The Glass Hotel

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF EMILY ST. JOHN MANDEL

Emily St. John Mandel was born in 1979 in Merville, British Columbia, Canada. Her father was a plumber, and her mother was a social worker. When Mandel was 10 years old, she and her family moved to Denman Island, located off the west coast of British Columbia. There, she was homeschooled until she was 15 years old. At 18 years old, Mandel moved to Toronto to study contemporary dance at The School of Toronto Dance Theatre. She lived in Montreal briefly before relocating to New York City, where she now lives with her husband, playwright and producer Kevin Mandel, and their daughter. Mandel's fourth novel, *Station Eleven* (2014), was longlisted for the National Book Award. Her first three novels, *Last Night in Montreal* (2009), *The Singer's Gun* (2010), and *The Lola Quartet* (2012), were selected as Indie Next Picks, and *The Singer's Gun* won the 2014 Prix Mystere de la Critique in France. *The Glass Hotel* is Mandel's fifth novel and was published in 2020. It was shortlisted for the Giller Prize in 2020 and longlisted for the Andrew Carnegie Medal of Excellence in Fiction in 2021.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The securities fraud engineered by Jonathan Alkaitis in *The Glass Hotel* is inspired loosely by the real-life Madoff investment scandal, the biggest Ponzi scheme in history, that defrauded investors out of tens of billions of dollars. Bernie Madoff was the former chairman of the NASDAQ and founder of the Wall Street firm Bernard L. Madoff Investment Securities LLC, founded in 1960, for which he served as chairman until his arrest on December 11, 2008. Though Madoff testified in court that the Ponzi scheme began in 1991, it's possible that illegal activates began as early as the 1970s. Despite claims that the firm's large, stable returns were the result of an investing strategy called "split-strike conversion," Madoff (like Jonathan Alkaitis in *The Glass Hotel*) would use client investments to pay out existing clients who wanted to pull out of the fund. Madoff was unable to continue this process when the market dipped in late 2008. He confessed to his sons who, though they worked for him at the firm, were supposedly unaware of the scheme. Madoff's sons reported him to the authorities the following day, and he pled guilty to securities fraud and money laundering, among other felonies, in 2009. Madoff was forced to forfeit $170 billion and sentenced to 150 years in prison. He died in prison on April 14, 2021.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

The Glass Hotel is Emily St. John Mandel's fourth novel. Prior to the publication of *The Glass Hotel*, Mandel published four other successful novels: *Last Night in Montreal* (2009), a novel centered around the criminal investigation of an abduction; *The Singer's Gun* (2010), which, like *The Glass Hotel*, explores themes of corruption and accountability; *The Lola Quartet* (2012), a literary noir novel about a disgraced journalist in search of his ex-girlfriend and the supposed child they had together; and *Station Eleven* (2014). *Station Eleven* is perhaps the best known of these earlier works and centers around a fictional swine flu pandemic, the "Georgia Flu," that eviscerates the global population. Two characters from *The Glass Hotel*, Leon Prevant and Miranda, appear first in *Station Eleven*. The Ponzi scheme at the center of *The Glass Hotel* is based on the real-life Madoff investment scandal, the largest Ponzi scheme in history, and one that defrauded investors of tens of billions of dollars for over three decades. Two works of nonfiction detailing this historical event include *No One Would Listen: A True Financial Thriller* (2010) by whistleblower Harry Markopolos, a former securities industry executive and financial fraud investigator who, from 1999 to 2008, gathered evidence of Madoff's fraud that was repeatedly ignored by the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC); and *The Wizard of Lies* (2011) by Diana Henriques, an American financial journalist and author based in New York City.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** The Glass Hotel
- **When Written:** 2020
- **Where Written:** New York City
- **When Published:** 2020
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary Literature
- **Genre:** Literary Fiction, Thriller, Mystery
- **Setting:** British Columbia, New York City, Toronto, the Atlantic Ocean
- **Climax:** Jonathan Alkaitis's Ponzi scheme implodes when liquidity problems prevent the firm from securing a loan, causing investors to pull out and ultimately leading to Alkaitis's arrest.
- **Antagonist:** Jonathan Alkaitis
- **Point of View:** First Person, Third Person

EXTRA CREDIT

Presidential Endorsement. Barack Obama listed *The Glass Hotel* as among his list of favorite books from 2020.

Book Tour Brainchild. Mandel has stated that the extensive travel and many hotels she stayed in during the promotional tour for her fourth novel, *Station Eleven*, served as inspiration for the Hotel Caiette, the titular hotel at the center of *The Glass Hotel*. She's said that her travels helped her form the notion "that a really great hotel feels like it exists outside of time and space," and that the Hotel Caiette is her "dream hotel."

PLOT SUMMARY

The novel begins in December 2018 with a series of connected fragments of speech depicting the moments leading up to Vincent's death as she falls overboard from the *Neptune Cumberland* into the stormy **sea** below. Snippets of her life flash before her eyes.

The narrative picks up in late 1999. Paul, an aspiring composer, is recently out of rehab for drug addiction and struggling to make friends at college in Toronto. One night, Paul goes to a nightclub and meets a band called Baltica. He's enchanted by the band's lead singer and violinist, Annika, though she rejects his advances. The next time Paul runs into Baltica, he offers them bad ecstasy, which causes the overdose death of the band's keyboardist, Charlie Wu. Paul flees Toronto for Vancouver, where his younger stepsister, Vincent, is living with her childhood friend, Melissa. Before arriving in Vancouver, Paul remembers the last time he saw Vincent, in 1995, when she was 13. Vincent had just gotten in trouble for graffitiing her school's window in Port Hardy, Vancouver Island, British Columbia. Paul had come to town to help out in the aftermath of Vincent's mother's recent drowning. Paul also blames Vincent for his parents' divorce, since it was Paul's father's affair with Vincent's mother and the birth of Vincent that instigated the divorce. The narrative returns to 1999. Paul arrives at Vincent and her friend Melissa's sketchy apartment. Paul, Vincent, and Melissa go out dancing. Paul sees Charlie's **ghost** in multiple clubs.

The narrative skips ahead to Spring 2005, at the Hotel Caiette, a luxury resort on a remote tip of Vancouver Island. In the middle of the night, someone scrawls a threatening message, "*why don't you swallow broken* **glass**," on the lobby's huge glass wall, which thoroughly disturbs Walter, the night manager, and Vincent, who is working as the hotel's bartender. Leon Prevant, a shipping executive kept awake by financial worries, is the only guest to see the message before it's covered up. Jonathan Alkaitis, the wealthy New York financier who owns the hotel and visits a few times each year, arrives a few hours later and doesn't see the graffiti. The next night, Alkaitis and Prevant have dinner together. Walter goes over security footage with Raphael, the hotel's general manager, though they don't find anything useful. Walter reveals that Paul, the night houseman, has been acting strangely and, shortly before the graffiti appeared, had asked about Alkaitis's arrival. When Walter confronts Paul about the graffiti, Paul acts cagey and mumbles something about needing money. Walter fires him. Shortly after this, Vincent leaves and quits her job with little notice. A year goes by. Walter learns that Vincent and Alkaitis are now married.

The narrative switches to Vincent's perspective, outlining the years that follow her departure from the Hotel Caiette. In 2005, Vincent leaves Caiette to become Jonathan Alkaitis's "trophy wife," though the two will never actually legally marry. The couple resides in Jonathan's suburban Connecticut home. At the start of their relationship, Vincent is 21, and Jonathan is 34 years her senior. They have an arrangement in which Vincent makes herself beautiful and available to Jonathan whenever he needs her (such as to accompany him to dinners with potential investors) and, in exchange, she's free to enjoy the life of luxury his immense wealth affords them. Vincent had been searching for a way to escape her precarious life as a bartender when she met Jonathan and, though she knows their arrangement has its drawbacks, she accepts them and the stability this new, wealthy life affords her. Vincent recalls different moments from her life with Jonathan, including an awkward introduction to Jonathan's daughter Claire and meeting an investor named Faisal and his girlfriend, Mirella, who becomes Vincent's best friend. Vincent recounts a time she and Jonathan went to Nice with Yvette Bertolli, one of Jonathan's investment associates. In Nice, Jonathan tells Vincent about a supposedly "unhinged" woman named Ella Kaspersky who believes that the success of Alkaitis's fund is the result of fraud and wants to see him punished for his crimes. In the last few months Vincent spends with Jonathan, she also meets Olivia Collins, an elderly former artist who once painted Jonathan's deceased older brother, Lucas.

The narrative picks up years later with Alkaitis, who is serving a 170-year prison sentence after being arrested for fraud in 2008. He's adjusted to his new life in a medium-security facility, though he grows increasingly obsessed with imagining alternate realities, or "counterlives." As time progresses, it becomes harder for Alkaitis to differentiate between what is real and what is imagined. He often sees the ghosts of investors he's betrayed wandering around the prison, taunting him.

The narrative shifts, focusing on Vincent's life following the collapse of Alkaitis's Ponzi scheme. After Jonathan's arrest in December 2008, Vincent moves out of his house and into a small apartment outside the city. She finds work bartending and as a cook. While bartending one night, she sees Mirella, who ignores her. Mirella's rejection reinvigorates Vincent's desire to go to sea, something her mother had done when she was a young woman, and Vincent gets a job working as a cook on the *Neptune Cumberland*. There, she meets Geoffrey Bell, the third mate, who becomes her boyfriend, though Vincent's refusal to be dependent on anyone causes rifts in the relationship.

The narrative flashes back to the very end of Vincent's stay in

Alkaitis's "kingdom of money," in 2008, when she discovers that Paul, now a successful composer, stole her video recordings and is using them as backdrops to his compositions. Vincent goes to see one of Paul's concerts in Brooklyn but can't bring herself to confront him about the stolen recordings. Part 2 ends in December 2008, when Jonathan's receptionist, Simone, urgently summons Vincent to Jonathan's office. Vincent arrives and walks in on a tense meeting between Claire, Harvey, and Jonathan. Jonathan asks Vincent if she knows what a Ponzi scheme is.

Earlier that day, Alkaitis calls a meeting with all the Floor 17 employees (those on the asset management team, the sector of the firm responsible for the fraudulent activity) and explains that the company is having problems securing a loan due to liquidity problems and that investors are pulling out. Everyone begins to panic. Enrico buys a plane ticket to Mexico, and Harvey composes a confession. Joelle and Oskar also worry about their fates. Alkaitis order Simone to stay late and shred documents. Simone, who is new to the firm and unaware of its fraud, does as she's told. Nobody has fun at the holiday party later that night.

After the party, Oskar accompanies a distraught Vincent to Jonathan's empty apartment, and they have a one-night stand. Early the next morning, Jonathan is arrested at his Connecticut house. Leon Prevant, who is in Las Vegas now, working as a consultant for his old shipping company, hears about the Ponzi scheme's collapse the next day. Authorities begin to investigate Alkaitis, and Ella Kaspersky appears on the news to discuss the case. The next day, Harvey gives a handwritten confession to the authorities. Later on, Simone brings Claire some of her belongings from the office building. A distraught Claire wryly tells Simone that this experience will be a great story to tell at future cocktail parties. Oskar is arrested. Six months later, Alkaitis is sentenced to 170 years in prison.

Ghosts torment Alkaitis in prison. He's begun to see the ghost of Olivia Collins and finds out from Julie Freeman, a journalist who interviews him for a book she's writing, that Olivia has passed away. In a separate prison interview with Freeman, Alkaitis discusses his tumultuous interactions with Ella Kaspersky, beginning at the Hotel Caiette in 1999, when he'd tried to convince her to invest with him. Ella did some research and began to suspect Alkaitis was committing fraud. She prompted the SEC to investigate Alkaitis, though they found nothing. Alkaitis remembers the last time he saw Kaspersky. He'd been out to dinner with his first wife, Suzanne, right before Suzanne's death from cancer, when the couple spotted Kaspersky across the room. As they passed by Kaspersky's table on their way out, Suzanne cruelly told her to "swallow broken glass," an allusion to the wine glass a waiter had accidentally shattered into Ella's bread basket. Alkaitis continues to fixate on the past, recalling his last memory with Lucas before he died of an overdose.

The narrative flashes forward to 2018. Leon and his wife Marie have been forced out of their house and are living a precarious, transient existence in an RV. Leon is overjoyed when Miranda, his former junior colleague, offers him work as a consultant for an investigation into a disappearance that occurred on one of the company's ships, the *Neptune Cumberland*. Leon will serve as a witness beside Saparelli, who works in the company's security office. Though the investigation presents plausible evidence to suspect that Geoffrey Bell was involved in Vincent's disappearance, Saparelli convinces Leon to turn a blind eye, arguing that Leon won't be called for future consulting work if he brings a company scandal to light.

The narrative flashes forward to 2029. Simone tells fellow partygoers about her experience working as Alkaitis's receptionist. The fates of Alkaitis's other former employees are also revealed. In 2018, Paul, now a successful composer, is in Edinburgh for a music festival. He continues to struggle with substance abuse problems. He runs into Ella Kaspersky, who had bribed him to write the threatening message on the wall at the Hotel Caiette so many years before. They both apologize for their past behavior. Later that night, Paul ruminates on everything he's done to Vincent over the years. He tries unsuccessfully to justify his actions. On his way back to his hotel, he sees Vincent's ghost.

The novel ends where it began, with Vincent plunging into the water. It's revealed that Vincent's death really was an accident, and that she lost her balance and fell overboard while filming video footage of the sea during a storm. In Vincent's final moments, her life flashes before her eyes. Her ghost visits people she's met over the years. She visits Paul, who is in rehab, and they both apologize for being "thieves" during their lives. Finally, Vincent visits Caiette, where she spots her mother sitting along the shore. Vincent realizes that her mother's death must have been an accident, too. Vincent calls to her mother, who looks up in surprise.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Vincent – Vincent is one of *The Glass Hotel*'s main characters. She grows up in Caiette, a town on a remote tip of Vancouver Island. Vincent has a half-brother, Paul, from her father's first marriage. Vincent's father left Paul's mother for Vincent's mother when Paul was young, and Paul resents Vincent because of it. Vincent's mother dies by drowning—either an accident or suicide—when Vincent is only 13 years old, and Vincent spends much of the novel wondering whether or not her mother willfully abandoned her. Shortly after her mother's death, Vincent's Grandma Caroline presents her with a video camera, and Vincent takes to recording five-minute segments of film, which becomes a lifelong hobby. Unresolved grief over

her mother's mysterious death leads Vincent down a searching, tumultuous path. At 13, she's suspended from school for vandalizing her school's **glass** window. Eventually, Vincent drops out of high school and gets an apartment with her friend Melissa when she's just 17. Fiercely independent, Vincent supports herself from that time forward. Vincent's independence is challenged in 2005 when she meets Jonathan Alkaitis, the owner of the Hotel Caiette, the luxury resort she works at after the death of her father, and Alkaitis soon whisks her away from a precarious life of low-paying bartending jobs and into a world of excess wealth. This involves Vincent becoming Alkaitis's trophy "wife," though the two are never legally married. Vincent lives with Alkaitis for three years, a period she refers to as her stay in the "kingdom of money," from 2005-2008, until the collapse of Alkaitis's Ponzi scheme. Vincent has regrets about forgoing her independence throughout her relationship with Jonathan, so, after Jonathan is imprisoned for his crimes, Vincent abandons her old life to work as a chef aboard a container ship called the *Neptune Cumberland*. Vincent spends the last decade of her life adrift, working at **sea** and travelling the world in her time off work. She refuses to answer to or belong to anyone, including her on-again, off-again boyfriend Geoffrey Bell, whom she meets while working on the *Neptune Cumberland*. Vincent dies when she falls overboard the Neptune Cumberland while trying to record video footage of a storm. In her final moments, her life flashes before her eyes, and she makes peace with the people she's wronged and the people who have wronged her. In addition to this, she comes to understand that her mother's death must have been an accident. Although Vincent is a sympathetic character, she's not without her own set of moral failings. Vincent's awareness of Alkaitis's Ponzi scheme—a massive case of fraud that destroyed the lives of many people, including Vincent's close friend, Mirella—is never entirely clear. Vincent hears at least one suspicious remark regarding the legitimacy of Alkaitis's fund, but she doesn't understand—or doesn't want to understand—what she hears and chooses to turn a blind eye in order to extend her stay in the "kingdom of money" and the stability it offers.

