

# The Dressmaker



## INTRODUCTION

### BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF ROSALIE HAM

Rosalie Ham was born in the rural province of Jerilderie, Australia. Her father was a farmer, and Ham enjoyed an active childhood and spent a lot of time outside helping on the farm. After finishing school, Ham traveled abroad before returning to Australia to study at Deakin University in Victoria. Ham studied drama and literature but fell in love with fiction during her studies. Ham then took a job in a care home, where she worked until 2005. Ham wrote her first novel, *The Dressmaker*, in 1996 while she was participating in a writer's course. She wrote part of the novel as an assignment for her course but she was inspired by the story and wanted to continue. *The Dressmaker* was published in 2000 and was turned into a film, starring Kate Winslet, in 2015. Ham has since published three more novels, *Summer at Mount Hope*, *There Should Be More Dancing*, and *The Year of the Farmer*. Like *The Dressmaker*, these novels deal with social relationships and rural life in Australia. Ham lives in Melbourne with her husband, where she teaches literature at the University of Melbourne.

### HISTORICAL CONTEXT

*The Dressmaker* is set during the 1950s in Australia, and it deals with many of the technological and social changes which occurred during this time period. After World War II, which ended in 1945, Australia experienced a long period of economic growth and rapid technological development. These technological changes are referenced in the novel through developments in transport (such as diesel trains replacing steam trains) and farming techniques (such as modern grain silos). Australia also implemented an immigration program during the 1950s and encouraged people from Europe to move there due to fears that Australia could be easily invaded by surrounding countries if its population was too low. *The Dressmaker* portrays a small Australian town in which people are reluctant to adapt to these changes and to accept people coming into their communities from outside. Medical advances in the 1950s also meant that prescription drugs were more widely available to ordinary people, and this change is also addressed throughout *The Dressmaker*. In particular, the novel is concerned with the potential for people to abuse these powerful drugs or to use them to manipulate others, as in the case of Evan Pettyman medically sedating his wife in order to sexually assault her.

### RELATED LITERARY WORKS

*The Dressmaker* depicts a small, conservative community which condemns outsiders and those who stray from its strict moral codes. In this way, the book is reminiscent of Shirley Jackson's short story "The Lottery," which famously depicts a group of townspeople who stone an outcast to death. Shirley Jackson's novels, such as [We Have Always Lived in the Castle](#), also deal with themes of conformity and alienation, and they use gothic tropes and black humor in a similar way to Ham. The depiction of Tilly and Molly's mother-daughter relationship, as outcasts in a small town, is reminiscent of Joanne Harris's novel *Chocolat* or Alice Hoffman's magical-realist novel *Practical Magic*. Ham's depiction of the gossiping townspeople and the spread of rumors and tales is reminiscent of Stephen King's description of a small American town in his novel *Salem's Lot*, while Ham's dark humor is similar to Scottish writer Muriel Spark's grotesque and comedic characters in novels like *The Girls of Slender Means* or [The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie](#). Ham's work has also been compared to the novels of Jane Austen because of her astute and comedic portrayals of social dynamics. The chapters in *The Dressmaker* in which the town frantically prepares for the ball are similar to Isaac Bashevis Singer's short story, "The Gentleman from Krakow," in which a small town's population goes into a frenzy of competition and corruption as they prepare for a ball. Additionally, the townspeople in the novel put on a production of Shakespeare's [Macbeth](#), and certain characters (like Sergeant Farrat, who plays Banquo) have experiences that parallel their roles in Shakespeare's play.

### KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** The Dressmaker
- **When Written:** 1996-1998
- **Where Written:** Melbourne, Australia
- **When Published:** 2000
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary
- **Genre:** Gothic Novel; Black Comedy
- **Setting:** Dungatar, a small town in Australia, in the 1950s.
- **Climax:** Tilly Dunnage, who is treated as an outcast by her hometown's inhabitants and is unfairly blamed for the death of a local boy, takes revenge on the townspeople by burning the town to the ground.
- **Antagonist:** Evan Pettyman
- **Point of View:** Third Person

### EXTRA CREDIT

**First-Hand Experience.** Ham partially based *The Dressmaker* on her own experience of growing up in a small town. Like

protagonist Tilly Dunnage, Ham's mother was a dressmaker in Jerilderie, the small town where Ham grew up. Although Ham states that Jerilderie was a lovely place to grow up, it was town where everyone knew everything about one another.

**Silver Screen.** Ham wrote the screenplay for *The Dressmaker* movie, which came out in 2015. The screenplay was adapted by director Jocelyn Moorhouse, and Ham has a cameo role in the final film.



## PLOT SUMMARY

Tilly Dunnage, a dressmaker, decides to return to Dungatar, the small town where she grew up and where her mother, Molly, still lives. Tilly arrives in Dungatar late one night. She is greeted by Sergeant Farrat, Dungatar's policeman, who recognizes Tilly and gives her a lift to Molly's house, which is on top of the Hill overlooking the town. Sergeant Farrat is excited to learn the Tilly is a dressmaker—he secretly adores fashion and makes himself women's clothes to wear in private. Tilly finds that Molly's house is extremely messy and that Molly is mentally ill and physically weak. Over the next few weeks, Tilly nurses Molly and cleans up the house, creating a workspace for herself where she can make clothes. At the bottom of the Hill, near the Dungatar tip, the McSwiney family notice the activity at Molly's house. Teddy McSwiney, the McSwineys' eldest son, takes a special interest in Tilly.

Meanwhile, in the town, the Dungatar residents are shocked by Tilly's return and they gossip frantically about her. Evan Pettyman, the wealthy and lecherous town councilor, is particularly dismayed to see Tilly back. Just after Tilly's arrival, William Beaumont (who attended school with Tilly) also returns to the town. Gertrude Pratt, whose parents, Alvin and Muriel, run Pratt's General Store, notices William's return and attempts to flirt with him when she sees him outside the shop. Muriel calls her away, however, and Gertrude finds Elsbeth Beaumont (William's mother) in the shop and waiting to be served. Elsbeth is a snobbish woman who pretends to be very rich to hide the fact that she is deeply in debt. Elsbeth senses Gertrude's interest in William and tries to put her off. After Elsbeth leaves the shop, Muriel tells Gertrude that there is a footballer's dance on Saturday night, which William is bound to attend.

As Tilly fixes up Molly's house, Teddy McSwiney begins to visit and to befriend Molly. He brings Tilly an old wheelchair that Molly can use and he cooks for them. Teddy finally persuades Tilly to come to the footballer's dance with him, and Tilly makes a spectacular dress from cheap **fabric** and to wear to the event. At the dance, the townspeople refuse to speak to Tilly; they glare at her and gossip about her all night. Tilly knows that the townspeople will not forgive her for what happened when she was a child. She remembers how the boys at school, especially a

boy named Stewart Pettyman (Evan Pettyman's son), used to pick on Tilly, beat her up, and even sexually assault her. One afternoon, Stewart ran at Tilly to headbutt her in the stomach, but Tilly stepped out of the way at the last moment. Stewart ran headfirst into the wall, broke his neck, and died. Tilly was taken away from Dungatar after that and sent to school elsewhere. Presently, although the townspeople snub Tilly, they do admire her dress. Meanwhile, Gertrude meets William at the dance and invites him to go for a walk with her. They almost have sex, and William decides that he must marry Gertrude—much to Elsbeth's dismay.

A few weeks later, Teddy persuades Tilly to come out into Dungatar again, to attend the horse races with him. Tilly goes, and again, she wears a dress she made herself that draws the attention of the crowd. Gertrude approaches Tilly and asks her if she will make a wedding dress for her. Tilly agrees and makes a magnificent gown that Gertrude wears on her wedding day. The townspeople are astounded by Gertrude's dress, and after this, many of the women visit Tilly and ask her to make outfits for them. Soon, Tilly has a bustling dressmaking business that she runs from Molly's house. Gertrude's marriage to William makes her extremely arrogant. She married him because he is a Beaumont—the most respectable family in town. When she learns that the Beaumont's are secretly poor, she begins borrowing money from Alvin to maintain their lavish lifestyle. Elsbeth and Gertrude even set up a Dungatar Ladies Social Club to inject some culture into Dungatar. They decide to host a fundraiser and a ball, and Tilly is inundated with demand for her dresses, although the townspeople still avoid her and gossip about her in private. Tilly hires Sergeant Farrat to help her with the workload, and he and Tilly become friends over their shared love of fashion.

Tilly does not plan to go to the ball herself, but at the last minute, Teddy McSwiney convinces her to go as his date. The pair has fallen in love with each other. Tilly wears a beautiful red gown, and she and Teddy go down to the ballroom together. However, when Tilly looks at the seating plan, she sees that her name has been scrubbed off the list. When she tries to enter the ballroom, Evan Pettyman spits at her and Beula Harridene, a malicious gossip, slams the door on her and holds it shut. Tilly rushes to the park and sits on a bench by herself. Teddy comes to find her, and the couple goes back to his caravan and has sex. Tilly tells Teddy about her past, and Teddy proposes to her and says that he will take her and Molly away from Dungatar. The pair go to the silo by the railway to watch the sunrise together. Teddy tells Tilly that when he was a boy, he and his friends used to jump off the silo and into the wheat trucks below. Tilly begs Teddy not to jump, but Teddy insists—he wants to prove to her that he is not afraid and that he does not believe that Tilly is cursed by her past. He leaps into the truck, which he thinks is full of wheat. However, it is really full of sorghum, and Teddy suffocates to death. Tilly is heartbroken by Teddy's death, and

the townspeople blame her for what happened to Teddy (who was extremely popular in town). After he dies, there is no one to protect Tilly and Molly. Townspeople throw things at their house and spit at them in the street.

The Dungatar Ladies hire a new dressmaker, Elsbeth Beaumont's cousin Una Pleasance, to make their clothes for their events. Una comes to stay in Dungatar and begins a romantic affair with Evan Pettyman. Una's clothes are poorly-made compared to Tilly's, however, and some of the Dungatar women secretly continue to buy from Tilly. Word of Tilly's skills also spreads to the neighboring town of Winyerp, and the Winyerp Ladies Cultural Society come to visit her to have some clothes made. During their visit, Tilly suggests that the Ladies Societies should collaborate and put on plays for their upcoming cultural event. The Winyerp Ladies think this is a great idea and they suggest it to Elsbeth at the next meeting. Elsbeth agrees to this idea, but she gets a little worried when the Winyerp ladies say that there will be a prize for best costumes and that they will hire Tilly to dress them. Gertrude suddenly announces that Dungatar have already hired Tilly, and the Winyerp ladies are disappointed. Una is fired, and the Dungatar Ladies go to beg Tilly to make their costumes. Tilly agrees, but only if she is paid upfront. Ruth Dimm, who runs the post office, gives Tilly the money that the townspeople have given her to insure their houses and businesses. The Dungatar Ladies tell Tilly that they are going to perform Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, and Gertrude shows Tilly a design for 17th-century Baroque costumes. Tilly knows these costumes are from the wrong time period for Shakespeare (who is from the 16th century) but she agrees to make them anyway.

One morning, Tilly has a dream about her baby, Pablo, who died before she came back to Dungatar. When Tilly wakes up and goes into the kitchen, Molly tells her that she had the same dream, and Tilly finally tells her mother all about her life before she came back to Dungatar. In Paris, Tilly had a dressmaking business, and she and her boyfriend, Ormond, had Pablo together. This all ended when Pablo died and Ormond left Tilly. After this, Tilly decided to come back to Dungatar. Molly explains that she was never told where Tilly went after Stewart Pettyman's death. Tilly's father, who Molly reveals is actually Evan Pettyman, hid Tilly's whereabouts from Molly, and Molly gradually went mad with grief and loneliness. That afternoon, Molly suffers a stroke and dies. Tilly is heartbroken and she vows to take revenge on the Dungatar residents, who have always been cruel to her and refused to help her or Molly. Sergeant Farrat attends Molly's funeral with Tilly, and they get drunk together that night. Tilly throws her radio out of the house—Molly hated popular music—and it strikes and gravely injures Beula Harridene, who is creeping about the garden spying on them. When Tilly finds out about this, she views it as revenge for Beula's gossiping.

The next day, Tilly visits Evan's wife, Marigold

Pettyman—whom Evan habitually manipulates, drugs, and rapes—and she tells Marigold the truth about Evan. Evan has told Marigold that Stewart died falling out of a tree and has not told Marigold about his relation to Tilly or his many affairs. Marigold also realizes that Evan has spent all the money that she inherited from her father. Presently, Evan is away visiting Una in Melbourne. When he returns, Marigold drugs him using **herbal** potion that Tilly gave her. In his weakened state, Marigold murders him and then tries to kill herself.

As the Dungatar production of *Macbeth* approaches, Tilly continues to work on the costumes. Gertrude (the play's director) begins to go mad with power, and the cast begin to hate her. Finally, on the day of the production, they sack Gertrude and she goes into a frenzy and is committed to the local asylum. The cast sets off for the theater in Winyerp. Sergeant Farrat (who has a role in the play) says that he will meet them there—but as he is about to leave, he notices that Tilly's house is on fire. Tilly has poured gasoline on everything and she walks through Dungatar freeing all the animals. Sergeant Farrat rushes up the hill to try and stop her, but he is already too late: the fire rips through the town and burns everything to the ground.

Meanwhile, in Winyerp, the Dungatar cast are deeply embarrassed when Mona Beaumont, William's sister, masturbates onstage during the play. The Dungatar cast is thrown out of the event. The group glumly rides back to Dungatar on the bus and they're shocked to find that the town has burned down and that Tilly has taken their insurance money and left. Distraught, they notice that Elsbeth Beaumont's house still stands, and they begin to make their way over the hill to seek her help.



## CHARACTERS

### MAJOR CHARACTERS

**Tilly Dunnage** – Tilly Dunnage is the protagonist and the titular dressmaker in the novel. Her mother is Molly Dunnage and her father is Evan Pettyman, the Dungatar town councilor, who seduced Molly when she is young and kept her as his mistress. Tilly grew up in Dungatar but was never accepted by the locals—she was picked on by the other children because she was Molly's daughter and because Molly was unmarried. In particular, Tilly was picked on by Stewart Pettyman, who was Evan's son with his wife, Marigold and, therefore, Tilly's half-brother. Although most people in town know who Tilly's father is, they do not speak about this openly and it is unclear throughout the novel whether Tilly knows about her parentage or not. Tilly left Dunagatar as a young girl, after Stewart Pettyman died in an accident which the townspeople claim that she caused. Tilly does not return to Dungatar for 20 years, by which time she has grown up and made a career for herself as a

dressmaker in Paris. Tilly is a hardworking and strong-willed person who tries not to let other people's criticisms get to her. She returns to Dungatar to care for Molly, who is mentally ill, and Tilly does her best to rise above the malicious gossip and ostracization that the Dungatar residents use against her. Tilly starts a thriving business as the town's dressmaker, she maintains a beautiful **garden**, and she helps a few of the town's kinder residents by giving them herbal remedies. But despite the positive aspects of her life, Tilly is emotionally guarded because she's also suffered tragedy. She eventually confides in Molly that before her return to Dungatar, she had a baby named Pablo who died in infancy. Pablo's father, Ormond, left Tilly after Pablo's death. Despite her determination not to fall in love again, Tilly starts a relationship with Teddy McSwiney and plans to marry him. Teddy dies, however, just after they get engaged. Tilly believes that she is cursed to kill men she loves and she's haunted and traumatized by incidents from her past. She hopes for a new life in Dungatar but, eventually, she decides to take revenge on the cruel townspeople—who have never made any effort to help or accept her—by burning Dungatar to the ground and making off with the town's insurance money.

**Molly Dunnage** – Molly Dunnage is Tilly Dunnage's mother; she's severely mentally ill. As a young woman, Molly was extremely innocent with men and easily taken in. She was seduced by Evan Pettyman, who claimed to be a rich man although he was actually poor. When Molly became pregnant with Tilly, Evan refused to marry her. Molly then moved to Dungatar to start a new life for herself and Tilly, but Evan followed her there and continued to manipulate and control her even after he married his current wife, Marigold. When Tilly was at school, Stewart Pettyman—Evan's son with Marigold—died in an accident which involved Tilly. Evan blamed Tilly for Stewart's death and had her sent away to boarding school. He refused to tell Molly where Tilly was sent, and Molly gradually went mad with grief and isolation after Tilly left. Even 20 years later, when the novel begins, Molly is cruelly rejected and gossiped about by the Dungatar residents because she is a single mother and had a child out of wedlock. When Tilly returns to Dungatar as an adult, she finds Molly delirious and extremely unhealthy—no one except Molly's neighbor, Mae McSwiney, bothers to check on her even though she is ill. Tilly nurses Molly back to health and fixes up the house for her. Although Molly often seems mentally unstable—she destroys things around the house for no reason and she sometimes talks to people who aren't there—in fact, there is logic to her behavior. Molly does not want Tilly to settle in Dungatar, even though she loves Tilly and loves spending time with her, because she feels that Tilly can do better and that Dungatar is a horrible place that will never change. Molly deliberately tries to push Tilly away so that Tilly will leave. Molly is also one of the only honest characters in Dungatar—her “madness” gives her an excuse to say what she really thinks about people rather

than gossip about them behind their backs as others do. Ultimately, Molly passes away from a stroke, leaving Tilly devastated and eager for revenge against the townspeople who so cruelly rejected them.

**Teddy McSwiney** – Teddy McSwiney is the eldest son of Edward and Mae McSwiney. Teddy is also Tilly's love interest throughout the novel. Teddy is handsome, dashing, and practical—he is popular with the townspeople and he provides for his 10 younger siblings by hunting rabbits and catching fish. Despite Teddy's winsome character, however, the townspeople look down on Teddy's family, the McSwiney's, because they are poor and live on the edge of town, near the garbage dump. Many local women find Teddy attractive but do not wish to marry him because of his family connections. Teddy is the Dungatar football team's “full forward” and is beloved by his team—and by Purl and Fred Bundle, who run the local pub and help manage the team. Teddy falls in love with Tilly and stands by her against the gossip of the townspeople. He tries to integrate her into society, persuading her to attend several events with him as his date, but Teddy is good-natured and naïve—he underestimates the level of hatred and jealousy which the townspeople harbor toward Tilly. Eventually, Teddy persuades Tilly to marry him and asks her to leave Dungatar with him. Tilly is also in love with Teddy, and so she says yes. Just after this, Teddy jumps into a silo full of sorghum as a stunt to prove that he's not afraid of anything, and he suffocates and dies in the silo before he and Tilly get the chance to marry.

**Sergeant Farrat** – Sergeant Farrat is Dungatar's policeman who becomes close friends with Tilly and Molly. Sergeant Farrat is a mild-mannered and patient man. He tolerates the Dungatar residents—whom he finds spiteful and malicious—and enjoys his quiet life in the town. Sergeant Farrat loves fashion and makes his own clothes in private, which he keeps this a secret from the townspeople because he likes to wear women's clothing and does not want to be gossiped about. Before Tilly's arrival in Dungatar, Sergeant Farrat does not challenge the status quo or go against the crowd and, instead, keeps his hobbies to himself. His friendship with Tilly, however—which spawns from their mutual love of clothes—helps Sergeant Farrat embrace his passion, and he learns not to care what the Dungatar residents think of him. Sergeant Farrat is one of the only characters in the novel who understands the negative consequences of gossiping about and ostracizing people and who tries to learn from this and change. Although Sergeant Farrat does not go to see Molly before Tilly's arrival, his friendship with Tilly makes him more considerate of people in the community and he begins to advise the Dungatar people to be kinder to one another. He is also the only person who stands by Tilly after Teddy McSwiney's death, which the townspeople blame Tilly for. Although Sergeant Farrat is a benevolent character in the novel, he is punished, along with the townspeople, at the novel's end when Tilly sets



Dungatar on fire and burns the town down. Sergeant Farrat, like the others, loses his home and all his homemade outfits in the fire. In the Dungatar production of Shakespeare's [Macbeth](#) (which the townspeople put on for a cultural event), Sergeant Farrat plays Banquo. This is fitting because, in Shakespeare's play, Banquo is a true friend to Macbeth and is betrayed by him. Sergeant Farrat, similarly, is a good friend to Tilly and is betrayed by her at the novel's end when she also burns his house down and steals his money.

**Evan Pettyman** – Evan Pettyman is Dungatar's town councilor and is an extremely wealthy and powerful man in the community. Evan is also Tilly's father—he seduced her mother, Molly, when she was young but he refused to marry her. Despite this, Evan pursued Molly after Tilly was born, following her to Dungatar. Evan is now married to Marigold Pettyman. The couple had a son named Stewart, who died in an accident, which involved Tilly, when he was a child. Evan is a lecherous, abusive, and dishonest man. His surname, Pettyman, reflects his character as a mean-spirited “petty man.” When Evan seduced Molly, he told her that he was a rich man, but really, he was poor. Evan then married Marigold just after she inherited a fortune from her father, and he took control of her money, which he then used to maneuver himself into a powerful position on Dungatar's council. To make matters worse, Evan is a womanizer and is known to sexually assault women, though people in Dungatar do not speak up about this because they are afraid that Evan will use his social position to ruin them. Evan also drugs Marigold, who is extremely nervous and mentally ill because of Stewart's death, and rapes her every night when she is unconscious. Although Evan gave Molly money for Tilly's education, this is money he stole from Marigold, and he uses it to control and manipulate Molly. Evan also sends Tilly away after Stewart's death (which he blames on Tilly), and he cruelly refuses to tell Molly where he sent her. Eventually, Tilly has her revenge on Evan: she tells Marigold the truth about Stewart's death (which Evan has hidden from Marigold), and Marigold realizes that she has been tricked and abused. As a result, Marigold murders Evan and then tries to kill herself.

**Gertrude Pratt** – Gertrude Pratt is the daughter of Alvin and Muriel Pratt, who run Pratt's General Store in Dungatar. Gertrude is an unattractive but vain and ambitious young woman. She decides to marry William Beaumont, who is from a supposedly wealthy family, and she pressures and manipulates William until she gets her way. Once Gertrude is married to William and friendly with William's mother, Elsbeth (who views herself as a very refined, upper class lady) Gertrude becomes extremely pretentious and looks down on her own parents. Gertrude and Elsbeth set up a Ladies Social Club in Dungatar and put on a series of cultural events. However, Gertrude is shocked to learn that Elsbeth is not as wealthy as she has made out, and instead of using the Beaumont's money, Gertrude

begins to rely on Alvin's business to fund her extravagant lifestyle. Throughout the novel, Gertrude is mean and ungrateful toward people who help her; she only cares about making herself appear refined and cultured, when really, she is ignorant and shallow. Gertrude eventually goes mad with power when she becomes the director of the local play (a version of Shakespeare's [Macbeth](#)). Gertrude treats the cast horribly and loses her mind when they eventually fire her; she is dragged off to the insane asylum after she tries to attack the actors. In this sense, Gertrude's demise mirrors the character of Lady Macbeth that she has chosen to play in [Macbeth](#): in Shakespeare's drama, Lady Macbeth goes mad after convincing her husband, Macbeth, to kill the King to satisfy her own ambitions.

**William Beaumont** – William Beaumont is Elsbeth and Bill Beaumont's eldest son. William returns home from college and moves back in with Elsbeth and his sister, Mona. Elsbeth is delighted to have William home, but she immediately grows bitter and jealous when she cannot control him and when he wants to go out and have a life of his own. Bill Beaumont has passed away, and Elsbeth is a lonely and pretentious woman who views herself as extremely refined—although she is not as rich as she pretends to be and is, in fact, heavily in debt—and despises the other Dungatar residents. William is a weak character, and although he wants to break free of his mother, he grows increasingly henpecked and manipulated by her as the novel progresses. To gain his independence, William marries Gertrude Pratt, who moves into the Beaumonts' house at Windswept Crest. Gertrude and Elsbeth gang up on William, however, and boss him around constantly. William dreams of being free throughout the novel. He knows he does not love his wife and he regrets his marriage and return to Dungatar. After William eventually encounters Tilly and becomes infatuated with her, he stands up to Gertrude and has her committed to an asylum after she goes mad during the Dungatar theater production of [Macbeth](#).

**Marigold Pettyman** – Marigold Pettyman Evan Pettyman's wife and Stewart Pettyman's mother. Marigold was swept off her feet by Evan as a young woman and is seemingly oblivious to the fact that Evan stole her inheritance money and has numerous affairs behind her back. Marigold is badly affected by her son's death—Evan lies to her that Stewart fell out of a tree and died, but really he was killed in an accident that involved Tilly Dunnage. Due to Marigold's grief and Evan's mistreatment, Marigold is neurotic and dependent on several medications, which she uses to help her sleep and to calm her nerves. Evan uses this dependency against her, however, and convinces her to take more sleeping medication than she needs so that he can sexually assault her at night and so that she will not notice his womanizing. During her waking hours, Marigold is obsessed with cleanliness and fastidiously scrubs her house every day. This obsession is ironic because, no matter how

much Marigold cleans, she cannot get rid of the real corruptive influence in her life: Evan. Marigold eventually gets revenge on Evan when Tilly reveals the truth about him to Marigold, and Marigold murders Evan and tries to kill herself. Marigold's name reflects her incessant cleaning, as Marigold is also a brand of rubber gloves used for housework. Marigolds are also the **plants** which Tilly uses to drug Evan when she and Marigold take revenge on him.

**Stewart Pettyman** – Stewart Pettyman is the son of Evan Pettyman and Marigold Pettyman and is therefore Tilly's half-brother (unknown to either child or to Marigold). Stewart is an obnoxious and spoiled boy who bullies and sexually assaults Tilly when they are in school together. Ultimately, Stewart dies in an accident: he runs at Tilly to headbutt her, and, when she steps out of the way, he breaks his neck against a wall and passes away. Evan blames Tilly for Stewart's death, and the Dungatar townspeople turn on Tilly and continue to hold this against her even when she returns as an adult. Evan also lies to Marigold about Stewart's death. Marigold—whom Evan frequently drugs, abuses, and lies to—believes that Stewart was a good little boy who died when he fell out of a tree. As an adult, Tilly ultimately reveals the truth of Stewart's death to Marigold, which contributes to Marigold's decision to murder Evan.

**Irma Almanac** – Irma Almanac is the wife of Dungatar's chemist, Mr. Almanac. Irma is an elderly woman who's crippled by painful arthritis and has lived a sad and downtrodden life. When Mr. Almanac was young, he used to beat Irma—now that he is too old and ill to do this, he abuses his power over her by refusing to let her take pain medication for her illness. Instead, Mr. Almanac tells Irma that she is in pain because she is a sinful person. Irma is kind, however, and she sends Molly food when she knows that Molly is ill and alone. Tilly becomes friends with Irma when she returns to Dungatar, and she makes Irma **herbal** cakes that ease her arthritic pain. Every day, after Mr. Almanac finished work, Nancy (Mr. Almanac's assistant) wheels him across the street in his wheelchair and Irma catches him with a cushion at the front gate. One night, after eating a batch of Tilly's cakes, Irma falls asleep and fails to catch Mr. Almanac. He rolls through the house and out of the back door, where he drowns in the river. After his death, Irma takes to wearing bright red dresses, which she was never allowed to do before.

**Mr. Almanac** – Mr. Almanac is a vicious, spiteful man who runs the chemist's shop in Dungatar. He is married to Irma Almanac. Mr. Almanac has Parkinson's disease and is hunched and bent because of his condition; he cannot see where he is going because his head faces the ground, so he's assisted around the shop by Nancy Pickett. When Mr. Almanac was young and healthy, however, he used to beat Irma. Now that he cannot physically abuse her, he abuses his power over her by refusing to prescribe her drugs for her painful arthritis. Irma cannot go to another doctor because there is no other doctor in

Dungatar, and the residents rely on Mr. Almanac for medication. Mr. Almanac, however, believes that people get ill because they bring it upon themselves through their sinful behavior. He is therefore unsympathetic with his patients and reluctant to help people. Every night after work, Nancy wheels Mr. Almanac across the road in his wheelchair, where Irma catches him with a pillow and takes him inside. However, one night, Irma falls asleep in her chair by the front gate. Mr. Almanac wheels past her, rolls through the house and out the back door, and drowns to death in the river behind their house.

**Elsbeth Beaumont** – Elsbeth Beaumont is William Beaumont and Mona Beaumont's mother and Bill Beaumont's widow. Elsbeth is a snobbish woman who married her husband because she incorrectly believed he was rich. Elsbeth thinks she is better than everyone in Dungatar and tries to keep up her refined appearance and lifestyle even though she is heavily in debt to Alvin Pratt, who runs the General Store. Elsbeth is dismayed when William decides to marry Alvin's daughter, Gertrude, who Elsbeth considers a lumpish, common girl. Elsbeth puts on a show of adoring Gertrude after she and William's marriage, but she secretly dislikes her. Elsbeth is extremely controlling with William and abusive and neglectful with Mona. Elsbeth is also power-hungry and likes to have control over the community. However, this backfires on Elsbeth as, after Tilly burns Dungatar to the ground, the Dungatar residents make their way to Elsbeth's house and expect her to take charge of the situation.

**Mona Beaumont** – Mona is William's younger sister and is the daughter of Elsbeth and Bill Beaumont. Mona is an unattractive and unfortunate young woman who is bossed around and mistreated by Elsbeth and ignored by everyone else. Despite this, Mona is highly sexual, and she masturbates every night before she goes to sleep. Mona is eventually married off to Lesley Muncan, whom Gertrude (William's wife) hires to teach Mona dressage. Lesley is a fraud, however—he is not a wealthy horse master from Europe like he claims, but a poor servant. It is heavily implied that Lesley is gay, but he is forced to marry Mona after a misunderstanding which leads people to believe that he and Mona have had sex. Lesley and Mona stay good friends despite this, and they have a pleasant, platonic marriage. Mona destroys Dungatar's reputation with its neighboring towns when, during the Dungatar theater production of *Macbeth*, Mona masturbates on stage and shocks the audience.

**Beula Harridene** – Beula Harridene is a gossiping, vindictive, malicious woman. Beula's surname "Harridene" symbolizes her malicious nature because it is close to the word "harridan"—a term for a vicious, spiteful woman. Beula goes out of her way to find out people's secrets so that she can judge them, spread rumors about them, and rile other people up against them. She is jealous and vicious toward anyone who is doing well. Beula tries to use the law against people whom she considers to be

outcasts or who behave in ways she finds socially unacceptable—she is extremely conservative and judges anything that she does not deem respectable. She constantly harasses Sergeant Farrat and tries to convince him to arrest people based on gossip and suspicion, and she also writes a gossip column in the local paper where she exposes people's secrets. Beula hates Tilly and Molly, and she particularly resents Tilly's beauty and dressmaking skills—even when Tilly's efforts as a dressmaker benefit the community. Beula locks Tilly out of the Dungatar Ball, which Tilly has tried to attend with Teddy McSwiney. When the townspeople will not let Tilly in, she and Teddy go to the silo together, where Teddy ultimately dies in an accident. In this sense, the townspeople, and Beula in particular, contribute to Teddy's death. Beula meets an unpleasant end, however: one night, when she is spying on Tilly, Tilly gets drunk and throws her radio out of the house. The heavy machine hits Beula in the face and seriously injures her, and Beula goes blind and is forced to be institutionalized in a local hospital.

**Una Pleasance** – Una Pleasance is Elsbeth Beaumont's cousin who works as a seamstress. Una is invited to Dungatar by Elsbeth, and she goes to stay with Marigold and Evan Pettyman after Teddy McSwiney's death, which the townspeople blame on Tilly. Although Tilly has been the local dressmaker for some time, Teddy's death makes her an outcast once more and the residents hire Una as a replacement. Una is a useless dressmaker, however, and her clothes fit badly and are unfashionable compared with Tilly's dresses. Una begins an affair with Evan Pettyman during her time in Dungatar.

**Lesley Muncan** – Lesley Muncan is a poor man with no connections or family. He meets William Beaumont in Melbourne—Lesley is working in the hotel kitchen where William, Gertrude, Elsbeth, and Mona go to stay. Lesley lies to William that he is from a rich family and that he is an expert in horses and dressage, so Gertrude hires Lesley to teach Mona how to ride. Lesley is a neat and fastidious man who forms a close friendship with Mona. It is implied that Lesley is gay, but he is forced to marry Mona when a mishap with her dress leads everyone to believe that they have had sex. Lesley is a natural “actor” and a conman: he deceives the Beaumonts into believing that he is wealthy and refined, and he tricks the Dungatar residents with his and Mona's sham marriage. Lesley also wears a wig, which suggests that his appearance is as false as his character.

**Barney McSwiney** – Barney is the disabled son of Edward and Mae McSwiney and is Teddy's younger brother. Barney is physically deformed, and he also suffers from a learning disability. He is a gentle, vulnerable boy who's often ostracized and picked on by the Dungatar community because of his disabilities. The Dungatar residents once tried to have Barney committed to an insane asylum, even though he had done nothing wrong and is not a danger to himself or others. Barney

is always accompanied by a member of his family, because Mae worries that the Dungatar townspeople might try this again. Barney befriends Tilly, who is kind to him and empathizes with him because she is also gossiped about and treated like an outcast. After Teddy dies, however, Barney is heartbroken and he leaves Dungatar with his family shortly after.

