if she remembers which building is hers, but she doesn't remember. Instead, Alice asks why they don't "focus on the things that really matter," but John tells her that's what he's trying to do.

John's questions are meant to gauge how much Alice remembers and to what degree she's kept her self-awareness. Alice, not recognizing this, believes he is only asking questions that don't "really matter."

John asks Alice if she "still want[s] to be here." Alice recognizes that this question is important to him and she's happy that she can provide a real answer. She says, "Yes, I like sitting here with you." She asks if they need to leave, but John tells her she can "take [her] time."

The reason for John's earlier questions becomes obvious: he is trying to figure out whether or not she is capable of really knowing what she wants before asking her if she wants to stay in Cambridge or move to New York with him. When Alice says she like "sitting here with you," she does, on some level, mean she likes being with him and wants him around, but what John understands is that she just likes being in Cambridge, ignoring the part that she likes him to be with her. This, to him, confirms that she will be happier if he leaves her in Cambridge with their children.

JUNE 2005

Alice gets on her computer after receiving a concerned phone call from Cathy, who wanted to know if Alice was okay because she hadn't attended their support group for a while. Alice tells her to let everyone know she's okay but knows that she had "said a tearful good-bye to okay some time ago." She opens her email and is overwhelmed by the number of unread messages, so she closes it.

Alice has stopped going to the support group she started, which means she is now dropping the new connections she made with Cathy and the others. This also means that she is losing a newer part of her identity that she had begun forming when she first met them all, signifying that she has essentially reached the point of no longer being able to develop emotionally or relationally.

Alice notices the folders saved on her desktop screen and decides to click on one. After briefly viewing the "Alice" one, she opens the folder titled "Butterfly." Inside it is a message saying she wrote the following when she was "of sound mind." Addressing herself, the letter tells Alice she "can no longer trust [her] own judgment," but can trust the version of her that wrote the letter. The letter tells Alice she has "lived an extraordinary life," and although the "end" that she's chosen "is tragic," her life has not been so. The letter tells Alice to get a bottle of pills from the back of a table in her room and take them all with water right away without telling anyone.

Alice's surprise at finding the letter to herself means she truly had forgotten her suicide plan, and even now it's clear that she doesn't understand that the directions at the end of the letter are for a suicide. The assurance in the beginning of the letter that it was written when Alice was "of sound mind" shows her early anxiety to assert the fact that she was capable of making this decision for herself, even though at the time she was also losing her sense of self and place at Harvard. However, there is no longer any trace of that anxiety, meaning that Alice has undeniably reached the point where she is no longer "of sound mind."

Alice doesn't remember writing the letter but is proud that she had once been able to do so. Alice follows the directions to go upstairs to her room but forgets what she's doing up there. She goes back to reread the letter and then returns to dig through her drawer but is unable to find what she's looking for. Suddenly, John comes in and tells her he needs to go to the office. He gives her, her usual medication and leaves. Alice lies on her bed "feeling sad and proud."

Alice's failure to commit suicide is a product of her inability to remember directions or what to do, something for which her old self failed to account. The "sad and proud" feelings she experiences after John leaves are due to the recollection that she had once been able to write a letter and because she has taken her pills, apparently believing they were the ones to which the letter was referring.

John gives Alice a robe, hood, and cap to put on. Alice asks where they're going, and he explains it's time for the Harvard Commencement and has to explain to her what "commencement" means. Once they arrive at Harvard and enter the area where the ceremony will take place, Alice remembers that she's done this before. She sits with John and they listen to an actor deliver a speech. The ceremony goes on "for longer than Alice cared for," but is soon over and John takes her to a nearby building where John says they'll see Dan receive his PhD.

This commencement will be the final one Alice attends as a professor (shown by her hood, cap, and robe) because, after this, she will no longer have Dan to advise in his research since he is receiving his PhD. Despite her initial confusion, enough of Alice's former identity exists to give her the vague feeling of having been in this place at a ceremony before.

Alice looks around at the room of people. She doesn't recognize anyone in particular but does "recognize the emotion and the energy in the room." She realizes that this is "something she knew" and understood, "although she couldn't remember the details." Still, she knows "it had been rich and worthwhile."