Jonathan Alkaitis – Jonathan Alkaitis is the New York financier at the center of the massive Ponzi scheme that destroys the lives and livelihoods of many of the novel's characters, such as Olivia Collins, Leon and Marie Prevant, Yvette Bertolli, and Faisal. Alkaitis is a charismatic man, which is how he convinces his investors to have confidence in the too-good-to-be-true returns his firm produces. Underneath his charming exterior, Alkaitis grieves the death of his older brother Lucas to a drug overdose that occurred when Alkaitis was just a child, as well as the death of Suzanne, his first wife and love of his life, to cancer. Alkaitis is the owner of the Hotel Caiette, a luxury resort located on a remote tip of Vancouver Island, and it's there that he meets and begins a relationship with Vincent, a bartender, in 2005. The couple return to Alkaitis's residence in suburban Connecticut, and Vincent acts as Alkaitis's trophy wife for three years, until the collapse of Alkaitis's Ponzi scheme in December 2008. After that, Vincent abandons Alkaitis, and Alkaitis is sentenced to 170 years in prison. For years, Alkaitis is antagonized by Ella Kaspersky, a Chicago businesswoman determined to bring knowledge of Alkaitis's securities fraud to the public eye. Kaspersky's antagonization of Alkaitis leads to her paying Paul to write a threatening message on the **glass** wall of Hotel Caiette's lobby in acid pen, though Alkaitis never sees the message. Although Alkaitis admits to the role he played in the orchestration of the Ponzi scheme, he maintains that he was only giving his investors what they wanted (impossibly high returns on their investments), and, further, the scheme would not have been possible had his investors and staffers not been willing to go along with Alkaitis. In this way, Alkaitis positions himself as only one cog in a machine run on humanity's collective greed and self-interest. As Alkaitis wastes away in prison, he is increasingly overtaken by daydreams of the "counterlife," or versions of his life that could exist in alternate realities; for example, he imagines an alternate reality in which it wasn't his own daughter, Claire, who alerted the authorities to his illegal activities. Alkaitis's obsession with what might have been eventually gives way to a complete loss of touch with reality, and he slips deeper and deeper into the prison of mental deterioration and dementia.

Paul – Paul is Vincent's half-brother. They have the same father, but Vincent was the result of an affair Paul's father had with Vincent's mother, a younger, bohemian hippie, when Paul was young. Paul is resentful toward Vincent and her mother for breaking up his parents' marriage and takes out these frustrations on Vincent, though he partially acknowledges that this is unfair of him to do. Paul aspires to be a composer and eventually achieves some success when he steals Vincent's abandoned video footage from her childhood room, passing off the videos as his own and using them as background footage for his electronic compositions. Vincent discovers Paul's transgression and entertains the notion of suing Paul but doesn't think Jonathan will want to be involved in a scandal. Paul struggles with drug addiction throughout his life and undergoes multiple stays in rehab. In 1999, when Paul is an undergraduate college student, he gives bad ecstasy to Charlie Wu, a member of the Canadian electronic band, Baltica, which results in Charlie's death. Paul is wracked with guilt over Charlie's death and often thinks he sees Charlie's **ghost**. His inability to write music that doesn't sound like Baltica serves as further evidence of Paul's guilt. Paul flees Toronto to avoid facing legal consequences over Charlie's death, and he travels to Vancouver to be with Vincent, whom he hasn't seen since Vincent's mother's death. Vincent eventually gets Paul a job at the Hotel Caiette. In 2005, only a few months into Paul's time there, he's approached by Ella Kaspersky and bribed into writing a threatening message for Jonathan Alkaitis on the hotel lobby's **glass** wall, and he's fired as a result. The message

greatly upsets Vincent, something Paul never thought of before he agreed to write the message. In general, Paul has a difficult time understanding what is expected of him and how he should treat people. Paul eventually admits himself to a rehab facility in Utah where he unpacks his many past demons with a counselor. Paul and Vincent never repair their relationship during Vincent's lifetime, but her **ghost** visits Paul while he's in Utah, and they both apologize for being "thieves" at different points in their lives.

Leon Prevant – Leon Prevant is a former shipping executive and Alkaitis investor. He first meets Jonathan Alkaitis while he and his wife, Marie, are vacationing at the Hotel Caiette, which Jonathan owns. Leon booked their stay as an anniversary surprise, but he's consumed with financial woes related to the fear that he's likely to lose his job as a consequence of a merger. Leon's financial anxieties convince him to invest with Alkaitis. When the Ponzi scheme Alkaitis is operating collapses in late 2008, Leon and Marie lose their savings, their home, and their former way of life. Unable to keep up with their mortgage payments, they choose to move across the country in an RV, taking odd jobs wherever they can find them to support themselves. Though Leon and Marie are grateful to have each other, their new transient lifestyle is always on the brink of collapse, and Leon mourns the "anchored," safer existence they once had. When Leon's former junior colleague at the shipping company (and the woman who replaced him when he was let go), Miranda, hires him on a consulting basis to serve as a witness to the investigation of Vincent's death (Vincent was working as a chef onboard the *Neptune Cumberland*, one of Miranda's company's container ships), Leon enthusiastically accepts, not fully admitting that his indirect connection to Vincent might be a conflict of interest. Although the ship's steward, Felix Mendoza, provides compelling evidence to implicate Vincent's boyfriend, Geoffrey Bell, in her disappearance, the lead investigator, Michael Saparelli, convinces Leon to ignore Mendoza's testimony, arguing that Leon will not be called back for more consulting work if he causes a publicity scandal for the shipping company. Leon's desire for stability ultimately undermines his desire to be morally just and provide Vincent with the thorough, fair investigation she deserves.

Olivia Collins – The novel presents Olivia at various stages in her life. In the 1950s, she is a young painter in Manhattan, struggling to make ends meet and to make a name for herself. She first meets Jonathan Alkaitis through his older brother Lucas, who is also a painter, when she and Lucas agree to pose for each other. Olivia sees that Lucas has bruises on his arm from intravenous drug use and incorporates this detail into her painting without Lucas's consent. Olivia's decision to put his addiction on display for the world infuriates Lucas, who dies of an overdose shortly after he sees the painting. It's at this showing that Olivia first meets a young Jonathan Alkaitis. Forty years later, there's a retrospective exhibition of 1950s art, and the portrait of Lucas sells for a large sum of money. That Olivia ultimately benefits financially from her betrayal of Lucas illustrates how people's greed and self-interest can make them complicit, if only indirectly, in the downfall of others. Olivia's sister Monica, who's a retired lawyer by the time the painting sells, suggests that Olivia invest her new wealth and recommends Jonathan Alkaitis, though she's unaware of Olivia's oddly coincidental connection to Jonathan. Olivia and Jonathan keep in touch after their initial meeting to discuss Olivia's investment, and they become friends. Jonathan likes being around Olivia because it makes him feel closer to Lucas, whom he never really got the chance to know. The fact of Jonathan and Olivia's friendship makes it all the more abhorrent that Jonathan keeps from Olivia the fact that he's running a Ponzi scheme and defrauding her of her life's savings. After losing her life savings to Alkaitis's fraud, Olivia can no longer afford rent on her New York City apartment and is forced to move in with her sister. Alkaitis sees Olivia's **ghost** on several occasions while he is in prison, which is indicative of the guilt he feels about bankrupting and betraying her. Olivia's ghost also visits Vincent the night Vincent drowns while working on the *Neptune Cumberland*: it's the shock of seeing Olivia that indirectly causes Vincent to become distracted, drop her camera, and fall overboard.

Suzanne Alkaitis – Suzanne Alkaitis is Jonathan Alkaitis's first wife and mother to their daughter, Claire. Suzanne dies of cancer sometime before the main events of the novel take place, which greatly affects Alkaitis. Alkaitis and Vincent remain legally unmarried because he's not ready to have a second wife, and they never talk about Suzanne. Although Alkaitis's lawyer will try to suggest that the Ponzi scheme began as a desperate, fear-incited response to learning of Suzanne's terminal illness, in fact the fraud began far earlier, in the 1970s, and Suzanne was Alkaitis's co-conspirator, which Alkaitis liked: it was nice to have someone to be honest with in the midst of a life dominated by fraud. The grisly message that Ella Kaspersky bribes Paul to write on the **glass** wall of the Hotel Caiette in 2005 comes from a verbal threat Suzanne made toward Kaspersky in the immediate aftermath of the SEC's fruitless investigation into Alkaitis's firm, when the couple ran into Kaspersky at a restaurant. On their way out of the restaurant, Kaspersky says something belligerent to Jonathan, and Suzanne responds by urging Kaspersky to "swallow broken glass," an allusion to a wine glass Kaspersky's waiter had accidentally broken into her breadbasket. In the aftermath of the implosion of Alkaitis's Ponzi scheme, Alkaitis can't help but feel regret that he is weathering its demise with the "wrong woman" by his side. Alkaitis might enjoy Vincent's company, but Suzanne was his "co-conspirator" and the love of his life.

Lucas Alkaitis – Lucas Alkaitis is the deceased older brother of Jonathan Alkaitis. Jonathan was only a child when Lucas died of

a drug overdose, and the death affects him throughout his life. Lucas was a painter and knew Olivia Collins when they were both struggling artists in New York City in the 1950s, though neither liked each other very much. Shortly before Lucas's death, he and Olivia pose for portraits for each other. Without Lucas's permission, Olivia paints a portrait that exposes Lucas's bruised arms (evidence of Lucas's drug addiction), which infuriates Lucas when he sees it displayed at one of Olivia's shows. It's at this show that Olivia meets a young Jonathan Alkaitis. Forty years later, there's a retrospective exhibition of 1950s artists, and Olivia's portrait of Lucas sells for a large sum of money. Against all odds, Olivia ends up investing the money she earns from the sale with Jonathan Alkaitis, who is now a wealthy New York financier.

Claire – Claire is the daughter of Jonathan Alkaitis and his wife Suzanne. She's not fully comfortable with her father's relationship with Vincent, who is five years younger than her, but makes an effort to be cordial toward Vincent. Claire works for her father's company, though she works on Floor 18, in the brokerage arm of the firm, which conducts the company's legitimate business and whose workers are not complicit in the illegal activities on Floor 17. It's Claire who calls the FBI on her father when she learns of his company's fraudulent activity, and she refuses to visit him in prison after his conviction. When Alkaitis attempts to contact Claire from prison, she responds only with a transcript from his trial in which he confesses to the charges brought against him.

Lenny Xavier – Lenny Xavier is Jonathan Alkaitis's most important investor. He's a music producer from Los Angeles and something of a slimeball. He worked as a producer for Annika when she was trying to become a pop star, though she ultimately abandoned Lenny and his team when she felt they were violating her "artistic integrity." Lenny finds Annika's supposed "integrity" laughable and unbelievably stupid, since he believes the most productive thing a person can do is seize opportunity when opportunity strikes. Along these lines, Lenny's bitterness toward Annika seems to stem from the fact that in abandoning him and his production team, she deprived him of the financially lucrative opportunity to produce a successful pop star. Unlike many of Alkaitis's investors, Lenny is well aware of the fraud Alkaitis is committing, and he's even provided Alkaitis with funds to perpetuate the scheme from time to time; in fact, the "Xavier files" are the first documents Alkaitis orders Simone to shred on the evening before his arrest. Sometime during her relationship with Jonathan Alkaitis, Vincent accompanies him to a dinner with Lenny and Lenny's wife Tiffany. That evening, Lenny makes a number of remarks that hint at the illegal activities at play in Jonathan's firm, but Vincent chooses to turn a blind eye to the implications of Lenny's comments. Lenny is ultimately tried and convicted on nine guilty counts for his involvement in Alkaitis's Ponzi scheme.

Mirella – Mirella is the girlfriend of Faisal, one of Jonathan Alkaitis's biggest investors. Vincent meets Mirella at a party she attends with Jonathan, and the two become fast and close friends, bonding over their shared strange journey from poverty to excess wealth. Like Vincent's relationship to Jonathan, Mirella use Faisal as a means of elevating herself financially, though Mirella genuinely appears to love Faisal, whereas Vincent only enjoys Jonathan's company. Faisal commits suicide when the news about Alkaitis's Ponzi scheme breaks, which causes Mirella to sever contact with Vincent, since she believes that Vincent knew about the scheme and chose to withhold information that could have prevented Faisal's financial ruin and resultant suicide. Vincent sees Mirella only once after the scheme's collapse, in 2010, when Mirella visits a bar at which Vincent is working. Mirella either doesn't recognize or chooses to ignore Vincent, and this hurtful experience is the impetus that pushes Vincent to abandon New York for a life at sea.

Faisal – Faisal, a Saudi prince in his forties, is one of Jonathan Alkaitis's biggest investors. He lives in New York and doesn't work. Before investing with Alkaitis, Faisal's family viewed him as something of a disappointment, as he was more interested in literature and the arts than in starting a family. Investing in Alkaitis's fund (and directing other family members to do the same) allowed Faisal to earn back his family's respect. Faisal met his girlfriend Mirella when she was a struggling actress and model. Unlike Mirella, who wasn't born into money, Faisal has always been rich and lived a life of ease. Faisal kills himself in the aftermath of the collapse of Alkaitis's Ponzi scheme, and his **ghost** later visits Alkaitis in prison, which speaks to the guilt Alkaitis feels over defrauding someone to whom he grew close over the years.

Yvette Bertolli – Yvette Bertolli is one of Jonathan Alkaitis's former investment associates, a highly "elegant" older woman. She loses $320 million of her clients' money to Alkaitis's Ponzi scheme and dies of a heart attack when news of the scheme breaks. Bertolli is one of the **ghosts** Alkaitis sees during his time in prison.

Ella Kaspersky – Ella Kaspersky is a Chicago businesswoman who frequents the Hotel Caiette. It's there that Kaspersky meets Jonathan Alkaitis, who tries (unsuccessfully) to convince her to invest in his fund. Kaspersky does some investigating, becomes suspicious that Alkaitis's firm is operating a fraudulent scheme, and makes it her mission to bring this to the attention of the public. She alerts the SEC, which opens an investigation into Alkaitis, though they don't try very hard and fail to produce any incriminating evidence. Adding to Kaspersky's personal vendetta against Alkaitis is her discovery that a research fund her family established in the aftermath of Kaspersky's mother's death from colon cancer had unwittingly been investing in Alkaitis's fund for years. This infuriates Kaspersky, who speaks disparagingly to Alkaitis and Suzanne when she later runs into

them at a restaurant. At the restaurant that night, Suzanne instructs Kaspersky to "swallow broken **glass**," an allusion to the wine glass a waiter accidentally dropped into Ella's breadbasket earlier in the evening. Years later, after Suzanne's death from cancer, Kaspersky bribes Paul to scrawl this same grisly message onto the Hotel Caiette's glass lobby wall, though Alkaitis arrives too late to see the message. Kaspersky appears on the news after Alkaitis is eventually arrested for fraud, and it's clear she takes personal pleasure in Alkaitis's downfall, rather than wanting him to be brought to justice for the greater good of his investors and the public.

Oskar Novak – Oskar Novak works on Floor 17, in the asset management branch of Jonathan Alkaitis's business. Although he is knowingly complicit in the Ponzi scheme, he offers the cryptic statement that "it is possible to know and not know something" during his cross-examination in court, perhaps as a weak attempt to justify his moral failing of going along with the scheme. Like Alkaitis, Oskar daydreams about alternative realities. For example, he imagines a world in which, when Harvey first bribed him to backdate a trade, he refused, reported the fraudulent activity to the authorities, and did not take part in Alkaitis's crimes. In reality, though, Oskar accepts Harvey's offer of a bonus in exchange for backdating the trade and keeping silent about it, and he becomes complicit in Alkaitis's scheme. Oskar is one of the few staffers who explicitly demonstrate remorse for their actions. On the evening before Alkaitis's arrest, after the office holiday party, Oskar follows Vincent home to Alkaitis's empty Manhattan apartment and they have a one-night stand. Oskar will serve prison time for his involvement in the scheme, and he'll eventually develop a substance abuse problem.