**Edward McSwiney** – Edward McSwiney is Mae McSwiney's husband and the father of Teddy, Barney, and the nine other McSwiney children. Edward is a cheerful man who works as a delivery man in Dungatar and lives in a caravan near the dump with his family. He is well-liked in the community and does many odd jobs for people. However, Edward and his family are still treated like outcasts in Dungatar because they are poor and live out by the dump. People believe that they are thieves and criminals, even though Edward often helps people and just wants to live his life peacefully in the town. As a young man, Edward witnesses Stewart Pettyman bullying Tilly Dunnage and he tries to stop Stewart. However, Edward arrives too late—by the time he gets there to intervene, Stewart has died in an accident. Although Edward tries to defend Tilly, who is wrongly blamed for Stewart's death, he is silenced by Evan Pettyman, Stewart's father. Edward is crushed by his own son Teddy's death decades later, and he and his family leave Dungatar shortly after this.

**Mae McSwiney** – Mae McSwiney is Edward McSwiney's wife and is the mother of 11 children, including Teddy and Barney. Mae is a kindly and practical woman who is gossiped about and treated like an outcast by the Dungatar townspeople because she and her family are poor and live beside the dump. Mae does not join in with the town's malicious gossip about others, and she's kind to Molly, even when everybody else ignores Molly and calls her crazy. Mae still takes food to the isolated, mentally-ill Molly. Mae has grown cynical and suspicious because of how she's treated in Dungatar, however, and she won't go out of her way to make friends outside of her family. She is wary of Tilly when Tilly returns to town decades later, and she distrusts Teddy's relationship with Tilly. After Teddy dies in an accident, Mae is heartbroken by his death, and she and her family leave Dungatar soon after this incident.

**Muriel Pratt** – Muriel Pratt is Alvin Pratt's wife and Gertrude Pratt's mother. Muriel and her husband run Pratt's General Store in Dungatar, and they're wealthy because of this. Muriel is an unpretentious woman who likes to lead a quiet life and only half-heartedly joins in with the local gossip. She subtly encourages Gertrude to pursue William Beaumont, however, as the Beaumont's are believed to be very rich and refined—but Muriel is disappointed when Gertrude's marriage makes her snobbish and dismissive of her parents.

**Alvin Pratt** – Alvin Pratt is Muriel Pratt's husband and Gertrude Pratt's father. Alvin is somewhat two-faced: he is extremely pleasant to his customers, but he also keeps an extremely close eye on everything they owe him and he is really

only concerned about money. This attitude makes Alvin rich, however, and he is one of the more powerful figures in Dungatar. Alvin encourages Gertrude's marriage to William Beaumont. Although the Beaumonts are actually poorer than the Pratts, Alvin snobbishly enjoys his family's connection with the Beaumonts as he feels that their high social status makes him refined by association. Alvin is the financial benefactor of the Dungatar Ladies Social Club—which Gertrude sets up with her mother-in-law, Elsbeth Beaumont—and he lends them money for all their cultural events. While this seems kind on Alvin's part, really, he likes people to owe him money because this gives him power over them.

**Nancy Pickett** – Nancy is Lois Pickett's daughter and Bobby Pickett's younger sister. Nancy works as Mr. Almanac's assistant in the chemist's shop. She is a boyish and aggressive young woman and is secretly a lesbian. Nancy used to pick on Tilly Dunnage at school and often got into fights when people made fun of Bobby, who has a learning disability. Nancy is involved in a secret relationship with Ruth Dimm, who runs the post office. She and Ruth often go through people's packages and gossip about their affairs.

**Lois Pickett** – Lois Pickett is a local gossip and a friend of Beula Harridene. Lois has two children, Nancy and Bobby. Lois is an unpleasant and unhygienic woman who judges and attacks others for their private behavior but has many disgusting habits which she indulges in in secret. For instance, she is known in the town for picking her skin spots, a tendency which is reflected in her last name, Pickett. Lois cleans for Irma Almanac, but is lazy and thoughtless about Irma's arthritis—Lois treats Irma quite roughly, which causes her pain.

**Bobby Pickett** – Bobby Pickett is Lois Pickett's eldest son and Nancy Pickett's older brother. It is implied that Bobby has a learning disability—he was made fun of at school for being big and slow, and he still sucks his thumb as an adult. Bobby is a gentle and harmless man. He plays the guitar in Faith O'Brien's band and drives the bus for the Dungatar Ladies theater group. Nancy is very protective of Bobby and defends him from gossip or teasing. She buys Bobby a pet to try and cheer him up, and this leads to Bobby's fascination with animals—he starts to adopt all sorts of pets and injured animals that he nurses back to health.

**Ruth Dimm** – Ruth Dimm is a nosy woman who works in the Dungatar post office. She's the sister of Prudence Dimm, the schoolteacher. Ruth is secretly a lesbian and is having an affair with Nancy Pickett; together, the two women root through people's mail and gossip about them based on what they find. Ruth and Nancy take a particular interest in Tilly's mail, which arrives from all over Europe, and they steal many of the **herbs** and ointments that Tilly orders from abroad.

**Prudence Dimm** – Prudence Dimm is the teacher at Dungatar school and is Ruth Dimm's sister. Prudence's last name, Dimm,

is pertinent because she is short-sighted to the point of near-blindness—her sight is “dim.” Prudence is a gossip and she's harsh with the children she teaches. She taught Tilly Dunnage and Stewart Pettyman when they were children, and she picked on Tilly because she was an outsider in the town. Prudence also tells Tilly that her father is Evan Pettyman, but Tilly doesn't tell people that she knows this.

**Purl Bundle** – Purl Bundle is married to Fred Bundle and runs the local pub and hotel with him. Purl is an attractive woman and takes pride in her looks. She does not worry that the other women gossip about her because she says they are only jealous. Purl had an affair, and possibly a child, with Bill Beaumont before her marriage to Fred, but this is kept secret by the townspeople. Purl and Fred are now very much in love.

**Faith O'Brien** – Faith O'Brien is a beautiful young woman and the singer in the local band. She is married to Hamish O'Brien, who is also in the band and is having an affair with Reginald Blood, Dungatar's butcher and her fellow bandmate. It is ironic that she is named Faith because she is unfaithful to her husband.

**Hamish O'Brien** – Hamish O'Brien is married to Faith O'Brien and he works at Dungatar train station. Hamish is oblivious to his wife's infidelities and only cares about his beloved steam trains, which he laments are being gradually phased out by diesel trains. Faith, Hamish, Reginald, and Bobby Pickett are all in a band together.

## MINOR CHARACTERS

**Frank** – Frank is the district Inspector who is sent to stay with Sergeant Farrat after a series of mysterious deaths and accidents occur in Dungatar. Frank is a messy, uncouth, and arrogant man, and Sergeant Farrat dislikes having him around.

**Ormond** – Ormond was Tilly's boyfriend whom she lived with in Paris before her return to Dungatar. Tilly and Ormond had a baby named Pablo, but Pablo died when he was seven months old. Ormond blamed Tilly for Pablo's death—although Pablo died of natural causes—and left her shortly after.

**Pablo** – Pablo was Tilly and Ormond's son who dies of natural causes when he was seven months old. Tilly has recurring dreams about Pablo during her time in Dungatar.

**Bill Beaumont** – Bill Beaumont is Elsbeth Beaumont's husband and William and Mona Beaumont's father who died before the novel begins. It is implied that Bill had an affair with Purl Bundle before he died.

**Fred Bundle** – Fred Bundle is married to Purl Bundle and runs the Dungatar pub and hotel. Fred was once an alcoholic but gave up drinking after he broke both his legs in an accident. He and Purl have a loving relationship.

**Reginald Blood** – Reginald Blood is Dungatar's butcher and works in Pratt's General Store. Reginald is having an affair with



Faith O'Brien and is in a band with Faith, Hamish, and Bobby Pickett.

**Mrs. Flynt** – Mrs. Flynt is the head of the Ladies Society in Winyerp, a neighboring town and Dungatar's rival.

**Scotty Pullit** – Scotty Pullit is a Dungatar resident who lives at the hotel and brews his own spirits on an illegal still.

**Septimus Crescent** – Septimus Crescent is a local man who believes that the earth is flat.

## TERMS

**Sorghum** – Sorghum is a plant substitute for wheat or grain which is often used as fodder for farm animals. In the novel, **Teddy**, Tilly's lover, dies when he jumps into a vat of sorghum and suffocates.

**Dressage** – Dressage is a form of horse riding in which the rider controls their horse and signals for them to do a series of stances and movements. In the novel, **Lesley** falsely claims to be a dressage teacher, and the Beaumont family hires him to teach **Mona** how to ride.

**Eisteddfod** – An *Eisteddfod* is a German term for a cultural festival which includes music, poetry, drama, and other types of performance. In the novel, the **Dungatar** Ladies Social Club arranges an *Eisteddfod* with the neighboring towns, Winyerp and Itheca.



## 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.



### TRANSFORMATION, ILLUSION, AND TRUTH

Rosalie Ham's novel *The Dressmaker* is set in Dungatar, a remote Australian town, in the 1950s.

The residents of Dungatar undergo a variety of transformations throughout the story. These transformations begin when Tilly Dunnage, a young woman who left the town as a child after she was wrongly accused of murdering a classmate, returns and sets up a dressmaking business. Her fashionable creations cause a stir in Dungatar, and her caring presence causes genuine positive change across the community. However, while Tilly's dresses transform some characters on the surface, many of these transformations are only temporary illusions that do not reveal, but instead disguise, those characters' true natures. Through these contrasting examples, Ham suggests that changing one's

appearance isn't enough to create genuine transformation; real change can only come from meaningful human connections.

Love and friendship have the power to transform people in the novel. Tilly returns to Dungatar to stay with her mother, Molly, who is mentally ill. When Tilly arrives, Molly is extremely sick. The townspeople ignore and ostracize Molly because she is unwell, and Molly's house has fallen into disrepair. Tilly's diligently remodels the house and cares for Molly, and Molly becomes much calmer and healthier. This suggests that Tilly's power to transform others is the result of her hard work and caring spirit. Tilly's arrival also affects the broader community and allows for genuine transformation among certain individuals. For example, Sergeant Farrat (the local policeman) is a cross-dresser who loves fashion and makes himself extravagant outfits in private. Sergeant Farrat hides his passion from the townspeople, however, because he fears he will be ostracized if his secret comes out. Through his friendship with Tilly, Sergeant Farrat gains confidence and learns not to care what the townspeople think. His transformation is demonstrated when, after Molly's death, he wears a black gown to her funeral. This suggests that, through his connection with Tilly, Sergeant Farrat is genuinely able to change for the better. Tilly is also transformed through her relationship with Teddy McSwiney, a young man from the town. Although Teddy dies shortly after they confess their love for each other, Tilly's connection with Teddy helps her to open-up and tell Molly about her past—Tilly lost a child before she returned to Dungatar. Confessing this to Molly brings the two women closer together and it suggests that love and connection have a transformative effect on people and can help them to heal old wounds.

However, not all the transformations in the novel last—most are only temporary illusions. When Gertrude Pratt (the daughter of Alvin Pratt, Dungatar's grocer) gets engaged to William Beaumont (a young man from a prestigious Dungatar family), Gertrude asks Tilly to make her wedding gown. Although Gertrude is not beautiful and William does not really love her (he agrees to marry her because Gertrude pressures him), the gown that Tilly creates temporarily transforms Gertrude and makes William believe that he *does* love her and that his reluctance to marry her is just “nerves.” This demonstrates that people can be temporarily fooled by appearances. However, despite the success of the wedding (which is largely due to Gertrude's dress), the illusion soon wears off and Gertrude's true character—which is vain and manipulative—shows through in her marriage. Similarly, William's temporary belief that he truly loves his wife also proves illusory, as he tearfully admits one night in the local pub. This supports the idea that although appearances can be powerful, they quickly lose their power if they do not reflect reality. Furthermore, Gertrude believes that her marriage to William will transform her into a refined and powerful person in

Dungatar. The Beaumonts *appear* to be very wealthy, and Elsbeth Beaumont, William's mother, is a snobbish woman who believes she is superior to everyone in Dungatar. However, Elsbeth's pretensions of grandeur are discovered to be illusory when Gertrude finds out that the Beaumonts are, in fact, heavily in debt and almost bankrupt. Elsbeth tries to disguise her poverty beneath her haughty persona and through luxurious items of clothing like her fox fur—which, from a distance, appears expensive, but up close is ancient and moldering. This suggests that although illusions can be maintained for a time, if they are not based on reality they will eventually wear off and reveal what is really underneath.

Ham suggests that despite the power of illusions, the truth usually comes out. This is demonstrated by the play that the Dungatar residents put on (a version of Shakespeare's [Macbeth](#)) to compete with their neighboring towns in a cultural event. Although the townspeople commission elaborate costumes for the play in order to show how sophisticated they are, the costumes are from the wrong time period and showcase the cast's ignorance rather than their worldliness. This suggests that it is impossible to conceal things forever and that people's unpleasant characteristics, or unkind motives, usually surface at some point. People's illusions about life are also destroyed throughout the novel. For example, Tilly tries to believe that she can make a life for herself in Dungatar, even though the townspeople are cruel and unwilling to accept her. Tilly releases these illusions at the novel's end and understands that there is no hope for Dungatar—it is rotten through and through—and so she burns it to the ground. This suggests that illusions about happy endings and idealistic escapes will usually turn out to be temporary and fleeting. When Tilly sets fire to the town, she transforms it one final time and reveals Dungatar's true character, which is wicked and morally bankrupt. The rural, picturesque landscape is turned into a smoking ruin, which makes Dungatar's internal reality match its external appearance. This suggests that illusions cannot hide the truth forever and that it is only through genuine connection with others that one can hope to grow and change in a meaningful way.



## VENGEANCE AND SUFFERING

In Rosalie Ham's *The Dressmaker*, Tilly Dunnage returns to her childhood home, a small town called Dungatar. However, the townspeople have always ostracized Tilly (they wrongly believe she is responsible for a local boy's death) and they continue to do so on her return. Eventually, their cruel treatment pushes Tilly to take revenge upon them by burning Dungatar to the ground and making off with the town's insurance money. Ham thus suggests that suffering can push people to seek revenge in extreme and irrational ways. But while vengeance can have devastating results, Ham also notes that it has a certain logic to it: for

people who have been treated badly, treating others the same way often seems like the only appropriate response. Furthermore, many of Ham's characters meet fittingly bitter ends after treating others badly, which implies that people who behave cruelly will generally suffer in return—whether or not anyone is actively seeking vengeance on them.

Suffering can cause people to take out their pain on others. Beula Harridene is Dungatar's primary gossip, and she spies on people so that she can use their secrets against them. While Beula's efforts seem malicious and unprompted, Ham subtly suggests that when people are cruel to others it is usually because they themselves are unhappy. This is reflected through Sergeant Farrat (Dungatar's policeman) and his charitable belief that Beula is "malicious and mad" because of the constant discomfort of her deformed jaw. This suggests that horrible people are often cruel because they themselves suffer. This idea is further demonstrated through Molly, who, after she suffers a stroke, destroys things in her house to take "revenge" on life for her pain. This suggests that suffering causes frustration which leads people to lash out—even when what they're lashing out at isn't really the source of their pain. The same is true for Tilly, who eventually takes revenge on the townspeople because they have mistreated her. Although Tilly has little interest in revenge when she first returns to Dungatar, by the end of the novel her grief and suffering have pushed her to her limit and she burns the town as vengeance for her mother Molly—who dies of a stroke and whose funeral is neglected by the Dungatar residents—and for Teddy McSwiney, who is Tilly's lover and who dies in an accident on the night that they try to attend the Dungatar Social Club Ball. At the ball, Tilly and Teddy are turned away because the townspeople unfairly hate Tilly. This indirectly leads to Teddy's death as, if he had been at the ball, he would not have had his fatal accident. Tilly's grief and extreme suffering push her to give in to her desire for vengeance against the townspeople, even though they didn't literally kill Molly or Teddy.

Even when vengeance is irrational or extreme, it can provide a kind of poetic justice since it can make people experience the same pain that they have inflicted on others. Marigold Pettyman, who is married to the misogynistic town-councilor Evan Pettyman, gets revenge on her husband by subjecting him to the same humiliation and powerlessness that he has put her through. Throughout their marriage, Evan drugs Marigold each night so that she does not suspect his multiple affairs, and he rapes her while she sleeps. Tilly eventually reveals this to Marigold and, as revenge, Marigold drugs Evan and murders him. This suggests that Marigold wants to abuse Evan the way that he has abused her so that he knows how it feels to be mistreated. Tilly's vengeance against the townspeople takes a similar shape: she destroys their homes so that, like her, they know what it is like to lose everything. Tilly blames the townspeople for her isolation (her mother and Teddy are both

dead) because they have ostracized her and have indirectly contributed to the deaths of her loved ones. Tilly is alone in the world and has nowhere to go, so she wants the Dungatar residents to experience this as well. Tilly also robs the town of their insurance money because the townspeople have tried to rob her—they have not paid her for the outfits she has made them. Tilly feels that the only way to teach the townspeople a lesson and show them what it feels like to be alienated, cast out, and taken advantage of is to put them in this position themselves. This suggests that victims of abuse often use vengeance to make their abusers suffer what the victims have felt.

Ham further suggests that even if no one takes revenge on people who are cruel to others, these individuals often suffer cruel fates themselves as a result of their behavior. For instance, Beula Harridene meets an unpleasant end as a result of her prying. One night, while Beula spies on Tilly, Tilly throws her old radio out of the house and, unknowingly, hits Beula with it and injures Beula's face. Beula goes blind because of this and is forced to spend the rest of her days in the sanitorium. This suggests that negative behaviors often lead to negative consequences for those who practice them, with or without revenge. The same is true of Stewart Pettyman, who dies in an accident because he tries to bully Tilly when they are both children. Stewart runs at Tilly to headbutt her in the stomach, and Tilly, who is pressed against a wall, steps out of the way to protect herself. Stewart breaks his neck against the wall and dies, and this incident suggests that those who abuse others often end up hurting themselves. This is further demonstrated through the character of Gertrude, who literally goes mad with power as the director of the town's production of *Macbeth* and is dragged off to the insane asylum. The cast of the play let Gertrude be taken away and do not defend her because she has mistreated them during rehearsals and, therefore, has brought this punishment on herself. In this way, Ham suggests that people who terrorize others will find no one on their side when they become victims themselves and that, either through vengeance or fate, people often suffer when they mistreat others.



## SECRETS, HYPOCRISY, AND CONFORMITY

In the close-knit community of Dungatar—a small town where the protagonist, Tilly Dunnage, grew up and which she returns to as an adult—"everybody knows everyone else's business." People in Dungatar go out of their way to learn each other's secrets because they feel that this gives them power over others. However, because *everyone* in Dungatar has a secret, no one wants to reveal other people's secrets in case they themselves are then gossiped about. This breeds an atmosphere of conformity and paranoia; Dungatar residents fear that if their secrets are exposed, they will be

ostracized from the community because behavior outside of the norm is not openly accepted in Dungatar, even though almost everyone who lives there privately engages in behavior which would be considered abnormal by the conservative residents. This suggests that Dungatar is an unforgiving and intolerant place in which people cannot freely be themselves. By illuminating Dungatar's conformist, judgmental tendencies while emphasizing that no one in the town actually meets Dungatar's conservative standard of behavior, Ham suggests that such communities are inherently hypocritical and that people in them often look for excuses to persecute others to deflect attention away from themselves and their own unconventional behaviors.

Knowing people's secrets gives people power over others in Dungatar because behavior outside of traditional, conservative values is not accepted or tolerated. Dungatar is full of people who love to snoop, gossip, and spy on others. Beula Harridene spends most of her time trying to catch people engaging in behaviors which she considers socially unacceptable and which she knows the conservative residents of Dungatar will also dislike. For example, Beula is determined to catch local women, Ruth Dimm and her lover, Nancy Pickett, together—she knows that if the community learns that Ruth and Nancy are lesbians, they will shun them. This suggests that Dungatar is an extremely conservative place in which diversity is not tolerated. However, although Beula runs a local gossip column, she also keeps as many secrets as she shares. Beula understands that if she keeps people's secrets, she can blackmail them to stop these secrets getting out. This further implies that there are negative consequences for people who step outside of the norm in Dungatar, as everyone wants to avoid being blackmailed. Characters like Tilly, Molly, and the McSwineys—who are all considered outcasts by the community—are gossiped about and mistreated because they do not fit it. This demonstrates that in Dungatar, the risks of being ostracized are very real; if people's secrets come out, they might end up like the town's other outcasts.

The novel suggests that communities that only accept people based on conformity are predatory and hypocritical, and they often use people's vulnerabilities against them. Although the townspeople judge those with secrets harshly, almost everyone in Dungatar has a secret of their own. This suggests that people in the town are hypocritical in their judgements of others. For example, it is implied that Purl, Fred Bundle's wife, had an affair (and possibly a child) before she was married to Fred. Although this seems to be common knowledge in the town, Purl is protected from ostracization because her husband runs the local pub—something the Dungatar residents consider vital to their way of life. This suggests that people who are considered useful or powerful in the community are accepted, regardless of their behavior. In contrast, however, Molly is judged harshly because she had Tilly out of wedlock. Molly is cast out of

Dungatar because she has no one to protect her and no influence in the community; the same people who accept Purl reject Molly because Molly is an easy target. This implies that people in small, insular communities often prey on vulnerable people, and gossip about their misfortunes and secrets, to avoid scrutiny themselves and deflect judgement about their own imperfect lifestyles. Molly and Tilly are actively persecuted by Evan Pettyman, a prominent political figure in Dungatar who everybody knows—but nobody will admit—is a sexual predator. This demonstrates the degree of hypocrisy people will tolerate from powerful figures in small towns. Not only is Evan cruel to Molly and Tilly (he unfairly blamed Tilly for his son Stewart's death and had her sent away from her mother when she was a child), he is also secretly Tilly's father—he uses Stewart's accident as an excuse to remove Tilly from the town and hide his own guilt. Several Dungatar residents know this but do not speak up, which implies that often, people would rather conform and submit to powerful people than risk being ostracized themselves for defending others.

However, Ham suggests that standing out is not easy and that people often have good reason to fear ostracization from society. This is demonstrated through Molly, who has been cast out for so long that she has gone mad through isolation and loneliness. This demonstrates how ostracization is especially cruel because people desperately need acceptance and social connection to lead happy and fulfilling lives. In contrast to most of the Dungatar residents, Tilly is not afraid to stand out and will not reject people because they are outcasts. This is demonstrated when Tilly agrees to go to the horse races with Barney McSwiney, a young disabled man whom people ostracize because of his disability. Rather than reject Barney to try and fit in, Tilly feels that she and Barney are the same because people in Dungatar gang up on them both. This makes her even more sympathetic toward Barney and shows that it is worth standing out to help someone vulnerable, rather than following the crowd. Genuine acceptance is impossible, however, in societies which do not allow for diversity or deviation from the norm. As the Dungatar residents demonstrate, everyone has preferences and behavior which could be considered strange by others. Judgmental and conservative communities, which ostracize people based on these behaviors, are almost always hypocritical and prevent people from forming positive social connections and from freely being themselves.

## MEMORIES, PROGRESS, AND THE PAST

Many of *The Dressmaker's* characters are haunted by or romanticize the past throughout the novel, which is set in the small, rural town of Dungatar—a place where the townspeople dislike change and feel that social progress threatens their conservative ways of life. While some characters mourn specific things that they have lost, others

more generally fear progress and are threatened by social change. However, their memories cannot always be trusted, and their beliefs about the past are often skewed in some way. Ham suggests that for progress to be possible, sometimes people need to let go of old-fashioned or romanticized beliefs about the past and embrace new ideas instead.

Although events may be in the past, the traumas caused by these events often stay with people and inform their future behaviors. For instance, Tilly—a young woman who grew up in Dungatar and who returns there as an adult—is haunted by the memory of her son, Pablo, who died when he was a baby and whom she often dreams about. This suggests that even though time moves on, memories stay with people and affect them in their day-to-day lives. The memory of painful events also causes people to be wary of future pain: Tilly is afraid to fall in love with her neighbor, Teddy, (who pursues her for a long time before she admits her feelings for him) because of her traumatic memories of loss and grief. This implies that people learn from their pasts and often allow past events to shape their futures. Sometimes, even when people try to leave the past behind, they cannot escape from their experiences. This is true of Molly, who gets pregnant with Tilly as a young woman. Tilly's father is Evan Pettyman, a womanizer who seduces and then abandons Molly. Although Molly tries to put the affair behind her, Evan will not let her forget the past and he follows Molly to Dungatar to “keep her as his mistress.” Although their affair ends when Tilly is a child, the impact of Evan's cruel treatment affects that whole course of Molly's life: she is never really able to escape his influence, and the trauma from the way he treats her ultimately causes Molly's isolation in the town, which drives her mad. This suggests that the impact of traumatic experiences can be far-reaching.

However, although past events can be powerful factors in people's lives, memories of these events often prove unreliable. Tilly is traumatized by Stewart Pettyman's death and does not accurately remember the details of this event (Stewart died by accident while trying to attack her). Tilly feels guilty for her part in his death, even though she did nothing wrong. This suggests that trauma affects memory and means that people do not always remember things correctly. Marigold Pettyman, Evan Pettyman's wife and Stewart's mother, also has a distorted view of the past and believes that Stewart was a good little boy rather than a bully. Evan, who knows the truth about Stewart's death, lies to Marigold, which leads to Marigold's romanticized and inaccurate memory of her son. Marigold also wants to believe Evan's lies because of her grief over Stewart's death, which indicates that people often remember the past as better than it really was. Other Dungatar residents also romanticize the past, such as Hamish O'Brien, who laments the fact that diesel trains are widely replacing steam engines. Diesel trains are faster, and therefore will improve things for travelers and make it easier to deliver



mail—and this will generally lead to social progress, as Dungatar will become easier to reach and therefore more cosmopolitan and diverse. Regardless, Hamish’s romantic view of the past makes him feel resentful of this social change.

Despite the allure of the past, Ham suggests that sometimes old beliefs about the past must be abandoned so that progress to be made. Dungatar is portrayed as a place that is rapidly becoming old-fashioned and losing touch with the technological and social changes that were widespread in the 1950s, when the novel is set. These changes are represented by developments in farming technology, such as the replacement of grain in the freight trains with sorghum (a plant substitute for grain that is used as fodder for cattle). Teddy dies when he jumps into a tank filled with sorghum—he thinks it is grain because this is what used to be in the tanks when he was a boy, and so he suffocates. His death demonstrates that things do not stay the same, and it highlights the idea that people’s memories of the past, and their desire to keep things the same, often trips people up and can, as in Teddy’s case, lead to tragic consequences.

Ham further suggests that although change may be difficult to endure, it is inevitable. Once people have experienced change, things cannot go back to the way they were. This is supported by the arrival of Una Pleasance in Dungatar. Una is a seamstress who is hired to replace Tilly after the Dungatar residents fire her. Compared with Tilly’s modern and fashionable creations, however, Una’s clothes are old-fashioned and dowdy. Although the Dungatar women try to tolerate Una, they have had a taste of something new and exciting through Tilly’s designs and they quickly go back to secretly using Tilly. This suggests that once change has been made, it is impossible to forget and to go back to the way things were. However, the novel’s ending suggests that sometimes change must be forced upon people for progress to occur. When Tilly realizes that the Dungatar townspeople have no interest in changing or becoming more open-minded, she decides to burn Dungatar. This symbolizes Tilly’s realization that social change must be made despite people who resist it, and that sometimes acts of destruction are necessary to destroy institutions or people who hold up this progress. This reinforces Ham’s overall argument that for society to progress for the better, many old-fashioned beliefs, prejudiced notions, and romanticized ideas about the past need to be forgotten.

### HEALING, MEDICINE, AND POWER

Different types of medicine are used throughout *The Dressmaker*. The protagonist, Tilly Dunnage (a young woman who grew up in Dungatar and returns as an adult to set up her dressmaking business) often uses **herbal** remedies when traditional medicine is not available. However, while medicine is most often thought of as something used to heal people, Ham suggests that medicine

can also be used to silence, punish, and control others. Overall, the novel implies that when it comes to medicine, people’s intentions are just as important as their capacity to heal.

Many of Dungatar’s residents rely on modern medicine to manage their various ailments, and this reliance sometimes makes them vulnerable to powerful members of the community. Advances in modern medicine in the 1950s meant that people had cheaper access to drugs to treat everyday problems and illnesses. This is demonstrated in the novel through Marigold Pettyman, who is reliant on sleeping pills to calm her nerves. This suggests that modern medicine was commonly available to ordinary people during the 1950s, even in remote places. However, although advances in drugs mean that these medicines are more freely available, the Dungatar residents do not have easy access to a doctor and, instead, rely on Mr. Almanac (the pharmacist) for the dispensation of medicine. This gives Mr. Almanac power over members of the community who rely on these drugs, because he is the only one who can provide them. Mr. Almanac is an unkind man who beats his wife, Irma, and does not have his patients’ best interests in mind. For example, Mr. Almanac puts bleach in a cream that he makes up for Faith O’Brien to treat an STD, because he knows that Faith has been unfaithful to her husband. Mr. Almanac’s behavior shows that because those who control medical supplies have power over people who rely on these medicines, it’s easy for those with access to medicine to abuse that power. This is further supported by the idea that people from Dungatar are frequently institutionalized in the nearby sanatorium even when they’re sane and capable of functioning in the outside world. For example, it is suggested that the townspeople wanted to have Barney McSwiney (the McSwineys’ disabled son) committed to the sanatorium simply because he does not fit in, even though Barney is not a danger to himself or others and has a family to take care of him. This suggests that medical treatment can be used to control people or to enforce social ideas about conformity.

Tilly, however, represents a threat to people who use medicine to control and subdue others, because she uses alternative forms of healing—such as herbal remedies—to help people. Although Mr. Almanac is a pharmacist, he refuses to provide his wife, Irma, with treatment for her severe arthritis, which causes her extreme pain. Instead, Mr. Almanac deliberately withholds medicine from his wife so that he can punish her and exert power over her. When Tilly comes to Dungatar, then, she bakes herbal cakes for Irma to help relieve her pain. While Mr. Almanac uses medicine to control and subdue his wife, Tilly uses healing remedies to help empower Irma and to alleviate her suffering. This suggests that while modern medicine is helpful, it cannot help people if it is withheld from them or misused by those who control its supply. Tilly also uses herbal medicine to help Marigold turn the tables on her husband, Evan Pettyman, who uses drugs to

abuse and manipulate her. Tilly provides Marigold with herbal potion which Marigold then uses to take revenge on her husband by poisoning and then murdering him. This suggests that knowledge of alternative medicines can be empowering—it can even let previously disempowered people like Marigold become just as dangerous as the people who control access to medicine. Tilly’s herbal remedies and use of plants for medicine is associated with witchcraft throughout the novel, which is part of why Tilly is an outcast. Witches were often historically cast out of communities or persecuted for their use of herbal medicine, which was believed to challenge Church power and traditional religious teachings (since witchcraft was associated with devil worship and blasphemy.) Ham suggests that, although Tilly’s use of herbal medicine seems to work, powerful members of the community feel threatened by this and use her healing skills as an excuse to persecute her.

Ham suggests that the purpose of any type of medicine, whether traditional or alternative, should be to heal people and to alleviate their pain—otherwise, medicine does more harm than good. Both traditional and herbal remedies are presented as effective in the novel. For example, when administered properly and to someone who genuinely needs sedation, the drugs that the doctor from the sanatorium gives to Gertrude (after she goes mad during the production of the *Dungatar* play) work quickly and do what they are supposed to do. Similarly, Tilly effectively eases Molly’s suffering with herbal treatment after Molly has a stroke. This suggests that both herbal and traditional medicines have their uses in society. Although Tilly’s healing powers seem mysterious and are associated with inexplicable power like witchcraft, in reality she uses practical knowledge of plants to create her cures. The fact that Tilly brings these ideas to *Dungatar*, which is very old-fashioned and remote, suggests that although herbal remedies seem archaic and mystical, they are in fact popular in modern cities, where Tilly has been educated. This suggests that in the 1950s, it is actually traditional medicine that has fallen behind the times by failing to prioritize healing and access to high quality medical care. Overall, Ham suggests that if medicine genuinely heals or benefits people, then it is worthy of respect and understanding. Meanwhile, even the most advanced medicine can be rendered worthless if people do not have easy access to it—or, even worse, if it is used to abuse or control people.



## SYMBOLS

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



### FABRIC

As a substance that can outwardly transform

people through clothing, fabric symbolizes the internal transformations that various characters undergo throughout the novel. Sergeant Farrat, for example, uses plain fabric, which is usually used to make curtains and tablecloths, to make himself stylish women’s clothes. Similarly, when Tilly attends the *Dungatar* Ball, she wears a beautiful, fitted dress she has for made herself out of georgette, which is usually deemed a shapeless fabric that is hard to manipulate. This suggests that even plain or cheap fabrics can be transformed into stunning creations with the right amount of imagination and skill, just as people who do not necessarily appear grand on the surface (like Farrat and Tilly) may be extremely impressive underneath.

Furthermore, the characters who are the best at working with fabric, Tilly and Sergeant Farrat, are the two characters who change and transform the most throughout the novel. Tilly starts the novel wary and emotionally closed-off and grows more open as the novel progresses. Toward the novel’s end, she transforms once again and becomes an avenging force in *Dungatar*—she takes revenge on the judgmental townspeople for all the outsiders that they have shunned and victimized. Similarly, Sergeant Farrat changes from someone who is afraid to stand out in *Dungatar* to someone who actively defies and goes against the townspeople. In this way, Tilly and Farrat’s flair for turning ugly fabric into beautiful creations parallels their ability to turn themselves from shy outcasts into confident individuals who have agency over their own lives.