Alice no longer has a definite idea of who she really was even a year before. The deep sense of satisfaction she feels, that it "had been rich and worthwhile," reflects the pride she still has in herself and in her successes even though she can't remember exactly what they were.

John points out Dan to Alice when Dan goes up on stage to get his diploma and Alice "applaud[s] him, this student of hers whom she had no memory of." Once the ceremony is over, Dan finds Alice and reminds her who he is. Alice congratulates him. Dan tells her he feels "so lucky to have been your student" and that she is the reason he chose to study linguistics. He thanks her for her "guidance and wisdom" and tells her she was the best teacher he's ever had. Alice thanks him for saying all that and is "glad to know that [he'll] remember these things about [her]." A man and two women come over to them and pass out glasses of "bubbly white wine," and they all toast Dan.

Alice believed her most important role was that of a professor because she had the "opportunity" to inspire the next generation, and Dan's speech to her proves that she succeeded in doing just that. Although she doesn't fully understand it, Alice appreciates that Dan will remember her for who she was. In Dan's case, at least, even Alice's worsening condition has not tarnished the reputation she worked so hard and for so long to create.

As they walk away from the event, someone calls to John and he lets go of Alice's hand to talk to them. Alice, however, keeps walking. Suddenly, Alice feels her hood "pulled [...] tight around her throat" and is "jerked backward." She falls onto her back and a man bends down to ask if she's okay. She says she's not and the man tells her she nearly walked into traffic. The man helps Alice up and asks if she can walk. She says she can and "walk[s] home with the kind stranger who had saved her life."

Perhaps due to the surprise of being suddenly pulled back, Alice forgets who John is after the graduation ceremony, recognizing him only as a "kind stranger" instead of her husband. This means that Alice is no longer able to recognize anyone in her family.

SUMMER 2005

Alice, sitting in a beach chair, asks the man next to her for the time. He tells her it's 3:30, so she says she has to get home. The man tells her she's at her home on the Cape, but she doesn't recognize anything when she looks around. She tells him this isn't her home and the man tells her they're "going back to Cambridge in a couple of weeks," but that she likes it at this house, too. Distressed by the unfamiliarity of the place, Alice insists that she wants "to go home now." The man again explains that this is her home and that she comes here to "relax and unwind." Alice doesn't "feel relaxed," and thinks the man may be drunk.

Alice still does not recognize John for who he is, now only referring to him as "the man" without questioning why she is with him or what her relationship with him is. John's repeated assurances to Alice that she likes the house they are at (their summer home in Chatham) echo his earlier argument with her about whether or not she preferred coffee or tea in Jerri's: John tells Alice what she likes, refusing to listen to her when she tries to tell him what she wants and what she doesn't want. In this way, John denies Alice the ability to have any agency over herself.

Alice sits in front of a full-length mirror and looks at her reflection, which reveals to her that she has "loose and spotty" skin and her hair is greying. Touching her skin, Alice can't believe this is her reflection and goes to the bathroom to check that mirror. In this mirror, as well, she notices that so many of her features in the reflection are "grotesquely wrong." She notices a bucket of paint and goes through the house and paints all the mirrors white.

Earlier in the book, Alice struggled to reconcile the reflection of herself and her body with the damage being done in her brain. Now, however, she struggles to recognize herself in the mirror because the image she has of herself in her brain is so different. By painting over the mirrors, Alice saves herself from the distress of being faced with the fact that the state of her body is beginning the reflect the state of her mind.

Alice again sits with the man who owns the house while he reads a book. She picks up a different book and studies it before telling him she thinks she's read it before. The man tells her they had written that book together. She looks at the names of the authors and realizes that the man is John. She opens the book at random and reads the words, which "push past the choking weeds and sludge in her mind to a place that was pristine and still intact."

The place in her mind that is still "pristine" is reached by the words of her book, which remind her of her marriage to John and what kind of person she was before the symptoms of Alzheimer's put the brakes on her life. For inexplicable reasons, the familiarity of the words is able to reveal a fleeting clear path to her sense of self and her relationships.