Enrico – Enrico works on Floor 17, in the asset management branch of Jonathan Alkaitis's business. When Alkaitis informs his employees of the scheme's impending collapse, Enrico flees to Mexico, starts a family, and avoids facing legal consequences for his role in the scheme, though he lives in perpetual fear of the day authorities will inevitably catch up with him.

Simone – Simone is Jonathan Alkaitis's new receptionist in late 2008 when the Ponzi scheme implodes. She is young, naïve, and struggling financially at the time of the collapse. The night before his arrest, Alkaitis orders Simone to start shredding incriminating papers, which she does, though she hasn't worked there long enough to know about the firm's illegal activities. Simone will later serve as a witness in Alkaitis's trial. In the immediate aftermath of Alkaitis's arrest, Alkaitis's distraught daughter Claire tells Simone that Simone is lucky: she isn't complicit in the Ponzi scheme, and she'll always have a juicy story to tell at cocktail parties. Simone heeds Claire's advice, and the end of the novel depicts Simone entertaining coworkers with the story at a party in 2029. That Simone uses the disaster and suffering of Alkaitis's Ponzi scheme for entertainment and social points shows the small ways people can use others for personal gain.

Ron – Ron works on Floor 17, in the asset management branch of Jonathan Alkaitis's business. He's the only employee who doesn't seem to grasp that he and his coworkers are doing anything illegal. After the collapse of Alkaitis's Ponzi scheme, Ron manages to avoid prison time, though his marriage falls apart, forcing him to move back in with his parents. When the novel ends, he has a job taking tickets at a movie theater.

Joelle – Joelle works on Floor 17 of Jonathan Alkaitis's business, in the firm's asset management branch, and is therefore complicit in the Ponzi scheme. She struggles over what to tell her husband about her role in the scheme, unsure of whether to come clean or feign ignorance. She has kids and is scared of not being able to see them, should she serve time for her role in Alkaitis's scheme. The night before Alkaitis's arrest, Joelle and Harvey stay late to destroy important documents. Harvey pours them both a **glass** of scotch. Though he gives Joelle enough to get her drunk, he pours himself considerably less, so as to remain sober enough to concentrate on saving documents he might use as leverage with authorities. Joelle ultimately serves a prison sentence for her role in the Ponzi scheme, and she moves in with her sister in North Carolina after her release.

Harvey Alexander – Harvey Alexander is an employee who works on Floor 17 of Jonathan Alkaitis's business, in the firm's asset management branch. He is one of the employees who knowingly engages in fraudulent business on Alkaitis's behalf. When news breaks that the Ponzi scheme is on the verge of collapse and investors are beginning to pull out, Harvey immediately begins to compose a confession and gather evidence to make himself useful to authorities in order to minimize (or avoid) serving prison time for his role in the Ponzi scheme. His desire to avoid imprisonment motivates him to betray the people he worked alongside for years—people who have become friends to him. Harvey's efforts to ingratiate himself with authorities do pay off, and he's sentenced to time served in exchange for his assistance to the prosecution. After the dust settles, he ends up moving to New Jersey to live with his sister and work in her ice cream shop.

Charlie Wu – Charlie Wu is a keyboardist with the Canadian electronica band Baltica. Charlie dies in late 1999 as a result of the bad ecstasy pills Paul gives him at a night club. Paul later insists that he hadn't know the pills were bad—that he'd assumed he'd only had a bad reaction to them when he took them on a previous night. After Charlie dies, Paul begins to see his **ghost**, and he remains haunted by the role he played in Charlie's death for the rest of his life.

Annika – Annika is the beautiful and talented violinist of the Canadian electronica band Baltica. Paul encounters Baltica while out at a club in Toronto in late 1999. He asks Annika out on a date, but she rejects him. Lonely and desperate to make

friends, Paul offers Annika and Charlie Wu, the band's keyboardist, ecstasy pills that made him sick the night before (Paul will later insist that he didn't know the pills were bad—that he assumed he'd simply had a bad reaction to them), and the pills cause Charlie's death. Later in the novel, the reader learns that Annika previously had worked with music producer and Alkaitis investor Lenny Xavier, though she ultimately abandoned Xavier and his production team to make music that was more closely aligned with her artistic values.

Vincent's and Paul's Father – Vincent and Paul have the same father. Vincent is the result of an affair their father has with Vincent's mother, a young, bohemian poet who moves to the remote British Columbia town of Caiette, where Paul had lived with his family. Vincent and Paul's father is a tree planter. His work sends him away for weeks at a time, and he finds himself unable to care for Vincent, who grows increasingly rebellious at 13, in the aftermath of her mother's death. As a result, he sends her to live with Vincent and Paul's Aunt Shauna. Paul and Vincent's father eventually dies of a heart attack sometime in the early 2000s, which leads Vincent back to Caiette, and which eventually results in her being hired at the Hotel Caiette. This indirectly results in Vincent meeting wealthy New York financier Jonathan Alkaitis.

Vincent's Mother – Vincent's mother was a free-spirited young poet when she gave birth to Vincent, who was the result of an affair she had with Vincent's father, who was married to Paul's mother at the time. Vincent suspects her mother was unhappy with domestic life, as she'd lived a much freer lifestyle prior to moving to Caiette and becoming pregnant with Vincent. In fact, Vincent's decision to go to sea is inspired by her mother's own history of working at **sea** as a young person. Vincent's mother named her after the poet Edna St. Vincent Millay, whom she admired due to the poet's ability to elevate herself from a life of poverty to a life rich in creativity and opportunity. When Vincent's mother is 36, she dies by drowning, and Vincent lives much of her life not knowing whether the death was an accident or a suicide. As Vincent's life flashes before her in the moments leading up to her own death by drowning, she sees her mother waiting for her on the shore in Caiette, and it's then that she realizes that her mother's death couldn't have been a suicide: she never would have abandoned her daughter. Vincent dies at age 37, just one year older than her mother was when she died, which suggests a sort of resolution, as though, in outliving her mother by one year, Vincent was able to achieve a level of introspection and complete the sort of personal transformation Vincent's mother wasn't able to undergo in her lifetime.

Aunt Shauna – Aunt Shauna is Paul and Vincent's aunt. Vincent comes to live with Shauna in Vancouver after Vincent's father's work schedule prevents him from adequately caring for her. Eventually, Vincent's rebelliousness becomes too much for Shauna to manage, and Vincent drops out of high school, leaves Shauna's home, and moves into a dilapidated apartment with Melissa.

Geoffrey Bell – Geoffrey Bell is an English man form Newcastle who is the third mate of the Neptune Cumberland. He's Vincent's coworker and, later, her boyfriend. When Vincent first meets Geoffrey, she believes he will play an important role in her life, and this proves to be true, as they become partners and, later, Geoffrey will be considered a person of interest in Vincent's disappearance at **sea**, though the narrative ultimately reveals Vincent's death to be an accident. Vincent and Geoffrey have a loving but strained relationship that is complicated by Vincent's refusal to let other people control her life. The night of her disappearance, Geoffrey pleads with Vincent not to go outside and film the sea, as the *Neptune Cumberland*'s crew was instructed not to go outside during hazardous weather. Vincent defies Geoffrey and goes outside, where she loses her balance and is swept overboard and into the roaring sea. Heartbroken by Vincent's disappearance and by his inability to help her, Geoffrey disembarks from the ship when it docks in Rotterdam, Germany, and disappears. Geoffrey's actions make him look guilty to other crew members, including the ship's steward, Felix Mendoza, who alleges that Geoffrey had a history of domestic violence. Ultimately, though, the shipping company's lead investigator, Michael Saparelli, chooses to ignore these suspicions in order to avoid a scandal for his company, and Geoffrey remains on the lam at the novel's conclusion.

Felix Mendoza – Mendoza is the steward of the *Neptune Cumberland* and is Vincent's boss during her time aboard the ship. He got along well with Vincent while she worked there. When Saparelli and Prevant board the *Neptune Cumberland* to investigate Vincent's disappearance, Mendoza discreetly informs them of a time, years back, when he heard Geoffrey Bell hit a woman he was seeing at the time. Given the fact that Bell and Vincent were in a relationship at the time of her disappearance, Mendoza thinks this information might be useful to the investigation. Ultimately, however, Mendoza's information is left unused when, wanting to avoid a publicity scandal for the shipping company, Saparelli discounts Mendoza's information and rules that Vincent's death was an accident.

Michael Saparelli – Saparelli is the lead investigator of Vincent's mysterious disappearance from the *Neptune Cumberland* in 2018. He is a former NYPD officer who works in the security office of Leon Prevant's former shipping company (for which Leon now works as a consultant). Saparelli and Prevant, who serves as a witness to the investigation, journey to Rotterdam, Germany, where the *Neptune Cumberland* is docked, and gather information about Vincent from the ship's crew. Felix Mendoza, the steward, provides Saparelli and Prevant with information that makes Geoffrey Bell, the third mate and Vincent's boyfriend at the time, a possible person of interest in Vincent's disappearance. However, Saparelli

convinces Prevant to turn a blind eye to this troubling new information, as it would scandalize the shipping company they're both representing, which would all but guarantee that Prevant will not be called back for future consulting work. Saparelli's decision not to investigate Vincent's disappearance shows how greed and self-interest can motivate a person to hurt or exploit others.

Melissa – Melissa is Vincent's childhood friend from Caiette. Vincent and Melissa eventually live together in Vancouver. In her youth, Melissa is a frequent partier, and this behavior will develop into a substance abuse problem. After recovering from her addiction, Melissa gets a job working alongside Vincent and Paul at the Hotel Caiette in the 2000s, working as a chauffeur, driving visitors to the remote hotel by boat. Paul steals and uses video footage that Vincent shot of a teenage Melissa playing along the shoreline in Caiette for his musical composition, "Melissa in the **Water**," which he premiers at the Brooklyn Academy of Music in 2008.

Walter – Walter serves as the Hotel Caiette's night manager in the 2000s. He later becomes the caretaker when the resort is abandoned in the aftermath of the collapse of Jonathan Alkaitis's Ponzi scheme. Walter first comes to the hotel from Toronto after he's hired by Raphael, the manager, to be the night manager. During his time at the hotel, Walter becomes acquainted with Alkaitis, who convinces him to invest in his fund. Walter loses everything when Alkaitis's Ponzi scheme collapses, and he has a hard time trusting another person after suffering such a betrayal. However, living alone in the abandoned, isolated Hotel Caiette—a place he has loved since he first set foot in it—gives Walter a solitary peace. Walter is the manager on duty the night Paul vandalizes the lobby's **glass** wall. He immediately recognizes Paul as guilty and fires him.

Raphael – Raphael is the Hotel Caiette's manager. He hires Walter to be the night manager three years before Ella Kaspersky hires Paul to write a threatening message on the lobby's **glass** wall. Raphael receives Walter's incident report detailing the message and commends him on his thorough work. Although Raphael doesn't particularly like Walter, he supports Walter's offer to become the hotel's caretaker in the aftermath of the collapse of Jonathan Alkaitis's Ponzi scheme in 2008.

Marie Prevant – Marie Prevant is Leon Prevant's wife. Leon takes Marie to the Hotel Caiette in 2005 as a surprise for their anniversary, though Leon's financial worries make it impossible for him to enjoy the trip. Marie and Leon will eventually lose their home when they lose all their savings in the collapse of Jonathan Alkaitis's Ponzi scheme in 2008. Unable to keep up with their mortgage payments, Marie and Leon move into an RV and travel around the country, taking odd jobs where they can find them. Marie appears to accept their new reality more than her husband does, and she doesn't seem to suffer the existential crisis Leon undergoes when he loses his career and everything he built around it.

Miranda – Miranda was Leon Prevant's junior colleague at the shipping company before he was let go in the wake of a company merger. Miranda replaced Leon in the midst of the restructuring. It's Miranda who invites Leon to serve as a second witness to the investigation into Vincent's disappearance onboard the *Neptune Cumberland*, a container ship operated by her shipping company. Miranda hires Leon because she wants to ensure that Vincent receives a fair, thorough investigation, and Miranda knows that internal investigations often lead to coverups. Miranda's efforts to create an unbiased investigation are morally upstanding. At the same time, though, she ignores a remark of Leon's that hints at his connection to Vincent (Vincent was Jonathan Alkaitis's wife, and Leon has just lost all his money to Alkaitis's Ponzi scheme), which could be seen as a conflict of interest. This suggests she's more invested in projecting the outward appearance of an impartial investigation than an actual impartial investigation.

Clarissa – Clarissa is Marie Prevant's psychic friend. Sometime before the events of the novel take place, she and Leon have a meaningful conversation about what Leon's career in shipping means to him. Clarissa will eventually fall upon hard times and lose her house, forcing her to move into a van and live a transient lifestyle. The Prevants take inspiration from Clarissa when they decide to travel around the country in their RV after losing all their savings in Alkaitis's Ponzi scheme.

Roberts – Roberts was an older man who was assigned to Jonathan Alkaitis's prison bunk before Alkaitis arrived there. He left the message "no star burns forever" scratched into the cell wall before being transferred to the prison hospital. Roberts's message resonates with Alkaitis, who relates it to the success and eventual collapse of his Ponzi scheme.

Julie Freeman – Julie Freeman is a journalist who is in the process of writing a book about Jonathan Alkaitis. She visits him in prison to conduct interviews about his past and the Ponzi scheme. When Alkaitis asks Freeman why she is writing about him, she explains that she is interested in mass delusion, and she sees investors' willingness to believe in the legitimacy of Alkaitis's fund to be an instance of mass delusion.

Renata – Renata is Olivia's friend in 1950s Manhattan. She and Olivia share a game of making up hypothetical **ghost** stories to pass the time when Renata poses for Olivia's paintings. Renata is at Olivia's studio when Lucas Alkaitis shows up to pose for Olivia. Renata suffers from substance abuse and dies of an overdose in 1972.

Monica – Monica is Olivia Collins's sister. She worked as a lawyer but is retired by the time Jonathan Alkaitis's Ponzi scheme implodes. Monica invests money with Alkaitis and gives his name to Olivia when she comes into some money as the result of her portrait of Lucas Alkaitis being sold at auction, though Monica is unaware of Olivia's earlier connection to

Alkaitis. Losing all her savings in the collapse of Alkaitis's Ponzi scheme in 2008 forces Olivia to move in with Monica.

Professor – The professor is a volunteer who leads a book discussion group at the medium-security facility where Jonathan Alkaitis is imprisoned. He exclusively focuses on the works of F. Scott Fitzgerald, though the group one day discusses the fable of the swan that was frozen in a pond, which takes Alkaitis back to memories from his childhood.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Theo – Theo is the bass player of the Canadian electronica band, Baltica, that Paul encounters at a nightclub in Toronto in 1999.

Grandma Caroline – Grandma Caroline is Paul and Vincent's grandmother (their father's mother). She comes to stay with Vincent and Vincent and Paul's father in Caiette after Vincent's mother's death. It's Grandma Caroline who gives Vincent the video camera that kickstarts Vincent's artistic obsession with capturing five-minute segments of film.

Paul's Mother – Paul's mother was married to Paul and Vincent's father before his affair with Vincent's mother ended the marriage. Paul's mother lives in Toronto and struggles to support and maintain a healthy distance with Paul, whose substance abuse problems complicate their relationship.

Paul's Counselor – The narrative features brief flash-forwards to Paul's conversations with his counselor at a rehab facility in Utah in 2019. Paul talks to his counselor about many of his past demons, including his unjust treatment of Vincent and the role he played in Charlie Wu's death.