### PLANTS AND HERBS

Plants and herbs symbolize the ability for good to triumph over evil. Tilly is characterized as a genuinely good person who’s been misunderstood, mistreated, and ostracized by the community in her hometown of *Dungatar*. Tilly also has a seemingly natural (and perhaps even magical) ability to grow plants, and she maintains an extremely lush garden while staying at her mother, Molly’s, house. The ability to sustain these plants even in the midst of her emotionally difficult stay in town reflects Tilly’s resilient inner goodness and ability to nurture; the garden itself acts as a symbol of resistance, positivity, and beauty that starkly contrasts the inner ugliness of the cruel townspeople who reject Tilly.

Additionally, Tilly makes herbal remedies for other people in town, which further suggests that she’s managed to remain a nurturing and kind person despite the abuse she’s faced. Whereas men like Mr. Almanac and Evan Pettyman use traditional medicine to manipulate and abuse women, Tilly uses her plant remedies to help them. For instance, she makes herbal cakes to treat Irma, who has painful arthritis (and who it’s implied was beaten by her husband, Mr. Almanac, for years). Tilly also drugs Evan using marigold water in order to weaken him and stop him from sedating and raping his wife, Marigold.

In this way, Tilly is able to show solidarity to people who've been mistreated just as she has, and her use of plants to help others rather than to hurt them represents the ability of this kindness and selflessness to overcome evil. Rather than succumbing to the toxic environment of Dungatar and the abuse that's rampant around her, plants enable Tilly to resist and to ensure that the town's few good people triumph over those who hurt them.



## FOOTBALL PITCH

The football symbolizes the close-knit community in Dungatar, which Tilly and her mother, Molly, are excluded from. The community—except for Tilly and Molly—are united by their love of football and their support for the Dungatar team. The football pitch therefore represents the town and the community, who see themselves as true insiders in Dungatar. The football pitch sits directly beneath the Hill on which Tilly and Molly live, and it looks up at them like an “eye.” In this way, the pitch symbolizes the idea that the community scrutinizes Tilly and Molly's behavior and judges and gossips about them. By contrast, the Hill represents Tilly and Molly's existence as outsiders, separate from this inner circle of acceptance and participation.


withhold treatment altogether, if he has a personal vendetta against them. This suggests that if medicine falls into the wrong hands, it can be used to harm people rather than heal them.

Furthermore, this position gives Mr. Almanac power over people because they must tell him about their ailments in order to get treatment. This means that Mr. Almanac knows people's secrets (he knows about their lifestyle habits, such as sexual promiscuity, which lead to certain conditions that require treatment). Knowing people's secrets in this way gives people power because Dungatar is a very conservative and judgmental community, and anyone who engages in behavior that's considered abnormal or immoral is socially ostracized. Therefore, Mr. Almanac can threaten people with this knowledge or use it to control people, because people will do anything to stop their secrets from getting out.

## Chapter 3 Quotes

☝☝ ‘You can't keep anything secret here,’ said the old woman. ‘Everybody knows everything about everyone but no one ever tittle-tattles because then someone else'll tell on them. But you don't matter—it's open slather on outcasts.’

**Related Characters:** Molly Dunnage (speaker), Teddy McSwiney, Tilly Dunnage

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 30

### Explanation and Analysis

Molly explains the Dungatar townspeople's attitude toward gossip to Tilly and Teddy. Since Dungatar is not a very exciting place, the locals are obsessed with gossip and scandal to keep themselves entertained. This means that everyone in Dungatar watches and scrutinizes everyone else's behavior so that they will have something to talk about. The townspeople are also extremely judgmental and conservative, and people are criticized for engaging in any behavior which is considered outside of the norm. This means that people try to hide unconventional behaviors or preferences from their neighbors because they do not want to become objects of social ostracization or ridicule.

However, although the townspeople are judgmental, they are also hypocrites because, as Molly suggests, they all have secrets of their own which they try to hide from society. This suggests that no one is perfect and that societies that judge people for unconventional behavior are necessarily



## QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Penguin edition of *The Dressmaker* published in 2000.

## Chapter 2 Quotes

☝☝ Mr. Almanac tended the townsfolk with the contents of his refrigerator, and only Mr. Almanac knew what you needed and why. (The nearest doctor was thirty miles away.)

**Related Characters:** Mr. Almanac

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 21

### Explanation and Analysis

Mr. Almanac is the pharmacist in the small town of Dungatar, and the townspeople rely on him for medicine because there is not a doctor nearby. Mr. Almanac has a powerful position in Dungatar because he is the only person with access to medical supplies. Therefore, anyone in Dungatar who is ill or in pain must go to Mr. Almanac for treatment and cannot go elsewhere. This gives Mr. Almanac power because he can pick and choose whom he treats; he has the power to give people the wrong medicine, or to


hypocritical and dishonest. While the Dungatar residents will keep one another's secrets to stop people from revealing *their* secrets in retaliation, they feel that they can say anything they want about outsiders because outsiders do not know about local scandals and, therefore, have no power in Dungatar. Communities like Dungatar are predatory because instead of tolerating and accepting outsiders, the locals slander them to deflect attention from their own unconventional behaviors.

## Chapter 4 Quotes

☛☛ Tilly Dunnage had maintained her industrious battle until the house was scrubbed and shiny and the cupboards bare, all the tinned food eaten, and now Molly sat in the dappled sunlight at the end of the veranda in her wheelchair, the wisteria behind her just beginning to bud.

**Related Characters:** Molly Dunnage, Tilly Dunnage

**Related Themes:**   

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 31

### Explanation and Analysis

Tilly returns to Dungatar and moves in with her mother, Molly, who is mentally ill. Molly's house has fallen into disrepair and Tilly works to transform the house and to improve Molly's health. Tilly is an extremely determined and hard-working person, and her efforts lead to several transformations throughout the novel. This is most noticeable in the fact that Tilly is a dressmaker and, therefore, her skills transform how people look. Tilly also applies these transformative powers in other areas of her life, such as her efforts to transform Molly's house from a dirty hovel to a pleasant living space. Tilly is not only industrious in these efforts, but her intentions are loving and genuine and this leads to positive results and significantly improves Molly's life.

Tilly's efforts also improve Molly's health and help her manage her mental illness. This supports the idea that human connection is vitally important for people's wellbeing and that traditional medicine is not the only thing that can help and empower sick people—community and support are also important. Tilly's transformative powers are associated with nature throughout the novel, and this is reflected in the buds which blossom behind Molly. These buds represent renewal and reflect Tilly's use of herbal remedies in

conjunction with her nurturing attitude, which helps people around her to flourish and grow, just as Molly's garden flourishes under Tilly's hard work and care.

☛☛ 'Your husband's mighty slow these days. How did you manage that?' Tilly placed an apologetic hand, lighter than pollen, on Mrs. Almanac's cold, stony shoulder. Irma smiled. 'Percival says God is responsible for everything.' She used to have a lot of falls, which left her with a black eye or a cut lip. Over the years, as her husband ground to a stiff and shuffling old man, her injuries ceased.

**Related Characters:** Irma Almanac, Tilly Dunnage (speaker), Molly Dunnage, Mr. Almanac

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 37

### Explanation and Analysis

Tilly discusses Mr. Almanac's condition (he suffers from Parkinson's disease, which restricts his mobility) with Mr. Almanac's wife, Irma. Tilly suggests that Irma may benefit from the fact that her husband is now immobile. It is implied that Mr. Almanac used to beat Irma and that, because of his disease, he can no longer do that. Although Irma used to tell the townspeople that her injuries were the result of falls, really, she lied to cover up her husband's behavior because she feared that if she tried to tell on him, he would physically hurt her. Tilly jokingly suggests that Irma has caused her husband's disease to save herself from his abuse.

Irma responds that, according to her husband's logic (that God is responsible for everything, and therefore that everything is part of God's plan), Mr. Almanac has brought his disease upon himself as punishment for his cruelty. Mr. Almanac is clearly a hypocrite because he used his religious beliefs to avoid responsibility for his behavior. He convinced Irma that God inspired him to beat her—thereby implying that she deserved it—when really, he chose to beat her himself because he is a cruel and abusive man. Irma, by contrast, has done nothing to harm her husband. Instead, she believes that Mr. Almanac is a victim of a kind of poetic justice: he now suffers because he used to make others suffer.




## Chapter 8 Quotes

☛☛ She eats birdseed and fruit and other things she has sent from the city. She gets things from overseas too, from places I've never heard of. She mixes things up—potions—says they're herbs, "remedial", and she pretends to be an arty type, so why would she want to stay here?

**Related Characters:** Molly Dunnage (speaker), Mr. Almanac, Teddy McSwiney, Tilly Dunnage

**Related Themes:**   

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 67

### Explanation and Analysis

Molly describes Tilly's behavior to Teddy and discusses the boxes of herbs and ointments which Tilly has delivered to Dungatar from abroad. Unlike most of the Dungatar residents, Tilly has lived and travelled abroad and has experienced different and diverse lifestyles elsewhere. This suggests that Tilly is more open-minded than most of the townspeople, as she has learned to accept that everyone is different and that people do not need to conform to restrictive conservative values, such as those held by the Dungatar residents.

Dungatar townspeople have newfound access to modern medicine, which became more widespread and available during the 1950s (when the novel is set). However, Ham suggests that elsewhere in the world, people are opening their minds to many different ideas—including the use of herbal remedies, which Tilly brings with her to Dungatar. Tilly's use of herbs and plants is associated with witchcraft. Molly's use of the word "potions" supports this, as witches are often described as using magic potions. Historically, witches have often been outsiders in communities (just as Tilly is an outsider in Dungatar) and have been persecuted for their use of magic—which is often just knowledge about plants and herbal medicine.


Tilly represents the outside world as it gradually reaches Dungatar and brings social change with it. Further, she represents a challenge to powerful people in Dungatar—like the pharmacist, Mr. Almanac, who wields power over people because he controls the town's medical supply. In this sense, Tilly is like a witch because she is persecuted by the townspeople for being different and because she offers people an alternative to traditional ways of doing things.

## Chapter 9 Quotes

☛☛ Couples stood aside and stared at Tilly, draped in a striking green gown that was sculpted, crafted about her svelte frame. It curved with her hips, stretched over her breasts and clung to her thighs. And the material—georgette, two-and-six a yard from the sale stand at Pratts. The girls in their short frocks with pinched waists, their hair stiff in neat circles, opened their pink lips wide and tugged self-consciously at their frothy skirts.

**Related Characters:** Teddy McSwiney, Tilly Dunnage

**Related Themes:**   

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 83

### Explanation and Analysis



Tilly attends the Dungatar ball with Teddy and causes a stir with an outfit she has made herself. Tilly has taken a plain fabric (georgette) and, through her hard work and talent, has transformed it into something stylish and beautiful. The couples are shocked to see Tilly at the dance because she is an outsider and is disliked by the townspeople because of incidents in her past. Therefore, the townspeople—who value conformity—are shocked that Tilly will go against local opinion and venture out where she is not wanted.

Tilly represents the outside world because she introduces the conservative and old-fashioned Dungatar residents to styles that they have never seen before. This suggests that, although Dungatar is behind the times, the societal changes which occurred during the 1950s and that gradually made society more diverse and progressive will eventually reach Dungatar despite the locals' resistance. The women's interest in Tilly's dress suggests that even though the Dungatar residents claim to dislike change, they too are tempted to try new and exciting things, and they'll eventually surrender to social and cultural change.

## Chapter 13 Quotes

☛☛ Every female seated in the War Memorial Hall that afternoon had listened hard, waited with bated breath for the name of a seamstress or dressmaker. She wasn't mentioned.

**Related Characters:** Gertrude Pratt, William Beaumont, Tilly Dunnage

**Related Themes:**  

**Related Symbols:** ●**Page Number:** 111**Explanation and Analysis**

Tilly makes Gertrude Pratt's dress for her wedding to William Beaumont, but her work is not acknowledged during the speeches at the wedding—even though the guests agree that the dress was the highlight of the day. The Dungatar women are clearly impressed with Tilly's creation, even though most of them do not know that it was her who made it. This suggests that Tilly's work is very skillful and that she is seemingly able to transform people through her hard work and her use of fabric—Gertrude is not a very beautiful woman, but Tilly's dress has made her appear so. The other women want to know Tilly's name because they, too, want to use her services and be made beautiful or have their flaws hidden.

Tilly's work is not credited, however, which symbolizes the townspeople's selfish and entitled attitude toward Tilly (and toward all outsiders) throughout the novel. Although the townspeople are happy to use Tilly's services when it benefits them, they do not want to give her anything in return for her work, and even neglect to pay her on several occasions. This is because, although they enjoy and benefit from her skills, they hypocritically judge and look down on her because she is considered an outsider in the town. They easily get away with this because Tilly has few people to defend her. This suggests that the townspeople are predatory and use people when it suits them while giving nothing in return.

●● Gertrude stepped out of her wedding gown and hung it on a coat hanger. She caught her reflection in the bathroom mirror an unremarkable brunette with quiver-thighs and unbeautiful breasts. She let the tea-colored silk negligee slide over her chilly nipples and looked in the mirror again. 'I am Mrs. William Beaumont of Windswept Crest,' she said.

**Related Characters:** Gertrude Pratt (speaker), Tilly Dunnage, William Beaumont**Related Themes:** ● ●**Related Symbols:** ●**Page Number:** 113**Explanation and Analysis**

Tilly makes Gertrude's dress for her wedding to William Beaumont, and the beautiful gown temporarily transforms the plain Gertrude into a stunning bride. However, when the wedding is over and Gertrude removes the dress, the illusion is shattered, and Gertrude goes back to looking ordinary.

Although Tilly's dresses (which she has learned how to make through her hard work and dedication) are spectacular and can visually transform people, they cannot really change what someone is underneath. This is demonstrated through Gertrude's transformation: when she takes off the gown, the spell is broken and the illusion that Tilly created (that Gertrude is beautiful) wears off. This suggests that fashion can be used to disguise people's flaws and to visually trick people.

This is further supported by the fact that Gertrude essentially tricks William into marrying her. Gertrude does not really love William (and he does not love her), but Gertrude manipulates the situation so that William feels pressured to marry her because the conservative townspeople believe that they have had sex. Therefore, according to the conservative values of the 1950s (when the story is set), they must marry. Gertrude's true motives are revealed when she speaks her new name in the bathroom, as this shows that Gertrude is primarily interested in the prestige that her marriage gives her (William is from an upper-class family) rather than William himself.

**Chapter 14 Quotes**

●● Winyerp sits smugly to the north of Dungatar in the middle of an undulating brown blanket of acres and acres of sorghum. The farms around Dungatar are golden seas of wheat, which are stripped, the header spewing the grain into semitrailers [...] The wheat will become flour or perhaps it will sail to overseas lands. The famous Winyerp sorghum will become stock fodder. The town will be quiet again and the children will go back to the creek to play. The adults will wait for football season. The cycle was familiar to Tilly, a map.

**Related Characters:** Tilly Dunnage**Related Themes:** ● ● ●**Page Number:** 116**Explanation and Analysis**

Tilly looks out over Dungatar and its neighboring town, Winyerp, which are both surrounded by farmland. Winyerp



is a more prosperous town than Dungatar because its main crop, sorghum, is more profitable than wheat. The Dungatar residents are jealous and spiteful and do not like to see others succeed—therefore, the word “smugly” expresses the Dungatar townspeople’s dislike of the Winyerp citizens, whom they consider to be arrogant and smug, although this may not necessarily be true and may reflect their own attitudes rather than the Winyerp residents’ actual behavior.

The Dungatar residents dislike and resist change. This is represented by their reluctance to adopt new farming methods and their reliance on older, more traditional products, like wheat. However, although the townspeople believe that they are safe from change, the process of wheat farming inherently involves change and transformation—for example, the wheat is transformed into flour. The townspeople also dislike outsiders and believe that they can be self-sufficient and remain isolated from the rest of the world. However, they rely on money from sending wheat abroad, so this attitude is misguided. These false beliefs show that although people living in insular, close-minded communities like Dungatar believe that they are insulated from progress, in reality, change is inevitable.

## Chapter 15 Quotes

☞☞ 'In this town a man can covet his neighbor's wife and not get hurt, but to speak the truth can earn a bleeding nose.'

**Related Characters:** Septimus Crescent (speaker), Fred Bundle, Hamish O'Brien

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 130

### Explanation and Analysis

Septimus, a local man who believes Earth is flat, gets into a fight with Hamish O'Brien, the station master. Septimus says that diesel trains are better than steam ones, and Hamish responds that Earth is round. In this quote, Septimus suggests that the townspeople are hypocrites and that it is more acceptable to be a dishonest hypocrite in Dungatar than it is to be honest. In one sense, Septimus is correct: the townspeople, who are highly conservative, would rather *appear* virtuous than actually behave virtuously. Although they hold one another to very high moral standards and socially shun anyone who does not meet these, the Dungatar residents all engage in behaviors which they themselves would judge and criticize in others. On the other hand, although Septimus believes he is an

honest man, his belief that the world is flat is, of course, untrue.

Meanwhile, Hamish prefers steam trains to diesel ones because he romanticizes the past and dislikes technological and cultural change. Diesel trains are faster and more reliable, however, and will open Dungatar up to more outside influence as people will be able to travel in and out more easily. Hamish’s views reflect the townspeople’s reluctance to accept change and to embrace the cultural changes which took place in the 1950s (when the story is set).



## Chapter 18 Quotes

☞☞ 'They've grown airs, think they're classy. You're not doing them any good.'

'They think I'm not doing you any good.' Tilly handed Teddy her smoke. 'Everyone likes to have someone to hate,' she said.

'But you want them to like you,' said Molly. 'They're all liars, sinners and hypocrites.'

**Related Characters:** Molly Dunnage, Tilly Dunnage, Teddy McSwiney (speaker), Stewart Pettyman

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 161-162

### Explanation and Analysis

Teddy, Tilly, and Molly discuss the townspeople, and Molly tries to dissuade Tilly from getting involved in town affairs. Tilly and Molly are outsiders in Dungatar: Molly and Tilly are judged because Molly had Tilly out of wedlock, and Tilly is also judged because the townspeople blame her for a Stewart Pettyman’s death in an accident that happened when Tilly was a child. Although Teddy is also an outsider (he is from a poor, travelling family), he is popular with the townspeople because he does favors for them and is a key player on their football team. The townspeople dislike Teddy’s interest in Tilly because they feel that she will lead him astray—the townspeople believe that outsiders are corrupt and immoral, and they judge people harshly and unfairly if they are not from Dungatar.

Although Teddy fits in with the townspeople, he also understands them and can see that they are hypocrites and that judge people for behaviors which they themselves exhibit. He also knows that the townspeople are jealous and ambitious—they feel that Tilly’s dresses, which she makes for them and which are very stylish, reinforce their attitude

that they are better than everyone else. Molly agrees with Teddy and worries that, although Tilly believes she will be able to win over the Dungatar residents and make them forget her past, the townspeople have no real interest in forgiving or accepting Tilly. Once the townspeople are bored with Tilly, Molly suspects, they will discard her and give her nothing in return for her hard work.

☛ 'It's not that—it's what I've done. Sometimes I forget about it and just when I'm...it's guilt, and the evil inside me—I carry it around with me, in me, all the time. It's like a black thing—a weight...it makes itself invisible then creeps back when I feel safest...that boy is dead. And there's more.'

**Related Characters:** Tilly Dunnage (speaker), Stewart Pettyman, Teddy McSwiney

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 170

### Explanation and Analysis

Teddy and Tilly try to attend the Dungatar Ball together, but they're turned away because the townspeople still blame Tilly for Stewart Pettyman's death—Stewart died in an accident which involved Tilly when they were children. Tilly is upset by the townspeople's rejection of her, and Teddy finds her in tears in the park.

Tilly feels responsible for Stewart's death, even though it was not her fault. Stewart bullied Tilly when they were children and, one day, pushed her up against a wall and tried to run at her and headbutt her in the stomach. Tilly stepped aside to protect herself, however, and Stewart broke his neck against the wall and died. Although this is not Tilly's fault and she was a victim in the situation, she is traumatized because of this event and cannot remember it accurately or think rationally about what happened.

Instead, Tilly is deeply affected by the townspeople's treatment of her. Although they are wrong to blame her, Tilly believes them and feels responsible for Stewart's death. Though this incident is in the past, its ramifications still affect Tilly because she is still treated like an outcast by the townspeople and is still haunted by the memories of this event. Tilly believes that she is unlucky and that it was this bad luck which caused Stewart's death. However, Stewart really died because he tried to hurt Tilly and suffered tragic consequences for this. This supports the idea that those who try to hurt others often hurt themselves in the process.

## Chapter 19 Quotes

☛ He wasn't able to offer any sense of anything from his own heart to them, no comfort, and he understood perfectly how Molly Dunnage and Marigold Pettyman could go mad and drown in the grief and disgust that hung like cob-webs between the streets and buildings in Dungatar when everywhere they looked they would see what they once had. See where someone they could no longer hold had walked and always be reminded that they had empty arms. And everywhere they looked, they could see that everyone saw them, knowing.

**Related Characters:** Stewart Pettyman, Marigold Pettyman, Molly Dunnage, Tilly Dunnage, Teddy McSwiney, Edward McSwiney

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 178

### Explanation and Analysis

After Teddy dies in an accident on the night of the Dungatar Ball, Edward McSwiney breaks the news to his family. Edward is heartbroken by his son's death and he suddenly understands the pain that other parents go through when they lose children. Marigold is the mother of Stewart Pettyman, who died in an accident when he and Tilly were children. Decades later, the townspeople still blame Tilly for Stewart's death. Tilly was sent away from Dungatar because of this and was forced to leave her mother, Molly, who subsequently went mad through grief. Marigold also went mad after Stewart's death and developed an addiction to prescription medication. This demonstrates the long-term effects that past events and trauma can have on people's lives.

Edward feels "disgust" toward Dungatar because he knows the townspeople's judgmental attitudes contributed to Teddy's death. Teddy died after he and Tilly were turned away from the Ball, because the townspeople hate Tilly and will not forgive her for past events. If Teddy had been allowed into the Ball, he would not have gone to the silo with Tilly, where he had his accident. Molly's grief was similarly laced with disgust because, again, it was the townspeople's cruel and unforgiving attitude toward Tilly which made them blame her for Stewart's death and send her away, even though she was just an innocent child. Edward also understands that Dungatar is a claustrophobic place where everyone knows one another's business. Therefore, it is difficult for people to grieve privately or with dignity because they know that the nosy and judgmental townspeople constantly gossip about them.



Then Sergeant Farrat left Tilly's side to stand and deliver a sermon of sorts. He spoke of love and hate and the power of both and he reminded them how much they loved Teddy McSwiney. He said that Teddy McSwiney was, by the natural order of the town, an outcast who lived by the tip. His good mother, Mae, did what was expected of her from the people of Dungatar, she kept to herself, raised her children with truth and her husband, Edward, worked hard and fixed people's pipes and trimmed their trees and delivered their waste to the rip. The McSwineys kept at a distance but tragedy includes everyone, and anyway, wasn't everyone else in the town different, yet included?

**Related Characters:** Mae McSwiney, Edward McSwiney, Teddy McSwiney, Tilly Dunnage, Sergeant Farrat

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 180

### Explanation and Analysis

Teddy dies in an accident while he is out with Tilly, and Sergeant Farrat gives a speech to the townspeople at Teddy's funeral. Although the other townspeople blame Tilly for Teddy's death, Sergeant Farrat supports her and does not "leave her side" until he gets up to give his speech. Sergeant Farrat knows that because Tilly is an outcast and because she was present at Teddy's accident, the townspeople will blame her and take their grief and frustration out on her. The townspeople have a vendetta against Tilly because they still blame her for Stewart Pettyman's death—Stewart died in a childhood accident when, again, Tilly was present.

Sergeant Farrat tries to remind the townspeople that just because someone is an outsider does not mean that they should be treated badly. He tries to remind them that Teddy and his family are also outsiders (they are very poor) and that, while the townspeople claim to hate all outsiders, they loved Teddy. This shows that Sergeant Farrat's friendship with Tilly has changed him for the better. While, at first, Sergeant Farrat was not willing to stand up to the townspeople and question the way that they attack outsiders, now he is willing to defend those in need against unfair persecution. Sergeant Farrat also tries to remind the townspeople that although they hypocritically judge others for their behavior, they, too, all engage privately in behavior that would not be openly accepted in Dungatar.

Sergeant Farrat said love was as strong as hate and that as much as they themselves could hate someone, they could also love an outcast. Teddy was an outcast until he proved himself an asset and he'd loved an outcast—little Myrtle Dunnage.

**Related Characters:** Teddy McSwiney, Tilly Dunnage, Sergeant Farrat

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 180-181

### Explanation and Analysis

Teddy, Tilly's lover, dies in an accident on the night that he and Tilly try to attend the Dungatar Ball. Sergeant Farrat gives a speech at Teddy's funeral. Sergeant Farrat knows that the townspeople hate Tilly and that they blame her for Teddy's death because she was with him when he died. The townspeople are already prejudiced against Tilly because they blame her for Stewart Pettyman's death—Stewart died in an accident when he and Tilly were children. Tilly is also considered an outcast because she is illegitimate (her mother, Molly, fell pregnant with Tilly when she was not married) and this goes against the judgmental townspeople's conservative moral values.

Sergeant Farrat tries to remind the townspeople that outsiders are not automatically bad, and that Teddy himself was an outsider in the town (he is from a poor family) and, yet, was hugely popular. He describes Teddy as an "asset" to the community to remind the townspeople that they benefit from allowing outsiders into their community and that they should extend this acceptance to Tilly. If they do not, Sergeant Farrat worries that the townspeople will use their grief and rage over Teddy's death as an excuse to unfairly persecute Tilly.

## Chapter 20 Quotes

The people of Dungatar gravitated to each other. They shook their heads, held their jaws, sighed and talked in hateful tones. Sergeant Farrat moved amongst his flock, monitoring them, listening. They had salvaged nothing of his sermon, only their continuing hatred.

**Related Characters:** Stewart Pettyman, Sergeant Farrat, Tilly Dunnage, Teddy McSwiney

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 185

**Explanation and Analysis**

After Teddy dies in an accident while he is out with Tilly, the townspeople turn against Tilly and blame her for Teddy's death. The Dungatar residents dislike outsiders, and the community is very insular. The idea that they "gravitate" toward one another after Teddy's death suggests that they unite against Tilly, whom they see as an outsider and whom they blame for Teddy's death simply because Tilly was present when he died. The townspeople are already prejudiced against Tilly because they wrongly believe she killed a boy in her class, Stewart Pettyman, when she was a child. They see her as an easy target and a convenient person to take their rage, frustration, and grief out on because, without Teddy (who was one of Tilly's only friends in Dungatar), she has no one to defend her.

At Teddy's funeral, Sergeant Farrat makes a speech and tries to convince the townspeople not to turn against Tilly and to open their minds and hearts to her instead. He can see by their reaction that his speech has failed and that they are too close minded and selfish to empathize with Tilly, who is an outcast in the town and has now lost her lover, Teddy, as well. Unlike the other residents, Sergeant Farrat's connection with Tilly has helped him change for the better, and now he's no longer afraid to stand up to the townspeople and defy them in order to be friends with Tilly.

**Chapter 21 Quotes**

☝☝ Tilly feared football defeat would send the people to her, that they would spill enraged and dripping from the gateway of the oval to stream up The Hill with clenched fists for revenge blood.

**Related Characters:** Molly Dunnage, Stewart Pettyman, Tilly Dunnage, Teddy McSwiney

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 189

**Explanation and Analysis**

After Teddy dies in an accident while he is out with Tilly, the townspeople blame Tilly for his death and turn against her. Tilly fears that their hatred will turn to violence and that they will physically attack her. The Dungatar townspeople are extremely close-minded and conservative and despise Tilly because they see her as an outsider. They have always been prejudiced against her because her mother, Molly, had Tilly while she was unmarried and because they believe that Tilly killed a boy in her class, Stewart Pettyman—although



really, Stewart died in an accident. Although Tilly was a child when this took place, the townspeople will not let her forget her past and they cruelly hold these things against her, even when she is grieving and vulnerable in the aftermath of Teddy's death.

Tilly knows that the townspeople see her as an easy target and that they blame her for Teddy's death. Teddy was well-liked in Dungatar and, therefore, his friendship with Tilly protected her from their attacks. Without him, Tilly has no one to defend her and she worries that the townspeople will use this as an excuse to take their pain and frustration out on her—even in response to something as trivial as losing a football game. This suggests that people often look for ways to take their disappointments and suffering out on others.

**Chapter 23 Quotes**

☝☝ 'Plays are such fun to put on. They bring out the best and worst in people, don't you think?'

**Related Characters:** Tilly Dunnage (speaker), Mrs. Flynt

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 203

**Explanation and Analysis**

Mrs. Flynt, the head of the Winyerp Ladies Cultural society, tells Tilly that the Dungatar Ladies want to put an Eisteddfod (a cultural festival) and that all the different towns will put on their own play. Tilly encourages the Dungatar Ladies to put on a play because she knows that they are ignorant about theater and culture (they have only arranged the Eisteddfod to appear cultured and to show off to the other ladies in the neighboring towns), and she wants to see them make fools of themselves.

Plays involve transformation and disguise because the actors transform themselves into the characters and use costumes to add to this illusion. However, staging a play also involves co-operation, teamwork, and unity because the cast and crew must work together to make the illusion plausible. Tilly knows that the Dungatar residents are ambitious and spiteful; they will bring one another down rather than support one another, which will only lead to failure. Therefore, a play will reveal the townspeople's true natures as malicious and unkind.

## Chapter 26 Quotes

☞ 'I realized I still had something here. I thought I could live back here, I thought that here I could do no more harm and so I would do good.' She looked at the flames. 'It isn't fair.'

**Related Characters:** Tilly Dunnage (speaker), Stewart Pettyman, Ormond, Pablo, Molly Dunnage

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 215

**Explanation and Analysis**

Tilly tells Molly about her life before she returned to Dungatar and is upset because her hopes of starting a new life in the town have been dashed by Teddy's death and the townspeople's continued rejection of her. Before Tilly returned to Dungatar, she lived with her partner, Ormond, and her baby son, Pablo, in Paris. Tragically, Pablo died when he was very young, and Ormond blamed Tilly for this and left her. Tilly is traumatized by these events and came back to Dungatar to try and escape them and to rebuild her connection with Molly, who she was sent away from as a child.

However, Tilly finds that the townspeople will not let her forget her past and still hold her responsible for an accident which occurred when Tilly was a child, in which a local boy, Stewart Pettyman, died. Tilly cannot remember this incident clearly and, based on the townspeople's account of events, blames herself for his death. She also believes that she is cursed to "cause harm" because of this and that she also caused Pablo's death because of her bad luck. Fire is associated with destruction in the novel, and Tilly looks at the "flames" because she realizes that her hopes of a new life in Dungatar were only illusions and have now been destroyed.

☞ 'Then when he couldn't have his son anymore, I couldn't have you.' Molly wiped tears from her eyes and looked directly at Tilly. 'I went mad with loneliness for you, I'd lost the only friend I had, the only thing I had, but over the years I came to hope you wouldn't come back to this awful place.' She looked at her hands in her lap. 'Sometimes things just don't seem fair.'

**Related Characters:** Molly Dunnage (speaker), Stewart Pettyman, Evan Pettyman, Tilly Dunnage

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 216

**Explanation and Analysis**

Tilly was sent away from Dungatar, and from Molly, when she was a child. Molly tells Tilly that after Tilly was gone, she went mad with grief and loneliness. This passage implies that Evan Pettyman is Tilly's real father—he kept Molly as his mistress but refused to marry her when she fell pregnant. It was considered shameful for women to have sex outside of marriage in conservative communities in the 1950s (when the story is set), and Molly is treated like an outcast in Dungatar because of this. The judgmental townspeople look down on Molly and refuse to befriend her, although many of them engage in behaviors which are also considered taboo or immoral according to their own standards.

Evan blamed Tilly for his son, Stewart's, death. Stewart died in an accident which involved Tilly but was not her fault, and Evan had Tilly sent away for this. However, Evan really sent Tilly away to silence Molly—he was afraid that Molly would reveal Tilly's parentage to the Dungatar townspeople and that he would lose his powerful position in the town as a result. Molly went mad because human connection is essential to mental wellbeing and, isolated and alone, she had no one to talk to or care for her. However, despite this, Molly hopes for a better life for Tilly and wants her to leave Dungatar because she feels that the townspeople will never change or become more tolerant and accepting of outsiders.

☞ 'Pain will no longer be our curse, Molly,' she said. 'It will be our revenge and our reason. I have made it my catalyst and my propeller. It seems only fair, don't you think?'

**Related Characters:** Tilly Dunnage (speaker), Stewart Pettyman, Pablo, Teddy McSwiney, Molly Dunnage

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 218-219

**Explanation and Analysis**

When Molly dies from a stroke, Tilly is left alone and friendless in Dungatar. She decides to take revenge upon the townspeople, who always treated her and Molly cruelly. Tilly feels that she is "cursed" because several people that she loved have died. She is haunted and traumatized by these memories, and she also believes that she is unlucky and has therefore caused their deaths. Tilly believes this because the Dungatar townspeople blame Tilly for Stewart

Pettyman's death. Stewart was a boy in Tilly's class at school who died in an accident which involved Tilly when they were children. Although this was not Tilly's fault, the townspeople ostracize her and will not let her forget the past. They also blame her for Teddy McSwiney's death (Teddy was Tilly's lover) although this, too, was an accident.