Alice says "John," and he puts his book down and looks at her. She says to him, "I remember. I remember you. I remember I used to be very smart." John tells her she was the smartest person he knew. She looks at the book and remembers that she once was "curious and independent" and knew how to communicate her ideas and knowledge. She misses being part of life because she loved her life and her family. She wants to tell John this but is unable to form the words. Instead, she "boil[s] it down […] into what was most essential" and tells him she misses herself and she "never planned to get like this." John says he also misses her, "so much," and knows she didn't mean for this to happen.

As she reaches this "pristine place," Alice's sense of self is restored, but there is still a sense that she is on the outside looking in and knows she only has a finite amount of time to express what she has discovered in herself. Saying she misses herself is the best way Alice can convey to John that she misses having a voice, she misses her marriage and her family, and she misses her identity as a Harvard professor. She is mourning her potential and what her future was supposed to be like. Finally, after months of struggling with a worsening condition, Alice and John are able to truly connect and understand each other.

SEPTEMBER 2005

John sits alone at a table drinking black coffee. He has a spare hour and decides to read the health section of the *New York Times*. The first article he sees states that Amylix has failed its trial, and he reads it while he cries over his coffee.

Although he has seen for himself Alice's rapid decline, when John sees the article about the failure of the Amylix trial, he is finally forced to accept that there is no hope for the drug to help Alice and that she, as he knows her, really is gone.

EPILOGUE

Alice sits next to "the woman" and watches "medium children" hurriedly walk to their destinations. Alice, however, doesn't need to go anywhere and this makes her feel "lucky." The woman tells Alice that Lydia will be home soon and so they should head back. Alice doesn't want to leave, but the woman is leaving, and Alice knows "she should stay with her."

Alice no longer questions who she is with or why she is doing what she is doing, but simply follows what simple directions she does know: she knows she should stay with this woman, and so she stays with her without questioning why.

When they get to the house, Alice notices two cars and the woman tells her, "They're both here." This makes Alice excited, and she hurries inside to see "the mother." The woman tells the mother that Alice had "another good day" with no wandering. A baby cries and the mother walks into another room and then comes back out holding a baby. The mother thanks Carole (who is "the woman"), and Carole calls out a goodbye to Lydia, who's in another room, as she leaves.

Carole says that Alice has had "another" good day, implying that there have been other days that were not good. Carole also mentions that Alice has not wandered, which also means that Alice has developed a habit of wandering off and now needs to be watched like a child. Although Alice doesn't recognize Anna or Lydia, her excitement at seeing their cars by her house means she still feels connected with them and is happy when she gets to see them. This means the love she has for them is still a part of her, as she hoped it would be.

Alice looks at the baby and smiles at him. The baby smiles at her "in recognition" and "the mother" asks Alice if she will hold him. Alice enjoys playing with this baby and patiently allows him to play with her hair and face. He finds her **butterfly necklace** and starts playing with that, too.

The reappearance of the butterfly necklace comes at a time that highlights how much beauty Alice is still able to find in her life: she is enjoying holding and playing with her grandson. She's experiencing real happiness even though there was a time when she believed there was no way she could really experience happiness in the later stages of Alzheimer's.

Alice walks into the room where "the mother" is and spots "the actress," who asks Alice to listen to her "do this monologue" and then tell her how it makes her feel. Alice agrees and watches "the actress's" eyes and listens to the way her voice changes volume as she goes on. She creates "an energy" that moves Alice to tears as she kisses the baby. "The actress" asks Alice what she feels and Alice says she feels "love." "The actress" is excited and, when Alice asks if she got it right, tells her that she "got it exactly right."

Alice recognizes that the monologue Lydia is rehearsing is about love. This would further imply that Alice is able to feel love despite losing so many of her other mental faculties—otherwise she would not have recognized the emotion. Alice once told Lydia to remember, in case Alice herself couldn't, that she loves her. Her ability to identify love sends the message to Lydia that, even though she no longer recognizes her, Alice still feels that love for her.

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