Larry – Larry is the Hotel Caiette's night porter. He's working the night Paul writes a threatening message on the lobby's **glass** wall (though he doesn't witness the act of vandalism) and tells Walter about Paul's odd behavior that night.

Veer Sethi – Veer Sethi is Jonathan Alkaitis's defense attorney when he's on trial for committing securities fraud. Sethi fails to make a convincing case when he refers to Alkaitis's decision to defraud his investors as a simple "mistake," and the court sentences Alkaitis to 170 years in prison.

Hazelton – Hazelton is Jonathan Alkaitis's cellmate in prison. He's doing 10-15 years for grand larceny. He's half as old as Alkaitis and talks often of having his whole life ahead of him, which depresses Alkaitis, who is sentenced to 170 years in prison and likely will die there.

Churchwell – Churchwell is one of Jonathan Alkaitis's acquaintances in prison. He's also serving a life sentence for his work as a double agent with the CIA/KGB. He listens to and sympathizes with Alkaitis's ideas about alternate realities, or "counterlives," as Alkaitis calls them.

Keisha – Keisha is Simone's assistant in the future (2029) when Simone works for a clothing company.

Tiffany – Tiffany is the wife of Lenny Xavier, Jonathan Alkaitis's biggest investor. She's very beautiful but rather uninteresting.

Ned – Ned is Vincent's coworker at a bar she works at after the collapse of Jonathan Alkaitis's Ponzi scheme.

Khalil – Khalil is a bartender who works at the Hotel Caiette while Vincent is employed there.

Ilieva – Ilieva is Vincent's favorite manager at the Russian Café, a place in lower Manhattan that Vincent and Jonathan Alkaitis frequented when they were together. Vincent sees Ilieva at the Russian Café the night she quits her bartending job in Chelsea.

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.

COMPLICITY AND INTERCONNECTEDNESS

The Glass Hotel consists of a series of initially disparate storylines. Yet as the novel progresses, narrative arcs converge, and the reader sees them as part of a larger, interconnected system. Through this interconnectedness, the novel illustrates the small and large ways in which characters are complicit in one another's misfortunes. At the center of this complicity is the uber-rich Jonathan Alkaitis, whose Ponzi scheme robs his investors of their homes, savings, and lives. Alkaitis isn't the only person who is complicit in the downfall of others, though: Vincent, Alkaitis's self-proclaimed trophy wife, turns a blind eye to Alkaitis's fraudulent firm and, through her willful ignorance, allows Faisal, the romantic partner of her close friend Mirella, to continue to invest with Alkaitis. When the scheme finally implodes, the novel insinuates that Faisal commits suicide out of shame; in this way, Vincent becomes indirectly complicit in Faisal's demise. The novel uses these interconnected narratives to suggest that, despite the anonymity that modern society—with all its travel and opportunities to reinvent oneself—can grant a person, people's very participation in larger social and economic systems renders them complicit in others' misfortunes.

The novel's focus on the ways that exploitation leads to further exploitation is evident in the relationship between Olivia Collins and the Alkaitis family. In a series of unlikely coincidences, Olivia invests—and loses—all her money with Jonathan Alkaitis, the man whose deceased brother Lucas was the cause of Olivia earning her fortune in the first place. Olivia first encounters Lucas Alkaitis, Jonathan's older brother, when they are both struggling painters in 1950s New York City and

agree to pose for each other. Olivia's painting of Lucas showcases his bruised arm (evidence of his substance abuse problem), which isn't something Lucas wanted displayed publicly to the world, nor is it something Olivia asked permission to do. Forty years after Olivia first displays this exploitative painting of Lucas, the painting sells for a large sum of money at a retrospective exhibit. As a result, Olivia benefits financially from her exploitation of Lucas, albeit many years into the future, and after decades of financial struggles. Olivia's sister Monica insists that Olivia invest her newfound wealth and, by the oddest of coincidences, refers her to Jonathan Alkaitis to do so. Olivia realizes who Alkaitis is and considers it to be a "message[] from the universe" that she's been directed to invest her money with the brother of the very man to whom she owes that wealth. When, years later, Olivia loses all her money to Alkaitis's Ponzi scheme, it's almost as though balance has been restored: Olivia wronged Jonathan and his family by profiting off of her exploitation of Lucas and his substance abuse problem, and now Jonathan has indirectly made things even by defrauding her of that morally dubious profit. The coincidental ways in which Olivia and Jonathan are connected—a series of economic and personal acts of exploitation, a blurring of the lines between what is right and what is wrong—shows how people can hurt and exploit each other across many degrees and years of separation simply by existing within a shared world and participating in its economic markets.

Meanwhile, the interweaving narratives that bind Lenny Xavier, Paul, and Annika together irrevocably alter the directions their lives take and illustrate how the consequences of one's actions are larger and more widespread than is immediately apparent. Lenny Xavier, a Los Angeles music producer and Jonathan Alkaitis's most important investor, becomes a link between Annika, who plays violin and sings with the Canadian band Baltica, and Paul, who ends up playing a critical role in the band's future when he gives them some ecstasy, which turns out to be bead. Lenny and Paul never meet, but they're connected through their mutual ties to Annika. At one point in time, Lenny served as a producer for Annika when she was on track to become a popstar. When Annika felt that Lenny and his team were pulling her away from her "artistic integrity," she returned to Canada, where she began to make music in a way that was truer to her artistic vision, with Baltica. Had Annika not met Lenny and subsequently reinvented herself, she might not have begun to make music with Baltica (the electronica trio consisting of Annika, Theo, and Charlie Wu). Had Annika not made music with Baltica, she might not have met and garnered the admiration of Paul at a Toronto club one night. Had this interaction not occurred, Paul might not have offered Annika and Charlie Wu bad drugs, and Charlie might not have died of an overdose. So, in a hugely indirect and coincidental way, had Lenny Xavier not met and clashed with Annika, Charlie Wu might still be alive. Such logical connections are tenuous and largely speculative, but in a novel built upon such complicated ties between characters they come to illustrate the systems and series of coincidences that inextricably tie individuals to other people.

It's tempting to see fortune and misfortune as random occurrences—as the rewards and casualties of an indifferent universe, as completely irrelevant to how a person behaves and the way they treat others. *The Glass Hotel* challenges this idea, however, and uses interconnected narratives and series of unlikely coincidences and connections to propose that, by virtue of one's participation in a social system, every choice a person makes matters in some way, even if the consequences of that choice are made invisible by degrees of separation or the passage of time.

GUILT AND RESPONSIBILITY

Ghosts and personal demons haunt the pages of *The Glass Hotel*. As Jonathan Alkaitis withers away in prison after he's convicted for securities fraud, he is haunted by the ghosts of deceased investors whose lives were destroyed by his Ponzi scheme. At the same time, Paul is haunted by the ghost of Charlie Wu, the keyboardist in whose death he was complicit after he gave Charlie bad ecstasy at a Toronto night club. The presence of ghosts and personal demons in the novel poses questions about what kind of responsibility individuals have to each other. While the novel seems to accept that it may be impossible for individual people to enact real, meaningful change within social systems at a larger scale, it also seems to suggest that individuals still have a social responsibility to help others in a smaller-scale, more immediate sense. In other words, while people can't help but participate in larger, problematic systems that oppress themselves and others, they still have a personal obligation not to throw their friends under the bus for their own personal gain. Through the presence of ghosts throughout the novel (representing guilt), the novel suggests that when people fail to honor their individual responsibilities toward others, they are haunted for the rest of their lives, unable to move on completely.

While imprisoned for fraud, Jonathan Alkaitis sees the ghosts of deceased investors whose lives and livelihoods were destroyed by his Ponzi scheme, insinuating that he feels (or *should* feel) responsibility for the key role he played in this mass misfortune. Try as he might to convince himself that his investors should have known there was something fishy about their near-perfect returns, the fact remains that Jonathan strategically ingratiated himself with investors and promised them investment returns he knew had no basis in reality. While Jonathan might make the feeble argument that he was only giving investors the returns they wanted to see, satisfying their greedy demands, it's clear to everyone (and, ultimately, to himself) that the investors didn't *make* him commit fraud: he

arrived at this decision on his own. Furthermore, Jonathan's poor decision-making results in dire consequences, bringing about not only financial ruin for his investors, but, in some cases, death. When Yvette Bertolli hears the news about the scheme, she dies of a heart attack, and it's insinuated that Faisal, who had used his investments with Alkaitis as a way to validate himself in the eyes of his family, commits suicide out of shame. That Alkaitis sees the ghosts of Faisal, Bertolli, and other people while in jail makes clear that not only is Jonathan physically imprisoned, but he is also imprisoned within the emotional cage of guilt and personal accountability. Interestingly, the two ghosts Jonathan doesn't see are those of Suzanne, his first wife and love of his life, who died of cancer, and Lucas, his older brother, who died of a drug overdose when Jonathan was a child. The absence of Suzanne's and Lucas's ghosts frustrates Jonathan greatly. Their very absence underscores the purpose of Jonathan's ghosts, however. Jonathan isn't visited by the ghosts of people for whom he grieves, but by the ghosts of people to whom he is morally indebted, suggesting that it is guilt and not grief that truly haunts people.

Unlike Jonathan, Paul never gets caught or imprisoned for the harm he causes, but he still sees the ghosts of people he's hurt. The first ghost Paul sees is that of Charlie Wu, the keyboardist to whom Paul somewhat knowingly gave bad ecstasy at a night club in Toronto in 1999. Charlie's heart stops shortly after taking the drugs, which directly implicates Paul in Charlie's death. Paul never faces legal repercussions for his role in Charlie's death. Though Paul is never accused of wrongdoing, he begins to see Charlie's ghost after this event. The juxtaposition between the lack of repercussions Paul faces publicly and the internal torment he suffers as a result of these ghostly encounters illustrates that guilt is an *internal* prison, separate from external legal or societal punishment.

Through the presence of the ghosts, the novel makes clear that those who ignore the responsibilities that they have to others, those who act selfishly for their own benefit and in doing so cause harm to other people, will suffer regardless of whether they ever get caught. The novel portrays its characters as often selfish, but as also possessing (perhaps without realizing it until suffering the consequences) a moral core that induces profound and haunting guilt that will weigh on them when they fail to live up to their social obligation to others.

FRAUD AND CONSTRUCTED IDENTITY

Instances of fraud and inauthenticity are prevalent throughout *The Glass Hotel*. The most prominent example of fraud is the Ponzi scheme orchestrated by Jonathan Alkaitis and enabled by his complicit staffers, but there are many subtler instances of fraud present throughout the novel as well. Vincent and Jonathan Alkaitis pretend to be married in order to project an air of stability to potential investors; Paul, Vincent's half-brother, steals Vincent's catalog of video footage and passes it off as his own work in an effort to jumpstart his music career; and Vincent herself creates a "light," fun public persona to embody the woman Jonathan wants her to be around his potential investors. The prominence of fraud throughout the novel poses broader questions about the nature of truth and reality, such as whether there exists such a thing as an essential, permanent core of truth beneath a person's performed identity and subjective interpretation of the world. In *The Glass Hotel*, fraud is the default state. Identity is a tenuous, performed activity rather than an absolute, authentic essence; correspondingly, there is no such thing as objective truth, but instead a myriad of subjective interpretations.

While outsiders might think Jonathan Alkaitis is financially and interpersonally successful, the reality is that he's failing and unfulfilled on both fronts. Everything about Alkaitis is self-fashioned to appear as he wants it to appear. For example, Jonathan constructs the appearance of a legitimate, highly successful investing fund, when in reality, the business is a Ponzi scheme that stays afloat by defrauding its investors. Jonathan gains the confidence of investors by maintaining an outward appearance of success and stability, but neither of these things are real: though he might appear confident and at ease on the outside, inside, he suffers with unresolved grief for his older brother, Lucas, and first wife, Suzanne. While to outsiders Alkaitis's marriage to Vincent might project an air of stability and contentment, Vincent and Jonathan aren't actually married, and their relationship is based entirely on lies and superficial appearances. They enjoy each other's company, and Jonathan finds Vincent to be charming and attractive, but neither truly cares for the other in an intimate, genuine way. Like everything else in Jonathan's life, the relationship is not just performative but manipulative—designed to convince people that Jonathan is someone to whom they should give their money.

Once Jonathan is imprisoned for his crimes and denied access to the people and business endeavors he used to create his public persona, his sense of self deteriorates, and he begins to lose his grip on reality—suggesting that there is nothing *to* Jonathan beneath his constructed, external self. In prison, Jonathan no longer has access to the investment fund that provided him with an exterior sense of financial worth. Further, his imprisonment deprives him of any real (or even fraudulent) relationships: Vincent, through whom he achieved the illusion of exterior stability, abandons him after his Ponzi scheme implodes, as does his daughter, Claire, who feels betrayed by her father's lies. In the absence of the financial success and familial and interpersonal relationships that formerly gave him a sense of worth and purpose in the word, Alkaitis begins to lose touch with reality. He loses the desire (or, perhaps, the ability) to exist in the present moment and instead spends his

time immersed in hypothetical musings about the alternate paths he could've taken through life, which he refers to as his "counterlives." Alkaitis's increasingly obvious confusion leads him to be sent to the doctor to be assessed for dementia. While the doctor examines him, Alkaitis compares the mental fog he is experiencing to "a creeping sense of unreality, a sense of collapsing borders, reality seeping into counterlife and the counterlife seeping into memory." Jonathan's descent into psychological confusion, and his increasing inability to exist in the present moment, reasserts the novel's position that identity is primarily a performed activity and lacks a stable, underlying essence. The characters of the novel do not have stable "real selves" hidden beneath the performances they put on for others. Instead, they become defined by their performances—making the content of those performances all the more critical.

GREED, DELUSION, AND SELF INTEREST

Vicious cycles of greed and self-delusion are prevalent throughout *The Glass Hotel* and serve to illustrate the many ways people are willing to absolve themselves and others of morally dubious behaviors if it benefits their own self-interest. When Oskar Novak, one of Alkaitis's staffers who knowingly participates in the Ponzi scheme, is interrogated in court over his involvement in the scheme, he defends his involvement on the grounds that "it's possible to both know and not know something." Oskar's rather cryptic response becomes one of the novel's major themes, which is that people will do anything to justify their own greed. As he sits in prison toward the end of his life, Alkaitis, for example, entertains the notion that, while he did dishonestly swindle his investors out of their money, he only did so because the investors expected to see big returns on their investments; in other words, Alkaitis's is here trying out the idea that his securities fraud can be (at least partially) justified on the grounds that his greed was motivated by the greed of self-deluded others. The novel doesn't support this notion. However, through Alkaitis's thoughts the novel suggests that greed and the allure of upward mobility can persuade even the most altruistic, well-intentioned people to hurt or exploit others when it is in their self-interest to do so. Simultaneously unable to avoid self-serving behaviors or to honestly face their own moral failings, then, characters resort to self-delusion to justify their lapses in personal moral integrity.

Jonathan Alkaitis tries to absolve himself of his complicity in the deaths and ruin of his bankrupted investors by spinning an alternate narrative in which the investors are partially to blame for their demise. In one interview with Julie Freeman, a journalist who is writing a book about Alkaitis, Alkaitis claims that the reason he kept up his fraudulent scheme for so long was that he was "embarrassed" and "didn't want to let everyone down." He calls his investors "greedy" and claims that, while he does accept responsibility for his central role in the fraud, the fact that "[the investors] expected a certain level of returns" that Alkaitis "felt compelled to deliver" at least in part absolves him of some responsibility. Alkaitis's description paints himself as powerless to say no or disappoint his eager investors, but in reality, this formulation attributes greed exclusively to the investors, and not to Alkaitis himself. Thus Alkaitis's self-deluding narrative ignores his own greed and minimizes his responsibility in the immense economic and personal suffering his greed has brought upon others.