Tilly swears revenge on the townspeople because, rather than sympathize with her when she loses her loved ones, the townspeople blame and harass her. Their cruelty pushes Tilly to her emotional extreme and makes her want to take her suffering out on the townspeople so that they know how it feels to be hurt and attacked. Tilly decides to channel her grief into this mission, so that she is not overwhelmed by her pain. Although revenge may seem immoral, Tilly suggests that it is, in fact, "fair" to make the townspeople suffer because they've suffered no consequences for their ongoing cruelty to Tilly and her family.

Sergeant Farrat points out that Beula is a hypocrite because she did not treat Molly with respect when Molly was alive. Instead, Beula helped to alienate Molly in the town (the Dungatar residents disliked her because she had a child when she was unmarried and because she was an outsider) and directly contributed to Molly's grief and loneliness, which eventually drove her mad. Sergeant Farrat implies that Beula only wants to attend the funeral to "stickybeak"—or pry—and that this is a voyeuristic and hypocritical way to behave.

☞ 'Molly Dunnage came to Dungatar with a babe-in-arms to start a new life. She hoped to leave behind her troubles, but hers was a life lived with trouble travelling alongside and so Molly lived as discreetly as she possibly could in the full glare of scrutiny and torment. Her heart will rest easier knowing Myrtle again before she died.'

## Chapter 27 Quotes

☞ 'Anyone can go, Beula, but only good people with respectful intentions should attend, don't you think? Without Tilly's tolerance and generosity, her patience and skills, our lives—mine especially—would not have been enriched. Since you are not sincere about her feelings or about her dear mother and only want to go to stickybeak—well it's just plain ghoulish, isn't it?'

**Related Characters:** Sergeant Farrat (speaker), Molly Dunnage, Tilly Dunnage, Beula Harridene

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 223

### Explanation and Analysis

Sergeant Farrat warns Beula, the local gossip, that she should not attend Molly's funeral because Beula was never kind to Molly when she was alive. During Tilly's time in Dungatar, she and Sergeant Farrat became close friends. This friendship has a genuinely positive and transformative effect on Sergeant Farrat. While he used to be afraid to offend judgmental and conservative residents like Beula, he is now willing to stand up to them and call them out on their hypocrisy. Sergeant Farrat would not have done this before because he was afraid that Beula, who goes out of her way to learn people's secrets, would reveal something about his to the townspeople which would make him subject to alienation and ridicule.

**Related Characters:** Sergeant Farrat (speaker), Evan Pettyman, Tilly Dunnage, Molly Dunnage

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 225-226

### Explanation and Analysis

Sergeant Farrat speaks at Molly's funeral after Molly dies from a stroke. Molly was always an outsider in Dungatar, having moved there as a young woman to try and escape her past. Molly was seduced and then abandoned by Evan Pettyman, Tilly's father. It was considered socially unacceptable for people (especially women) to have sex while unmarried at this time, and because Molly was not married when she had Tilly, she was judged harshly and ostracized by the Dungatar townspeople.

As well as the negative reaction from the townspeople, Molly could never escape Evan, who followed her to Dungatar and tried to keep control over her so that his secret about his illegitimate child would not get out. Therefore, despite Molly's best efforts, she couldn't escape social judgment and rejection; she ultimately went mad through loneliness and isolation. She was even separated from Tilly, whom Evan cruelly sent away to stop his secret from getting out. Sergeant Farrat points out that isolation is extremely destructive, while connection and loving relationships have the power to heal and ease past hurts.




## Chapter 28 Quotes

☞ 'I used to be sick, Evan, you used to make me sick, but Tilly Dunnage has cured me.'

**Related Characters:** Marigold Pettyman (speaker), Molly Dunnage, Tilly Dunnage, Evan Pettyman

**Related Themes:** 

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 239

### Explanation and Analysis

Tilly tells Marigold that her husband, Evan, drugs her so that he can hide his womanizing from her. Evan is secretly Tilly's real father, having had her out of wedlock with Molly, and Tilly tells Marigold Evan's secret to take revenge on him for the cruel way that he treated her mother, Molly. Evan seduced Molly as a young woman and refused to marry her, but he followed her to Dungatar to keep her as his mistress. Evan also sent Tilly away from Molly when she was a child because Molly threatened to reveal Tilly's real parentage. Most people in Dungatar are afraid of Evan because he is a powerful man and knows a lot about how people live—therefore, he can use this information against people to threaten them or get his own way.


Marigold now knows that Evan used medicine against her to keep her unaware of his secrets and his womanizing. Marigold is addicted to sleeping pills, but she now realizes that her addiction has been encouraged by Evan, who benefits from keeping her subdued because it means that he can take advantage of her. Tilly is associated with the ability to heal people throughout the novel. While Evan misused traditional medicine against Marigold, Tilly empowers Marigold by giving her access to herbal medicine, which she uses to turn the tables on Evan and make him feel as weak and powerless as he made her.

## Chapter 29 Quotes

☞ Then her round soft babe was still and blue and wrapped in cotton-flannel and Molly, pained and cold in her rain-soaked coffin turned stiffly to her, and Teddy, sorghum-coated and gaping, clawing, a chocolate seed-dipped cadaver. Evan and Percival Almanac stood shaking their fingers at her and behind them the citizens of Dungatar crawled up The Hill in the dark, armed with firewood and flames, stakes and chains, but she just walked out to her veranda and smiled down at them and they turned and fled.

**Related Characters:** Mr. Almanac, Evan Pettyman, Pablo, Teddy McSwiney, Molly Dunnage, Tilly Dunnage

**Related Themes:** 

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 243

### Explanation and Analysis


Tilly dreams about the people she has lost and the Dungatar townspeople. In this dream, she witnesses her dead loved ones (her baby son Pablo, her lover Teddy, and her mother Molly) transform from living beings into corpses. This horrible reminder of Tilly's past grief demonstrates that painful and traumatic experiences are not easily forgotten and stay with people long after the event.

The townspeople dislike Tilly and persecute her because she is an outcast and because she challenges powerful individuals in the town, like Evan Pettyman and Mr. Almanac, the pharmacist. Tilly threatens Evan because she knows his secrets—he is a womanizer who abuses his wife and he is Tilly's real father. She is a challenge to Mr. Almanac's authority because, as the only pharmacist in Dungatar, he is the only person who has access to medical supplies and, therefore, can withhold treatment from people if he has a personal vendetta against them. Tilly threatens Mr. Almanac because she makes her own medicines from plants and herbs. In her dream, Tilly defeats the townspeople with a smile because, even though they persecute and attack her, they are spiteful, bitter people and therefore do not have loving relationships with others. Tilly, on the other hand, has been well-loved because she is kind, even though all the people she loved are now dead.

## Chapter 30 Quotes

☞ Trudy circled them, her seventeenth-century Baroque cast of the evil sixteenth-century Shakespeare play about murder and ambition. They queued on the tiny stage like extras from a Hollywood film waiting for their lunch at the studio canteen.

**Related Characters:** Tilly Dunnage, Elsbeth Beaumont, Gertrude Pratt

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 258

### Explanation and Analysis

Elsbeth and Gertrude organize a theatre production of

*Macbeth* with the Dungatar Ladies Cultural Society, which they have set up to show the neighboring towns, Winyerp and Itheca, how cultured and worldly they are. Although the Dungatar Ladies have chosen *Macbeth* to show how cultured they are, their choice only reveals their true ignorance about Shakespeare. For example, Gertrude has commissioned 17th-century costumes from Tilly even though Shakespeare was writing in the 1500s. It is fitting, however, that *Macbeth* is about “ambition” as it is ambition which drives Gertrude to arrange the theater group and to put on the play because she wants to prove that she is most cultured woman in Dungatar, even though she really has no experience of anything outside the town.

The other Dungatar residents are also ambitious and vain. Therefore, they behave like film stars when, really, they are only starring in a small production put on in a small town. This suggests that the Dungatar residents are arrogant—rather than trying to cooperate or support one another, they seek glory and praise for themselves.

## Chapter 33 Quotes

●● They all started to cry, first slowly and quietly then increasing in volume. They groaned and rocked, bawled and howled, their faces red and screwed and their mouths agape, like terrified children lost in a crowd. They were homeless and heartbroken, gazing at the smouldering trail splayed like fingers on a black glove.

**Related Characters:** Molly Dunnage, Teddy McSwiney, Tilly Dunnage

**Related Themes:** 

**Page Number:** 274

### Explanation and Analysis

Tilly takes revenge on the Dungatar townspeople by burning the entire town to the ground while they are away at the Eisteddfod performance. When they return, the residents see their homes and businesses in ruins. Tilly wants to punish the townspeople because they have never shown her any kindness, even when she lost her lover, Teddy, and her mother, Molly, who both died recently. Instead, the townspeople have always treated Molly and Tilly as outcasts, even when they were desperately lonely and grieving. By burning the town, Tilly gives the townspeople a taste of what she has experienced in the town: she's made them feel persecuted, unfairly attacked, and grief-stricken, as everything they love is taken from them.

The townspeople are described as being like lost “children” because they have suddenly lost all the things they know and that make them feel comfortable. This forces the townspeople to experience what Tilly and Molly went through in the town as they were forced to make a life for themselves in a place where nothing was familiar and where everyone was hostile toward them. The soot mark, which is like a “glove,” represents Tilly's transformative influence on the town. Although, at first, Tilly wanted to change the town for the better, she realized that the Dungatar townspeople would never open their minds and sympathize with the position of an outsider unless they were forced to.



## SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

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

## PROLOGUE

From the road that approaches Dungatar, Australia, travelers can see the distant shape of a hill on the flat horizon. On top of this hill stands a ramshackle house with a large chimney that overlooks the town. People can see this house from the train, which rolls into Dungatar through the wheat fields that surround the town. Sometimes, passengers can see a light in the shack window. In the evenings, the Hill casts a long shadow right across Dungatar.

*The Hill is raised, whereas the surrounding landscape is flat, and this suggests that the Hill (and, by extension, whoever lives on it) is somehow separate from the town and the surrounding neighborhood. Since Dungatar is a town which values conformity, this person, who is separate from the community, literally and metaphorically casts a shadow over the town.*



One evening, in winter, Myrtle (Tilly) Dunnage approaches Dungatar on a Greyhound bus and she looks up at the Hill to see if there is a light on in the shack, which is where her mother, Molly, lives. Tilly has tried to write to Molly but received no response. She then tried to call, but the woman on the “telephone exchange” told her that “Old Mad Molly” does not have a phone. Tilly says that she wrote to Molly and the woman replies that Molly would not understand a letter. Tilly decides that she must return to Dungatar.

*Again, Molly’s dwelling on the Hill, which is separate from the rest of Dungatar, suggests that Molly is an outcast who does not fit in with the townspeople. This is further supported by the woman’s unhelpful attitude, which suggests that people in Dungatar view Molly as “mad” or crazy because she is different. Tilly decides she must go back to see Molly because Molly is not treated kindly or included by the townspeople, who seem careless and disinterested in her wellbeing.*



## CHAPTER 1

Sergeant Farrat, Dungatar’s local policeman, prepares to do his evening lap to check for any trouble in town. He does not think there will be any problems tonight as there is a football match the next day, and the players and fans go to bed early in preparation for matches. Sergeant Farrat parks on the high street and looks out at the town. The evening is quiet and foggy, and there is no one around.

*Dungatar is a community which values conformity and convention. Therefore, it is important to the residents that everyone in Dungatar supports the local football team. This support symbolizes Dungatar’s solidarity as a place where everyone (in theory) is united behind the same cultural values and behavioral standards and where those who do not fit in are not accepted.*



A Greyhound bus pulls up beside the post office and Sergeant Farrat watches as a young woman steps out into the street. The woman hides her luggage in the post office’s shadowy porch and looks down Dungatar’s main street. Sergeant Farrat notices her smart, fashionable outfit and the Singer sewing machine that she carries. Suddenly, Sergeant Farrat recognizes the woman as Tilly Dunnage and he leaps out of the car. Tilly hears the car door and she begins to march in the other direction, carrying her sewing machine.

*Tilly’s fashionable outfit marks her as unusual in Dungatar. This suggests that Dungatar is a provincial and old-fashioned place which does not keep up with modern fashion or culture. Tilly clearly wants to avoid meeting or making connections with people in the town, possibly because she has been hurt before and has grown wary of people through past experiences.*



Sergeant Farrat hurries after Tilly and calls her name. He offers to help her with her luggage, but she ignores him. Sergeant Farrat grabs the sewing machine from Tilly's hand and she spins around to face him. Sergeant Farrat smiles awkwardly, and Tilly watches as he loads the sewing machine and the rest of her luggage into his car. She climbs into the backseat and sits, feeling tense and uncomfortable, as Sergeant Farrat drives her home.

Sergeant Farrat drives Tilly through Dungatar's town center. They pass the **football pitch** and the school. Tilly remembers her own childhood in Dungatar: she recalls how the school library smelled and she remembers a pool of blood on the grass outside. She remembers being taken to the bus stop by Sergeant Farrat when she was a child, which makes her feel queasy. Presently, they reach Molly's house at the top of the Hill, and Tilly looks out at her childhood home. Sergeant Farrat watches Tilly: he thinks that she has grown into a beauty but that she looks "damaged."

Sergeant Farrat asks Tilly if anyone knows she is back. Tilly says that "everyone will know soon enough." She asks Sergeant Farrat how Molly is and Sergeant Farrat replies that Molly does not go out much. Tilly gets out of the car and makes for the door. Sergeant Farrat helps her with her luggage. He admires her sewing machine, and Tilly tells him that she is a dressmaker. Sergeant Farrat is delighted. He sees Tilly inside and then he gets back in his car to drive home. He hasn't seen Molly for a year or so, but he knows that Mae McSwiney sometimes checks on her.

Inside Molly's house, Tilly finds that the rooms are dank and musty-smelling. A possum has nested in the rafters, and the fire hasn't been lit for some time. Tilly opens the door to Molly's room, and Molly looks up from her bed and gapes at Tilly. Molly is extremely thin—her face is gaunt and skeletal. She gestures to a group of invisible people around her bed and says that Tilly cannot take her dog. Tilly sighs and says that this is what "they" have done to Molly.

*Tilly is reluctant to accept Sergeant Farrat's help, which insinuates that she is wary of people and does not trust people easily. This implies that Tilly has experienced negative treatment in the past, either in Dungatar or elsewhere, which has informed her behavior and made her unwilling to connect with people. This demonstrates that way in which people's pasts can inform their future behaviors.*



*Tilly's memories insinuate that she grew up in Dungatar and that she has unpleasant and traumatic memories from her childhood there. Although these childhood events are in the past, Tilly's memories affect her in the present and make her wary of Sergeant Farrat, even though he seems keen to help her. Although time has transformed Tilly in some ways (she has grown into a beautiful woman), her traumatic memories stay with her and impact her behavior and her willingness to connect with people as an adult.*



*Tilly implies that the Dungatar residents are gossips and that nothing stays a secret for long in the town. This supports the idea that Dungatar is a place which does not change much, as the residents are desperate for scandal and gossip to make their lives more exciting. Sergeant Farrat's observation that Molly "does not go out much" suggests that Molly is ostracized and lonely. Although Sergeant Farrat is meant to take care of the community (he is the local policeman), his complacent attitude toward Molly, who is isolated and vulnerable, suggests that in societies which value conformity and dislike outcasts, it is easier to ignore those who do not fit in than to stand against the crowd and reach out to them.*



*Molly is an outcast in Dungatar and has clearly been neglected and abandoned by the townspeople, even though she is vulnerable and cannot care for herself. This suggests that the Dungatar residents are cruel to people who do not fit in, and they value conformity over kindness. Molly's isolation has seemingly led to mental health problems that cause her to hallucinate that she is surrounded by people when, really, she is alone. This demonstrates the devastating effects of isolation on people and the importance of human connection. Tilly blames the townspeople for Molly's condition because they have alienated her when she needed help.*



After Tilly has seen Molly, she sits on the porch outside, drinks a brandy, and looks down at Dungatar. At dawn, Tilly gets up and begins to clean the house, clearing away cobwebs and throwing out mounds of clutter. She drags Molly to the bathroom and forces her to wash and brush her teeth. Tilly then cleans Molly's bed and feeds her tomato soup. Molly thinks Tilly is trying to poison her and so she vomits the soup up.

The next morning, Tilly stands on the porch and looks down at the Dungatar dump at the bottom of the Hill. The McSwineys' caravan sits nearby, and it appears to be part of the garbage dump. Edward McSwiney is the delivery man in Dungatar, and his many children often ride around on his cart with him. Tilly remembers the McSwiney kids and how she used to watch them play when she was a child. They have an eldest boy, three younger girls, and a disabled son named Barney, who is "not quite finished," as well as six younger children.

Tilly looks out over the town, which is lit by the morning sun. Dungatar lies between the curved railway line and the low, sluggish river. There is a park on the riverbank and then the town moves east to west—from Mr. and Mrs. Almanac's cottage to the school where Prudence Dimm teaches. Alvin Pratt's General Store sits on the high street alongside the pub, police station, and post office. At the end of the high street, the road leads to the oval **football pitch**, which looks up at Tilly like an eye. Tilly turns away from the town and washes an old dress stand that she found in Molly's house.

*Tilly's resilience and nurturing personality shine through as she begins to transform Molly's house from a shabby, uninhabitable shack into a pleasant place to live. She also intends to transform Molly by cleaning, caring for, and feeding her. Tilly is motivated to do this because she loves Molly, and this supports the idea that love has transformative power.*



*The fact that the Hill is raised above Dungatar supports the idea that Molly and Tilly are outcasts and live separately from the rest of the townspeople, who dislike and ostracize them. The McSwiney's yard is also separate from the town, as the garbage dump is on the outskirts, and this suggests that the McSwineys may be outcasts too.*



*Again, the Hill represents their Tilly and Molly's and ostracization from the townspeople because they are geographically removed from them. In contrast, the buildings of the town below are trapped together by the river and the railway line, which run on either side of the high street. This suggests that the Dungatar community is close-knit and that everyone knows one another's business—all the time. The townspeople therefore seem to value conformity because they are afraid to stand out and be gossiped about or ostracized by their neighbors. However, the townspeople are all united in their dislike of Tilly and Molly, who live separate from them and therefore present a challenge to their lifestyles. This idea is represented by the football pitch, which is a symbol of the community, and which seems to stare up at Tilly as a symbol of the fact that the whole town is watching her and judging her behavior.*



## CHAPTER 2

On Saturdays, the Dungatar high street is crowded with shoppers and the town seems busy and lively. Sergeant Farrat makes his way down the strip and passes William Beaumont, who sits dejectedly in his mother's car. As Sergeant Farrat approaches Pratt's General Store, he bumps in Mona Beaumont and remarks to Mona that her brother, William, is home. Mona is a slow, graceless girl. She says that now that William is home, they can fire Edward McSwiney, who helps them with the grounds.

*Everyone knows one another's business in Dungatar and, although William has been away returned, everyone knows who he is and has an opinion about his return. Meanwhile, Edward McSwiney is considered an outcast in Dungatar because his family is poor and lives at the garbage dump. Therefore, although Edward is a useful and employable man, he is treated flippantly by the Beaumonts, who feel they are too good to employ him. This further suggests that Dungatar is a superficial and judgmental place.*





Sergeant Farrat says that they shouldn't be too hasty because William may become engaged to one of the local women soon. Mona replies that her mother, Elsbeth, doesn't want William to marry an unrefined, local girl. Sergeant Farrat says that times have changed and that it is now important for women to specialize in things other than being refined. He says that the "Pratt women" are fine examples of this and he leaves Mona to enter Pratt's General Store.

Inside Pratt's store, there are several counters. Alvin Pratt, his wife, Muriel, and his daughter Gertrude serve behind the dry goods and hardware counters. The butcher, Reginald Blood, works at the meat counter. Although Alvin is polite with his customers, he is very tight and always keep careful track of everything they owe him. Sergeant Farrat approaches the counter where Muriel and Gertrude stand. He asks them for a length of gingham for some curtains.

Muriel serves Sergeant Farrat, who often comes in and buys **fabric** to make tablecloths and linen for his house. As Sergeant Farrat leaves the counter, Gertrude notices William in the car parked outside. She makes for the door, but Alvin calls for her to serve a customer. Gertrude approaches the farm section of the store and finds Elsbeth and Mona Beaumont waiting there and talking to Muriel.

Muriel tells Gertrude that Elsbeth needs feed for William's horse and Gertrude begins to portion it out. Muriel says teasingly that the Dungatar women will be pleased that William is home. Elsbeth glances at Gertrude and she says icily that William will be far too busy to think about that. Elsbeth is from a poor family and she thought she had married a rich man. However, he did not turn out to be as wealthy as she believed.

*The snobbish Beaumonts, who feel that they are better than Dungatar's other residents, are, in fact, old-fashioned. While Elsbeth feels that Mona should live a genteel and leisurely life, Sergeant Farrat points out that it is no longer viable for women to just be refined. Due to changes in society, which occurred throughout the 1950s, women began to participate in a range of practical activities, and more women went out to work and became financially independent. While Elsbeth feels she is superior to the Dungatar residents, really, she is irrelevant and stuck in the past because she has not given Mona a broad or practical education which would allow her to become independent as times change.*



*Although Alvin appears kind and considerate, he is really a hypocrite and is only kind to his customers so that they keep spending money and running up debts. This suggests that people in Dungatar are not always what they appear.*



*Fabric is a symbol of transformation in the novel, as it can be turned into many different things when people rework it. This suggests that people and situations are not always what they appear and that some things can be transformed.*



*Although Elsbeth believed her marriage would transform her into a wealthy woman, instead she was tricked by her husband's wealthy appearance (he was from a prestigious, upper-class family) and she ends up poorer than she would have had she believed. Elsbeth, therefore, wants to appear as something she is not so that she will not become an object of gossip and ridicule among the townspeople.*



Muriel leans over and brushes something off Elsbeth's fox fur, which she always wears. Elsbeth says it is probably chaff, but Gertrude plucks some fur from the scarf and says that she will get Elsbeth something to keep moths away. Elsbeth watches Gertrude indignantly as bits of her fox fur float in the air between them. Muriel says that they will put the horse feed on Elsbeth's account, as always.

*Everybody knows one another's secrets in Dungatar. Although Elsbeth tries to hide her poverty, Gertrude makes it clear that she knows about it, even if she will not say anything. Although people know one another's business in the town, people are reluctant to openly disclose other people's secrets because they likely have secrets of their own which could then be disclosed in retaliation. Here, Gertrude subtly reminds Elsbeth that she knows her secret (by pointing out that her fox fur is shabby) without openly drawing attention to this.*



William Beaumont arrived in Dungatar the previous night, just before Tilly. He has been away at agricultural college. Elsbeth is delighted to have William home and she says that he will make a great future for himself in Dungatar. William is not so sure; he sits despondently in the car, reading the local paper. He looks up at the house on the Hill and thinks that it would be nice to live up there, separate from the town.

*Elsbeth, like many Dungatar residents, is close-minded and conservative—she cannot imagine that there may be more opportunities for William elsewhere and does not want him to go out into the world, where he will be beyond her control. William, who has experienced the world beyond Dungatar, doubts that the town can really provide him with a positive future, as it is an old-fashioned place which does not like change and is out of step with modernity. This implies that once people have opened their minds, it is hard for them to be satisfied with old ways of doing things.*



William goes to help Elsbeth load the chaff into the car and he notices Gertrude smiling at him from the doorway of Pratt's. As he and Elsbeth drive out of town, William asks who lives at "Mad Molly's" now. Elsbeth screams for him to stop the car so that she can look. In the street, the townspeople gather to look up at the Hill: there is smoke coming from Molly's chimney. Evan Pettyman, the town councilor, is horrified when he sees this. Beula Harridene, the local gossip, rushes between houses telling people that Tilly is home. In the McSwineys' yard, Mae McSwiney watches her son Teddy as he gazes up at Tilly.

*The townspeople are clearly bored and seek scandal and gossip to entertain themselves, which explains their eagerness to gossip about Tilly's return. The townspeople like to have someone to gossip about and they use gossip to deflect attention from their own secret behavior—which, often, does not line up with Dungatar's conservative behavioral standards. However, they also feel threatened by Tilly's return. Tilly, in this sense, represents modernity, change, and the outside world, which threatens to infringe upon Dungatar's conservative and provincial society.*



In his house, Sergeant Farrat works at his sewing machine, using the gingham **fabric** he bought. Sergeant Farrat was posted to Dungatar soon after he joined the force, after he showed his superior designs for new police uniforms. Sergeant Farrat loves his home; in the peaceful town, he has plenty of time to make himself exciting outfits. He does not wear these outfits outside, however, and he only uses them when he goes on vacation to Melbourne, where he attends fashion shows.

*Sergeant Farrat's love of fashion is considered unconventional because conservative gender roles in the 1950s (when the story is set) dictated that fashion was considered a feminine pursuit. It is implied that Sergeant Farrat is posted to Dungatar (a small, unimportant town) because his superior is worried that Sergeant Farrat will embarrass the police force by openly sharing his unconventional love for clothes. Sergeant Farrat learns from this past experience and hides his love of fashion from the Dungatar inhabitants because he correctly suspects that the townspeople will judge him and use his secret against him if they find out.*



All the other Dungatar residents are at the **football pitch** cheering their team on. Fred Bundle, who runs the hotel and pub, can hear the yells and cheers from the crowd from across the street. Fred used to be an alcoholic, but he stopped drinking after suffering a nasty fall when he was drunk. His wife, Purl, washes greens in the kitchen sink. She is a beautiful woman who takes pride in her appearance. Dungatar women sometimes criticize Purl for this, but she thinks it is because they are jealous. A cheer from the football crowd tells them that Dungatar has won the match.

New stock has just arrived for Mr. Almanac, the pharmacist, which he sorts through in his shop. The townspeople rely on Mr. Almanac for medicine because the closest doctor is 30 miles out of town. Mr. Almanac looks through the photos he's developing for Faith O'Brien: there are pictures of Faith with her husband, Hamish, and with the butcher, Reginald Blood. Mr. Almanac grumbles that Faith is a sinner and he puts the photographs away. He begins to make up a pot of medical cream that Faith ordered from him to treat vaginal itching. Mr. Almanac adds some bleach to the mixture.

Mr. Almanac gets up and begins to stumble through the shop—he has Parkinson's disease and so he's stooped and unsteady on his feet. His head is hunched over so that cannot see where he is going. Mr. Almanac's assistant, Nancy Pickett, arrives back from the football game and she helps him. She tells him cheerfully that the injured players will come to him to buy pain relief and ointments.

Nancy leads Mr. Almanac to the door and she sits him down in a wheelchair. She wheels him to the curb and then looks both ways for traffic. Seeing that the street is clear, Nancy shoves Mr. Almanac's wheelchair across the street. His wife, Irma Almanac, waits with a cushion at the Almanacs' garden gate on the other side, and Mr. Almanac comes to a stop with his head against the cushion.

*Football unites the Dungatar community and symbolizes their conservative belief in conformity. The women's attitude to Purl suggests that the Dungatar residents are spiteful, jealous, and close-minded—they dislike anyone who seems extraordinary in some way, such as Purl, who considers herself exceptionally beautiful and works hard on her appearance. Although Purl is gossiped about, she is not alienated by the town women because her husband, Fred, runs the pub, which the Dungatar residents hypocritically enjoy and make use of despite their criticism of Purl.*



*Mr. Almanac is an extremely powerful person in Dungatar because he controls people's access to medicine. As there is no doctor nearby, the townspeople rely on Mr. Almanac if they fall ill. Therefore, people can potentially suffer greatly if Mr. Almanac withholds treatment from them or treats them with the wrong medicine. Mr. Almanac's power is demonstrated here as he cruelly contaminates Faith's treatment because he disagrees with her infidelity. This shows the dangers of personal agendas being involved in medicine, as this can lead to people being hurt rather than healed.*



*Mr. Almanac is a cruel and twisted man who treats other people badly. His Parkinson's disease reflects this physically (it twists his body), and this potentially suggests that he is a victim of a kind of cosmic justice: he suffers a fate which reflects the unkind way that he has treated others. Mr. Almanac's power as the only person able to distribute medicine in Dungatar—and his ability to profit financially from this position—are reflected by the fact that the footballers have nowhere else to buy treatments for their injuries.*



*Mr. Almanac suffers from Parkinson's disease, and his body is twisted and immobile as a result. This reflects Mr. Almanac's internal state: he's a twisted person inside and has always been cruel to others and abused his power over them as the only pharmacist in the area. Again, Almanac's disease makes his body rigid and twisted, much like his personality, which suggests that fate has punished Mr. Almanac for his cruel behavior.*



In her house on Windswept Crescent, Elsbeth Beaumont prepares a roast dinner. William Beaumont is in the changing rooms at the **football pitch**, laughing and joking with the other players. He drinks watermelon spirits with Scotty Pullit, who brews this drink himself on his own still.

The footballers tumble into the pub after the game, and Purl and Fred Bundle serve them drinks and celebrate with them. Purl notices William in the crowd and, for a moment, she thinks he is his father, Bill. She seems stunned—like she has seen a ghost. Fred notices her expression and he says that William looks just like his father. Teddy McSwiney arrives, and Purl turns unsteadily to him and congratulates him on the win—Teddy is the team’s “full forward.”

Sergeant Farrat, who is also in the bar, reminds Fred that it is six o’clock. Fred nods, and Sergeant Farrat makes to leave. On Farrat’s way to the door, Purl stops him and asks if Tilly Dunnage plans to stay in town. Sergeant Farrat replies that he doesn’t know and he steps outside. Fred and Purl put blackout blinds on the pub windows, and the celebration continues inside as Sergeant Farrat wanders off to do his nightly lap of Dungatar.

Sergeant Farrat drives down past Scotty Pullit’s spirits still and parks near the cemetery. Reginald Blood’s car is parked nearby and Sergeant Farrat can see Reginald having sex with Faith O’Brien in the back seat. Faith’s husband, Hamish, is in the bar drinking with the footballers.

*Although William has experienced the world outside of Dungatar, he fits in well with the community, and therefore it is easy for him to slot back into his old way of life. Dungatar residents value conformity and team spirit, which William displays.*



*It is implied that Purl is haunted by her past relationship with William’s father, Bill Beaumont, who is now dead. Although Purl knows that Bill is dead, her memory of him affects her very strongly when she sees William. This supports the idea that although the past may be gone, people are often haunted by their memories of people and events.*



*Although Dungatar enforces a six o’clock curfew on the pub, Sergeant Farrat ignores it because of the football victory. This suggests that while Dungatar inhabitants hold others to extremely strict behavioral codes (and judge anyone who steps outside of these), they are hypocritically willing to bend these rules themselves.*



*It was illegal to brew alcohol for personal use in Australia in the 1950s (when the story is set). Sergeant Farrat ignores Scotty’s still, however, and this again suggests that, although Dungatar inhabitants hold outsiders to a very strict behavioral code, they are hypocritically willing to bend these rules themselves if the rules interfere with their own pleasure. Faith’s infidelity supports the idea that everyone has a secret in Dungatar, although all the residents want to appear virtuous and moral.*



## CHAPTER 3

Edward and Mae McSwiney have 11 children: Teddy is the eldest, then they have three girls, then Barney. There is a gap because it took them a while to get used to Barney. After Barney, however, there are six younger children. Teddy is dashing and popular; he's an excellent salesman and a sharp, cheerful young man. The Dungatar girls like him, but he is a McSwiney, so Beula Harridene says that he's a criminal.

Teddy sits on his caravan roof and watches Tilly, who is in her garden at the top of the Hill. Mae hangs washing up in the yard and looks up at Teddy. She asks if he remembers Tilly and what happened with Stewart. Teddy replies that he does, and Mae says that she saw Tilly taking stuff to the dump the day before. Teddy asks if Mae spoke to her, but Mae says that Tilly doesn't want to speak to anyone. Teddy climbs down and gets ready to go out hunting rabbits for dinner. As Teddy sets off, Mae can tell that he is plotting something.

Molly wakes up and hears the possum scratching in the ceiling. She totters to the kitchen and sees Tilly stirring porridge, which Molly thinks is probably poisoned. Molly looks around and sees that the room is empty. She asks Tilly where her friends are, and Tilly says that they left. Molly sits at the table and Tilly puts the porridge in front of her. Molly says that there is nothing in Dungatar for Tilly, but Tilly replies that she has come for some peace. Molly throws a spoonful of porridge at Tilly, which scalds Tilly's arm.

After this, Tilly goes to the dump, where she ties a sack around her face and climbs into the trash. As she's trying to pull a wheelchair out from amid the rubbish, she's interrupted by Teddy, who calls out from the bank above her. Teddy tells Tilly that Mae has a wheelchair which she can have. He persuades her to climb out of the dump and he catches her when she almost tumbles back in. Tilly says that Teddy frightened her, and Teddy jokes that he's the one who should be afraid.