Vincent similarly practices a kind of self-delusion in order to maximize her own comfort. One night, when out to dinner with Alkaitis and his biggest investor, Lenny Xavier, Lenny comments that he recognized the opportunity of investing with Alkaitis "when [he] figured out how his fund worked." Alkaitis responds by rather forcefully changing the subject. Yet Vincent turns a blind eye to the possible sketchiness at play in Alkaitis's business in order to allow herself to continue to enjoy her place in Alkaitis's " kingdom of money." That Vincent always understood, to some degree, that she was engaged in this selfish self-delusion is made clear at the very end of the book, when, after falling overboard the *Neptune Cumberland*, she visits Paul as a **ghost** and admits that she and Paul were both "thieves" in their lives. It's in this admission that she abandons self-delusion and takes responsibility for consequences that arose as a result of her delusion.

Paul engages in a different sort of self-justification for his own selfish actions and hurtful actions toward Vincent, particularly his decision to steal Vincent's collection of videos she's recorded over the years and pass them off as his own work. Vincent, who hasn't seen Paul in years, attends his show and realizes what Paul has done, but is too troubled by the realization to approach him. Unbeknownst to Vincent, Paul recognizes her, but he, too, fails to reach out or apologize to Vincent. A decade later, in 2018, he imagines the hypothetical conversation he and his half sister never got the chance to have in which he attempts to justify his theft of Vincent's tapes, reasoning that they were up for grabs since she abandoned them in her childhood bedroom. Paul's reasoning redirects the blame from himself, for stealing and using the videos without Vincent's consent, to Vincent for not putting her videos to good use. But Paul's logic is thin and unconvincing, even to himself. It is clear that Paul's betrayal of his half sister was in fact a product of the unjustified grudge he holds against Vincent for the role her very existence played in his parents' divorce: when Paul was young, his father fell in love with Vincent's mother, who soon became pregnant with Vincent, which led to Paul's parents' breakup. Paul's attempt to excuse the bad behavior he exhibits in stealing Vincent's work is just another example of his tendency to manipulate and lie to himself to recast his moral shortcomings in a more forgiving light. In this case, he creates a narrative of victimhood in order to justify his anger at Vincent,

excuse his mistreatment of her, and absolve himself of his guilt.

ALIENATION AND SELF-KNOWLEDGE

Despite the fact that in *The Glass Hotel* many of the characters' disparate narrative arcs eventually converge into a web of interconnected stories, feelings of alienation pervade almost every character, many of whom suffer from isolation of both a psychological and physical sort. Sentenced to 170 years in prison for orchestrating a massive Ponzi scheme, Jonathan Alkaitis is fated to spend the rest of his days behind the figurative and literal bars of incarceration. Paul, meanwhile, is alienated by his depression, social awkwardness, and struggles with addiction. After their lives fall apart when they lose all the savings they invested in Alkaitis's fraudulent scheme, Leon Prevant, a former shipping executive, and his wife, Marie, are forced to spend their golden years living in an RV, cut off from the social world that had formerly provided the Prevants with the comfort of being bound to something bigger. *The Glass Hotel* explores what happens when people become isolated from the social networks and systems they rely on to give their lives meaning, direction, and safety. While mental and literal isolation causes suffering for many characters, it also presents them with an opportunity to consider themselves clearly, unobstructed by life's distractions, and obtain a better sense of themselves and their purposes. In this way, *The Glass Hotel* positions social life and material objects as distractions that distance people from understanding themselves and the world around them. Ironically, then, it is only through physical and psychological isolation that a person can begin to understand themselves and their relationships to others.

After losing everything to Jonathan Alkaitis's Ponzi scheme, former investors like the Prevants become uprooted and isolated from their former life. Although living "adrift" comes with loneliness and uncertainty, it also allows the Prevants to reflect on their relationship to and reliance on other people through an unobscured lens. During Alkaitis's sentencing in 2009, one investor comments that Alkaitis "made you feel like you were joining a secret club." When Leon Prevant reads the hearing transcript, he agrees with this sentiment, elaborating on it to claim, too, that Alkaitis's great skill was making people crave his acceptance. Thus Alkaitis's skill was to use people's innate desire to run from loneliness—to be accepted by others—to distract them from the sketchy aspects of his fund. And it worked: by preying on people's insecurities, Alkaitis could make otherwise sensible people like Leon Prevant willing to let their guard down and take a chance on him. But after bankruptcy leaves the Prevants without a home, they are forced to live a transient, haphazard existence, traversing the country in an RV and existing in what Leon refers to as a "shadow country," a world of suffering, impoverished drifters who exist on the periphery of society. In the "shadow country," the Prevants no longer have the option to be bewitched by charm and the desire for social acceptance. Their priority becomes survival.

Vincent's death at **sea**, which frames the novel, is arguably the ultimate form of isolation, and it's in this final transformation that she achieves the most clarity about the things that haunt her throughout her life. Although Vincent achieves a contentedness in the independent, detached lifestyle her seafaring job affords her, it's only in death that she arrives at concrete answers about the question that has pained her most over the course of her life: whether her mother's death by drowning was intentional or accidental. In the novel's final moments, as snippets of Vincent's life pass before her eyes, she arrives at the shoreline in Caiette and sees her mother there. In that moment, as though by intuition, Vincent comes to the realization that her mother's death was accidental. "She would never have left me on purpose," Vincent thinks to herself. "She was always here. This was always home." Vincent's repetition of the word "always" suggests that this truth about her mother's death has "always" existed. It implies that Vincent's failure to uncover the truth was not because the truth wasn't there, but because Vincent was too distracted to recognize the truth. Vincent moved from place to place, person to person, and job to job throughout her life, using these external things to dull the pain of her mother's death and the uncertainty that surrounded it. The time she spent with Jonathan in the "kingdom of money," too, provided Vincent with material preoccupations that stood in the way of her internalizing and coming to terms with her mother's death. When Vincent dies, though, she's separated from the entirety of the world and its distractions, and it's only then that this intuitive knowledge of her mother's death is able to come to her: that she can see her mother in her final moments clearly.

REGRET AND DISILLUSIONMENT

There are very few characters in *The Glass Hotel* who feel satisfied with the trajectory of their lives. In her later years, Olivia Collins, a painter who is both a friend of Jonathan Alkaitis and an investor in his scheme, finds herself unable to make new art or recreate the moderate successes she achieved in the earlier decades of her career. Vincent achieves upward mobility when she agrees to pose as Alkaitis's trophy wife, but she feels that she has sacrificed personal integrity by becoming so wholly dependent on another person. And after Alkaitis is jailed for his financial fraud, his guilt drives him to obsessive thoughts about his "counterlife," an alternate reality version of what his life might have become, had he done things differently. Alkaitis's "counterlife" becomes one of the novel's key structuring concepts, with a multitude of other characters entertaining where their lives might have led them or who they might have become if they'd only acted a certain way, met a certain person,

or lived up to a higher moral standard. *The Glass Hotel*'s use of the concept of alternate realities, or "counterlives," is two-fold: on the one hand, the concept of counterlives entertains the notion that individuals really do have the power to transform their lives in meaningful ways—that an entirely different "counterlife" could be possible if a person had done one thing differently. On the other hand, though, the very fact that these counterlives remain hypothetical and irrevocably detached from reality suggests that such alternate realities are doomed to remain in the realm of the hypothetical and are mostly appealing to characters because they convey the unattainable. Through its exploration of characters' counterlives, *The Glass Hotel* suggests that regret and speculation about unforged paths and unfulfilled dreams are a central and unavoidable part of the human experience.

In Alkaitis's "counterlife," he imagines a world in which he is able to pull off his Ponzi scheme for years and escape without suffering any legal consequences to live a life of luxury in a country without an extradition treaty to the United States. It is significant that Alkaitis's counterlife offers a highly idealized version of events through which he cleverly avoids jailtime, and is *not* a story of self-redemption, nor is it one in which he avoids defrauding others in the first place. Alkaitis's counterlife, then, isn't an expression of remorse. Rather, it's an exercise in wishing things weren't the way they were: it's an expression of disillusionment about the state of the real world. The lack of any meaningful introspection in Alkaitis's counterlife means that it can only ever be a fantasy world. If Alkaitis were to repent his actions, he could attempt to make amends, and on that foundation form new relationships. But instead, he imagines an alternate reality that will never converge with the real world . That Alkaitis becomes so lost in his alternate reality that he is eventually diagnosed with dementia suggests, by extension, that those who focus solely on their disillusionment about how things didn't go their way, rather than acknowledge their own role in whatever happened, will be forever lost in their regret.

Vincent also imagines a different world from the one that she inhabits. But in her daydreams she expresses her dissatisfaction with her current situation by imagining the ways her life *actually* could have been if she or others had made different choices. For example, during her tenure as Jonathan's trophy wife, Vincent imagines "different permutations of [the] events" that led up to her meeting Jonathan: she imagines quitting her job at the Hotel Caiette before Jonathan arrived at the hotel the night they met, or that she did continue to work at the hotel, but Jonathan chose to order room service rather than sitting at the bar. Unlike Jonathan's counterlife, which is characterized by idealization and unbelievability, Vincent's "permutations" consist of small, entirely plausible adjustments that modify the course of her life in hugely meaningful ways. When Vincent observes that each of these alternate realities seems equally as "real" as her actual lived experience, she expresses an implicit regret about the "real" choices, the "permutations," she and others *could have* made but simply *chose* not to. Vincent's alternate realities articulate a remorse rooted in a person's decisions rather than their destiny. They express a regret about her own choices, rather than the life not given to her. And while Alkaitis's regret about what the world did to him leads him to get lost in a fantasy, Vincent's regret about her own choices leads her ultimately to choose a more satisfying life on a cargo ship, and to realizations of the truth of her mother's death that has always haunted her.

The presence of **ghosts** throughout the novel further emphasizes the nagging, haunting presence of guilt and regret. The novel repeatedly employs ghosts to illustrate characters' guilt over the way they've oppressed others or failed to honor their obligations. Paul is haunted by the ghost of Charlie Wu after he gives Charlie the bad ecstasy pills that cause Charlie to overdose and die. And while Alkaitis is serving time in prison for securities fraud, he's visited by the ghosts of former investors whose lives and livelihoods he destroyed with his Ponzi scheme. For Paul and Alkaitis, no amount of time or legal consequence is enough to fully eradicate the guilt they feel in the wake of such grave mistakes and miscalculations. Their regret will haunt them all their lives. In contrast, Vincent at the end of the novel *herself* becomes a ghost, free to travel the world, to visit Paul and to see her mother once more. Vincent, after much regretful introspection, continues to feel guilty about her role as a "thief" during life, but in acknowledging and accepting that guilt and regret—something neither Paul nor Alkaitis ever do—finds freedom and comfort, too.

SYMBOLS

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

WATER

Water symbolizes isolation and, by extension, the state of self-awareness and understanding that can result when one accepts the lessons isolation has to teach them. Throughout the novel, water is itself an isolating force. Water isolates the Hotel Caiette and its inhabitants from the mainland. When Walter, the former night manager, takes on the role of caretaker after the hotel is abandoned after Jonathan Alkaitis's arrest, the hotel's location on an isolated island provides him with a highly solitary, lonesome life. When, in the aftermath of the collapse of Jonathan Alkaitis's Ponzi scheme, Vincent goes to sea to work as a cook aboard the *Neptune Cumberland*, the ocean separates her from the troubles and baggage of her previous life. Water also separates Vincent from her deceased mother, who drowned when Vincent was 13

years old.

Water's symbolic role in the novel, then, is to add a layer of thematic significance to the literally isolating properties of water. When characters are confronted with water, they're often at a point in their lives where they can—if they wish—take advantage of their isolation to come to terms with themselves, the trajectory of their lives, and who they've become or failed to become. Some characters, such as Walter and Vincent, accept the opportunity for introspection that water and isolation presents them, abandoning the safe, connected havens that social networks and other cultural systems afforded them. Isolated from the distractions inherent within a connected, community-oriented life, they look within themselves in an effort to find inner peace and confront their demons. When Vincent goes to sea, she abandons the cushy, stable existence she had living with Jonathan in "the kingdom of money." Being at sea helps her reconnect with her deceased mother, who also went to sea when she was a young woman. Though Vincent eventually dies at sea, in her final moments of consciousness, she has the realization that her mother's death so many years before was an accident—an uncertainty that had plagued her all throughout her life—and is able to die peacefully, laying this longtime demon to rest.

Closely aligned with isolation is the idea of independence. When water separates islands from one another, it creates independent, self-sustaining bodies of land. The struggle to become independent—and the allure of relying on others to satisfy one's emotional and financial needs—is a problem that plagues many characters throughout the novel. Vincent, in particular, struggles to justify her new existence as Jonathan's trophy "wife," particularly in light of the fact that she's prided herself on supporting herself since she was 17. Still, she goes along with her and Jonathan's "arrangement" for nearly three years, turning a blind eye to any potential sketchiness she senses in his firm, because, as she cynically realizes, "dependency was easier." Thus, when Vincent chooses to go to sea after Jonathan is arrested and her stay in "the kingdom of money" comes to an end, it's Vincent's way of definitely ending the period of her life when she was dependent on others and reestablishing herself as an independent, self-sufficient entity.

GLASS

Glass symbolizes a person's capacity to hurt and be hurt by others. More generally, it represents the vulnerability every person has to be complicit in actions and systems that affect the lives of others, and to have their own lives affected by those larger systems. There's a certain honesty and vulnerability inherent in the material of glass: it's easy to see through, and easy to break. The interactions characters have with glass throughout the novel draw attention to the vulnerability inherent in existing as a human among other humans: the ways a person's actions have consequences that may radiate far beyond their immediate surroundings, making them complicit in the oppression of others, and people's corresponding ability to become victims, themselves, of those same systems.

The first major scene with glass occurs in a flashback Paul has to one of the last times he saw Vincent, when she was just 13 years old and had just graffitied the words "*sweep me up*" (supposedly the philosopher Kierkegaard's final words), in acid paste, onto one of her school's glass windows in Port Hardy. Vincent writes the graffiti shortly after the death of her mother, and it's clearly a visual manifestation of her inability to confront and make sense of the trauma of her mother's death. By extension, then, the pain that Vincent puts on display when she vandalizes the glass window is a reflection of her vulnerability: of her ability to be hurt, too, as a consequence of things that happen to others. It also follows that the visual, explicit nature of Vincent's mode of expression—the vandalization of a public space—creates the opportunity for Vincent to hurt and affect those who might see her vandalization. In this way, glass presents a reciprocal pain relationship: people can be hurt by other people, but they can project that pain onto others as well.

This isn't the only time glass is used as a canvas on which to display one's pain. The other major appearance of glass occurs at the Hotel Caiette, when Ella Kaspersky bribes Paul into scrawling a threatening message for Jonathan Alkaitis onto the glass wall of the hotel lobby. Similar to Vincent's graffiti 10 years earlier, Kaspersky's grisly message, "why don't you swallow broken glass," has dual resonances. It's a reflection of the pain and frustration she feels at failing to bring Alkaitis to justice for his fraudulent scheme, but it's also a symbol of her ability to inflict pain on others. The message, "why don't you swallow broken glass," is a quote from Alkaitis's now-deceased wife, Suzanne, who uttered the violent words to Kaspersky at a restaurant years before. Resurrecting Alkaitis's dead wife's words and repurposing them as a threat against him is Kaspersky's attempt to inflict pain on Alkaitis. Kaspersky's message results in unintended pain, too: the violence inherent in Kaspersky's message thoroughly disturbs the few people who do manage to see it, such as Walter and Vincent.

In these two instances, and in other moments that prominently feature glass, the novel uses glass as a vessel through which to convey one's ability to hurt and be hurt by others. Like a transparent pane of glass (in which one can see and be seen by others), vulnerability and complicity are a two-way street.

GHOSTS

Ghosts symbolize the responsibility a person has to do well by others—and the haunting guilt that arises when people fail to live up to their social and interpersonal obligations. Jonathan Alkaitis and Paul are the

two characters who have the most direct interaction with ghosts, but many other characters are plagued by haunting feelings of regret and remorse at not living up to their obligations.