*The McSwineys are outcasts in the Dungatar community because they are poor. It is also implied that they are travelling people because they live in caravans, and travelers are often seen as outsiders in conventional society. The Dungatar residents are hypocritical, however, because they all make use of the things that Teddy sells and use Edward McSwiney's handyman services, while still rejecting the McSwineys personally because they are not local. Dungatar residents will not let their daughters marry Teddy because he is a McSwiney, and Beula spreads malicious rumors about him, which suggests that being an outsider has very real, negative consequences for people in Dungatar.*



*Tilly is haunted by her past because everyone in Dungatar also remembers it. Though the reader does not yet know the details of this incident with Stewart, Mae clearly reminds Teddy about it to warn him away from Tilly, who is considered an outsider and is a victim of malicious gossip in Dungatar. Mae worries that if Teddy associates with Tilly, he too will be ostracized. This suggests that people cannot escape their pasts, especially in a small, conservative town like Dungatar in which people who do not fit in are harshly judged and gossiped about.*



*Molly is a social outcast in Dungatar and is extremely lonely and isolated before Tilly's return, and this isolation drives her mad and causes her to hallucinate that she is surrounded by friends. This supports the idea that human connection is essential to people's happiness and mental health. Molly wants to drive Tilly away because she does not believe that Dungatar will ever change. While Tilly believes she can ignore the townspeople and start a new life in the town, Molly knows that Dungatar is a narrow-minded place which will never be positively transformed.*



*Tilly plans to transform the abandoned wheelchair into something she can use, which demonstrates Tilly's determination and her ability to transform things through hard work. Teddy jokes that he should be afraid of Tilly because the townspeople see her as a threat—she is an outsider and someone who they feel challenges their conservative way of life, even though Tilly just wants to be left alone.*





Tilly watches Teddy wander down the road. She clammers home, burns her clothes, and takes a long bath. When she gets out, Molly asks her if she saw anyone at the dump. Tilly doesn't say anything, and Molly warns her that people cannot keep secrets in Dungatar. Everyone knows one another's secrets, Molly says, but no one will tell because they are afraid of being told on themselves. People in Dungatar say whatever they want about "outcasts," though. The next morning, Tilly finds a wheelchair outside the front door.

*Dungatar is a very judgmental place where behavior that's considered outside the norm is not tolerated. However, Molly's statement suggests that no one can live up to these high standards of behavior because everyone exhibits preferences or behavior which could be considered strange by others. Rather than openly admit this, the townspeople choose to judge and persecute those who do not fit in to deflect attention from their own unconventional behaviors. This suggests that the townspeople are afraid of being ostracized, and they cast out other people to prevent this from happening to themselves.*



## CHAPTER 4

The next weekend is the football match between two nearby towns, Winyerp and Itheca. Dungatar will play the winner in the finals. Tilly finishes cleaning Molly's house and she continues to feed and care for Molly. Molly's strength begins to come back, and she tries to think of ways to outsmart Tilly, whom she still sees as an imposter.

*Tilly's love and care begin to positively transform Molly. This supports the idea that human connection can be a transformative and strengthening. Ironically, Molly's madness makes her see Tilly as an outsider despite everyone else seeing Molly as an outcast.*



Tilly dresses Molly and wheels her down the Hill toward town, where the high street is crowded with shoppers. Molly hisses that Tilly is trying to kill her. They approach the cake stall, which is manned by Lois Pickett and Beula Harridene. Nancy Pickett sweeps the street nearby. Lois and Beula gossip together as they watch Molly and Tilly approach. Lois asks Beula if Marigold knows that Tilly is back, and Beula says no.

*The locals openly gossip about Molly and Tilly because they view them as outsiders and therefore do not feel the need to respect them. This suggests that the Dungatar residents are judgmental and hypocritical because they hold people to an extremely high moral standard but then behave immorally themselves by alienating and being cruel to people.*



Tilly feels her legs begin to shake as she stops in front of the stall. Lois Pickett and Beula Harridene look Tilly up and down. Tilly says she will buy some of the cake, which Lois makes herself, but Molly warns her that they will be poisoned. Lois and Beula are offended, and they glare at Tilly. Tilly buys a jam cake and pushes Molly toward Pratt's.

*Although Tilly does not seek the townspeople's approval, she still fears being judged and ostracized because humans crave social connection and because the consequences of being cast out can be frightening and severe. While the townspeople are dishonest and talk about people behind their backs, Molly's madness makes her honest because she no longer cares what people think of her and does not try to fit in.*



Inside Pratt's, Alvin, Muriel, and Gertrude watch, amazed, as Tilly wheels Molly between the shelves. Tilly approaches the counter and asks for a length of green georgette **fabric**. Muriel cuts it for her and Alvin complains that, because of its unusual green color, the cloth will only be good for a tablecloth. He presumes that Tilly will also pay for Molly's outstanding accounts, and so Tilly pays him what's owed.

*The Pratts are amazed to see Tilly because she is an object of gossip and scandal. The townspeople, therefore, obviously hope to shame and frighten Tilly away and are shocked when she instead stands up to their opinion and comes into town.*



Tilly pushes Molly into the pharmacist's next, and they approach the counter that Mr. Almanac is hunched over. Molly cries out that she is being poisoned, and Nancy Pickett appears behind Tilly. Nancy is a boyish, strong-looking woman whom Tilly remembers from school. Tilly recalls that Nancy used to pick on her; Nancy was good at fighting and she always defended her older brother, Bobby. Nancy gives Tilly an antacid for Molly and Tilly turns to leave the shop. As Tilly goes, she whispers to Nancy that, if she does choose to murder Molly, she will "break her neck."

As Tilly and Molly cross the high street once more, the townspeople gather to watch them. The two women pause by the river and they watch a duck and her ducklings struggle upstream. As they move up the road, they pass Irma Almanac, who sits in her garden in the sun. Irma suffers from painful arthritis and so she can barely move. She longs to be free of pain and she wishes she didn't have to cope with her husband, Mr. Almanac, who tells her that she is ill because she is a sinner.

Tilly and Molly stop to admire Irma's garden, and Irma recognizes Tilly. She says that Tilly is brave to come home, and Tilly thanks Irma for sending Molly food over the years. Irma glances warily at the pharmacy and warns Tilly not to tell anyone about the meals. When Mr. Almanac was young and healthy, Irma used to fall and injure herself a lot. As Mr. Almanac's Parkinson's disease progressed, Irma's injuries stopped. Tilly and Molly bid Irma farewell and they make their way back up the Hill.

## CHAPTER 5

Prudence Dimm teaches in the Dungatar school opposite the post office. Her sister, Ruth, works in the post office and often covers the night shift. Beula Harridene also works at the post office. One morning, Ruth and Nancy wake up together on the couch in the post office phone exchange. Nancy is naked, and the women are cuddled up together. A twig breaks outside, and Nancy whispers to Ruth that Beula is sneaking around in the yard.

*Nancy picked on Tilly because her own brother, Bobby, was also a target. Rather than showing compassion toward Tilly because she, too, is vulnerable, Nancy instead chose to attack Tilly to take the attention away from her brother and to avoid becoming a target herself. This suggests that people are afraid of being alienated and would rather ostracize someone else than face this themselves. Tilly tries to frighten Nancy by suggesting that she is just as mad and dangerous as the townspeople believe she is.*



*The townspeople are united against Molly and Tilly, whom they view as outsiders; they do not even try to hide their scrutiny of them. The duck and her ducklings represent Molly and Tilly: much like these ducks struggle to swim upstream, Molly and Tilly struggle against the tide of judgement and hate which they face in Dungatar. Meanwhile, rather than using his position as the only nearby pharmacist for good, Mr. Almanac abuses this power and cruelly denies his wife treatment for her pain. This suggests that access to medicine can sometimes be used to harm people, rather than to heal.*



*Given that Irma's injuries mysteriously went away after Mr. Almanac got sick, it's implied that Mr. Almanac was the one hurting her. Irma is extremely brave because she risked social judgment and violent consequences from her husband in order to help Molly. This suggests that unlike many of the Dungatar residents, who are too afraid to go against the community to help those who do not fit in, Irma values kindness and human connection over conformity.*



*Nancy and Ruth are clearly in a relationship, but they hide the fact that they are lesbians because Dungatar is extremely conservative and intolerant of any behavior, like homosexual relationships, that's considered outside the norm. Beula is a gossip and tries to learn people's secrets so that she can have power over them—they are afraid that their secrets will get out, and that they will be judged and alienated because of them, so they will do anything she wants to stop her from telling on them.*



Ruth shouts out a greeting to Beula, who hides in the bushes outside. Nancy dresses hurriedly, dashes out of the post office and across the road, and climbs into her mother, Lois Pickett's, house through the bedroom window. Lois, who suffers from acne, lies in bed in her own room and picks her spots. Nancy goes downstairs and finds her brother, Bobby, feeding his pets. Nancy bought Bobby a dog for Christmas because he kept sucking his thumb and she thought a pet would help. Since then, Bobby has taken in several other injured animals, whom he nurses back to health.

*Nancy and Ruth try to hide the fact that they are lesbians because they know that, if their secret gets out, they will face judgment and alienation from the Dungatar community. Beula wants proof that Nancy and Ruth are gay because knowing other people's secrets gives her power over them—they will do what she wants to prevent her from spreading these secrets. Although Lois is also a gossip, she also engages in unpleasant behavior that she would not want anyone to know about (like picking her spots) in private. This supports the idea that no one is perfect, including those who judge and gossip about others. Meanwhile, Bobby is portrayed as kinder and more nurturing than character and his care heals and transforms his animals.*



Nancy drinks some milk and she leaves for work. As she opens the pharmacy, Beula Harridene marches up to her. Nancy teasingly greets her as "Mrs. Harriden" and Beula mutters "one of these day—" in return. Beula looks up at Nancy, suddenly looks shocked, and dashes off. Nancy is confused, but when she gets inside the shop, she notices that she has milk on her top lip.

*Beula is frustrated because she has not succeeded in gaining evidence that Nancy and Ruth are lesbians, which she wants because she feels that knowing people's secrets gives her power over them. If she can prove that Ruth and Nancy are lesbians, she will be able to threaten them with social ostracization if their secret gets out. Nancy's use of "Harriden" a play on Beula's last name, is an old-fashioned term for a vicious and unkind woman. Meanwhile, Beula is horrified because she mistakenly believes that the milk on Nancy's lip is bodily fluid from her sexual encounter with Ruth.*



That morning, in his house, Sergeant Farrat tries on the new **gingham** skirt he made. It fits perfectly, and Sergeant Farrat is very pleased. Beula Harridene presses her face to his window and tries to peer in. She hammers on the door, and Sergeant Farrat quickly changes his clothes and lets her in. Beula complains bitterly that drunken footballers and barking dogs kept her up all night and that the McSwiney children have been throwing seed pods at her roof.

*Sergeant Farrat is secretly a crossdresser. He hides this from the Dungatar residents because he knows that they are intolerant and will not accept any behaviors which are considered outside of the norm. In the 1950s, when the novel is set, conservative gender roles were extremely rigid, and it was socially unacceptable for men to dress in women's clothes. Beula suspects that Sergeant Farrat has a secret and she wants to learn it so that she can wield power over him. Beula knows that people are afraid of being ostracized or gossiped about and, therefore, they will do anything she asks to stop their secrets getting out.*



Sergeant Farrat listens to Beula patiently. Beula is an unfortunate-looking woman, and Sergeant Farrat believes that she can't eat properly because her mouth is slightly deformed. Therefore, Beula is always hungry, and this makes her "vicious." Sergeant Farrat says that they will check her roof for seeds and then go and visit the McSwineys. There are no seeds on Beula's roof, but she insists that the wind blew them away. She makes Sergeant Farrat drive her to the McSwineys' yard.

*Sergeant Farrat believes that Beula lashes out at the world because she herself is in pain and suffers with her deformed jaw. This supports one of Ham's main points throughout the novel: that suffering makes people cruel and often causes people to unfairly take their own pain out on others. The McSwineys are outcasts because they are very poor and therefore are an easy target for Beula—the townspeople, who dislike outsiders, will not defend them.*



In the McSwineys' yard, the children help Mae round up and kill chickens. The dogs begin to bark as Sergeant Farrat's car approaches, and the children immediately rush to their marbles and hopscotch and pretend to play. Sergeant Farrat and Beula get out of the car and the McSwineys come to the gate.

*It is implied that the McSwineys are poachers and that they hunt and steal other people's animals. They want to hide this from Sergeant Farrat because it is illegal. However, although the townspeople judge the McSwineys and call them criminals, the McSwineys are really forced to be poachers because they are poor and because the townspeople alienate them and make it hard for them to work and earn money in the town. This implies that social ostracization often causes people to partake in criminal activities, as this is the only way that they can survive without social support.*



Sergeant Farrat offers the children sweets, but Beula says that these are the children who vandalized her house and she goes to strike them. Sergeant Farrat stops her and says that these children are not wearing school uniforms—as Beula said the assailants were—and the children reply that they do not go to school yet.

*Sergeant Farrat is sympathetic with the McSwineys and knows that Beula tries to unfairly take her frustrations out on them because they are social outcasts and, therefore, easy targets who have no one in the town to stand up for or defend them.*



Mae McSwiney cynically asks Sergeant Farrat what he plans to do with the children and Sergeant Farrat jokes that he could publicly thrash them. The McSwineys laugh, and Beula storms back to the car. Sergeant Farrat bids the McSwineys good day and he goes back to the car himself. He drops Beula off at the bottom of the Hill, opening the door suddenly so that she topples onto the pavement.

*Sergeant Farrat sympathizes with the McSwineys and dislikes Beula. He understands that Beula tries to take her frustrations out on the McSwineys because they are social outsiders in Dungatar. Therefore, she believes that they are easy targets because nobody will stand up for them and everyone will believe her over them. Sergeant Farrat refuses to pander to Beula, however, and he defends the McSwineys against her.*



## CHAPTER 6

In Pratt's, Reginald Blood serves Faith O'Brien at the meat counter. Faith flirts with the butcher and she can barely breathe when he teases her. William Beaumont enters and asks Gertrude where Alvin is. Gertrude introduces herself brightly to William, but he wanders off before she can finish. Gertrude watches William approach Alvin and ask to buy some gardening equipment, but Alvin explains that Elsbeth Beaumont has many outstanding debts. William seems stunned and he leaves the shop, ignoring Gertrude's attempts to flirt with him. As Gertrude watches William leave, Muriel informs her that there is a dance on Saturday night.

*Faith and Reginald are having an affair—something most of the townspeople know about. This suggests that the Dungatar residents are hypocritical because they will harshly judge outsiders, like Molly, for similar behavior (Molly had an illegitimate child—Tilly—when she was not married) but will make allowances for people they consider insiders, like Faith and Reginald. Meanwhile, Elsbeth tries to disguise her poverty by running up debts so that she can maintain an appearance of wealth. Her public appearance is not based in reality, and Alvin makes that known to William here, which suggests that the truth usually comes out in the end.*



Tilly tries to visit the school library, but it is closed. She sits by the river instead, and she remembers her own school days in Dungatar. She recalls being on “ink well duty” and that Stewart Pettyman used to bang the drum when they marched into class. One day, when Tilly was pouring ink into pots for the students, Stewart shoved the desk so that she spilled ink on him. Prudence Dimm, the teacher, made Tilly sit outside all morning as punishment.

*Tilly’s memories of the past are jumbled and vague, which implies that they may not be reliable. Prudence Dimm chooses to punish Tilly instead of Stewart because Tilly is a social outcast and, therefore, an easy target with no one to defend her. This suggests that while people who are considered insiders in the community can get away with bad or immoral behavior, those without friends in the town are unfairly punished even when they are victims of persecution.*



After school, Stewart and the other boys chased Tilly and attacked her. Stewart headbutted her in the stomach and the boys pulled down her pants and sexually assaulted her. The girls laughed and joked that Tilly was a “bastard.”

*Tilly is rejected and picked on by the other children because she is a “bastard,” or an illegitimate child (her parents were not married when she was born). This suggests that Dungatar is an extremely intolerant place and that anyone who steps outside of conventional and conservative morality will not be accepted. During the 1950s, it was considered immoral for unmarried women to have sex. Therefore, Molly (Tilly’s mother) is judged by the townspeople and Tilly is picked on by their children, who imitate their parent’s intolerance.*



In the present, Marigold Pettyman, Evan Pettyman’s wife, waits anxiously for her husband to get home from work and takes several pills to calm her nerves. She is a panicky woman who keeps her house fastidiously clean. When Evan arrives home, Marigold shrieks at him to take off his shoes. Evan Pettyman is the town councilor. Women try to avoid him because he fondles and gropes them. No one says anything, however, because his son, Stewart, died and because Evan gets things done on the council. Evan also knows how everyone in Dungatar earns a living.

*Advances in modern medicine in the 1950s meant that ordinary people had newfound access to a wide range of drugs to treat everyday ailments, such as Marigold’s anxiety. Evan is a powerful man in Dungatar because people are afraid of him. It is implied that he knows people’s secrets—Ham insinuates that many of the Dungatar residents are involved in illegal activities and that Evan ignores this—if he wanted to, he could use his position as a councilor to punish and ostracize people for their secrets. Evan also abuses this power over women, who are afraid to speak out against him because of his powerful position in the community.*



Marigold was very young and shy when she married Evan and she’d just inherited a large sum of money from her father. Throughout their marriage, however, she grew anxious and neurotic—and Stewart’s death affected her badly. Evan puts on the pajamas Marigold cleaned for him and he eats his dinner in the kitchen. Marigold lays out newspaper so that Evan won’t spill crumbs, and she asks him to remove all the doorknobs in the house so that she can clean them.

*It is hinted that Evan married Marigold for her money and that this money has helped him attain his powerful position in Dungatar. Marigold is traumatized by the memory of Stewart’s death, and this past event has a far-reaching impact on her life and is partially responsible for the neuroses she develops.*





Evan complains that he is too busy to help Marigold with housework and he tries to give her a spoonful of her nightly “tonic.” Marigold refuses to open her mouth, so Evan says he will take off the doorknobs. Marigold swallows her medicine and laments that it’s been 20 years since Stewart died. Evan helps Marigold to bed and, when she is asleep, he spreads her legs and sexually assaults her. The next day, Marigold cleans all the door fixtures.

*Evan uses medicine to subdue and control Marigold. Although she eventually takes the medicine willingly, Evan pressures her into it and then takes advantage of her once she is asleep. This suggests that Evan abuses his power over Marigold—rather than try to help her, he uses medicine against her to make her submissive and to get his own way. Like Dr. Almanac’s withholding of medication from his wife, this suggests that medicine can be used to harm people instead of to help them.*



## CHAPTER 7

In the bar, Dungatar’s football team drinks beer and the players discuss their game plan for the finals. Purl listens anxiously and Fred tells her that there will soon be something to celebrate. Purl and Fred lovingly embrace each other. The team heads outside for training and a nervous crowd of fans gathers to watch them. After this, the players go home to bed and the supporters go back to the bar. Dungatar hasn’t won the finals for several decades; the players from the last victorious team are old men now.

*Dungatar is an extremely close-knit community which values conformity and participation—so long as people participate in the way that the conservative Dungatar residents deem acceptable. Football represents this conformity, as everyone in the town (except for outcasts like Tilly and Molly) participates in it, either as players or supporters. Dungatar residents also dislike social change—they cling to and romanticize the past. This is reflected in their obsession with their prior football victories, even though these took place long ago.*



Purl gossips about Tilly with the men in the bar to distract them from their nerves. One man says that Teddy McSwiney fancies Tilly just as Teddy enters the bar. Teddy winks at Purl when he hears Tilly’s name, but the man says that Tilly is “loose,” like her mother. Hearing this, Teddy grabs the man by the throat and pins him to the bar. Purl begs Teddy to stop—Teddy is Dungatar’s hope for the match tomorrow. Teddy lets the man go and the man shuffles from the bar. That night, in bed, Teddy looks up at the Hill and sees the light on in Tilly’s window.

*The conservative Dungatar residents judge Molly because she had Tilly when she was not married. It was considered immoral for unmarried women to have sex, let alone to have children, in the 1950s. The townspeople are judgmental and reject Tilly based on her mother’s past, rather than on her own merit. Although, like Tilly, Teddy is considered something of an outcast in Dungatar, the inhabitants hypocritically accept Teddy because they hope he will win the football for them. They reject Tilly seemingly because they feel that she has nothing to offer them.*



The next day, the Dungatar supporters anxiously watch their team play against Winyerp. Dungatar wins by one point, and the celebration rages all night in Fred and Purl’s bar. At dawn the next day, Beula Harridene walks past the pub and sees people sprawled all over the car park. Fred sits behind the bar and sips a hot drink.

*Dungatar is a conservative town—residents value conformity and feel that they are superior to outsiders. Football reflects these attitudes in the novel as the Dungatar residents (apart from outcasts like Tilly and Molly) all participate in games, either as players or as fans. Their desire to beat the other teams, who are from different towns and are, therefore, outsiders, also reflects their belief that they are superior to anyone who is not from Dungatar.*



## CHAPTER 8

Ruth Dimm waits by her post van at Dungatar station. Hamish O'Brien, the station master, waits with her. The steam train pulls up and a guard unloads a puppy for Bobby Pickett and a chest addressed to Tilly. As the train pulls out, Hamish looks after it with tears in his eyes. He explains to Ruth that he is sad because diesel trains are replacing steam ones. Ruth says that this is "progress" and that faster trains are better for the passengers. Hamish retorts that the passengers don't matter to him.

Back at the post office, Ruth opens the package addressed to Tilly and examines its contents. The chest is full of mysterious substances and postcards written in foreign languages from capital cities all over Europe. There is also a bundle of expensive lace and a novel by Hemmingway. Ruth examines a tin that contains brownish **herbs**, which says "mix with water" on the label. She puts the tin aside and hides it in her cupboard.

Tilly pushes Molly home from town in her wheelchair. Molly carries bundles of shopping and Tilly stops at the base of the Hill to wipe sweat from her brow. Teddy pulls up beside them in his cart and offers them a lift. Tilly refuses, but Teddy lifts Molly up beside him anyway. Tilly gives in and climbs onto the cart, and Teddy drives them up the Hill. At the top, Tilly immediately jumps down and goes into the garden. Molly invites Teddy in for a cup of tea.

Tilly sets biscuits on a plate, and Molly and Teddy drink their tea. Molly complains that Tilly makes her drink tea made from **herbs** and roots that Tilly gets sent over from Europe. Teddy says that women like Tilly need men like him around, and Molly scoffs. Tilly brings washing inside and begins to fold it. Molly asks if they still have dances for the football team and Teddy replies that there is one on Saturday. Molly says he should take Tilly, but Tilly says she won't go.

*Hamish's attitude demonstrates that romanticized ideas about the past are often selfish and close-minded. The introduction of diesel trains likely means that Dungatar will gradually become a more modern and diverse place, as people from out of town will be able to reach it more easily. However, Hamish dislikes change to the point that he'd rather inconvenience people and slow down social progress than let go of his romantic and nostalgic ideas about the past.*



*Ruth abuses her power—her access to people's mail and, therefore, their personal information—to snoop into their affairs and try to learn their secrets. Everyone is obsessed with gossip in Dungatar, and people like to learn other people's secrets because they feel that this gives them power over others.*



*Tilly is reluctant to accept help or kindness from Teddy because of her past experiences with the townspeople. She is used to being outcast and, therefore, has come to expect rejection and cruelty from people. This demonstrates how people's past experiences can impact their future behavior.*



*Europe is associated with modernity, progress, and diversity in the novel, whereas Dungatar is associated with old-fashioned and conservative ways of life. Tilly creates herbal remedies with the plants she receives from abroad and this suggests that, while herbal medicine is seen as suspect in Dungatar, it is commonly practiced elsewhere in more progressive, open-minded societies. Tilly is reluctant to socialize in Dungatar because she has always been treated like an outcast there. As a result, she expects this same treatment again. This demonstrates how people's past experiences can influence their future behavior.*



At the post office, Nancy and Ruth get comfortable on the couch and they prepare to drink the tea Ruth has made from Tilly's powder. They have also tried some **herbs** that Tilly was sent, but these put them to sleep. The tea also makes them sleepy, and they wake up when Tilly knocks on the door. Tilly explains that she never received part of her mail—a tin of brown powder—and she notices that Ruth's lips are stained brown. Ruth says that she hasn't seen it, and Tilly shrugs and says that it was bat dung fertilizer for her plants. She hears Ruth and Nancy gag as she walks away, and she wonders where she can buy some more henna.

As Tilly walks back through town, she sees Mae McSwiney. Tilly thanks Mae for looking after Molly, but Mae says that she didn't do anything. Tilly remembers that Mae's disabled son, Barney, was almost taken to the asylum once, but that his siblings stopped this. Mae sternly tells Tilly that people should "keep to themselves" in Dungatar and that Tilly should know this by now.

The next day is muggy, and Tilly takes Molly to visit Irma Almanac. Molly and Irma sit and talk in the garden. They avoid unpleasant conversation about things they have in common—lost children, men who have abused them—and Tilly gives Irma some homemade cakes to help with her arthritis. Irma asks Tilly why such a clever woman would want to live in Dungatar, and Tilly counters, "Why not?"

By the time Tilly and Molly leave, Irma's pain is gone and she can't stop giggling. Nancy rushes into the kitchen and asks Irma sharply why she was not outside to catch Mr. Almanac after work. Irma bursts out laughing again as Mr. Almanac careens past her and he lands in his chair. Over dinner that night, Mr. Almanac says that Tilly can never make up for what she did. Irma just laughs at him again.

*Ruth and Nancy, like most of the Dungatar residents, are extremely conservative and suspicious of anything new or unknown. They suspect that Tilly's herbal concoctions are drugs because they believe that anything outside of Dungatar, and especially something that comes from a foreign place, must be dangerous and sinful according to conservative moral standards. However, while Ruth and Nancy think they are being daring and worldly by trying the powder, the experiment only showcases their ignorance as the powder is nothing but henna—a perfectly common plant-based hair dye.*



*Although modern medicine should be used to help people, in Dungatar it is often used to silence and control anyone who does not fit in or will not comply. The townspeople try to have Barney committed simply because he does not fit in. In this sense, Ham suggests that if medical treatment is misused, it can do more harm than good for people like Barney. Mae is wary of people because of her experiences in Dungatar, where she is treated like an outcast because her family are poor. This suggests that ostracizing people leads to more cruelty and lack of connection among people, as those who have been hurt are less likely to reach out to others.*



*Molly and Irma are both haunted by tragic events which occurred in their pasts. Tilly uses herbal remedies to ease Irma's suffering. By contrast, Irma's husband, Mr. Almanac, is the town pharmacist and has access to a range of medical cures. He will not prescribe any to Irma, however, because he is cruel and uses his power to abuse her. This suggests that although modern medicine is extremely powerful, it can be withheld from or used against people.*



*Tilly uses herbal remedies to temporarily heal and transform Irma—she is no longer in pain and enjoys herself for the first time in a long while. Tilly's remedy also allows Irma to get revenge on her husband, who cruelly refuses to provide her with medicine for her arthritis even though he is the town pharmacist.*



That night, Teddy brings Tilly and Molly some eggs and some shellfish he caught. The next night, he brings them fish and cooks it for them. Molly says that Tilly should be kind to Teddy because Mae, Teddy's mother, kept her alive while Tilly was away. Tilly says that Mae only brought what Irma cooked. Molly insists that Tilly should go to the dance with Teddy, but Tilly does not want to go. Teddy does not insist—everyone would be shocked to see her there anyway, he says.

Molly is angry with Tilly because Tilly refuses to go to the dance. Molly wets the bed, so Tilly changes the sheets. Next, Molly deliberately rams Tilly with her wheelchair. The next day, Teddy brings them a chicken and a cooking pot that he took from Marigold Pettyman's bin. He makes a stew for them and they listen to Billie Holiday on Tilly's new record player while they eat. Teddy tries to talk about books and modern music, but Tilly is sarcastic with him.

Noticing Tilly's attitude, Molly tips her soup onto her legs so that it burns her. Teddy quickly rubs butter on Molly's burns and puts her to bed. He sends Barney to buy cream from Mr. Almanac. Tilly thanks Barney and Teddy, but she throws the cream away after they have gone and she makes up her own potion from garden **herbs** and ointments that she owns.

## CHAPTER 9

At Elsbeth Beaumont's house, Windswept Crescent, Elsbeth tearfully looks out the window and waits for William to come home. William is in the pub, however, drinking before the footballer's dance. He follows Scotty Pullit into the hall, which is already crowded and where Faith and Hamish O'Brien's band are warming up. William feels miserable because of the money his mother owes to Alvin Pratt, which William now must pay. He wanders to the snack table and bumps into Gertrude Pratt, who smiles and invites him to dance.

*Even though Teddy shows genuine kindness toward Tilly, her past experiences of rejection and ostracization in Dungatar make her reluctant to accept his help. This suggests that people's pasts can inform their future behavior. When people are treated badly, they are less likely to reach out to others because they may be traumatized by their past experiences.*



*Molly does not want Tilly to end up lonely and isolated (the way that she was before Tilly arrived) and so she tries to pressure Tilly into connecting with Teddy. Teddy tries to show Tilly that he is interested in the outside world, unlike the rest of the Dungatar residents, who fear anything new or modern. Tilly is snobbish with Teddy, however—she is scarred by her past experiences of rejection and heartbreak and does not want to risk being hurt again, so she tries to push him away.*



*Molly can see that Tilly is about to sabotage her relationship with Teddy and so she burns herself to stop this. Meanwhile, Tilly prefers to use her own herbal remedies rather than traditional medicine. Although traditional medicine is considered modern in Dungatar, Tilly knows that Dungatar is an old-fashioned place and that, elsewhere in the world, attitudes toward medicine have broadened. Tilly also does not trust Mr. Almanac because she knows that since he is the only person who can supply medicine in Dungatar, he may use this power to hurt Molly in some way because he dislikes her and sees her as an outcast.*



*Elsbeth is a powerful woman in Dungatar because people believe she is rich, even though she is actually poor and deeply in debt. In fact, her façade of wealth is just an illusion. She wants to control William and feels that she is better than the other Dungatar residents, who she does not want him to mingle with. In this way, Elsbeth reflects the general attitude of the Dungatar residents, who all judge each other and hypocritically think that they are better than everybody else—even though they all secretly engage in behaviors which would be considered taboo and immoral by the other residents.*



William dances around the hall with Gertrude and feels comforted by her presence. When they take a break, Scotty Pullit jokes that William can't afford Gertrude. William thinks glumly that this is probably true, but Gertrude follows him and asks if he will join her on a walk outside. William agrees, and she leads him from the hall.

The hall falls silent as Teddy and Tilly enter together. Tilly feels guilt and shame overwhelm her and she tries to step back, but Teddy drives her forward into the hall. Her dress fits her beautifully; it's made of green **georgette**. The other girls feel inadequate in their quaint, old-fashioned dresses. Teddy leads Tilly to a deserted table and he buys each of them a drink. He urges Tilly to dance, but she refuses. No one speaks to them for the rest of the night.

Mona reads in the corner of the living room while Elsbeth sits by the window, still waiting for William to come home. At last, tired of being ignored, Mona gets up and goes to bed. In her room, Mona undresses slowly, watching herself in the mirror. Pleased with her reflection, Mona climbs into bed and masturbates—something she does every night.

Out on the riverbank, Gertrude and William lie together and Gertrude allows William to slip one finger inside her. William arrives home cheerfully at dawn. Elsbeth is in tears—she's been up all night waiting for William. She complains that William has been drinking, but he says that he is a grown up now and he swaggers off to his room.

Teddy walks Tilly home after the dance and he tells her that, if she will let him, he will take care of her. Tilly thanks him stiffly and says goodnight. Teddy tells her not to worry about the townspeople—they will get used to her. Tilly says that it is she who will have to get accustomed to them.

*People in Dungatar believe that Gertrude is a social climber and that she wants to marry William for his money and prestigious family. This supports the idea that everyone in Dungatar values one another based on their superficial characteristics—for better or worse.*



*Tilly is treated as an outcast. She represents the outside world and the changes in fashion, culture, and society which took place in the 1950s and which the conservative Dungatar residents shy away from. However, while the residents fear modernity and progress, they residents are also jealous of Tilly's outfit. This suggests that these changes are inevitable and will eventually reach Dungatar, whether the inhabitants like it or not.*



*Although Elsbeth and Mona think of themselves as extremely refined and they judge the other women for being common and immoral, Mona secretly engages in masturbation, which would be considered taboo and improper for women in the 1950s. This suggests that Mona is a hypocrite and it supports the idea that everyone in Dungatar has a secret of their own despite their judgment of one another.*



*It was considered immoral for women to have sex outside of marriage in conservative societies, like Dungatar, in the 1950s. This suggests that many of the Dungatar residents are hypocrites, as they engage in sexual encounters that they judge others for. For example, Molly is treated as an outcast in Dungatar because she had a child when she was not married, yet characters like Gertrude and William also indulge their sexuality out of wedlock. On another note, William's encounter with Gertrude seems to temporarily transform him and give him confidence to stand up to Elsbeth.*



*Although Teddy genuinely wants to help Tilly, Tilly seems to be haunted by her past experiences of rejection and does not want to allow Teddy to get close to her for fear of getting hurt again. Teddy thinks that Tilly wants to be accepted by the townspeople, but Tilly feels that this is impossible (they are too conservative and close-minded to change) and, therefore, she will have to change and adjust to live alongside them.*





## CHAPTER 10

Sergeant Farrat soaks in his bath and rubs eggs into his hair. His bath is full of **plant** sprigs, and he drinks herbal tea and sketches a new outfit in his notepad. He thinks the outfit should be decorated with peacock feathers. Sergeant Farrat gets out of the bath and begins to look over the pattern for a women's jumper he plans to make. Underneath his police uniform, he wears stocking and ballet slippers.

*Unlike most of the Dungatar residents, Sergeant Farrat is an open-minded man and is interested in fashion—something that is considered unacceptable by the intolerant and conservative values of the Dungatar residents. Farrat's general open-mindedness means that he's also aware of interest in herbal remedies in progressive parts of the world and uses similar homemade ointments as Tilly. Sergeant Farrat hides his secret love for fashion under a veneer of respectability (his uniform) because he worries that the Dungatar residents will ostracize and reject him if they find out he's a crossdresser.*



Beula bangs on Sergeant Farrat's door and comes bursting in when he opens it. She complains about the indecency that went on at the footballer's dance and indignantly tells Farrat that Gertrude Pratt went off alone with William Beaumont. Sergeant Farrat gives Beula the knitting pattern and tells her that it is a secret police code. He needs her to write down what the code says for top secret police business.