While Jonathan Alkaitis spends the rest of his days in prison for his role in a massive Ponzi scheme that put many of his unsuspecting investors in financial ruin, he is visited by the ghosts of the investors (some of whom he also considered friends) who have died in the aftermath of the scheme's collapse. Some of these people died as a direct result of the scheme: for example, Yvette Bertolli, a former investment associate who was quite elderly when the fraudulent scam was made public, died of a heart attack when she learned that she lost over $300 million in her investors' funds. Jonathan is also visited by the ghost of Faisal, who committed suicide in the aftermath of the scheme's collapse. Before investing with Jonathan, Faisal's family had regarded him as something of a disappointment, and the financial success he began to see after making his investments allowed him to redeem himself in his family's eyes. Given this context, it's logical to posit that Faisal committed suicide out of shame and despair when he realized he'd lost not only all his money, but his family's respect as well. The circumstances of Bertolli's and Faisal's deaths are such that they may be seen as the direct or indirect result of Alkaitis's fraud. It follows, then, that Alkaitis is seeing the ghosts of these investors because he feels—consciously or unconsciously—that he bears some responsibility for their fates. Their ghosts, therefore, symbolize not only Jonathan's guilt, but his failure to uphold his personal responsibility to others, placing his selfish desire for wealth above his obligations to Faisal and Bertolli as friends and fellow humans.

Ghosts torment Paul, too. Early in the novel, Paul believes he sees the ghost of Charlie Wu, a Canadian musician to whom he gave the bad ecstasy that resulted in Charlie's overdose and death. Although Paul is never caught and brought to justice for his actions, the guilt of knowing he was directly involved in Charlie's death is something that plagues him for the rest of his life, and he sees visions of Charlie at many points throughout his life, the first time being at a Vancouver nightclub he visits with Vincent and Melissa on New Year's Eve, 1999. Later in life, Vincent's ghost visits Paul as well. Although Paul had nothing to do with Vincent's death, he wronged Vincent in a number of ways throughout their lives, unjustly resenting her for his parents' breakup (Paul's mother and father divorced as a result of the affair and resultant pregnancy that occurred between Paul's father and Vincent's mother), and he spends his life hurting Vincent in conscious and subconscious ways in a misguided effort to get even with her. Throughout the novel, Paul alternates between condemning what he knows is an unfair hatred and poor treatment of Vincent and justifying those feelings. Ultimately, Paul fails to fully acknowledge Vincent's blamelessness, correct his misguided hatred of her, and actively work toward treating her with more respect. As a result, they become estranged, and, when Vincent dies, much of the hurt and issues that tormented their relationship remain unresolved. Thus, when Paul is visited by Vincent's ghost, it's a manifestation of these unresolved issues, as well as of Paul's failure to live up to the responsibility he had to do well by Vincent.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Vintage edition of *The Glass Hotel* published in 2021.

Chapter 2: I Always Come to You Quotes

❝ But does a person have to be either admirable *or* awful? Does life have to be so binary? Two things can be true at the same time, he told himself. Just because you used your stepmother's presumed death to start over doesn't mean that you're not also doing something good, being there for your sister or whatever.

Related Characters: Paul (speaker), Vincent, Vincent's Mother, Vincent's and Paul's Father, Grandma Caroline

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 20

Explanation and Analysis

This passage occurs in a flashback to the time Paul spends in Caiette, British Columbia, supposedly to care for Vincent in the aftermath of her mother's death. Vincent is dealing with her grief in rebellious, destructive ways: she's just graffitied her school's window, which resulted in her suspension, and Paul feels that his father and grandmother are disappointed in his inability to look after her. Paul's family is under the impression that Paul came to British Columbia to care for the grieving Vincent, but in reality, he's been kicked out of school and his mother's house and just wants a fresh start.

Paul feels that if he'd been looking after Vincent as he was supposed to, she wouldn't have committed her act of vandalism or been suspended. His question of whether "a person [has] to be either admirable or awful" is a reflection of the guilt he feels about his inability to look after Vincent. It's also his attempt to justify and defend his selfish reasons for travelling to Vancouver in the first place: not to fulfill an obligation to support Vincent through the unimaginable grief of losing her mother, but because he had nowhere else

to go and saw an opportunity at a new chance at life.

While it's true that humans are complicated, that moral judgment and intention can be ambiguous, that good people can be capable of bad actions, and that bad people are capable of goodness, the problem with Paul's logic is that he's not actually doing anything "admirable" in Caiette. Though physically there, he doesn't make any attempts to help or support Vincent. This is evidenced by the glib way in which he describes his responsibilities: "being there for your sister or whatever." The dismissive "or whatever" tag at the end of this phrase suggests that Paul could care less about Vincent or her grief.

In this passage, Paul crafts a narrative in which he's a troubled person who's trying the best he can, when the reality is that this isn't fully true. Paul is troubled and suffering, certainly, but in creating a narrative that exaggerates his "admirable" qualities and minimizes his "awful" qualities, he's merely creating a muddied logic by which he may absolve himself of his failure to live up to his obligations as Vincent's sibling, for the vague reasons that people are complex, and morality is tenuous and subjective, and therefore it's okay for him to let down Vincent. The logic Paul employs in this passage frees him of personal accountability, and it is similar to the logic many people in the novel will use to excuse their own selfish actions.

❝ *I don't hate Vincent*, he told himself, *Vincent has never been the problem, I have never hated Vincent, I have only ever hated the* idea *of Vincent.*

Related Characters: Paul (speaker), Vincent, Vincent's Mother, Vincent's and Paul's Father, Paul's Mother

Related Themes:

Page Number: 22-3

Explanation and Analysis

This passage occurs in a flashback to the immediate aftermath of Vincent's mother's disappearance. Paul has come to Caiette, British Columbia, under the pretense of helping with Vincent, though in reality, he's been kicked out of school and his mother's house for drug-related issues and just wants a fresh start. After Vincent confronts Paul about his drug abuse, he thinks these lines in irritated response.

"*I don't hate Vincent*" is something of a mantra for Paul, who consistently needs to remind himself that he doesn't (or at least, shouldn't) hate his younger half-sister. Paul's father had an affair with Vincent's mother, which resulted in Vincent's mother becoming pregnant with Vincent, which led to Paul's parents separating. Paul and his mother then moved across the country to Toronto, and Paul became depressed and socially alienated, turning to drugs to cope with his feelings, and eventually developing a full-fledged addiction. Paul unfairly blames Vincent for the role her birth played in his parents' divorce, and the downward trajectory his life suffered in the aftermath. When he claims to "have only ever hated the idea of Vincent," he means that he hates all the drama and messiness her existence caused for him.

But the hatred of "the idea of Vincent" that Paul expresses here is misguided, and illustrates how deluded he is about the origins of his problems. Paul's hatred of Vincent places Vincent as the cause of his problems, when in fact many of Paul's troubles stem from his inability to directly confront the real source of his problems and assess the extent to which he can exercise control over his life.

Though Paul's depression and substance abuse issues are clearly not his fault, the strategy he develops to cope with them—blaming them on Vincent—effectively absolves him of any personal responsibility to improve the conditions of his life. By blaming all his problems on Vincent, Paul relegates the responsibility to solve these problems onto Vincent, as well. Paul's delusional thinking is ultimately self-destructive. In absolving himself of responsibility he also eliminates his own agency, allowing his drug addiction to continue, his depression to persist, and destroying his relationship with the half-sister he wrongfully believes owes him something.

❝ It was a new century. If he could survive the ghost of Charlie Wu, he could survive anything. It had rained at some point in the night and the sidewalks were gleaming, water reflecting the morning's first light.

Related Characters: Paul (speaker), Charlie Wu, Vincent, Melissa

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 31

Explanation and Analysis

This passage occurs at the end of Paul, Vincent, and Melissa's night out in Vancouver on New Year's Eve. They've managed to survive the night: Y2K hasn't destroyed the

world, Paul survived a harrowing experience seeing the ghost of Charlie Wu, a musician in Toronto who died as a result of the bad ecstasy tablets Paul gave him, and Paul, Melissa, and Vincent are driving through the city back home in the early hours of the morning.

The start of a new year and a new century fills Paul with a great hope for his future. Paul's hopes are founded on the notion that the new year renders all the troubles, tragedies, and moral failings that plagued him in the 20th century obsolete. The problem with Paul's optimism is that it's based on the false premise that the external factor of a new year will be enough to make him a new person. In truth, Paul will carry his same troubles with him into the 21st century, and it'll take more than the simple passage of time for him to discard them. For instance, he thinks that the fact that he made it through the harrowing experience of seeing Charlie Wu's ghost at a nightclub means that he'll be absolved of a guilty conscience for the role he played in Charlie's death. In fact, Paul's guilt will be something that haunts him for the rest of his life.

The possibility for renewal and redemption Paul associates with the new year is underscored by the water imagery that concludes this passage: "it had rained at some point in the night and the sidewalks were gleaming, water reflecting the morning's first light." The novel uses water as a symbol for independence, personal growth, and redemption, and Paul clearly sees the water gleaming on the sidewalks under the first light of morning through a similar symbolic lens, believing it to be a metaphor for the redemption that awaits him in this new year.

The problem is that the water gleaming under sunlight isn't a reflection of how Paul has transformed, but how he'd like to, in theory. It's purely symbolic. It's an externalization of the personal shortcomings he wants to change in his life but remains too stubborn, deluded, and passive to actually confront in a meaningful way. When Paul looks at the water, he imagines all his life could be if only he could abandon his bitterness toward Vincent, his guilt about Charlie's death, and the drug addiction and loneliness that makes everything all the more difficult. But Paul's hopes remain symbolic and theoretical, and if he's hoping that the mere passage of time will be enough to witness these personal changes take hold, he'll be sorely disappointed.

Chapter 3: The Hotel Quotes

"Very few people who go to the wilderness actually want to experience the wilderness. Almost no one." Raphael leaned back in his chair with a little smile, presumably hoping that Walter might ask what he meant, but Walter waited him out. "At least, not the people who stay in five-star hotels," Raphael said. "Our guests in Caiette want to come to the wilderness, but they don't want to be *in* the wilderness. They just want to *look* at it, ideally through the window of a luxury hotel. They want to be wilderness-adjacent. The point here—" he touched the white star with one finger, and Walter admired his manicure—"is extraordinary luxury in an unexpected setting. There's an element of surrealism to it, frankly. It's a five-star experience in a place where your cell phone doesn't work."

Related Characters: Raphael (speaker), Walter

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 35

Explanation and Analysis

This passage occurs during Walter's interview with Raphael for the position of night manager at the newly renovated Hotel Caiette. During the interview, Raphael explains to Walter the appeal of the Hotel Caiette for its guests.

Raphael's explanation of the Hotel Caiette positions the resort as a simulation of sorts. It's a place wealthy people can go to experience the wilderness from a removed, artificial perspective: "a five-star experience in a place where your cell phone doesn't work."

The novel explores at times the way that geographic and social isolation can function as a means through which characters can get away from the distracting people and pursuits that dominate the social world and, if they're lucky, achieve some level of inner contentment and understanding. But such self-knowledge gained through isolation isn't what's happening with the Hotel Caiette's guests at all. As Raphael explains, they aren't actually looking for a truly transformative experience. Rather, they want to create the illusion of isolation-derived rejuvenation without actually undergoing any personal growth. As Raphael says, "they want to look at [wilderness], ideally through the window of a luxury hotel. They want to be wilderness-adjacent."

Raphael's explanation also separates what the Hotel Caiette's guests *think* they want versus what they *actually* want, thereby revealing the delusion that exists at the

center of the hotel's success. The hotel's guests come there because they think they "actually want to experience the wilderness," but this isn't true. The wilderness is wild, unpredictable, and, most of all, decidedly indifferent to humanity's notions of what it should and shouldn't be.

The "window" through which guests look at nature refers to the Hotel Caiette's magnificent glass wall featured in its lobby. In the novel, glass functions as a symbol for vulnerability and complicity. In this case, the glass window represents both the self-deceiving lie the Hotel Caiette's guests are telling themselves—the lie that they are in nature and not separated from it—as well as the potential tenuousness of that comforting lie: that their protective barriers could so easily shatter.

> Alkaitis was interesting only in retrospect. He'd come to the Hotel Caiette with his wife, now deceased. He and his wife had fallen in love with the place, so when it'd come up for sale he'd bought the property, which he leased to the hotel's management company. He lived in New York City and came to the hotel three or four times a year. He carried himself with the tedious confidence of all people with money, that breezy assumption that no serious harm could come to him. He was generically well dressed, tanned in the manner of people who spend time in tropical settings in the wintertime, reasonably but not spectacularly fit, unremarkable in every way. Nothing about him, in other words, suggested that he would die in prison.

Related Characters: Walter (speaker), Jonathan Alkaitis

Related Themes:

Page Number: 43-4

Explanation and Analysis

In 2005, Jonathan Alkaitis arrives at the Hotel Caiette (and makes his first appearance in the novel, as well). The narrative shifts to a flash forward from the perspective of Walter, the night manager of the hotel. After Alkaitis's arrest and conviction for securities fraud, Walter will consider whether there was anything about Alkaitis that had "suggested he would die in prison."

This moment is shocking for the reader, who at this point knows nothing about Alkaitis other than what Walter has just conveyed about him. The passage puts the audience in Walter's shoes, forcing them to ask themselves if any of the banal, unassuming information about Alkaitis that Walter has just conveyed would suggest that Alkaitis could be a criminal, capable of manipulating and defrauding unsuspecting investors of millions of dollars. Judging by outward appearances alone, Alkaitis's greatest sin is that his immense wealth has imbued him with an inflated sense of confidence, but this is a far cry from criminality.

The banality of the details Walter conveys about Alkaitis, when juxtaposed with the passage's provocative final line about Alkaitis dying in prison, establishes a dichotomy between the exterior shells people present to the world versus the hidden, inner reality of who they are and of what they are capable. Alkaitis's ordinariness—his "tedious confidence," his "generically well dressed" style, and his "reasonably but not spectacularly fit" body, renders him "unremarkable in every way." This "unremarkable" nature, though, is merely a disguise that conceals the remarkable level of deceit and exploitation of which Alkaitis is capable, and a signal that every character in the novel is actually engaged in some sort of performance of who they are.

Finally, underscoring Alkaitis's unassuming outer appearance helps the reader understand how Alkaitis was able to successfully con so many people into investing in his Ponzi scheme.

Chapter 4: A Fairy Tale Quotes

> Sanity depends on order.

Related Characters: Vincent (speaker), Jonathan Alkaitis, Vincent's Mother

Related Themes:

Page Number: 56

Explanation and Analysis

This is the opening line of Chapter 4, which consists of Vincent's memories from her relationship with Jonathan Alkaitis and the time she spent in his luxurious world of financial excess, which she refers to as the "kingdom of money." The statement "sanity depends on order" introduces a section of text wherein Vincent laments how being rich means having to fill a lot of empty hours—hours she previously had problem filling, as she used to have to work long hours as a bartender to make ends meet.

"Sanity depends on order" refers to Vincent's plight: the need to find things to do with herself so as not to become stir-crazy while she waits for Jonathan to return from work. On a more symbolic level, "sanity depends on order" alludes to a person's need to "order" their life and their sense of life,

constructing a personal narrative around which to center their life, and a personality to present to the world in order to find their way in an otherwise meaningless, disordered world.

Vincent is a fiercely independent character. She lost her mother when she was just 13, and she's supported herself since she was 17. Though she saw and took the opportunity for an easier life that giving up her independence to become Jonathan's much younger trophy wife provided her, she now struggles to come to terms with how taking that opportunity has robbed her of her independence and the freedom to be herself. In this way, "sanity depends on order" alludes to Vincent's need to construct (order) a narrative through which she can justify the losses being with Jonathan have forced her to incur.

> In her hotel days, Vincent had always associated money with privacy—the wealthiest hotel guests have the most space around them, suites instead of rooms, private terraces, access to executive lounges—but in actuality, the deeper you go into the kingdom of money, the more crowded it gets, people around you in your home all the time, which is why Vincent only swam at night.

Related Characters: Vincent (speaker), Jonathan Alkaitis, Vincent's Mother

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 58-9

Explanation and Analysis

This passage is taken from Vincent's reflections on the time she spent in the "kingdom of money," the phrase she uses to describe the period between 2005 and 2008 that she lived with Jonathan Alkaitis as his trophy "wife," though the two were never legally married. Vincent didn't grow up with money, and many things about Jonathan's luxurious existence surprise her. Here, she examines the shock of discovering how little privacy the rich have.

Prior to living with Jonathan, Vincent's only exposure to a wealthy lifestyle was what she gleaned from her days working as a bartender in the Hotel Caiette, a luxury five-star hotel. Everything that Vincent observed at the Hotel Caiette pointed to the privacy and space the rich are afforded. The wealthiest guests at the Hotel Caiette have "the most space around them, suites instead of rooms, private terraces, access to executive lounges." Once she charms her way into financial stability and travels to live with Jonathan in his sprawling suburban Connecticut home, though, she discovers that it's actually a lack of personal space that defines her existence there: she's constantly surrounded and attended to by house staff, which she finds immensely claustrophobic; it's for this reason that she only swims at night, when the staff are not around.

Vincent's observations underscore the literally stifling quality of wealth, which alludes to a mental stifling, as well. When a person is constantly surrounded by people whose job it is to make their life more orderly, comfortable, and convenient, it becomes impossible to find the mental clarity and space that is necessary for introspection. One of the major themes *The Glass Hotel* explores is the transformative, redemptive quality of literal and psychological alienation: the idea that social and economic structures create distractions that prevent people from conducting self-reflection and ultimately finding peace with their lives. Here, Vincent seems to allude to the distracting effect that wealth's lack of privacy has on her.

In the aftermath of Alkaitis's arrest, Vincent will abandon her life in the kingdom of money and find work as a chef aboard a container ship, effectively trading the life of claustrophobia and distraction she experienced at Jonathan's suburban home for the quiet isolation of the open sea. And it's while she's at sea, isolated from others and with the time and space to reflect on her inner demons, that she's finally able to make peace with her demons and regrets, like the death of her mother, and her unintentional complicity in Alkaitis's Ponzi scheme— that have plagued her for her entire life.

> "The point is she raised herself into a new life by sheer force of will," Vincent's mother had said, and Vincent wondered even at the time—she would have been about eleven—what that statement might suggest about how happy Vincent's mother was about the way her own life had gone, this woman who'd imagined writing poetry in the wilderness but somehow found herself sunk in the mundane difficulties of raising a child and running a household in the wilderness instead. There's the *idea* of wilderness, and then there's the unglamorous labor of it, the never-ending grind of securing firewood; bringing in groceries over absurd distances; tending the vegetable garden and maintaining the fences that keep the deer from eating all the vegetables; [...] managing the seething resentment of your only child who doesn't understand your love of the wilderness and asks every week why you can't just live in a normal place that isn't wilderness; etc."

Related Characters: Vincent's Mother, Vincent (speaker), Vincent's and Paul's Father

Related Themes:

Page Number: 61

Explanation and Analysis

This passage is taken from a memory Vincent has of her mother, who'd once told Vincent what she admired most about Edna St. Vincent Millay, the poet after whom Vincent is named: "the point is she raised herself into a new life by sheer force of will," explained Vincent's mother. On the surface of Vincent's mother's remark is praise for Millay's ability to propel herself form a life of suffering and poverty to an exciting, bohemian life surrounded by artists and their art in New York City. Even then, though, Vincent wondered at the subtext of her mother's admiration for the poet. Vincent's mother had been a poet before she met Vincent's father and became pregnant with Vincent, and Vincent knows that the banalities of domestic life inhibited her mother's ability to create art and live the free-spirited life she wanted.

Vincent's analysis of her mother's words establish a dichotomy between her mother's idealized life—her "idea of wilderness," and "the unglamorous labor" of the life she actually had: while her mother had dreamed of a life spent "writing poetry in the wilderness," her actual experience in wilderness was dominated by a seemingly endless sequence of tedious chores like hauling around firewood and groceries, tending to the vegetable garden, and having to entertain a child—Vincent—who was not capable of appreciating her mother's dreams of her life unlived, nor all the work that went into the life she did live.

This passage explores the presence of regret and disillusionment that Vincent believes dominated her mother's life. It also illuminates a key aspect of grief about her mother's untimely death that dominates Vincent's thoughts. Vincent's mother drowned when she was 13, and Vincent spends her life uncertain of whether it was an accident or a suicide. This passage illustrates Vincent's belief that her mother's life was one of regret and unhappiness. Thoughts like these make Vincent feel guilty for the role she played in her mother's unhappiness and, subsequently, the life she might have played in her mother's death, if it actually was a suicide.

This concept of "the idea of wilderness" versus the actual wilderness also appears earlier in the novel, in Raphael's explanation of the purpose the Hotel Caiette serves for its wealthy guests: their desire for wilderness is similar to Vincent's mother's in that it's an idealized, glossy version of wilderness (a wilderness they can experience from behind the safe, temperature-controlled confines of the hotel's glass wall) they really want, rather than the raw, unfiltered, wilderness as it exists in its natural state. In both instances, the concept captures the way that people imagine a kind of fantasy of life or the world, and prefer that fantasy to the messy and indifferent actual world.

> "What I'm suggesting," Caroline said softly, "is that the lens can function as a shield between you and the world, when the world's just a little too much to bear. If you can't stand to look at the world directly, maybe it's possible to look at it through the viewfinder."

Related Characters: Grandma Caroline (speaker), Vincent, Vincent's Mother

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 68

Explanation and Analysis

This passage is from a memory Vincent has of the period right after her mother died. Her grandma Caroline came to stay with her and her father and gifted her a video camera to help her cope with her grief.

Grandma Caroline explains that the glass camera lens can function as a mediating force between Vincent and the rest of the world, comparing the camera's lens to a protective

"shield." Vincent begins behaving rebelliously in the immediate aftermath of her mother's death, vandalizing her school and dying her hair blue. Her grandmother recognizes these behaviors as Vincent's way of expunging herself of the grief and other difficult feelings she finds too painful to keep inside. She believes a creative pursuit might serve as better outlet for Vincent to work through her grief, maintain a healthy attachment to the outside world, and come out of her grieving process unscathed.

Grandma Caroline's advice alludes to a couple key themes from the novel. First, it introduces the idea that people perceive the world through subjective lenses. Here, Vincent's camera lens acts as a metaphor for the unique, constructed ways people shape their experiences of the world. In examining the world through the camera's viewfinder, Vincent is afforded the opportunity to frame her experience, filtering out the details she finds painful. She can control the narrative of her life, beginning new chapters when she presses record, and deciding when and where to end things when she presses pause.

Vincent carries with her this idea that she can enact a "shield between [herself] and the world" throughout her life, literally, as she continues to film videos up until her death, and figuratively, in the way she disguises and transforms her appearance and characteristics to rise to what a situation requires of her, such as when she assumes the role of Jonathan Alkaitis's rich, beautiful trophy wife to escape a claustrophobic, dead-end bartending job in her hometown.

The former scenario represents something of a healthy way to cope with the difficulties of life. The latter, though—concealing the entirety of one's real self from the world out of desperation and self-preservation—represents an extreme, corrupted interpretation of Caroline's advice, and Vincent is just one of a multitude of characters who enact various shields to avoid seeing and understanding the details of the world that they find "too much to bear."

> "She had real potential. Real potential. But an inability to recognize opportunity? That right there is a fatal flaw."

Related Characters: Lenny Xavier (speaker), Vincent, Jonathan Alkaitis, Annika

Related Themes:

Page Number: 79

Explanation and Analysis

This passage occurs during a dinner Vincent and Jonathan Alkaitis attend with Lenny Xavier—a music producer and Alkaitis's most important investor—and Lenny's wife. Lenny is talking to Vincent about an infuriating experience he had with a musician named Annika who at the last minute backed out of a record deal Lenny and his production studio had set up for her. Lenny and his people had set up Annika to become a big popstar, but Annika decided to leave because she felt their interference was compromising her values as an artist. Lenny bemoans Annika's decision because he doesn't understand it.

The narrative will later reveal that Lenny is aware of Alkaitis's Ponzi scheme and has even provided Alkaitis with money to keep the thing afloat, because he has figured out how he himself can make money from it. This illustrates that, to Lenny, an opportunity is opportunity, regardless of ethical considerations. He believes that the "fatal flaw" one can commit isn't failing to live up to one's values, but failing to seize an opportunity to make money when an opportunity presents itself.

One of the central themes explored in *The Glass Hotel* is the role greed and self-interest play in a person's willingness to compromise their personal values. In one way or another, almost every character in the novel lets the drive for survival, self-preservation, or upward mobility steer them down ethically dubious paths. In this particular passage, Lenny puts forth the thesis that the world is a cutthroat place, and it's ultimately more existentially damaging to deny oneself an opportunity for upward mobility or financial stability than to break one's own personal moral code.

> Ghosts of Vincent's earlier selves flocked around the table and stared at the beautiful clothes she was wearing.

Related Characters: Vincent (speaker), Mirella, Jonathan Alkaitis

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 89

Explanation and Analysis

This passage occurs during Vincent's sham marriage to Jonathan Alkaitis and her stay in the so-called "kingdom of money," the phrase she uses to describe her brief existence as a member of the upper class. Vincent and her close friend Mirella, who is the girlfriend of one of Alkaitis's investors,

are out shopping and take shelter in a coffee shop as it begins to rain.

Vincent catches sight of the mountain of shopping bags that surround her and the expensive clothes she's wearing and feels suddenly guilty about how materialistic and dependent on Alkaitis's money she's allowed herself to become. Vincent had been fiercely independent before she met Jonathan, having supported herself completely since the age of 17, and this is one of the earlier versions of herself she refers to when describes the "ghosts of [her] earlier selves flocked around the table." Independence and a disregard for material vices had been core features of the identity she'd constructed for herself as a young woman.

The person she is now—a woman who depends on a man and who's allowed herself to be corrupted by the allure of his wealth—is so deficient in what she'd considered to be her defining personality traits that it's almost as though parts of her have died and become "ghosts of [her] earlier selves." The novel repeatedly uses ghosts to symbolize the haunting nature of guilt and regret. The narrative employs ghost imagery in this passage to suggest that Vincent feels guilty about losing her independence and being corrupted by wealth.

Chapter 5: Olivia Quotes

❝ "It's interesting," he said, "she's got a very particular kind of gift."

"What's that?"

"She sees what a given situation requires, and she adapts herself accordingly."

"So she's an actress?" The conversation was beginning to make Olivia a little uneasy. It seemed to her that Jonathan was describing a woman who'd dissolved into his life and become what he wanted. A disappearing act, essentially.

"Not acting, exactly. More like a kind of pragmatism, driven by willpower. She decided to be a certain kind of person, and she achieved it."

Related Characters: Jonathan Alkaitis, Olivia Collins (speaker), Vincent

Related Themes:

Page Number: 105

Explanation and Analysis

This passage occurs a few months before Jonathan's arrest when he, Vincent, and Olivia Collins are on Jonathan's yacht. When Vincent momentarily leaves to make drinks, Olivia compliments Vincent, which prompts Jonathan to mention what he considers to be one of Vincent's most admirable skills, which he describes positively as "a very particular kind of gift." This passage illustrates the inauthenticity that lies at the core of Jonathan and Vincent's relationship. It also shows how this inauthenticity leads Jonathan down a path of delusion that inhibits him from seeing the uneven power dynamics at play in their relationship.

Jonathan and Vincent have a transactional relationship in which Vincent is charming, beautiful, and available for Jonathan at home and while out with investors; in return, Vincent has access to Jonathan's credit card and all other privileges his wealth has to offer.

Alkaitis fails to see that what he perceives as a skill Vincent employs freely is itself evidence of that very skill: of putting on a mask, of "adapting herself accordingly" to "what a given situation requires" in an act of self-preservation. Vincent is only showing Jonathan what Jonathan expects of her, which is a woman who can, as Olivia astutely observes, "dissolve[] into his life and become what he wanted." The irony is that the more Jonathan admires Vincent, the less he sees of her, as her "particular gift" is "a disappearing act," a way to make Jonathan get exactly what he wants without even realizing he's gotten it. Olivia, though, sees what Jonathan fails to see: that Vincent makes herself adaptable because that's what Jonathan wants her to be. The rub is that Vincent does her job so well that Jonathan fails to realize she's doing it.

Jonathan's final observation, which attributes Vincent's adaptability to "pragmatism" and "sheer willpower" gets at the novel's main themes that if self-interest guides a person's decisions, it can drive them to compromise their morals. But Jonathan's take on Vincent's "sheer willpower" suggests a situation in which Vincent does exactly what she wants to do and isn't coerced by necessity. It ignores the elements of desperation and survival that guide her decision making, the poverty that led her to accept Jonathan's offer in the first place.

Chapter 6: The Counterlife Quotes

He doesn't tell Julie Freeman this, but now that it's much too late to flee, Alkaitis finds himself thinking about flight all the time. He likes to indulge in daydreams of a parallel version of events—a counterlife, if you will—in which he fled to the United Arab Emirates. Why not? He loves the UAE and Dubai in particular, the way it's possible to live an entire life without going outdoors except to step into smooth cars, floating from beautiful interior to beautiful interior with expert drivers in between.

Related Characters: Jonathan Alkaitis (speaker), Julie Freeman, Vincent

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 115

Explanation and Analysis

After Julie Freeman, a journalist who's working on a book about Alkaitis's Ponzi scheme, asks him if he'd considered fleeing the country to avoid prison time, Alkaitis considers how different his life would be right now if he'd managed to avoid arrest. Alkaitis refers to his daydream of an alternate reality as a "counterlife," an imaginary, idealized world in which he runs away to Dubai, one of his favorite places, and lives a life of exquisite comfort and luxury.

This passage is important as it's the moment in which the narrative introduces the idea of the counterlife, an escapist strategy Alkaitis uses to make his 170-year prison sentence more bearable. As the novel progresses, Alkaitis relies more heavily on his trips into the counterlife, eventually losing touch with reality. This is indicative of his refusal to accept the reality of his situation, and his corresponding refusal to accept full responsibility for the role he played in orchestrating the Ponzi scheme, and to atone for the lives that were ruined when the scheme collapsed.

What's interesting about this counterlife scenario in particular is that it reveals what Alkaitis likes best about Dubai, which is the way it allows him to see the city in a completely artificial, controlled, ideal way. Alkaitis daydreams about not having to go outdoors, of instead "step[ping] into smooth cars, floating from beautiful interior to beautiful interior with expert drivers in between." It's not really Dubai that Alkaitis longs for, but a return to a world he could construct and alter to meet his every need. In a way, for Alkaitis, what's appealing about Dubai is what was appealing about Vincent: they both conform to meet his every need, providing an artificial but nonetheless comfortable, predictable, and self-affirming experience.

She had a significant financial stake in maintaining the appearance of happiness.

Related Characters: Jonathan Alkaitis (speaker), Vincent

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 116

Explanation and Analysis

This passage occurs during one of Alkaitis's daydreams about a "counterlife" in which he fled the country before he could be arrested and moved to Dubai, a city he loves. He thinks back to the last time he visited and recalls that Vincent, who accompanied him, seemed in awe of the magnificent city, though he sees now that she might have just been pretending to appease him, admitting that "she had a significant financial stake in maintaining the appearance of happiness."

Alkaitis's cynical realization underscores the transactional nature of his relationship with Vincent. Their relationship was a clearly outlined arrangement wherein Vincent was to appear—physically and emotionally—exactly as Alkaitis desired her to appear, and in exchange, she got to travel the world and live a life of luxury. Therefore, Vincent's supposed "happiness" at seeing the city of Dubai wasn't her authentic response, but the response she felt Alkaitis wanted her to have—a reflection of his own love of the place.