*Beula knows everybody's secrets and tries to use them against people. She is so conservative and extreme in her desire to police other people's behavior that she goes to the police to report Gertrude's indiscretion (it was considered immoral for unmarried women to have sex in the 1950s). This suggests that people like Beula not only wish to gossip about people but actively seek to punish them for behavior which is outside of the norm. Clearly, there can be severe consequences for people who refuse to conform.*



At the pharmacy, Nancy prepares to send Mr. Almanac out for the mail. She points him in the direction of the post office and shoves him forward so that he totters along, following the cracks in the pavement. Ruth waits at the post office, hands Mr. Almanac his envelope, and shoves him back toward Nancy. While Nancy wait, Reginald Blood approaches her and whispers that he needs cream for a rash on his genitals.

*As the pharmacy is the only source of medicine in the town, Nancy and Mr. Almanac have a lot of power over people because they learn their secrets, such as Reginald's sexual promiscuity.*



Beula rushes into Pratt's and stops to talk to Muriel. Beula tells Muriel that Tilly went to the dance with Teddy and that she wore an indecent dress made from a tablecloth that Muriel sold her. Beula says Tilly is just like her mother, Molly. Muriel listens halfheartedly. Beula then tells her that Gertrude was with a man all night. Just then, William drives past and nods at the two women, who both turn to stare at him.

*Beula gossips about everyone and goes out of her way to learn people's secrets because this gives her power over them—no one wants to have their secrets revealed because Dungatar residents are extremely conservative and judgmental, and people are ostracized if others find out that they engage in behaviors outside of the norm. It was considered improper for unmarried women to have sex in the 1950s, and the women judge Molly harshly because she had Tilly when she was not married.*



Lois Pickett scrubs Irma's floor as Irma watches unhappily from her chair. Lois always washes the same spots and never cleans under the table. While Lois works, she gossips about the footballer's dance and tells Irma that she thinks William Beaumont and Gertrude Pratt will have to get married. Lois doesn't think that Elsbeth will be very happy about this.

*Lois is a gossip and likes to know everybody else's business. It was considered immoral for unmarried women to have sex in the 1950s—as such, women who got pregnant and didn't get married were judged extremely harshly in conservative society. This suggests that there are severe consequences for people who break social conventions, as they face a choice between social ostracization or being forced to marry even if they are not in love.*



## CHAPTER 11

Sergeant Farrat cheerfully eats his breakfast and daydreams about a new outfit he has made based on one worn by Rita Hayworth. He wonders if he could ask Tilly for an ostrich feather to complete his look. At Tilly's house, Molly gets up and knocks everything off the shelf in the kitchen with her stick as she passes. Tilly ignores her, and Molly wheels herself outside. Barney is waiting there and he asks if he can see Tilly. Molly says no—she doesn't know who Barney is—but Tilly brushes past Molly and tells Barney that she won't go to the races with Teddy.

*Sergeant Farrat secretly loves fashion but hides this from the townspeople because he fears he will be shunned if his secret gets out. Fashion was considered effeminate and unmanly in conservative societies in the 1950s, and anyone who stepped outside of traditional gender roles could face severe consequences for their behavior. Tilly rejects Teddy's advances because she has been hurt in the past, and these experiences have seemingly scarred her and made her want to keep her distance from people.*



Barney says that he has come to ask Tilly to the races himself. Molly wants Tilly to go, but Tilly says no. Molly tells Barney that it is because he is disabled, and Barney starts to cry. Tilly furiously tells Molly that she will deal with her later, and she invites Barney inside to wait while she gets ready to go.

*Molly deliberately upsets Barney because she knows that Tilly is kind and does not want to hurt Barney's feelings. Unlike the townspeople, who dislike Barney because he is disabled, Tilly feels sorry for him and wants to protect him because she empathizes with his position—she is an outcast herself.*



Sergeant Farrat puts on a slimming bodice beneath his police uniform and admires his reflection. His outfit inspired by Rita Hayworth lies spread out on the bed, and Farrat frowns at it as he prepares to leave for work.

*Sergeant Farrat loves fashion but hides his secret from the townspeople because he fears that if it gets out, he will be socially shunned and alienated. Sergeant Farrat, disguises his secret under a veneer of respectability—his police uniform—to maintain his status in society.*



The crowd at the Dungatar races stares as Gertrude, William, and Alvin make their way through the stands together. Mona and Elsbeth have already taken their seats, and Mona gasps as the others approach. Elsbeth looks horrified and clutches the jewels around her throat. Gertrude, William, and Alvin sit down beside Elsbeth, who ignores them.

*Elsbeth is a snob and feels superior to everyone in Dungatar because her deceased husband was believed to be a wealthy man. His wealth was an illusion, however, and Elsbeth is almost ruined—she hides this from the townspeople by running up large debts. Her jewelry is another attempt to appear wealthy even though she is poor. Elsbeth is also a hypocrite because she does not want William to marry someone who is poor, even though she herself was poor when she married her husband.*



Alvin asks Elsbeth if she has bet on a winner and says that he has put his money on a horse called “Married Well.” Elsbeth says this is fitting. Alvin stands up, offended, and tells Elsbeth that he brought her unpaid bills with him. He hands them to her, and Elsbeth gapes at him, horrified. Alvin and Gertrude storm off through the crowd and William follows. The crowd around them watches, fascinated.

Tilly walks Barney down to the racetrack. She wears a beautiful amethyst gown and high heels. Teddy waits in his car at the bottom of the hill and drives alongside them. Tilly and Barney pointedly ignore him. Tilly gently warns Barney that Teddy has used him to get to her. She explains that Teddy will probably give Barney money to go home. Barney says he knows, and that Teddy has already paid him. Barney says that his mum says he is “not finished” and that he is “five bob out of ten.” Tilly tells him that people say rude things about her, too.

As Tilly and Barney reach the racetrack, women gather around and gossip about Tilly. Tilly realizes that they are discussing her dress. Teddy steps up beside them, and Gertrude Pratt pushes through the crowd. Gertrude asks Tilly if she made her dress herself, and Tilly says that she did. Sergeant Farrat saunters over and says that Gertrude’s boyfriend is looking for her. Gertrude tells Tilly that she and William Beaumont are engaged.

William wanders over and Tilly catches his eye. They stare at each other until Gertrude drags William away. Tilly tells Sergeant Farrat that she remembers William from school. Teddy says William used to wet himself in class. William recognizes Tilly too, and he says to Gertrude that Tilly has grown very beautiful. Gertrude bursts into tears.

*Elsbeth believes that Gertrude wants to marry William for his money. This is ironic because, although Elsbeth pretends to be rich, she herself has no money and is deeply in debt. Elsbeth keeps up illusion of wealth by wearing fine clothes and running up large debts. Meanwhile, the crowd’s reaction suggests that everyone in Dungatar enjoys gossip and scandal and likes to judge and speculate on other people’s affairs.*



*Tilly sympathizes with Barney because like her, he is an outcast in the town, and people often use his vulnerability against him to get their own way. Although most of the townspeople are afraid to be seen with people who are socially shunned, Tilly would rather offend the townspeople than hurt Barney’s feelings. She feels that it is the townspeople who are wrong to judge her and Barney, not the other way around.*



*The Dungatar women gossip openly about Tilly because they think that, as an outcast in the community, she has no one to defend her. However, Tilly’s genuine kindness leads to her connection with the McSwineys, and Teddy is willing to defend her against criticism. This suggests that love and connection are more powerful than hatred and judgment.*



*Everyone in Dungatar has a secret or something that they would be embarrassed about if it were public knowledge—even if this secret, like William’s pant-wetting, is in the distant past. This suggests that no one can live up to judgmental behavioral standards, even though people try to pretend that they have nothing to hide.*



That night, William and Gertrude fondle each other in the back of William's car. William wants to have sex with Gertrude, but she refuses and rushes home. William drives to the base of the Hill and looks up at Tilly's house. He has heard from people in town that Tilly has been abroad. When William gets home, Elsbeth is up waiting for him. She says he cannot marry Gertrude Pratt, and William cries that he wants "a future." He says that if he does not marry Gertrude, he will ask Tilly. After this, his engagement to Gertrude is settled.

*Tilly represents the outside world and aspirations and experiences beyond Dungatar. William has had a brief taste of the outside world in his time at college, and although he plans to stay in Dungatar, he still secretly longs for something different. Elsbeth feels that William is too good for Gertrude because she considers the Pratts common, while the Beaumont's are considered a prestigious family. Their prestige is based on a lie, however, as Elsbeth's deceased husband was really bankrupt. Although she maintains the illusion of wealth, Elsbeth herself is very poor. William and Gertrude are only expected to marry because they spent the night together—otherwise they will be ostracized by the community. This demonstrates the restrictive social attitudes that were common in the 1950s and suggests that there were serious consequences for people who refused to conform with behavioral standards.*



## CHAPTER 12

At Pratt's General Stores, Alvin places a wedding cake in the window display. Beula, Lois, Nancy, Ruth, Faith, and Purl all peer through the glass and watch Gertrude and Muriel flip through a bridal catalogue with Tilly. Molly is parked in her wheelchair nearby, making sarcastic comments. Gertrude, who's a shapeless girl, picks an elaborate gown from the magazine. Tilly looks it over and says that she can make something even better.

*Although the townspeople are happy to judge Tilly when they don't need anything from her, as soon as Gertrude wants a dress, she is willing to use Tilly's services. This shows that the Dungatar residents are hypocrites and only ostracize people who they feel they cannot use in some way.*



Teddy hears all about the wedding plans from Purl in the bar. He hears that Tilly is making the dress and that the **fabric** will arrive on the fast train on Friday. Teddy repeats all this to Tilly, and they joke about whether or not the train will arrive (Hamish says that the new diesels are unreliable). Teddy says it will be better if it does arrive because Tilly will get to show everyone how well she can sew.

*Although diesel trains are faster and more reliable than steam trains, Hamish romanticizes the past when only steam trains were used. Teddy is slightly naïve and holds onto the illusory belief that Tilly will be able to win over the townspeople and gain acceptance in Dungatar. This is not true, however, as the townspeople are close-minded and are not interested in accepting Tilly—only in using her for her dressmaking talents.*



Teddy invites Tilly to come for a drive with him the next day, and Tilly agrees. When Tilly gets back home, she finds that Molly has taken apart her sewing machine—it takes Tilly days to put it back together. Once it is fixed, Tilly begins works on Gertrude's dress. Molly approaches Tilly with the fire poker, however, and hits her over the head with it.

*Molly sabotages Tilly's sewing machine because she feels that Tilly's belief that she can start a new life in Dungatar despite the local people's prejudice against her, is naïve and illusory. Instead, Molly wants Tilly to move away and make a new life elsewhere.*



Teddy comes to the house and finds Tilly nursing a large bump on her head. Molly starts to cry when Tilly tells Teddy what happened—she says that Tilly is out to get her. Teddy comforts Molly and invites the women to his house the next day to celebrate Christmas. Tilly refuses, but Molly says that she will go and that Teddy can pick her up.

*Although Molly does not want Tilly to stay in Dungatar (she tries to sabotage Tilly's attempts to work for the Dungatar townspeople because she feels that the locals will never accept Tilly and will make her unhappy), she tries to push Tilly and Teddy together because she can see that Teddy is kind and has Tilly's best interests in mind. Tilly is reluctant to accept Teddy's kindness, however, because she has been hurt by past experiences of loss.*



The next day, Teddy comes to collect Molly and brings roses for Tilly. He stole them from someone's garden, which at once touches and amuses Tilly. Teddy tries to convince her to come once more. He says that the McSwiney children are very excited about Christmas and that it will be fun, but Tilly says she'd rather be by herself. As Teddy leaves and wheels Molly down the Hill, Tilly whispers that seeing the McSwiney children would break her heart.

*Although Teddy seems well-meaning toward Tilly, Tilly is reluctant to accept his kindness because she is scarred by past experiences. This demonstrates how people's memories (particularly traumatic ones) can have far-reaching impacts on their future behavior.*



## CHAPTER 13

Elsbeth refuses to leave her bed in protest over William and Gertrude's wedding. Alvin postpones Elsbeth's debt repayment, however, and he lends William money for the wedding. Mona is excited because she has never been a bridesmaid, and she helps Gertrude put together the invitations. William reads Shakespearian sonnets to Gertrude, but Gertrude shows little interest. As the wedding approaches, William suggests to Gertrude that things might be moving too fast. Gertrude begins to sob and complains that her reputation will be ruined. William has no choice but to comfort her.

*Although Elsbeth is a snob and pretends to be a rich woman, she's actually heavily in debt and uses her pretensions to disguise this from the townspeople. Ironically, the only person who knows Elsbeth's secret (aside from William) is Alvin, who lends her the money and therefore knows how poor she is. This gives Alvin power over Elsbeth, even though Elsbeth views Alvin as common and inferior. Meanwhile, Gertrude knows that the townspeople think she has slept with William; therefore, she knows that they will judge her harshly if she and William do not marry. In this sense, conservative society puts restrictions on people's behavior because they face serious social consequences if they do not conform.*



At the wedding, William waits nervously at the altar. When Gertrude enters the church and floats down the aisle, all his misgivings melt away—Gertrude looks stunning in her gown. Even Elsbeth stands up and begins to proudly tell her neighbors that Gertrude's father is a prominent businessman. The wedding is a success, and William makes a speech over dinner.

*The beautiful gown that Tilly creates temporarily transforms Gertrude and makes her appear beautiful to everyone, even though she is not a particularly beautiful person inside. The illusion is so powerful that it even convinces William he is happy to marry Gertrude (even though he is not); this demonstrates that physical appearances can wield temporary power even if they do not always reflect the truth.*





Tilly arrives during the speech and stands at the back to watch. Every woman at the wedding is desperate to know who made Gertrude's gown, but the seamstress's name is not revealed. After the wedding, Tilly goes home and sits on her porch. She remembers her schooldays in Dungatar and how the boys—Stewart Pettyman especially—used to tease her.

One day, Stewart cornered Tilly outside the library and pushed her up against the wall. He told her to stay still or else he'd come and kill her in the night. Then he lowered his head and ran at her, aiming to headbutt her in the stomach. Tilly prepared for the blow, but at the last moment, she stepped aside. Stewart's head hit the wall and he fell to the ground.

Molly wheels herself out onto the porch beside Tilly. She has decorated her wheelchair with bits of cloth that she pulled from the furniture and bits that she tore off garden **plants**. She calls Tilly "Cinderella" and asks her how the "ball" was. Tilly says that it was a wedding and she thinks bitterly that she should not expect anything from the Dungatar residents. She tells Molly that the dresses were lovely.

Back in Windswept Crest, Gertrude removes her wedding dress and sees her plain, unattractive figure underneath. She announces proudly to her reflection that she is "Mrs. Gertrude Beaumont of Windswept Crest," puts on her lingerie, and goes into the bedroom, where William is reading in bed. Gertrude gets into bed with him and puts a towel beneath herself. William rolls on top of her and they have sex.

*The Dungatar residents are selfish and hypocritical—they are happy to use Tilly's services when it suits them, but they do not thank her for her work because they are ashamed to be publicly associated with her. Tilly is haunted by her memories of the past and the horrible treatment she received from Dungatar community when she was a child.*



*Stewart was Evan Pettyman's son, and Evan is a powerful man in Dungatar. Tilly, by contrast, is an outcast who has no one to defend her. Stewart takes advantage of his powerful position against Tilly: he knows that no one will challenge him because they fear his father's influence. Although Tilly feels guilty about Stewart's accident, really, she did nothing wrong and only tried to protect herself. Stewart's death also reflects the idea that when people hurt and abuse others, they often end up inadvertently hurting themselves in the process.*



*Molly is happier since Tilly's return, and the wheelchair's transformation reflects her genuine change for the better that's been brought about through Tilly's care. In the fairy tale that Molly references, hard-working servant girl Cinderella is temporarily transformed so that she can attend a ball. At midnight, however, Cinderella's beautiful dress turns back into rags. This parallels the idea that although Gertrude has been temporarily through the beautiful gown that Tilly made her, Tilly is the one who's really like Cinderella. Unlike Gertrude, she is beautiful inside and leaves the ball with nothing to show for her efforts because the Dungatar townspeople do not credit her for her dressmaking skills at the wedding. Like Cinderella, who is persecuted by her wicked stepsisters, Tilly is persecuted by the hypocritical townspeople, who are happy to use her services but who do not want to reward or credit her for this work because they still view her as an outcast.*



*The transformation which Tilly's beautiful dress enacts upon Gertrude is only temporary and cannot really change how Gertrude is inside. Gertrude's comment reveals that she is not beautiful underneath, but vain and ambitious—she has married William for his title, because she feels that this improves her own social status.*



Afterward, William asks her if the sex was painful, and Gertrude replies that it didn't hurt much. It reminded her of when she was a child and she accidentally put her hand into the broken eggs of a bird's nest. William was reminded of the Easter eggs he got as a boy. He always meant to eat them slowly, but after one bite he would gobble up the whole thing. The newly-married couple holds hands and falls asleep.

The next morning, Gertrude sniffs the bit of towel she used the night before and hides it away. She and William go down to breakfast with Mona and Elsbeth. Gertrude announces that she needs some new clothes and curtains for her life as Mrs. Beaumont, which causes Elsbeth to glare at William across the table. Gertrude says that they will go to Melbourne and they will pay for it on her father's account.

*William and Gertrude both use memories from their past to understand this new, unfamiliar experience. This demonstrates that past experiences help people to understand the present and shape how they respond to future events.*



*Gertrude's sniffing of the towel is done in private—it's not something she would want other people to see. Ham includes this detail to suggest that everybody has secret behaviors which they wish to hide from the world and that, therefore, nobody is perfect or can appear perfect all the time under public scrutiny.*



## CHAPTER 14

Tilly sits on the veranda and watches the train roll into Dungatar station. The trains transport grain away from the silo, which is visible from the Hill. Around Winyerp, the fields grow sorghum, whereas the fields around Dungatar are covered with wheat crops. Children play near the silo, and the air is full of golden dust when the wagons are being filled. The wheat gets made into flour elsewhere and the sorghum is fed to cows. The cycle continues with the seasons, and Tilly remembers its pattern.

Tilly goes shopping in town and, on her way, she passes Beula and Marigold. They make disparaging comments about Tilly's dressmaking. Tilly ignores them and climbs back up the Hill with her groceries. When she reaches the top, she finds Lois Pickett waiting for her on the porch. Lois has brought a dress for Tilly to mend. While Tilly and Lois discuss the worn, shabby dress, Purl barges in and asks if Tilly can make her a new lingerie set. Tilly says that she can.

After Lois and Purl have gone, Tilly hits golf balls from the top of the Hill down toward the town. Molly and Barney sit on the porch and watch her. One of the golf balls flies past Prudence Dimm, who is stumbling up the Hill. She has a bundle of school uniforms with her and she asks if Tilly can fix them up. Tilly agrees, and Prudence totters away. Barney takes Tilly's golf club and hits a ball over the hill's edge. It hits Prudence on her way down the Hill, and she collides with Teddy, who is on his way up.

*Tilly's memory of the trains, and the fact that they still operate in the same way, reflects the fact that nothing really changes in Dungatar. This supports the idea that the townspeople dislike social and technological change and actively discourage and fight against it. At the same time, however, the farming process still involves transformation (the wheat is made into flour, the sorghum into cow feed) and this suggests that even when things are seemingly the same, some level of change is inevitable.*



*The townspeople are hypocritical—although they are happy to gossip about Tilly and they refuse to befriend her publicly, they'll still make use of her services when it suits them.*



*Prudence is a hypocrite because she is happy to make use of Tilly's dressmaking service even though she never stood up for Tilly when Tilly was bullied as a child. Like many of the Dungatar residents, Prudence won't defend ostracized people because she fears being cast out herself. Meanwhile, Tilly's golf ball is a kind of minor cosmic justice: it punishes Prudence because she has not treated Tilly kindly in the past.*



The next day, Faith O'Brien comes to see Tilly to have a dress fixed up. While Tilly works, Faith asks her about where Tilly trained—she has heard that Tilly worked for a famous fashion designer in Paris. Muriel Pratt arrives next and asks Tilly to make her a stylish “day wear” look.

*Faith, like many Dungatar residents, is hypocritical because she will not publicly befriend Tilly, who is an outcast in the town—but Faith will still make use of Tilly's services when it suits her. Tilly represents the fashionable outside world in contrast to Dungatar, which is old-fashioned, conservative, and provincial.*



Down at the post office, Nancy and Ruth look over a fashion magazine that Nancy has ordered. Nancy is fascinated by the beautiful models. First thing the next morning, Nancy rushes up to Tilly's house and asks if Tilly can make her a colorful pant suit like one that one of the models wears on the runway in *Vogue* magazine. Nancy tells Tilly to keep the design a secret because she does not want people to copy her look.

*Like Prudence and Faith, Nancy is a hypocrite in her use of Tilly's services. Furthermore, Nancy is vain and mean—she wants to look better than her neighbors and to keep this improvement to herself rather than share this knowledge around.*



That evening, Tilly works on her orders while Teddy sits on the veranda and Barney weeds the garden. Teddy asks Tilly if she wants to go fishing the next day, but Tilly replies delightedly that she needs to run her business.

*Tilly starts to believe that she can run a successful business in Dungatar despite the cruelty and rejection she faces from the inhabitants. This suggests that Tilly craves social acceptance and that, although she has been scarred by past experiences of rejection and ostracization, she still hopes to make a positive difference in Dungatar and transform the town into a better place.*



## CHAPTER 15

Beula Harridene hurries through town and notices that many of the Dungatar women wear striking new outfits made by Tilly. The whole street turns to stare as William Beaumont's car passes by. Elsbeth, Gertrude, Mona, and another man are in the car, and the roof is piled high with suitcases from their shopping trip to Melbourne. There is a sense of excitement in the air as the Dungatar women get ready to show off their new, fashionable clothes to the Beaumonts.

*The townspeople are hypocrites—although they will not befriend Tilly or treat her kindly on a day to day basis, they will use her services to transform and improve their own status in the town. Although the townspeople value conformity, they also compete ruthlessly with one another and like to feel superior to their neighbors. This supports the idea that genuine, altruistic connection is impossible in a place like Dungatar because everyone is out for themselves and worried about superficial appearances rather than their treatment of others.*



The next day, Elsbeth and Gertrude go into Pratt's to see Muriel. They wear their new designer outfits and they're slightly put out that Muriel, too, has a new, stylish dress. Muriel notices that Gertrude (who now wants to be called "Trudy") has developed an exaggerated accent to match Elsbeth's. The women want to speak to Alvin—they explain that they have big plans for a Dungatar women's social and cultural club and they plan to raise funds for this. They want to advertise in the shop.

Alvin agrees to this and asks where Mona is. Elsbeth and Gertrude explain that Mona is being taught dressage by her new tutor, Lesley Muncan, who is a very refined man. Alvin notices Elsbeth and Gertrude's fine clothes and says that they should bring the bill in to him and that he will add it to their debts. Gertrude is horrified, and Elsbeth glares furiously at her daughter-in-law.

In the pub, Septimus Crescent and Hamish O'Brien sit at the bar. Purl sits behind the bar and paints her fingernails while Fred, Scotty, and Bobby get ready to play cards. They are waiting for Teddy but they decide to start without him. The phone rings and Purl answers. It is Mona, who invites Purl to the Dungatar Social Club's first meeting. Purl says she is busy and hangs up—she thinks the club sounds incredibly boring.

Hamish and Septimus discuss machinery at the bar. Hamish says that everything went wrong for humans when they started farming, but Septimus disagrees—things went wrong when they invented the wheel. Hamish says that the only harmless machinery is a beautiful steam train. Septimus says that diesel is better, but Hamish says that the world is not flat and he pours his pint on Septimus's head. As Septimus and Hamish begin to brawl, Fred orders them to leave. Septimus complains that people can get away with anything in Dungatar, except with telling the truth.

*Although Dungatar is a close-knit community, the residents are competitive and strive to outdo one another. This suggests that genuine connections are impossible in narrow-minded communities because people are afraid of being judged negatively. Therefore, people will go out of their way to bring others down in order to distract people from their own shortcomings. Gertrude feels that her marriage to William has transformed her into an important and cultured woman because William is from a prestigious family. However, this transformation is not real. Gertrude has only begun to act as though she is more refined and cultured, but she's really the same person she was before. This suggests that although changes in status or reputation may impress some people, they are not evidence of genuine transformation.*



*Gertrude feels that her marriage to William has transformed her into a refined and cultured person because William is from a prestigious family. Gertrude's pretensions inspire her to hire new servants, like Lesley (who claims to be highly refined) because she wants to appear better than the other Dungatar residents. Gertrude's transformation is not genuine, however, and she has not really gained anything through her marriage. William's wealthy and prestigious family ties are illusory and Gertrude is just as uncultured as she was before. Although Alvin appears to have Gertrude's best interests in mind, really, he has helped himself by marrying her to William as now he can lend her money and charge her interest on these debts too.*



*Gertrude and Elsbeth attempt to bring culture to Dungatar through their establishment of the Social Club. Their endeavors are laughable, however, because neither Elsbeth nor Gertrude are cultured or know anything about fashionable society. Instead, they maintain the illusion of knowledge because of Elsbeth's prestigious, though secretly bankrupt, family.*



*Septimus and Hamish romanticize the past and hold extremely old-fashioned views. Their beliefs are satirized and taken to comic extremes, however, to demonstrate that it is pointless to try and keep things the same because change is inevitable, and society is constantly adapting. Septimus suggests that people in Dungatar are dishonest and hypocritical because they all gossip behind one another's backs but will never say what they really think.*



The other Dungatar ladies also receive invites to the Social Club meeting. They immediately phone Tilly and she receives them all in a group in her living room. They all want dresses for the meeting and they all want to look more stylish than Elsbeth Beaumont, who has also asked Tilly for a dress.

Lesley Muncan sits in the kitchen at Windswept Crest and watches Mona wash the dishes. Lesley met William in the lobby of the hotel in Melbourne, where Lesley was working in the hotel kitchens. Lesley struck up a conversation with William and told him that he worked with horses. Lesley asked if William knew anyone looking for a stable-hand, and right at that moment, Gertrude, Elsbeth, and Mona came back from a shopping trip. William introduced them to Lesley.

Mona is afraid of horses, but Lesley insists that riding is very easy. Mona is lonely and wants to impress Lesley so that he will be her friend. Lesley sleeps in the barn loft but comes to see Mona every day when he notices her at the kitchen window. He says that Mona must learn how to ride because this is what Elsbeth wants.

Meanwhile, in the library, William, Gertrude, and Elsbeth listen to records and relax. Suddenly, Gertrude rushes out of the room, and William and Elsbeth hear Mona shriek from the kitchen. William and Elsbeth hurry downstairs and find that Gertrude has thrown up in the sink. Elsbeth gasps, and Lesley exclaims dramatically that Gertrude is pregnant. Mona looks sullen and says that they'll turn her room into the nursery. Elsbeth steps forward and slaps Mona's face.

## CHAPTER 16

Ruth drags another heavy chest from the post office up to Tilly's house. At the top of the Hill, she meets Sergeant Farrat, who is about to visit Tilly. Sergeant Farrat asks what the box contains, and Ruth tells him that it's full of **fabrics**, jewels, and feathers. Tilly, who has just come out, looks knowingly at Ruth, who gasps and covers her mouth. Tilly and Sergeant Farrat take the box inside, and Tilly makes Sergeant Farrat a cup of tea.

*The Dungatar women are hypocritical: although none of them will openly befriend Tilly since she is an outcast, they will all use her services when it benefits them. Although Dungatar is a close-knit society, the residents all compete with one another. This suggests that genuine acceptance is impossible in Dungatar because it's based upon judgement and conformity rather than genuine connection.*



*Given the dishonest and social-climbing nature of characters in the novel, it may well be that Lesley isn't who he says he is—given his relatively low-status job as a kitchenhand, it's safe to assume that he isn't the refined gentleman he's pretending to be.*



*Although Mona is accepted by the Dungatar community, she is ostracized and treated like an outcast in her own family. Mona craves connection, however, and hopes to form a friendship with Lesley. Conformity is considered highly important in Dungatar, and Mona is expected to learn to ride because she is from an upper-class family, even though she has no real interest in the sport.*



*Although Mona is accepted within the Dungatar community, she is treated like an outcast in her own family and is quickly replaced by Gertrude when Gertrude marries William. This suggests that real acceptance in Dungatar is impossible, even for insiders, because acceptance there is based on conformity and status rather than on genuine connection.*



*Ruth accidentally reveals that she goes through Tilly's mail. This is one of many examples of how nosy the Dungatar residents are—they love to snoop into and gossip about other people's business. People like Ruth enjoy learning others' secrets because they feel that this gives them power. Because people are afraid that their secrets will get out, they will do anything to prevent this and are easily manipulated because of this.*





Sergeant Farrat asks Tilly if he can open the box, and Tilly agrees. Sergeant Farrat delightedly pulls silks, envelopes full of fashion drawings, and packets of feathers from the chest. The last item inside is a gorgeous red **fabric**. Sergeant Farrat wraps it around himself and struts before the mirror. He tells Tilly that he can sew and that he wants to help with accessories, and Tilly happily agrees.

*Sergeant Farrat's friendship with Tilly puts him at ease—he doesn't feel the need to hide his love of fashion from her, which he usually conceals because he is afraid of being judged or socially ostracized. In contrast to the other Dungatar residents, Tilly is open-minded and accepts Sergeant Farrat for who he is. This creates a genuine connection between them, as Sergeant Farrat is able to develop his passion and help Tilly at the same time.*



The Dungatar residents gather at Windswept Crescent for the Social Club Gala held outside in the grounds. William shows Reginald and Scotty the field, talking vaguely about his plans for the farm. Gertrude surveys the scene anxiously from her lounge chair and bosses Muriel around. Faith O'Brien sneaks off to meet Reginald while Hamish guards his model train set and stops children from playing with it. Lesley demonstrates dressage for the Dungatar children and parents, but the horses bunch up in a herd together instead of staying in line.

*Gertrude's marriage to William has given her delusions of grandeur, and she becomes extremely entitled because she feels that the marriage has transformed her into a grand and important person. Meanwhile, Hamish's romanticized view of the past is satirized as he wants to prevent any changes to the railway system, which he works for. However, just as it is arguably irrational that Hamish does not want children to play with his trainset, it is foolish to believe that one can prevent change, because change is inevitable.*



Halfway through the afternoon, the Dungatar residents get bored and start a football game on the lawn. Elsbeth tells her snobbish relatives, who are visiting for the day, that this is what one expects from the "riff-raff." In the stables, Lesley asks Mona what she will wear to the presentations that evening. Mona replies that she will wear her bridesmaid's dress again, but Lesley says that Mona should get Tilly to make her something instead. Mona asks Lesley if he has a date for the evening, and Lesley jokes that he is taking Lois Pickett. At this, Mona and Lesley dissolve into laughter.

*Elsbeth believes that she is better than the Dungatar residents because she married into a wealthy family. Elsbeth's pretense at refinement is an illusion, however—really, her family relies on Alvin, Gertrude's father, who lends them money. Although Mona is accepted by the Dungatar community, she is treated like an outcast by her family. Therefore, Mona and Lesley form a bond because they are both outcasts and crave human connection.*



That evening, Mona enters the hall for the presentations wearing a beautiful dress that Tilly has fixed up for her. Lesley is her date, and he's shown her how to walk with poise. As they make their way through the hall, Lesley hisses at Mona that her petticoat is showing. They slip outside for Mona to fix this and then rush back in to go onstage. The crowd breaks out laughing, and Mona realizes that she put her dress back on inside out.

*Lesley tries to transform Mona into a refined and graceful young woman. Although Tilly's dress almost makes this transformation possible, Mona's clumsiness reveals her true character.*



Meanwhile, rather than going to the Social Club, Tilly and Teddy take Molly to the cinema in Winyerp. They see *Sunset Boulevard*, and Molly talks loudly all the way through it. They put Molly to bed when they get home, after which Teddy asks Tilly about her past. She tells him that she went to school in Melbourne and then got a job in a clothing factory, where she was supposed to work until she had paid off her debt to her “benefactor.” Teddy asks if she knew who this was, and Tilly says yes.

*Rather than participate in the Dungatar community activities, Tilly, Molly, and Teddy—who are all outcasts in the town—go outside of Dungatar for their entertainment. This reflects the idea that Tilly has had experiences elsewhere and has become open-minded and worldly as a result of this. Teddy is also naturally open-minded and does not follow along with the town’s narrowminded rejection of Tilly. However, Tilly is reluctant to open up to Teddy and tell him about her past. On another note, *Sunset Boulevard* is a film about a forgotten film star who yearns for her glory days as a great actress, much like the Dungatar residents romanticize their own conservative values which are rooted in the past.*



## CHAPTER 17

Back at Windswept Crescent, Mona cries and Lesley laughs about the dress mishap. Elsbeth announces sharply that Lesley and Mona will have to get married, which instantly sobers Lesley up. Lesley protests that he doesn’t want to get married, but Gertrude says that if they don’t, they will have to leave Dungatar.

*Although Lesley and Mona have not had sex, the townspeople believe they have because gossip spreads so fast in Dungatar. Although Mona is Gertrude’s sister-in-law, Gertrude will not defend Mona against gossip—instead, she forces her to get married or to leave town in order to appease the town’s conservative values. This suggests that relationships are damaged by societies which pressure people to conform in order to keep up appearances, rather than allowing people the freedom to live as they like.*



Mona and Lesley have a quiet wedding, and William drives them to the station to set off on their honeymoon. They are booked into the Grand Suite hotel in Melbourne. They drop off their bags, and Lesley hurriedly offers to take Mona sightseeing. When they get back, the hotel owner has left a bottle of champagne in the room. Mona goes to change into her lingerie, which Tilly made for her. Lesley is almost sick in the bathroom while she is gone.

*Leslie’s anxious reaction to Mona changing into lingerie heavily implies that Lesley is gay. He hides this from Mona (and seemingly from himself) likely because homosexuality was illegal in the 1950s (when the story is set). In a conservative and judgmental society like Dungatar, Lesley cannot be himself because he would face terrible consequences if he openly admitted his sexuality.*



When Mona comes out, Lesley says the **fabric** of her new underwear is gorgeous and he quickly pours them both some champagne. Mona gets drunk and passes out, and Lesley wraps himself in Mona’s silk dressing gown to sleep. The next morning, Mona wakes up feeling sad and upset; she looks accusingly at Lesley. When Mona and Lesley get back to Dungatar, Elsbeth gives Mona her inheritance and tells her that it must go toward a cottage that she and Lesley will rent in town.

*Again, it is heavily implied that Lesley is gay, but that he cannot admit this to Mona. Homosexuality was not accepted, and was, in fact, illegal in many countries during the 1950s. Although Lesley is not sexually attracted to Mona, Mona does not understand this and feels rejected by him. This suggests that in societies which do not accept diversity, people cannot maintain honest and loving connections with one another.*



Faith makes up the posters for the Dungatar Ball and takes them into town. At the station, Hamish helps a woman off the train. She asks him when the next train back leaves and he replies that there is one the next day. The woman seems disappointed. She reluctantly gives her bags to Ed McSwiney, who drives her to the hotel on his cart. When she reaches the hotel, Fred shows her up to their best room and asks what brings her to town. The woman is very fashionably dressed. She replies that she thought the countryside might be relaxing, but now she does not seem so sure.

Fred leaves the woman alone and she smokes a cigarette and looks out of the window. She is astonished to see that the Dungatar women are all dressed very stylishly. Some of them are wearing fashions that she has only seen in designer collections in Europe. She wonders how on earth this has happened.

The Dungatar women stand around Faith's poster and gossip. Beula says that ball is more expensive this year and that some people from Winyerp are coming. Nancy says that Tilly just received another package, and Sergeant Farrat joins them and says the package came from New York. He says that Tilly is making a beautiful dress for herself. Beula bitterly complains that Tilly saves all the nicest **fabric** for her own clothes.

In the bar, Purl waits to take the new guest's dinner order. The woman looks dubiously at the menu and then asks Purl where she got her clothes. Purl explains that Tilly made them, and the woman asks where Tilly lives. After dinner, the woman goes to visit Tilly, and Tilly takes her measurements. The woman orders several outfits from Tilly and then offers her a job at her fashion company. Tilly says that she cannot leave Dungatar for the time being, and the woman leaves, impressed.

As the ball draws near, people are constantly going in and out of Tilly's to order new clothes and accessories. Faith, Hamish, Reginald, and Bobby come to get fitted for new band outfits. Hamish puts on Tilly's Billie Holiday record and comments that Holiday's voice sounds like pain. Sergeant Farrat collects the garments from Tilly and finishes them at his house to help her with the workload.

*The woman, who is a stranger and is never named by Ham, represents the fashionable outside world to which Dungatar seems a quaint, old-fashioned place. Although local scandal seems important to the townspeople, in the outside world, conservative places like Dungatar are falling behind and will soon experience the inevitable, progressive changes which took place elsewhere in the 1950s.*



*The woman represents the fashionable outside world, to which Dungatar seems like a quaint, old-fashioned place. She notices Tilly's designs because they are out of place in Dungatar and have temporarily transformed the Dungatar women into stylish, cosmopolitan dressers. However, this does not reflect the real characters of the women (who are unimaginative and close-minded) and, instead, reflects Tilly's innovation and hard work.*



*Tilly's innovative designs and her open-mindedness, which allows her to make clothes for the Dungatar women even though they reject her and treat her like an outcast, transform the town and superficially make it more diverse and cosmopolitan. However, despite this surface transformation, the Dungatar residents are the same as they always were—they are jealous and spiteful and, rather than appreciate Tilly's hard work, they resent her when she saves something for herself.*



*The woman represents the modern outside world to which Dungatar looks quaint and old-fashioned. Although Tilly is offered a job elsewhere, she believes that it will be possible for her to make a good life for herself in Dungatar despite the cruel townspeople who still treat her as a social outcast.*



*Again, the townspeople are hypocritical because they will not openly befriend Tilly or defend her from gossip, but they will take advantage of her dressmaking services. Unlike the other residents, Sergeant Farrat is open-minded and forges a genuine friendship with Tilly. Their relationship is based on mutual respect; Sergeant Farrat helps Tilly in return for her kindness, whereas most of the townspeople do not.*



Sergeant Farrat asks Tilly where she is seated at the ball, but Tilly says she isn't going. Sergeant Farrat is horrified—who will wear the gorgeous red **fabric** that Tilly bought for herself? He says that she should go with Teddy, but Tilly dismisses this idea and goes on with her work.

In their new cottage, Lesley and Mona practice their waltz in the living room. Mona tries to kiss Lesley, but he pushes her away. Mona begins to cry, and Lesley desperately explains that he just cannot love her—he doesn't know why. Mona asks if Lesley wants her to leave, but Lesley says that he has no one else in the world. His story about his rich family is a lie—his family is dead. Mona is amused by this since she is an outcast too, and the pair continues to dance together.

## CHAPTER 18

One evening, as Tilly works on the dresses, she hears Teddy enter the house. She hides in the bedroom and tries to resist the temptation to go out and see him. Tilly has grown more comfortable with Teddy recently; she enjoys his company. Finally, she goes into the living room and finds him sitting with Molly and Barney. Tilly sits down with them and she continues to sew.

Teddy says that Tilly is wasting her time on the Dungatar residents—they do not appreciate her. Tilly says that it doesn't matter if they hate her because everyone needs a scapegoat. Molly says that they are all morally corrupt and hypocritical. Barney goes out to weed the garden, and Teddy laughs and points out that it's dark outside. After Barney leaves, Teddy leans close to Tilly and tells her that he is falling for her. Tilly tells him not to because she is “falsar than vows made in wine.” Teddy says that he doesn't know this quote and he gets up to leave. Tilly blows a kiss at the door as he goes.

The next evening is the ball, and Teddy comes to collect Tilly. He wears a suit—but when Tilly opens the door, he sees that she is in her dressing gown. Tilly says she's not going, and Teddy teases her and dances with her until she agrees to go with him after all. They stand in the kitchen, laughing and holding each other. Molly approaches and says happily that they are disgusting together. Tilly changes into her gown, and she and Teddy set off for the ball.

*Tilly is reluctant to fall for Teddy, or to allow him to take her to the ball, because she has been scarred by past experiences of rejection. These experiences inform her future behavior as she tries to avoid getting hurt again.*



*Again, it is heavily implied that Lesley is gay but that he either does not understand his sexuality or cannot admit it to himself. Since Lesley cannot be himself, he is forced to disguise his true self with Mona, and she ends up feeling hurt and rejected because of this. This implies that intolerant societies hamper genuine connections among people because they cannot truly be themselves.*



*Tilly tries to resist Teddy's advances because she has been scarred by previous experiences of rejection and wishes to protect herself from further pain. However, over time, Teddy's kindness gradually transforms Tilly and helps her to open up.*



*Tilly naïvely believes that she can withstand the rejection and cruelty of the Dungatar townspeople, even though Teddy warns that they will never understand her because they are too close-minded. Molly thinks that the townspeople are hypocrites because they judge others for behavior that they themselves privately engage in. Meanwhile, Tilly quotes a Shakespeare play to suggest that Teddy should not fall in love with her because she is unlucky, something she believes because of negative past experiences.*



*Tilly resists Teddy's advances and fights her own growing feelings for him because her past experiences of rejection and loss make her wary about getting hurt again. Ultimately, though, Tilly cannot deny the connection that she and Teddy have; she allows herself to be transformed by him into someone who is more open and loving.*



The Dungatar women look radiant in their gowns as they stroll across the ballroom, and they show off to the guests who have come from Winyerp. Marigold Pettyman wins “Bell of the Ball,” and Beula takes her to the restroom to prevent her from fainting. Beula asks Marigold if Tilly made her dress. Marigold says yes and she asks Marigold if she knows who Tilly’s father was. Marigold says that he was a travelling salesman, but Beula whispers something else in Marigold’s ear.

*Although the Dungatar women have been transformed by Tilly and look beautiful in their gowns, they are not beautiful on the inside—instead, they’re still vain and arrogant, desperate to appear superior to the ladies from the other towns. Beula knows everybody’s secrets because she feels that this gives her power over others. In a conservative, conformist community like Dungatar, people are terrified of having their secrets spread and of being judged and ostracized.*



Tilly and Teddy look in at the ball through the open door. They try to find their names on the seating arrangements, but Tilly is horrified to see that her name has been scrubbed out. Teddy drifts in through the doorway, chatting to some friends. Evan Pettyman passes Tilly and spits on the ground beside her. Beula Harridene appears and hisses that Tilly is a “bastard, murderer.” Beula slams the door. Tilly tries to pull it open again, but someone holds it firmly shut.

*Despite all Tilly’s hard work (most of the Dungatar women at the ball wear dresses that she has made for them), they still reject her and will not let her forget her past in the town, where she has always been considered an outcast. The townspeople unfairly hold Tilly accountable for Stewart Pettyman’s death, even though his death was an accident and Tilly was only a child when it happened. This suggests that, although Tilly has tried to escape her past, the spiteful townspeople will not let her do so and they literally shut her out of the community.*



Tilly goes to the park, and Teddy comes to find her. Tilly starts to cry and tells Teddy that she doesn’t care about the ball, but that the guilt from her past tortures her. She feels remorseful about Stewart Pettyman’s death. Teddy comforts her and takes her home to his trailer. Tilly tells Teddy about her past, after which they have sex and fall asleep. When Tilly wakes up, Teddy proposes to her and Tilly accepts. Teddy says that they will have a huge wedding in Dungatar and then take Molly and Barney and go elsewhere.

*Tilly blames herself for Stewart’s death, even though it was not her fault. Her memory of the accident is unreliable and, rather than remember correctly (and realize that she was not to blame), Tilly instead believes the spiteful townspeople who unfairly hold her responsible. However, Teddy’s persistent kindness transforms Tilly. Although Tilly is reluctant to fall for Teddy because she has been hurt in the past, his loving nature leads Tilly to let her guard down. She even begins to hope that, despite her negative past experiences, she and Teddy may have a happy future together.*



Tilly and Teddy climb up on top of the silo and they lie there, looking at the stars. Tilly says that she remembers seeing Teddy and his friends playing here as kids. Teddy says that they used to jump into the grain trucks and get into trouble. Tilly comments that Teddy wasn’t afraid of anything, and Teddy replies that he still isn’t. Tilly says that he should be afraid of “her curse,” but Teddy says that he’ll prove he is not. He goes to jump into the wheat truck below. Tilly begs him not to, but Teddy blows her a kiss and jumps.

*Although Tilly’s connection with Teddy encourages her to open up about her past, she still does not fully believe that she is free from the effects of traumatic experiences (such as Stewart Pettyman’s death, in which she was indirectly involved). Instead, she feels that her past stays with her like a curse. Although Tilly was not responsible for Stewart’s death, the townspeople made her feel guilty and blamed her for it. This leads Tilly to believe that she is unlucky, even though this version of the past is inaccurate. By contrast, Teddy, who had a happy childhood in Dungatar, has romanticized memories of the past—because of this, he is not afraid to fall in love or to take risks.*





Evan Pettyman takes Marigold home to bed and he hears a thin voice calling out from near the railway. He walks down and finds Tilly pacing beside a grain truck. She has pushed a pole into the truck and shakes it. Tilly tells Evan that someone is inside but that they will not grab the pole.

*Evan's relationship with Marigold is very controlling and abusive—he routinely uses sleeping pills to drug her and then sexually assaults her when she is asleep. The idea that he takes her home “to bed” suggests that she is drunk and that he encourages her to become intoxicated so that she is not aware when he takes advantage of her. Meanwhile, Teddy is clearly stuck in the grain truck and is unable to get out despite Tilly's efforts.*



## CHAPTER 19

Tilly sits with Sergeant Farrat in his house, and Sergeant Farrat takes her statement. Tilly cries as Farrat presses her to keep her talking. She tells him that she and Teddy went to the silo to watch the sun come up and that Teddy used to jump into the grain trucks when he was little. Tilly cries that no one in Dungatar will forgive her for what happened to Stewart Pettyman. She tearfully tells Farrat that there was “another,” and Farrat puts her to bed.

*Teddy clearly meets with an accident when he jumps into the grain truck. Teddy wanted to jump because he had romantic memories of this childhood game and wanted to prove to Tilly that their future together would be as happy as his past in Dungatar. His tragic fate suggests that people should not try to recreate the past, as they will often find that things are not what they remember and that the past cannot be brought back. Again, Tilly emphasizes that the townspeople blame her for Stewart's death even though this was not her fault and she was only a child. This shows that the townspeople are cruel and unforgiving and will not let Tilly forget her past or accept her in the town.*



Edward McSwiney witnessed the incident between Tilly and Stewart Pettyman when they were children; he was up on the silo mending the gutter and he could see the school yard from there. Edward saw Stewart attack Tilly and he went to the yard to stop him. By the time Edward got there, Stewart was dead, and Tilly said that Stewart had run at her with his head down like a bull. Edward could see that Stewart's neck was broken.

*Like Tilly, Edward is something of an outcast in Dungatar because his family are poor and live at the dump. Edward, therefore, feels sorry for Tilly and tries to defend her from bullies, who are the children of the Dungatar locals and pick on Tilly because their parents ostracize her and Molly. Although the townspeople blame Tilly for Stewart's death, Stewart really dies because he picks on Tilly and has an accident while he does so. This supports the idea that people who hurt others often end up suffering themselves.*



Edward went to Sergeant Farrat's office afterward with Tilly, Molly, and Evan Pettyman. Edward tried to explain what happened, but Evan yelled that Tilly murdered Stewart. Molly then screamed that Tilly is Evan's daughter and that Evan followed them to Dungatar to ruin their lives. Molly attacked Evan, and Tilly was taken away. Sergeant Farrat put her on a bus out of Dungatar.

*Although Edward tries to defend Tilly, he, too, is an outcast and has little power to influence the townspeople. Evan, by contrast, is a powerful politician in Dungatar and uses this power to cover up his secret—that Tilly is his daughter—and to silence Molly when she complains about the way he treats them.*



Presently, Sergeant Farrat goes with Edward while he tells his own family that Teddy has died. The McSwineys crumble at the news, and Edward can barely make sense of his own grief. He suddenly understands why Molly and Marigold have gone insane through grief, and he feels haunted by memories of the past which crowd all around him in Dungatar.

In Sergeant Farrat's report on Teddy's death, Farrat does not write many of the things Tilly has said—that she is cursed or that men who come near her always die. Instead, Sergeant Farrat writes that Teddy slipped and fell into the truck, which was filled with sorghum instead of wheat. Sorghum is slippery and fine, like sand, and Teddy suffocated on it. He writes that Tilly was a witness and that she warned Teddy not to get too close to the edge.

Sergeant Farrat goes to tell Molly about Teddy's death. In response, Molly goes to bed and puts the sheets over her head. Tilly decides that it must be her punishment to stay in Dungatar. Sergeant Farrat persuades Tilly to come to the funeral with him so that she will not be alone. The funeral is awful and tragic. Sergeant Farrat gives a speech about how "love was stronger than hate" and how much the townspeople loved Teddy even though he was an outcast.

Sergeant Farrat says that Teddy was loving and forgiving and that he did not judge people for not fitting in. He loved Tilly even though she wasn't accepted in the town, and he disliked the townspeople for rejecting her. Sergeant Farrat suggests that if the townspeople had been kinder to Tilly and allowed her to come to the ball that night, Teddy might still be alive.

*Edward feels that Dungatar is now haunted for him because although Teddy is dead, Edward's memories of his son are still present in Dungatar. This supports the idea that although the past is gone, strong emotional connections and traumas, such as loss, stay with people and impact their lives.*



*Tilly is haunted by her past misfortunes and therefore believes that she is unlucky. Teddy's romanticized memories of his own boyhood in Dungatar are what prompted him to jump into the truck, which caused his death. Although Teddy naïvely believes that things remain the same and that his memory of the past can be trusted, he discovers—with tragic consequences—that the past cannot be successfully recreated.*



*Although Tilly is not responsible for Teddy's death, the townspeople's belief that she killed Stewart Pettyman leads Tilly to have a skewed perception of past events and to blame herself for Stewart and Teddy's deaths, which she believes came about because she is cursed. Therefore, Tilly feels that she deserves to be punished so that these deaths can be avenged. Sergeant Farrat knows that the townspeople will blame Tilly for Teddy's death because they already believe that she killed Stewart Pettyman. The townspeople are prejudiced against Tilly because she is an outcast and is therefore an easy target with no one to defend her—therefore, it is convenient for the Dungatar residents to blame these tragedies on her. However, Sergeant Farrat tries to appeal to the residents so that they might take pity on Tilly.*



*Sergeant Farrat knows that the townspeople will blame Tilly for Teddy's death because she is an outsider and because they are prejudiced against her and already blame her for Stewart Pettyman's death in an accident which occurred when Tilly was a child. Sergeant Farrat tries to subtly hold the townspeople accountable for their own cruel behavior, as it was their rejection of Tilly which pushed Teddy away (since they would not accept his lover) and meant that he was not at the ball—where he would have been safe—on the night that he had his fatal accident.*



The whole town turns out for the funeral and wake, and Sergeant Farrat drives Tilly home afterward. The next morning, Barney brings the animals up the Hill and leaves them with Tilly. Edward McSwiney says that she can keep them. Tilly wishes that Barney would look at her, but he is distraught and he stumbles away. That afternoon, the McSwineys gather up their things, set fire to their caravans, and leave Dungatar.

Tilly walks around her house, which is still strewn with scraps of **fabric** and mannequins that she used to drape the ballgowns. She thinks bitterly about the townspeople and she remembers Stewart Pettyman's death—the way he fell very suddenly to the ground. When she looked down at him, she saw that his head was twisted to one side and his mouth was full of blood. Tilly gazes out at the silo and thinks that it looks like a giant coffin.

*The McSwineys feel that they must leave Dungatar because the town is haunted for them now and will always remind them of their past, when Teddy was alive. Teddy's death also reminds the McSwineys that, although Teddy was popular in the town, they are still considered outcasts by the townspeople.*



*Tilly is traumatized by her past and her memory of Stewart Pettyman's death. She feels haunted by his death, although it happened decades ago, because it causes the townspeople to reject her, which also indirectly led to Teddy's death. Tilly and Teddy were not allowed into the ball by the townspeople and, therefore, Teddy went with Tilly to the silo where he had his accident. Meanwhile, Tilly's observation that the silo looks like a coffin represents the way in which Stewart's death follows Tilly through her life and affects its course.*



## CHAPTER 20

The Dungatar residents are united in their hatred of Tilly and their belief that she caused Teddy's death. People shove or throw things at Tilly if she goes into town, and locals drive around the house and scream that Tilly and Molly are "witches" or "murderers." Sergeant Farrat still supplies them with food, though, and Molly and Tilly hide away in their house, wrapped up in grief and bitterness. Below them, in the dump, people burn garbage so that the fumes blow up the Hill to their cottage.

*Tilly is an easy target for the townspeople's hatred because she is already seen as an outsider, and with the McSwineys gone, she has no one to defend her. Teddy was popular in the town, and the townspeople are genuinely saddened by his death. They take their pain and frustration out on Tilly because they can, even though she is not responsible for Teddy's death. Historically, witches were outcasts, who lived on the fringes of society and who were persecuted because people wrongly believed that they had magical powers, which were viewed as a threat to mainstream religion. The townspeople's characterization of Molly and Tilly as witches, then, reinforces their view of the women as social outcasts.*



## CHAPTER 21

Lesley and Mona give Una Pleasance (Elsbeth's seamstress cousin) a guided tour of Dungatar. Una seems unimpressed and wonders why Lesley (who claims to be from a rich, European family) wanted to live here. As they pass Pratt's, Evan Pettyman appears and lecherously says that he will show Una around. Lesley tells Una that Evan is the wealthiest man in town, and so Una happily goes off with Evan and gets into the front seat of his car.

*Lesley is clearly lying about who he is, and the Dungatar residents are easily fooled by his story because they are vain and believe that Dungatar is an exciting and cosmopolitan place—in reality, the town is old-fashioned and dull. While Gertrude and Elsbeth think they have shown refinement by hiring Lesley, they have really showcased their ignorance by being taken in by a conman. Meanwhile, Evan uses his wealth and power to get his own way and to impress women. No one is willing to criticize Evan for this, however, because they are afraid that he will retaliate against them.*



Tilly sits out on her porch that afternoon and listens to the cries from the Dungatar **football field**, where a game is being played. She is afraid that if Dungatar loses, the townspeople will come to the house and attack her. When the game is over and it becomes clear that Dungatar have won, she goes inside and sits with Molly. Molly is reading the local paper and she slyly tells Tilly that Dungatar has a new dressmaker, Una Pleasance. Una is staying with Evan Pettyman and she's a guest of the Dungatar Ladies Social Club, who now call themselves *Le Salon*.

*Tilly knows that the townspeople blame her for Teddy's death. Tilly is already an outcast in Dungatar and has no one to defend her from unfair attacks. Teddy was popular among the townspeople, and Tilly knows that they will take their pain and frustration (both about Teddy and the lost football game) out on her, even though neither of these things are her fault. Meanwhile, Le Salon is a reference to French salons, which were gatherings of intellectuals (particularly educated women) that were popular in the 1700s. The Dungatar Ladies use the name to present themselves as cultured intellectuals, when really, many of them are ignorant and have no experience of the world beyond Dungatar.*



The next day, Tilly finds Mona on her doorstep. Lesley, Una, and Elsbeth sit in the car behind her. Mona nervously asks Tilly if they can have back all the half-finished clothes that people have ordered. Tilly says no, because she has not been paid for her work, and she slams the door on Mona.

*The townspeople are hypocrites: they have been happy to make use of Tilly's dressmaking services (and even failed to pay her for her efforts), yet they still treat her like an outcast and refuse to defend her from unfair persecution.*



That evening, Sergeant Farrat comes to visit Tilly. He is dressed in a homemade Russian Cossack outfit and he's brought another matador costume for Tilly to mend for him. Tilly cheers up a little at this, and she listens as Sergeant Farrat tells her about the Dungatar Ladies Social Club. They have organized a fundraiser and a cultural event with the neighboring towns, Winyerp and Itheca. There's even going to be a poetry reading, Sergeant Farrat tells her.

*Sergeant Farrat wears many different costumes because he is one of the only townspeople who is truly open-minded and who accepts people without judgment. This means that Sergeant Farrat is open to change himself, and this is symbolized by his frequently changing outfits.*



## CHAPTER 22

William slouches on the deck outside his house and listens to Gertrude as she gossips on the phone. She complains about Tilly, who would not give them back the clothes she was mending, and she talks about the new clothes she will buy when she is no longer pregnant. William pours himself a drink and looks sadly across the garden. Lesley pulls up in the car, and Gertrude hangs up the phone and rushes off.

*William did not marry Gertrude because he loved her, but because of social pressure from the conservative Dungatar residents, who believed that William and Gertrude had slept together and therefore felt that the only proper thing would be for them to marry. Sex between unmarried people was considered shameful in conservative societies in the 1950s (when the story is set). Although William believed that he could make a future for himself in Dungatar and that he and Gertrude could be happy together, these beliefs have turned out to be illusions. Although Gertrude pretended to love William, she was really only interested in his money and the prestige that his family name would bring her.*



Una Pleasance, Beula, Lois, Ruth, Gertrude, Elsbeth, Mona, Lesley, and Irma assemble in Marigold's house. Marigold watches them nervously, anxious that her clean floor will become dirtied. She hastily takes one of her medicines as Lois lumbers around clumsily. Muriel causes a stir when she arrives because she's wearing a dress that Tilly made her. Una has put a mannequin in the room with one of her creations draped on it, and Purl arrives and asks if Una made this outfit when she was in college.

Marigold composes herself and serves cakes and tea to the women. Just then, Nancy bursts in and knocks Marigold over, causing Marigold to spill cake and tea on the carpet. Una is about to start her presentation when Gertrude yells and doubles over. Her water breaks on the carpet, and several people make a hasty exit. Lesley faints immediately. Gertrude cries out to fetch a doctor, but Beula reminds her that there isn't one in Dungatar.

Elsbeth snarls at Gertrude to be quiet—she is making a scene—and she sends Mona to fetch help. Mona gets into the car and drives across the lawn, tearing up the grass. Gertrude snaps back at Elsbeth, and she gives birth on the carpet. Beula whispers to Lois that Gertrude has been married to William for eight months. When Evan arrives home, he is shocked by the scene that greets him: his garden is destroyed, his living room carpet is ruined, and Marigold is sedated in bed.

*Marigold is neurotic and is traumatized by past events, such as her husband's abusive treatment and her son's death. She relies on prescription medication to keep calm as modern remedies for everyday ailments became more commonly available in the 1950s. Meanwhile, Una is clearly not a talented dressmaker. Although the Dungatar women did not know anything about fashion before Tilly arrived, now that they have experienced to Tilly's modern and fashionable designs, they can see that Una's work is subpar. This suggests that once people have had a taste of something new, it is hard for them to go back.*



*Marigold's obsession with cleanliness is ironic because, although her house is spotless on the surface, underneath her home life is soiled and corrupted, as Marigold is abused and controlled by her husband. The mess that the women make in Marigold's house reveals the true state of Marigold's life and the emotional squalor beneath the surface.*



*Marigold and Evan present a respectable façade to the world—they have a clean house and a nice garden. However, underneath, their home life is squalid and Evan abuses and controls Marigold—he drugs her with prescription medication so that he can sexually assault her. The chaos and destruction that ensues in the house represents the true corrupt nature of Evan and Marigold's life together. The closing image—of Marigold heavily sedated—reflects her position in this mess (she is unaware of what her husband does because she is always drugged).*



## CHAPTER 23

One day, a group of women from Winyerp gather outside Tilly's house and admire her garden. It is amazingly lush and fertile given the time of year. Molly comes to the door and shouts that they are trespassing, but Tilly greets them politely. The women want Tilly to make them some clothes. Tilly agrees to work for them and invites them in.

*Tilly is associated with growth and flourishing plant life because, unlike the Dungatar residents, she is open to emotional growth and helps others to change through her tolerant attitude—something the Dungatar townspeople do not exhibit. However, although the Dungatar townspeople have persecuted Tilly and tried to drive her away, news of her talent has spread. This suggests that genuine talent and hard work usually shine through and win recognition.*





Molly is pleased to see Tilly working again. One evening, a thin woman appears at the gate. She drags a suitcase behind her and asks Molly where Tilly is. The woman introduces herself as Una Pleasance, but Molly shouts to Tilly that Gloria Swanson is at the door. Tilly appears, and Una explains that she cannot keep up with her orders and needs someone to finish hems and sew on buttons. Tilly says that she is overqualified for that, and she goes back inside.

*Like the Dungatar townspeople, Una is a hypocrite and is willing to use Tilly when she needs help—even though, not long ago, she was willing to take Tilly’s job and to side against her with the rest of the townspeople. Gloria Swanson stars in the film *Sunset Boulevard*, which Teddy took Molly and Tilly to see. The movie is about a forgotten film star (played by Swanson) who yearns for the glory of her younger days, just as the Dungatar townspeople dislike change and want to return to a romanticized, conservative version of the past.*



One day, while Tilly works on an outfit for a woman from Winyerp, the woman tells her about the cultural event organized by the Dungatar Ladies Society. They are putting on a poetry reading, but the woman says that Winyerp’s is not very good. Tilly suggests they put on plays instead, because plays always bring out interesting sides of people.

*Although plays involve disguise, costume, and transformation into characters, Tilly believes that when people pretend to be what they are not, they sometimes inadvertently reveal their true personalities.*



In the bar, Purl pours drinks and listens to a drunken William tearfully exclaim that he is not really in love with Gertrude. He also complains that Gertrude had a baby girl—he wanted a son. Purl says that the baby might grow up to be like William’s father, who Purl “knew very well.” William bursts out crying, and the other men in the bar buy him drinks.

*William did not really love Gertrude when he married her but was forced to propose due to social pressure. Although, at first, William believes that he might build a happy future in Dungatar and that he might fall in love with Gertrude, these hopes prove illusory—William gradually realizes that he does not love his wife and that she only married him for his prestigious family name. It is implied that Purl had an affair with William’s father before his death. This supports the idea that everyone in Dungatar has a secret of their own.*



## CHAPTER 24

Lois arrives at Marigold’s house, where she’s greeted by Marigold, who is midway through cleaning and is dressed in protective clothing. Marigold asks if Lois has an appointment, and Lois replies that she has a fitting. Marigold snaps that it had better not be for a velvet dress—velvet frays all over the carpet—and she lets Lois in. Inside Una’s room, Lois puts on the ill-fitting outfit Una has made. It looks terrible. Una charges 10 shillings for her work.

*Marigold’s obsession with cleaning is ironic because, while on the surface her family life appears respectable and “clean,” underneath her marriage is very sordid and corrupt—her husband, Evan, abuses and controls her to conceal his womanizing.*



Evan Pettyman hides in the garden and peers out at his house. He watches as Lois leaves and stops to gossip with Marigold, who is out washing the sidewalk. Evan sneaks inside to Una’s room, where the pair begin to kiss and fondle each other. Suddenly, the jet from Marigold’s hose hits the window and startles them. Una accidentally squashes Evan’s testicles between her knees, and he collapses, writhing, on the floor.

*Una and Evan are hypocrites—they pretend to be respectable when, really, they are corrupt. Una’s accident provides a type of poetic justice because it causes Evan pain, just as his affairs and abusive treatment would hurt Marigold if she knew.*



A year after Teddy's death, Lois arrives at Tilly's house with money and cake ingredients from Irma. Lois asks if Tilly will make some more buns for Irma's arthritis. Lois says she will collect them the next day. As Lois goes out the door, she adds that if Edward McSwiney was still in town, he could take them on his cart.

*Tilly uses herbal remedies to help Irma and to temporarily ease her suffering. In this sense, Tilly is a threat to powerful people in Dungatar like Mr. Almanac, who is the town pharmacist and who refuses to prescribe his wife, Irma, medicine to ease her pain. Tilly provides an alternative source of medicine for the townspeople, thereby challenging Mr. Almanac's power because people no longer rely solely on him for treatment. Lois clumsily tries to guilt Tilly by suggesting that Tilly is responsible for Teddy McSwiney's death and the McSwiney family's subsequent departure from Dungatar. This demonstrates the way that the Dungatar residents use people's pasts against them to try and get their own way. Lois believes that making Tilly feel guilty will force her to deliver the cakes, which Lois is too lazy to do herself.*



The next day, Tilly takes the cakes to Irma herself. Irma is pleased to see her, and the pair chat pleasantly. Suddenly, Lois bursts in and asks Tilly if she will mend her dress—Lois needs it by the next day. Tilly says that she will, for a price. Lois undresses on the spot and gives the outfit to Tilly. Tilly resews it that night.

*Lois is a hypocrite: she is happy to bully Tilly and to join in with the townspeople when they bully and persecute her, but she still expects Tilly to do her a favor. Unlike the townspeople, Tilly is a good person and continues to help people even when they treat her cruelly.*



The Winyerp and Itheca Drama Club members arrive at Elsbeth's house for the Ladies Social Club meeting. The Dungatar women are dismayed by their guests' stylish outfits—they suddenly feel inadequate in their own homely frocks. The group congregates in Elsbeth's living room, where Lois rushes in and begins to show off her new dress. Mona arrives wearing a dress Tilly has made for her. Then, Mrs. Flynt from Winyerp brings up her idea for a drama competition, and the Dungatar women listen attentively.

*The Dungatar women are vain and competitive. Rather than try to connect with new people, they see the meetings as an excuse to show off their own superiority. However, although the townspeople knew nothing about fashion before Tilly's arrival, they have grown used to wearing modern and exciting styles and are disappointed that Una cannot execute these. This suggests that once people have had a taste of new and exciting things, it is difficult for them to return to their old way of life.*



The ladies decide to perform the plays in Winyerp's town hall. Mrs. Flynt says that there should be prizes for acting and costume. At this, Elsbeth suddenly looks nervous and says that Una will make their costumes. Mrs. Flynt is delighted—Winyerp will take Tilly. Gertrude suddenly stands up, and the skirt Una has made for her rips off. Gertrude announces that she has already asked Tilly, and that Tilly has agreed to make Dungatar's costumes.

*The townspeople are hypocrites because they have ostracized and persecuted Tilly, but now that they need her help, they want to use her services again. Gertrude even ruins Tilly's chances of finding clients elsewhere because she lies to the Winyerp ladies and loses Tilly their business. This suggests that even though the Dungatar residents will not accept Tilly into their community, they still want to control and use her while giving her nothing in return.*



## CHAPTER 25

At the Dungatar station, Hamish sells Una a ticket, and William sees her onto the train. Una cries a little as she leaves Dungatar for good. Meanwhile, Evan Pettyman puts Marigold to bed. She is nervous tonight and she asks for an extra spoon of her medicine. Evan gives it to her and says that Mr. Almanac has advised her to take it as often as she wants. As Marigold dozes off, Evan tells her that he must go out of town on business. When she is asleep, he masturbates to a photo of Una.

*Even though Una is related to Elsbeth (an important person in Dungatar), she is still an outsider and is used and discarded by the hypocritical townspeople, just as they use and discard the town's other outcasts. Evan pretends to help Marigold by encouraging her to take her medicine, while, really, he uses her drug dependence to control her and to conceal his womanizing.*



## CHAPTER 26

Tilly dreams that her baby, Pablo, sits on her pillow beside her. She reaches out for him, but he seems to hear something far away and he says “mother” before he disappears. Tilly wakes up and drifts into the kitchen. Molly is there, burning pieces from her wheelchair. Molly tells Tilly that she had a dream about Tilly's baby. Molly says that she also lost a child, and Tilly sits down beside her and begins to tell her story.

*Although Tilly has tried to start a new life in Dungatar, she is still haunted by events in her past. Despite her negative experiences in the town, her connection with Molly has had a positive impact on her life because it is built on mutual love and acceptance—it helps Tilly to open up and come to terms with her past experiences.*



Tilly explains that before coming back to Dungatar, she lived in Paris, where she had her own shop and a boyfriend named Ormond. They had a baby named Pablo who died when he was seven months old. Ormond blamed Tilly and he left her, so Tilly came home to Dungatar, hoping she could help Molly and do some good. She laments that nothing seems fair.

*This revelation adds another layer to the trauma that Tilly has experienced in the past. Here, it's clear that she has experienced extreme loss and grief in addition to the ostracization she faced after Stuart's death. These experiences have impacted the course of her life and influenced her decision to return to Dungatar.*



Tilly says that life hasn't been fair on Molly either. Molly says that she was naïve when she fell in love with Tilly's father. She asks if Tilly knows who her father is, and Tilly replies that Prudence Dimm told her when she was at school. Molly says that she tried to escape Tilly's father, but that he followed her. He gave Molly money and she had no option but to take it because she was a single mother. Molly says that he sent Tilly away because he lost his own boy.

*Dungatar is very small, and everyone knows one another's business. Unlike the other inhabitants, Tilly keeps secrets to herself because she realizes that although knowing other people's secrets may give one power over others, keeping secrets also gives one power as others wonder about how much one knows. Meanwhile, although Molly has tried to escape her past, it has determined the course of her life. Molly was a single mother with an illegitimate child (something which was considered sinful in the 1950s, when the story is set), and Tilly's father used his power against her because he knew that Molly would be socially shunned and have no one to defend her.*



Molly says that she began to hope that Tilly would not come back because Dungatar is such a dreadful place. Tilly asks Molly why she never left, and Molly says that she didn't know where to go. Molly says that Tilly's father would never tell her where Tilly had been sent—she only knew that Tilly had been taken away in a police car. The two women break down crying, feeling deep sorrow for each other.

Later that day, Molly collapses, and Tilly carries her to bed. Tilly rushes to Pratt's and finds Sergeant Farrat, who goes to fetch Mr. Almanac. Tilly hurries back to Molly's bedside, but Molly grows worse throughout the day and never fully regains consciousness. Mr. Almanac says that Molly has had a stroke. He callously explains that Molly will be dead in the morning and that he cannot prescribe anything for her pain. Tilly lunges at him, but Sergeant Farrat catches her.

Tilly and Sergeant Farrat put Molly back to bed, and Sergeant Farrat fetches some painkillers for Molly. He tells Tilly that he tried to call the doctor, but that the nearest one is 30 miles away in Winyerp. Tilly prepares **herbal** medicines for Molly to ease her suffering. Sergeant Farrat sits with Tilly all night, and Molly dies before morning.

Tilly sits out on the porch, shivering with grief. She knows there is nothing for her in Dungatar now and that she should leave and get a job in Melbourne. She looks down at the town, however, and feels that she cannot leave until the Dungatar townspeople have gotten what they deserve—there needs to be retribution for the things that they've done and that they've refused to do. Tilly weeps for Molly and screams "like a Banshee" as morning breaks over the town. That night, it rains heavily. Tilly sleeps in Molly's bed and dreams that Teddy, Molly, and Pablo visit her. They smile at her and wave, and then they disappear.

*Although Molly loves Tilly, she did not want her to come back to Dungatar because she knew that the spiteful townspeople would not accept her. Molly's grief over her loss, coupled with her isolation once Tilly was sent away, gradually drove her mad. This demonstrates the importance of human connection, which is virtually impossible in a judgmental place like Dungatar in which diversity is not tolerated and people are not accepted for who they are.*



*Mr. Almanac clearly abuses his power as the only person in the area who can provide medicine. He does not prescribe medication to help his patients—rather, he uses it to take out his own frustrations and enforce his own moralistic beliefs on people.*



*Since there is no doctor in Dungatar, the residents rely on the pharmacist, Mr. Almanac, for medical care. Mr. Almanac is a spiteful man, however, and abuses this power by refusing to treat people if he disagrees with their way of life. This demonstrates that even the best medicine can be rendered useless if people do not have access to it, and it can do more harm than good if it is in the wrong hands. Tilly challenges the power of men like Mr. Almanac by making her own herbal remedies with the intention of healing people rather than controlling them.*



*Although, at first, Tilly did not want to take revenge on the townspeople despite their cruel treatment of her, Molly's death causes Tilly extreme pain. This suffering makes her want to take her pain out on the townspeople, whom she holds responsible for Molly's death because they shunned and neglected Molly while she was vulnerable and sick. Tilly feels that the townspeople neglected their social responsibility toward Molly and ostracized her when they should have helped her. A banshee is a mythical creature which is believed to prophesize death with its scream. In this sense, Tilly's grief prophesizes suffering for the townspeople, whom she plans to take revenge on. Tilly's dream is a painful reminder of all the people she has loved and lost in the past, and whose loss has driven her to plot revenge on Dungatar.*



## CHAPTER 27

Beula Harridene approaches Sergeant Farrat and asks when Molly's funeral will start. Sergeant Farrat tells her sternly that people who weren't close to Molly, and who only want to gossip, should not attend. He says that Tilly's presence and her hard work have benefitted the town and that people have not appreciated her.

Beula goes into Pratt's and tells Alvin and Muriel that Sergeant Farrat advises against going to Molly's funeral if they were not really friends with her. Alvin and Muriel are vaguely indignant and they say they'll close the door when the funeral goes by. Lois says that she wants to go because Tilly still has some of her clothes, but Muriel says that this would be wrong, according to Sergeant Farrat. Beula suggests that Tilly and Sergeant Farrat are having an affair, and the women continue to gossip.

Sergeant Farrat arrives to take Tilly to Molly's funeral. He wears a black dress and high heels. Tilly is concerned about this, but Sergeant Farrat says he no longer cares what the Dungatar people think. Tilly and Sergeant Farrat are the only people who attend the funeral. Sergeant Farrat makes a speech: he says that Molly came to Dungatar for a fresh start but that she was a victim of gossip and constant scrutiny. He hopes she will find a better place now—one where she will be loved and accepted, as she tried to love and accept others.

Reginald Blood, who drives the hearse, helps them lower Molly's coffin, and Tilly says goodbye to Molly in the rain. Sergeant Farrat takes Tilly home and the pair get drunk and listen to popular songs on Tilly's radio. Beula Harridene lurks in the garden outside and spies on them. Suddenly, Tilly decides that Molly hated popular songs and she staggers to the door with the radio. She throws it outside, where it hits Beula in the face.

Beula staggers home in the dark, her face crushed by the blow from Tilly's radio. A few days later, on Monday morning, Sergeant Farrat waits expectantly for Beula's daily call. When Beula does not arrive, Sergeant Farrat goes to her house and discovers Beula lying in bed. Her face is badly injured, and the wound has begun to fester.

*Sergeant's Farrat's friendship with Tilly has transformed him for the better and he is no longer afraid to stand up to the hypocritical townspeople. They only want to attend Molly's funeral to gossip, even though they cruelly ostracized her when she was alive. The townspeople have benefitted from Tilly's presence because she has made them beautiful clothes, yet they have still refused to accept her or even to pay her for her work.*



*The townspeople are annoyed because Sergeant Farrat has pointed out their hypocrisy. Although they were unkind to Molly while she was alive, they now wish to attend her funeral so that they can gossip about her among themselves. This shows that Sergeant Farrat's relationship with Tilly has transformed him for the better, as he is now no longer afraid to stand up to the judgmental townspeople who ostracize and persecute anyone who does not fit in.*



*Sergeant Farrat's relationship with Tilly has a positive effect on him: he is no longer afraid to openly be himself in Dungatar. Although Sergeant Farrat used to hide his crossdressing because he was afraid that the conservative Dungatar residents would judge him, he has now realized that the townspeople will never accept or tolerate anyone who is different from themselves because they are hypocrites and expect others to live up to behavioral standards which they, themselves, do not meet.*



*Beula's injury is an example of poetic justice because she spies on people in order to hurt and control them—but, ultimately, she herself gets hurt while doing this. This suggests that even if no one actively takes revenge on people who lead negative lives and hurt others, these people often end up suffering themselves as a result of their own cruel behavior.*



*Beula spends her life spying on people and trying to discover their secrets so that she can exert power over them or turn others against them. She ends up getting hurt because of this behavior, which again suggests that those who seek to hurt others often end up hurting themselves.*





Sergeant Farrat takes Beula to the hospital. The doctor explains that the injury has made her blind and that she must move into the sanitorium permanently. Sergeant Farrat drives up to Tilly's in his matador costume to tell her about Beula. When Tilly hears that Beula was injured the night of Molly's funeral, she smiles to herself.

*Tilly is pleased because she feels that Beula's injury is an example of poetic justice. Beula has spent her life spying on people and trying to catch them doing things that she knows the Dungatar residents will judge and punish. Therefore, it is ironic that Beula goes blind, because she can no longer watch what people are doing. Beula sustained her injury while spying on Tilly, which suggests that those who try to hurt others often end up hurting themselves.*



Nancy closes the pharmacy and shoves Mr. Almanac across the street toward his house, where the garden gate and the front and back doors are open. Irma is asleep on her chair outside, so Mr. Almanac goes careening past her. Nancy rushes across the road and finds that Mr. Almanac has plunged straight through the front door of the house and straight out the back. He lands face down in the river outside and drowns. When Tilly hears about this, she goes to Molly's grave and tells Molly about Beula and Mr. Almanac.

*Mr. Almanac's death is an example of poetic justice. Mr. Almanac is a cruel man who used to abuse his wife, Irma. It is fitting, therefore, that Irma indirectly causes Mr. Almanac's death—she sleeps through his return from work and fails to catch him—because this indirectly avenges abuse she has suffered at his hands. Tilly is pleased because the townspeople were cruel to Molly and, therefore, she feels their accidents are fitting forms of punishment.*



When Tilly arrives home, she finds the Dungatar Ladies Social Club in her garden. They try to flatter Tilly and compliment her **plants**. Tilly listens cynically as Elsbeth explains that they are putting on a play (Shakespeare's [Macbeth](#)) and that they'd like Tilly to make the costumes. Gertrude shows Tilly what they would like, and Tilly remarks that these costumes are "Baroque." In response, the women condescendingly ask if she has ever heard of Shakespeare. Tilly quotes the witches' speech from [Macbeth](#), but Muriel says that they have not read the play yet.

*The women are hypocrites because they are only nice to Tilly when they want something from her; they're cruel to her and treat her like an outcast the rest of the time. The women choose [Macbeth](#) because they want to show that they are worldly and cultured. However, their choice of costume instead reveals their ignorance because they are from the wrong time period—Shakespeare wrote during the 1500s, whereas the Baroque period was in the 1600s and 1700s. Tilly, who is genuinely cultured and worldly, knows the play and spots the women's mistake. She does not point it out to them, however, because she wants them to make fools of themselves and showcase their true ignorance at the festival. It is fitting that Tilly quotes the witches' speech, since Tilly is associated with witchcraft throughout the novel because she is an outsider in Dungatar. Like Tilly, witches were often persecuted in small, conservative places because they were seen as threats to mainstream power and conventional authority.*



Elsbeth asks Tilly if she wants the job, and Tilly says that she will make the costumes if they pay her up front. Everyone owes her money for her previous work, and if she's not paid she will make Winyerp or Itheca's costumes instead. Gertrude demands that the treasurer, Muriel, ask Alvin for the money. Muriel snaps that the group also owes Alvin money and that no one has paid him for years. Elsbeth sighs and says that they will use the money that she was saving for William's tractor. Gertrude suggests that William can play *Macbeth*, and the group sets off happily down the Hill.

*The townspeople are hypocrites because they are happy to use Tilly's services but give her nothing in return, and they treat her like an outcast when they feel she is of no use to them. It is appropriate that William should play *Macbeth* because just as *Macbeth* is manipulated and used by his wife, Lady *Macbeth*, William is used by Gertrude. Gertrude did not marry William because she loved him, but for the power and prestige that this marriage would bring her. In this sense, the fiction of the play reveals the truth about William and Gertrude's situation.*



That afternoon, Tilly picks **marigolds**, cuts the stems off, and boils them in a pan of water. She bottles the liquid after several hours and leaves her house to go to the “shires” offices.

*Tilly is associated with growth and plant life throughout the novel, and this is often reflected in her use of plants to make medicine and herbal remedies. This reflects Tilly’s association with witchcraft and the idea that, through her use of alternative medicine, she can empower people and challenge mainstream authority.*



## CHAPTER 28

A couple of days later, Evan Pettyman wakes up in a bad mood. He is tired, and when he tries to masturbate, he finds that his penis is numb. Marigold is still asleep so he gets up, packs a bag, and sets off to see Una in Melbourne. Later that morning, Tilly arrives at Marigold’s door and gives her a bouquet of **marigolds**. Tilly explains that the sap from marigolds kills worms by making them go limp. Marigold lets Tilly in uncertainly and says she is sorry about Molly’s death. Tilly says that this is a lie, and she asks Marigold how much she knows about Molly. Marigold replies that Tilly was sent away as a child because Molly was unstable.

*Evan uses sleeping tablets to control Marigold and to conceal his womanizing from her. Tilly is associated with plants throughout the novel because she often uses them to make her own medicines and remedies. Tilly is also associated with witchcraft because witches, historically, were often female outcasts who used herbal remedies to treat people and who were persecuted because they considered a threat to mainstream power. Tilly is an outcast in Dungatar and is persecuted because of her past—the townspeople blame Tilly for the death of Marigold’s son, Stewart, who died in an accident. Despite this, Marigold does not know the truth about Stewart’s death because Evan has lied to her and given her an unreliable account of past events.*



Marigold asks Tilly where she went after she left Dungatar, and Tilly tells her. Marigold asks if Tilly’s father paid for her education, and Tilly says that he did. Marigold says vaguely that she had money saved for Stewart’s education but that now it is gone. Tilly tells Marigold that she can make her a costume for the play if Marigold wants. Marigold replies that it will be better than anything Una made, and then she immediately looks guilty. Marigold says that she knows Teddy’s death was not Tilly’s fault, but that she understands how his mother, Mae, felt. Marigold’s own son, Stewart, fell out of a tree and died when he was a child.

*Marigold cannot clearly remember what happened to the money she saved for Stewart, who died when he was a boy. Marigold is addicted to sleeping pills and is encouraged to take them more frequently by her husband, Evan, who uses Marigold’s fuzzy memory to conceal his womanizing and corrupt behavior from her. Marigold is a weak person and is afraid to go against the Dungatar townspeople and stand up for Tilly, even though she knows that Tilly has done nothing wrong. The townspeople blame Tilly for Teddy’s death although it was not her fault. Meanwhile, Marigold’s version of Stewart’s death is incorrect because Evan has lied to her—really, Stewart, like Teddy, died in an accident which involved Tilly but was not her fault.*



Tilly begins to tell Marigold about Molly. Tilly says that Molly was a spinster who was very naïve about men. One day, she met a very charming man who told Molly he was wealthy and successful. Molly fell pregnant with this man and wanted to get married. Marigold cries that the story is familiar, and Tilly says that Marigold knows this tale.

*Marigold recognizes this story because she has heard it before from the townspeople, who gossip about everyone in Dungatar—particularly about people like Molly, who are outsiders and are therefore easy targets. Marigold's memory is bad because she is addicted to sleeping pills. Her husband, Evan, encourages her to take pills and uses Marigold's confusion to hide his womanizing. Although Marigold's memory of the story is vague, she knows that she has heard it somewhere before. In fact, Beula told Marigold the story of Tilly's parentage at the Dungatar Ball, when Marigold was heavily intoxicated.*



Meanwhile, in Melbourne with Una, Evan is unable to maintain an erection. He returns dejectedly to Dungatar and finds Marigold waiting for him quietly in the living room. Evan tells Marigold that he is ill, and Marigold replies that he has made her ill for a long time and that Tilly has explained everything to her. Evan says that Tilly is crazy and that they should have her locked up.

*Marigold now knows that Evan is Tilly's father, making Tilly and Stewart half-siblings. She also realizes that Evan has drugged and manipulated her throughout their marriage. Evan uses medicine to control and silence women, and this is reflected in his suggestion that they should have Tilly committed to an asylum—he is afraid that she will reveal the truth about his corrupt behavior if she is not silenced.*



Marigold says that Tilly is not mad—Marigold knows that Evan assaults her at night after she has taken her medicine. Evan says that Tilly murdered Stewart, and Marigold replies that Tilly is Evan's daughter. Marigold explains that Tilly has poisoned Evan to make him weak and powerless—she put **marigold** water in his pitcher at work. Evan follows Marigold into the kitchen and Marigold drops to her knees before him and cuts the back of his ankles with a razor.

*Although Evan tries to manipulate Marigold, she now knows the truth about Evan's past and poisons him to get revenge for the way he has treated her. Tilly poisons Evan to make him feel powerless and weak—the way that he has made her feel. The fact that she uses marigold water is pertinent because, while Evan uses traditional medicine to control and silence women, Tilly uses alternative, herbal medicine to empower Marigold and allow her to get back at her husband.*



Evan crumples up on the ground, bleeding from his legs. He begs Marigold to save him—he will die from blood loss unless he receives help—but Marigold replies that everyone knows the strain she has been under and that they will understand. Even if they lock her in the asylum, she says, her life will be nice and peaceful. She leaves Evan on the kitchen floor, goes to her bedroom, and takes sleeping pills with sherry.

*Marigold takes revenge on Evan for the way that he has abused her over the years—he has kept her weak and powerless using drugs. Although Marigold's revenge is extreme, this suggests that pain and suffering often drives people to extremes and causes them to lash out and take drastic action against their persecutors.*



## CHAPTER 29

Sergeant Farrat arrives unexpectedly at Tilly's house with armfuls of dresses and **fabrics**. These are his clothes, and he wants to hide them at Tilly's because a district Inspector has been sent to stay with him—Sergeant Farrat does not want the Inspector to think he is gay. The Inspector will investigate Evan Pettyman's murder and the string of recent accidents in town. Tilly says that she would like to meet the Inspector to see if he is clever.

Tilly dozes off in her chair; she dreams of feeding Pablo and of Molly when Tilly was a young child. She dreams about Teddy and their night together, but suddenly the dream changes and the townspeople are lurching up the Hill toward her, armed with weapons. Tilly steps out onto the porch and faces them with a smile. The townspeople turn and flee.

Meanwhile, Sergeant Farrat finds the district Inspector, who is named Frank, to be a very messy and uncouth man: he farts a lot, eats with his mouth open, and does not wash his clothes much. Sergeant Farrat misses his neat, peaceful life alone and he hopes the Inspector will not stay long. One night, Sergeant Farrat takes Frank for dinner at Tilly's and Frank is extremely taken with Tilly, who wears a very low-cut dress. Tilly cooks for the men and offers them excellent cigars. They drink wine and dance around her table after supper.

When Sergeant Farrat and Frank leave, Tilly piles up all her **fabrics** and sewing materials and covers them with a sheet. Next, she takes a sledgehammer and smashes in the walls of the house so that she is just left with one long workroom. There are drawings of Baroque costume designs pinned to all the walls, and Tilly begins her work.

*Sergeant Farrat is a crossdresser—something that was considered unacceptable by the intolerant and conservative moral standards of the 1950s, when the novel is set. Although, through his genuine friendship with Tilly, Sergeant Farrat has learned not to care what the Dungatar townspeople think about him, homosexuality was illegal in the 1950s and so Farrat may face extremely severe consequences if it is widely believed that he is gay.*



*Tilly is haunted by her past because she has lost people and because she knows that the townspeople will not let her forget her past, which they punish and persecute her for. Tilly is afraid that the townspeople will use her past as an excuse to take their own pain and frustration out on her.*



*Sergeant Farrat cannot reveal his true personality or interest in fashion to Frank because fashion was considered effeminate according to the strict gender norms of the 1950s. Therefore, Sergeant Farrat has to disguise his true behavior from Frank because he is afraid that, if Frank found out about his cross-dressing, he would judge Sergeant Farrat and possibly believe that Sergeant Farrat is gay, which was a crime in 1950s Australia.*



*Tilly, who once transformed Molly's house for the better and made it a pleasant place to live, now transforms the house again when she destroys it. Before, the house represented Tilly's hopes for her new life in Dungatar. However, the spiteful townspeople and Tilly's own grief over Molly and Teddy's deaths, dash these hopes and show Tilly that the Dungatar townspeople are incapable of changing or becoming more accepting of outsiders. Tilly still plans to make the Baroque costumes for the townspeople's version of Macbeth because she knows that these costumes are from the wrong time period (Shakespeare wrote in the 1500s whereas the Baroque period was in the 1600s and 1700s). She wants the townspeople to make fools of themselves and show off their ignorance publicly at the performance.*



## CHAPTER 30

Auditions open for the Dungatar production of [Macbeth](#). Gertrude announces that she is the director and so she has full creative control. Elsbeth adds that she's the producer—therefore, she's in charge the director. Gertrude reads the casting list out. She, herself, will play Lady Macbeth, and Lesley will be Macbeth. Sergeant Farrat will be Banquo. Mona complains that she doesn't have a speaking part, and Elsbeth snaps at Gertrude to get the cast under control.

Tilly and Irma sit at the back of the hall to watch. Irma wears a flaming red dress. It's announced that Irma is head of wardrobe, and Irma glances worriedly down at her swollen hands. Tilly promises that she will make Irma some more cakes to ease her arthritis. During the first rehearsal, Gertrude asks Hamish, who is head of props, why he has built a balcony. Hamish thinks the play is [Romeo and Juliet](#). When he learns that it is actually [Macbeth](#) he rushes, terrified, from the hall.

Tilly works from morning until night on the costumes. Sometimes, in the evenings, she goes and watches the rehearsals, which are quickly descending into chaos. Gertrude is bossy and demanding with the cast, who struggle to remember their lines. Elsbeth keeps interrupting and causing fights—eventually, Gertrude tries to fire her. Elsbeth argues that without her, there is no money for the play. Ruth suggests that they use the town's insurance money—she hasn't sent it to the insurance company yet. The cast reluctantly agrees, and Elsbeth storms out.

As February turns into March, the days grow hotter. William goes to Tilly to be fitted for his costume. He is very drawn to her and he can't sleep that night after spending the day in her work room. Gertrude's attitude grows more intense and she keeps the cast for hours rehearsing the play, which they still have not mastered. She has lost weight and bitten off all her nails. The next day, cast gather for the dress rehearsal. Purl, William, and Lesley struggle on stage, wearing their ornate 17-century costumes. Gertrude says that they look very authentic, and Tilly smiles and agrees.

*Gertrude and Elsbeth are both selfish and ambitious; they want to control others rather than address their own unpleasant behaviors. This means that genuine connection and cooperation is impossible between them because, rather than help and support each other, they try to bring each other down to make themselves look better.*



*Tilly is associated with witchcraft throughout the novel because she uses herbal remedies to heal people. Historically, witches were often women who were outsiders in small, conservative communities and who were persecuted because they were believed to have magical powers and were thought to use plants and herbs to cast spells. Macbeth and Romeo and Juliet are both plays by William Shakespeare. Macbeth is set in Scotland (where it is implied Hamish is from) and is believed to be a cursed play because of several disastrous productions when tragedy struck the crew and cast. This reflects the idea that things and people can be haunted by even distant occurrences in the past.*



*Although Dungatar is a very insular and close-knit community, individually, the townspeople are spiteful and selfish and would rather bring each other down than support one another. Therefore, the cast cannot bring the play together because such productions require connection and teamwork to produce, something that the townspeople do not understand.*



*Tilly represents the outside world and life experiences beyond Dungatar. William has had a taste of a life beyond Dungatar in his time away at college. Although he hoped to make a future for himself in Dungatar when he returned home, he finds life in the town disappointing and still aspires to something better beyond this. This suggests that once people have had a taste of new and exciting things, it is hard for them to return to their old way of life. Although Tilly knows the costumes are from the wrong century (Shakespeare was active in the 1500s), she does not tell the townspeople because she wants revenge on them for the way they have treated her. She wants them to make fools of themselves and reveal their ignorance to publicly at the performance*





## CHAPTER 31

As the play draws closer, Tilly works long hours and grows tired and stiff from sewing. She is almost cheerful, though, as she enjoys her work. Sergeant Farrat tells her that the play is going badly. Everyone despises Gertrude, who is mean to everyone, and Lesley has become very arrogant. Sergeant Farrat helps Tilly take costumes down to the hall and they find Gertrude screaming at the frightened-looking cast.

Fred Bundle nervously says his line, and Gertrude explodes and shrieks that he has got it wrong. The other cast members defend Fred and they say that Gertrude is wrong. She turns on them furiously, howling like a demon and cursing them with pox and sores.

William suddenly steps forward and slaps Gertrude hard. He says that if she does not stop screaming, he will fetch the doctor and they will have her committed. Mona says that William will take Gertrude's baby as well, and the cast stomps out of the hall and leaves Gertrude behind. Gertrude spins around and gapes at Tilly. Tilly shrugs and leaves the hall. None of the cast can sleep that night, as they are all worried about the play.

## CHAPTER 32

The morning of the Eisteddfod arrives, and the cast prepares nervously to leave on Bobby Pickett's bus. They wait in the hall, and Tilly watches from the Hill as the bus pulls up. Gertrude, who has gone mad, flies off the bus and begins hammering on the hall doors. The cast covers inside and they bar the door with furniture. Bobby shuts the bus doors, and Gertrude throws herself on the bonnet and begins to beat the window-screen and howl that they cannot fire her.

From the hall window, William waves to the doctor, who is in the hotel across the street. The doctor hurries down and injects Gertrude with a sedative. She falls to the ground, and the cast clambers onto the bus. Mona takes over as director and announces that Sergeant Farrat has not arrived. Bobby says that Sergeant Farrat will meet them at the station and he goes to start the bus, but the engine dies, so everyone climbs off the bus again.

*The townspeople are spiteful, jealous, and vindictive. Therefore, they are incapable of successfully organizing the play because this requires teamwork and connection. Instead, the Dungatar residents want to bring one another down in order to help themselves. This is particularly evident in Gertrude, who has gone mad with power and alienates the cast by abusing them.*



*Gertrude is ambitious and controlling. Although she finally gets what she wants—power over a large group of people—this does not make her happy, but instead drives her mad. This suggests that it is better to connect and work with people than to dominate and control them.*



*William uses the threat of medical intervention to silence Gertrude, who has gone mad with power. The other cast members do not stand up for Gertrude, and side with William against her, because she has treated them badly. In this sense, Gertrude's power-hungry attitude alienates her from the cast and she is punished because she has treated others badly.*



*Gertrude is a power-hungry and ambitious woman. However, once she gets power (as the director of the Dungatar play) she abuses it, and gradually drives herself mad, because she holds others to such impossibly high standards. This suggests that when people alienate and abuse others, they often end up hurting themselves.*



*William and the doctor use medicine to silence Gertrude and to stop her violent outburst. This shows that when modern medicine is used appropriately, it is powerful and can stop people from hurting others and themselves.*



Tilly's house is covered in scraps of **fabric** and half-finished garments. She has stuffed strips of fabric into every nook and cranny of the house and piled it up beneath the roof. She looks at herself in the mirror and notes that she looks tired and lean. She picks up a can of petrol at her feet and begins to pour it over everything.

At the police station, Sergeant Farrat practices his lines and Frank puts the finishing touches to his outfits. The bus, pushed by the Dungatar cast, rumbles up outside, and Sergeant Farrat says that he will follow them in the police car. Bobby gets the bus going again, and Frank gets on. Sergeant Farrat watches it chug away and he looks up at the Hill. Smoke billows from Tilly's chimney.

Tilly marches through the town, untying animals and slapping their behinds to make them run away. Sergeant Farrat hunts for his car keys, but he can't find them. He notices the smoke cloud from Tilly's growing larger. Sergeant Farrat realizes that Tilly's house is on fire, and he sprints up the Hill toward it. He collapses, exhausted, at the top, and sees that Tilly's house is ablaze. He is too tired to reach the tap, but Tilly has switched off the water anyway.

The Dungatar cast arrives very late and misses the first play. They wait outside during the second one, and their makeup begins to melt in the heat. They grow irritable and start to bicker. When they are due to go on, they realize that Sergeant Farrat is still not there. Mona says that Lesley can play Banquo. The others protest that he does not know the script, but Mona says that Lesley is a born actor and he'll be fine.

*Tilly has transformed the house into a large workspace for herself. Once she finishes her project, she begins to transform the house once more and turn it into something that will burn easily. Although Tilly is associated with creative energy throughout the novel, her grief over her recent losses drive Tilly to the opposite extreme. Now, she's become destructive and she decides to take revenge on the townspeople for cruelly ostracizing her and her loved ones, as this ostracization indirectly led to their deaths.*



*Sergeant Farrat is different from the townspeople, although he is accepted by them, because his friendship with Tilly has helped him learn to love and accept himself—something that the judgmental Dungatar residents do not encourage. This is symbolized by the fact that the townspeople all go on the bus together—they are a homogenous group—whereas Sergeant Farrat goes in the other direction and tries to save Tilly when he sees her house is on fire.*



*Tilly sets the town on fire to take revenge on the townspeople, who have ostracized her and who indirectly contributed to the deaths of her mother, Molly, and her lover, Teddy. She does not want to hurt the animals, however, because they have done nothing wrong, whereas she feels that the townspeople deserve to lose their homes.*



*Although Dungatar is a close-knit community, the residents do not genuinely like one another—instead, they gossip and slander each other in private. The true nature of their relationships is revealed as they bicker outside the hall, as this shows that although they value conformity, they are not united.*



The play begins, and when it comes to Mona's Lady Macbeth soliloquy, she masturbates on onstage. The audience shuffles uncomfortably and they don't return after the break. When the actors appear onstage to continue, the judges tell them that they don't wish to see anymore.

*The Dungatar residents organized the play so that they could show off how refined and cultured they are. However, according to the conservative behavioral standards of the 1950s (when the story is set), they are not refined at all and do not know how to conduct themselves respectably. Ironically, Mona's behavior is in line with more modern interpretations of this scene in the play and reflects how the scene was originally meant to be played. Although the conservative audience think that they are honest and respectable, really, their honesty is based around a provincial and old-fashioned type of morality which views female sexuality as shameful. Inadvertently, Mona has been too honest in her performance as Lady Macbeth and has made the audience uncomfortable. This shows that although conservative morality may claim to value honesty, those who abide by these beliefs do not want to be confronted with anything which feels unfamiliar or uncomfortable.*



## CHAPTER 33

The cast sulks and snaps at each other as Bobby drives them home. When they pull up in Dungatar, they are shocked to find that the town no longer exists—it has been burned to the ground. Nothing is left except a few frightened animals, who huddle nervously nearby. The townspeople traipse up the Hill and find Sergeant Farrat sitting where Tilly's cottage used to be.

*Tilly has burned Dungatar to get revenge on the townspeople, who have always treated her cruelly and whose cruelty indirectly contributed to the deaths of two of her loved ones. By destroying Dungatar, Tilly has revealed the town's true nature to the world. Although the townspeople try to present themselves as moral and respectable, really, they are corrupt and morally bankrupt underneath.*



The townspeople begin to sob—they have lost their homes and everything they love. Lois says that at least they are insured, but Ruth nervously replies that she gave Tilly the insurance money to pay her for the costumes. Sergeant Farrat begins to giggle hysterically. Mona says that she can see Windswept Crescent from the Hill—it is untouched by the fire. William says that they should all visit Elsbeth, and the Dungatar residents begin to traipse across the hill in their theatrical costumes.

*Tilly's revenge is successful—she burns Dungatar so that the townspeople will know how it feels to lose everything. This is how they have made Tilly feel because they alienated her and her loved ones and indirectly contributed to the deaths of Molly and Teddy, which left Tilly alone in the world. Tilly steals the townspeople's money to show them how it feels to be taken advantage of, just as they have taken advantage of her and used her dressmaking services with no intention of paying her. Elsbeth is vain and snobbish and wants to control people in Dungatar so that they fall in line with her conservative standards. However, Elsbeth is about to receive poetic justice: although she wants to be in control of the whole town, she is about to find them all at her door. They will likely want the supposedly wealthy Elsbeth to solve their problems for them—a task that she will find is a punishment rather than a triumph.*





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