The sadness or disillusionment Alkaitis feels upon realizing that Vincent probably wasn't actually happy to visit Dubai also shows how, in order for their relationship to work, Alkaitis had to remain willfully ignorant to the fact that the emotions that Vincent showed to him were merely her upholding her end of their deal—"maintaining the appearance of happiness"—rather than authentic self-expression. In other words, the arrangement only works if Vincent pretends to be happy and Alkaitis pretends not to know Vincent is pretending.

The mutual agreement to uphold the charade of a happy relationship and turn a blind eye to the existence of artifice demonstrated in Vincent and Alkaitis's relationship also parallels the mutual agreement to uphold a charade that allowed Alkaitis's Ponzi scheme to operate successfully: not only did Alkaitis have to con his investors into believing they were investing in a legitimate fund, but his investors had to choose to ignore any signs that the fund was illegitimate, and his employees also had to hide from themselves the severity of the crime they were engaged in.

In the counterlife, Claire visits him in Dubai. She is happy to see him. She disapproves of his actions, but they can laugh about it. Their conversations are effortless. In the counterlife, Claire isn't the one who called the FBI.

Related Characters: Jonathan Alkaitis (speaker), Claire

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 119

Explanation and Analysis

This passage occurs while Alkaitis is in prison, during one of his daydreams about his counterlife, an alternate reality in which he escaped the consequences for his securities fraud. This interlude into the counterlife is important because it establishes a key element of Alkaitis's counterlife daydreams and the purpose they serve him, namely that he does not use them to express remorse for the crimes he committed. Most of the situations Alkaitis dreams up in his counterlife reflect an idealized world in which he can live the rest of his days out of prison, be forgiven his legal sins, and be accepted by the people who turned on him in the aftermath of his arrest. What they do not reflect is any attempt to atone for his crimes, nor does Alkaitis ever entertain an alternate reality in which he did not commit fraud in the first place.

In this excerpt, for example, the only person whose behavior is adjusted in Alkaitis's fantasy is Claire: Alkaitis imagines a world in which Claire "visits him in Dubai. Is happy to see him." She still "disapproves of his actions, but they can laugh about it." Alkaitis's daydream doesn't imagine a world in which he and Claire have a better relationship because he didn't commit a crime. Rather, he imagines a world in which they get along because Claire chooses to forgive and forget the years her father spent lying to her about the illegitimate business he was running. Alkaitis's counterlife adjusts reality so that Claire "isn't the one who called the FBI," not so that he isn't the one who committed the crime over which Claire called the FBI in the first place.

The alternate realities Alkaitis imagines in his counterlife demonstrate his unwillingness to accept responsibility for the role he played in the orchestration of a massive Ponzi scheme, and for the lives that were destroyed in the aftermath of its collapse. His thinking is deluded and based on a subjective worldview in which he is as much the victim of others' reactions to his crimes as those people were victims of his crime in the first place.

Chapter 9: A Fairy Tale Quotes

"The thing with Paul," her mother said, while they were waiting for the water taxi on the pier at Grace Harbour, "is he's always seemed to think that you owe him something." Vincent remembered looking up at her mother, startled by the idea. "You don't," her mother said. "Nothing that happened to him is your fault."

Related Characters: Vincent's Mother (speaker), Vincent, Paul, Jonathan Alkaitis

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 149

Explanation and Analysis

Vincent attends Paul's concert at the Brooklyn Academy of Music and realizes he's stolen her video recordings to use in one of his compositions and is passing them off as his own. In her anger, she recalls something her mother said to her when she was a child about Paul having "always seemed to think that [Vincent] owes him something." The idea that had "startled' Vincent as a child now makes perfect sense to her. Seeing her stolen work projected on a screen in the Brooklyn concert hall places a tangible value on just how much Paul thinks Vincent owes him.

Paul has always hated Vincent for the role she played in the separation of his parents, who divorced after Paul's father had an affair with Vincent's mother, who became pregnant with Vincent. Although Paul knows that it's not fair to hate Vincent for something over which she had no control, he never quite manages to purge himself of his grudge, and he subconsciously uses it to justify behaviors that intentionally and unintentionally cause Vincent great emotional distress. For example, Paul will later claim he felt entitled to use Vincent's work because she'd abandoned her video recording equipment in her childhood room and he thought that somebody might as well make use of it. Paul's reasoning here is a thinly veiled attempt to excuse behavior he knows is inexcusable.

Paul's ability to justify his repeated mistreatment of Vincent illustrates the novel's larger premise that willfully or unintentionally delusional thinking can prompt people to make decisions that result in consequences that are destructive to themselves and to others. In a way, Paul's ineffective attempts to justify his attempts to get even with Vincent parallel Alkaitis's attempt to justify his fraud on the grounds that he was only giving his investors the high returns they wanted, by whatever means necessary. Paul's and Alkaitis's justifications for their morally inexcusable actions are alike in that they both rewrite the narrative to

position the victim as somehow complicit in their victimization, and themselves as victims.

Chapter 10: The Office Chorus Quotes

"It's possible to both know and not know something."

Related Characters: Oskar Novak (speaker), Jonathan Alkaitis, Lenny Xavier, Vincent, Paul

Related Themes:

Page Number: 168

Explanation and Analysis

This quote is taken from Jonathan Alkaitis's employee Oskar's cross-examination, while he is on trial for the role he played in Alkaitis's Ponzi scheme. Oskar's observation that "it's possible to both know and not knowing something" alludes to the way greed and self-interest can cloud a person's judgement, inhibiting them from seeing things clearly and leading them to act in a manner that compromises their morals and the well-being of others, which is one of *The Glass Hotel*'s central themes.

Oskar is one of Alkaitis's staffers who works in the asset management department, which is the branch of the firm that operates the Ponzi scheme. Though the first time Oskar was directly asked to backdate a trade (and therefore directly made aware that the firm was conducting illegal business practices) for Alkaitis was 10 years ago, it would've been impossible for him not to pick up on any of the red flags that indicated he was working for a sketchy firm. In retrospect, Oskar realizes, he'd known about the Ponzi scheme all along and had opted not to contact the authorities because he was getting paid an exorbitant salary, and because he had his own office. Besides all that, he received—and immediately deposited—a Christmas bonus as a reward for the first trade he backdated.

The confession Oskar gives in his cross-testimony—that he was simultaneously aware of and ignorant to the fraudulent activities he and his colleagues conducted over the years—is a clever way to avoid implicating himself in a crime. But it's also a succinct explanation of the way greed motivated Oskar and his coworkers to disregard their legal and moral obligation not to defraud investors—to selectively unsee the truths that would be inconvenient for them in their pursuit of wealth. Many characters outside Alkaitis's firm will operate on a logic similar to that employed by Alkaitis's staffers. For example, Vincent hears but subconsciously decides not to understand a comment Lenny Xavier makes that hints at the illegitimacy of Alkaitis's business, and Paul pretends not to understand that it was wrong of him to steal Vincent's video recordings.

Chapter 11: Winter Quotes

"I mean, here's the question," Joelle said, "and I'd be genuinely interested to hear your thoughts: How did he know we'd do it? Would *anyone* do something like this, given enough money, or is there something special about us? Did he look at me one day and just think, *That woman seems conveniently lacking in a moral center, that person seems well suited to participate in a—*"

Related Characters: Joelle (speaker), Oskar Novak, Jonathan Alkaitis

Related Themes:

Page Number: 196

Explanation and Analysis

This passage occurs after Floor 17 employees hear about Alkaitis's arrest. At the office that day Joelle and Oskar, who both work in asset management and are complicit in the Ponzi scheme, dread the legal consequences that await them. Joelle laments the role she willingly played in the scheme and asks Oskar if there's something morally deficient about her and the other asset management staffers that made them suitable workers to uphold the illegitimate end of Alkaitis's business.

Joelle's question to Oskar opens the door to a more nuanced interpretation of their complicity in Alkaitis's scheme, simultaneously defending their complicity as a mistake anyone might make if given proper incentive, while also entertaining the idea that it was a "lacking" moral compass that made their cooperation in the scheme a possibility in the first place. Joelle sees herself and Oskar as both victims and perpetrators of the scheme, acknowledging that though they participated in the fraud of their own volition, Alkaitis might also have handpicked people he thought he could more easily exploit and manipulate into undertaking illegal business ventures.

Joelle's question to Oskar identifies the allure of wealth as part of what motivated staffers like them to compromise their moral integrity and go along with Alkaitis's scheme. By questioning whether "anyone [would] do something like this," she frames her complicity in the Ponzi scheme as a logical and even sympathetic response to an opportunity for

upward social mobility and financial security.

> One of our signature flaws as a species: will risk almost anything to avoid looking stupid.

Related Characters: Leon Prevant (speaker), Jonathan Alkaitis

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 206

Explanation and Analysis

This passage occurs right after Leon Prevant's accountant calls to inform him that Jonathan Alkaitis was running a Ponzi scheme, and that all the money Leon invested with him is gone. The news crushes Leon, whose initial instinct is to believe that Alkaitis has robbed him of his savings. When he thinks about the circumstances of his decision to invest with Alkaitis in the first place, though, he realizes that this isn't an accurate depiction of what actually happened.

Leon recalls the evening in 2005 when Alkaitis propositioned Leon to invest with him at the Hotel Caiette bar. Though Leon hadn't understood Alkaitis's investment strategy, he'd handed over his savings, nonetheless. With a certain sense of shame, Leon realizes that he—and the rest of humanity—"will risk almost anything to avoid looking stupid." This passage exhibits the regret Leon feels at his naivete. It also expands on the novel's exploration of the role greed plays in mass delusion by suggesting that fear of social ostracization or embarrassment can also convince people to overlook red flags and act against their best interest or the best interest of others. In this case, Leon ignores any reservations or confusions he might have about Alkaitis's fund because he doesn't want Alkaitis to think he's ignorant or unworldly, or for other people to think that he foolishly passed on the opportunity Alkaitis was offering.

> "You know what's permanent? You're a person with a really excellent cocktail story. Ten, twenty years from now, at a cocktail party, you'll be holding a martini in a circle of people, and you'll be like, 'Did I ever tell you about the time I worked for Jonathan Alkaitis?' [...] You get to walk away untarnished."

Related Characters: Claire (speaker), Simone, Jonathan Alkaitis

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 214

Explanation and Analysis

The night before Alkaitis's arrest, his receptionist, Simone, accepts a ride home from Jonathan's daughter Claire Alkaitis, who expresses wry jealousy over Simone's ability to "walk away untarnished" from the Ponzi scheme that effectively ruined Claire's life. Though Claire wasn't involved in the fraudulent side of her father's business, the crime shatters the image she had of her father, which, it's fair to predict, will cause significant psychological damage. Simone, in contrast, has a much brighter future in store for her and even might be able to use the Ponzi scheme to her advantage.

Claire's prediction that Simone will be "a person with a really great cocktail story" juxtaposes the scheme's devastating effects on her own life to the beneficial effect it will have on Simone, who for the rest of her life will be able to use the anecdote of the crazy time she worked for the corrupt Alkaitis to entertain people at parties and make herself out to be a fascinating person. However, in using the Ponzi scheme to score social points, Simone effectively exploits the immense suffering the scheme caused for people like Claire for her own personal gain. In so doing, Simone—who might otherwise have been an innocent bystander—becomes complicit in the web of greed and self-serving behavior that made the Ponzi scheme possible in the first place.

Chapter 12: The Counterlife Quotes

> You can know that you're guilty of an enormous crime, that you stole an immense amount of money from multiple people and that this caused destitution for some of them and suicide for others, you can know all this and yet still somehow feel you've been wronged when your judgment arrives.

Related Characters: Jonathan Alkaitis (speaker), Oskar Novak

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 224

Explanation and Analysis

Jonathan Alkaitis is in prison, reflecting on something Oskar Novak said during his cross-examination about being able to know and not know something at the same time. Alkaitis expands on Oskar's comment about being simultaneously

aware and ignorant, using the premise to reflect on his crime, guilt, and punishment. In so doing, he constructs a narrative that allows him to take accountability for his moral failings while still maintaining the illusion that he is a good person who has been unfairly judged.

Alkaitis's thoughts about the crimes he committed and the legal consequences that followed embodies the same duality of thought: he admits to being "guilty of an enormous crime," and accepts that he played a role, too, in the unintended consequences of his Ponzi scheme, such as the suicides of at least four people connected to it.

Yet his knowledge of his involvement in the scheme does not seem to equate to a knowledge of his culpability or responsibility. Just like Oskar's paradoxically simultaneous knowledge and ignorance, Alkaitis imagines himself as at once *causally* responsible without being *morally* responsible.

This ability to imagine a split sense of responsibility, helps to make sense of the strange nature of Alkaitis's imagined "counterlives." In the alternate realities Alkaitis dreams of while in prison, it is the causality, the ricocheting series of events, which he mentally edits, but never the morality. He always commits the crime in his counterlives, but the consequences just never matter. He doesn't want to change himself; he wants reality to have been different from how it was.

❝ "Well, look at it this way. I believe we're in agreement that it should have been obvious to any sophisticated investor that you were running a fraudulent scheme. [...] So in order for your scheme to succeed for as long as it did, a great many people had to believe in a story that didn't actually make sense. But everyone was making money, so no one cared, except Ella Kaspersky."

Related Characters: Julie Freeman (speaker), Jonathan Alkaitis, Ella Kaspersky

Related Themes:

Page Number: 225-6

Explanation and Analysis

This passage occurs during one of Julie Freeman's interviews with Alkaitis. She's just explained to Alkaitis that she's writing a book about him that deals with mass delusion, of which she believes his Ponzi scheme is an excellent example.

Freeman's point holds Alkaitis accountable for his role in orchestrating the scheme while also maintaining that the investors, too, played a critical role in the scheme's success. She contends that the scheme wouldn't have been sustainable without the cooperation of investors who were willing to ignore any red flags that pointed to the investment fund's illegitimacy—without their willingness "to believe in a story that didn't actually make sense." While it's undeniable that the investors are victims of Alkaitis, Freeman suggests that their delusional thinking renders them indirectly complicit in their own financial ruin, too. In this way, Freeman's logic suggests that there was deceptive behavior on both sides of Alkaitis's scheme: Alkaitis lied to investors, and investors lied to themselves.

Lastly, Freeman's interest in mass delusion positions greed as the central motivating force behind investors' willingness to believe in Alkaitis's scandal, arguing that the fact that "everyone was making money" incentivized people to keep quiet about the fraud.

Chapter 13: Shadow Country Quotes

❝ But they were citizens of a shadow country that in his previous life he'd only dimly perceived, a country located at the edge of an abyss. He'd been aware of the shadowland forever, of course. He'd seen its more obvious outposts: shelters fashioned from cardboard under overpasses, tents glimpsed in the bushes alongside expressways, houses with boarded-up doors but a light shining in an upstairs window. He'd always been vaguely aware of its citizens, people who'd slipped beneath the surface of society, into a territory without comfort or room for error; they hitchhiked on roads with their worldly belongings in backpacks, they collected cans on the streets of cities, they stood on the Strip in Las Vegas wearing T-shirts that said GIRLS TO YOUR ROOM IN 20 MINUTES, they were the girls in the room. He'd seen the shadow country, its outskirts and signs, he'd just never thought he'd have anything to do with it.

Related Characters: Leon Prevant (speaker), Marie Prevant, Jonathan Alkaitis

Related Themes:

Page Number: 247

Explanation and Analysis

This passage occurs as Leon Prevant reflects on how his and his wife Marie's lives have changed since the collapse of Alkaitis's Ponzi scheme when they lost all their money and were forced to move into an RV, working odd jobs just to make ends meet.

Leon now considers himself to be part of "a shadow country," a world "located at the edge of an abyss" and populated by other people whose tragedies and financial disasters have ejected them from the protective safety nets of society. The landmarks that populate Leon's new world are bleak images of poverty and social rejection: "shelters fashioned from cardboard under overpasses, tents glimpsed in the bushes along expressways," and "houses with boarded-up doors." Leon's new home is a dark corner of the world where suffering is the default and a path out a near impossibility. It's a place whose citizens are alienated from the help, hope, and comforts available to the people lucky enough to have remained within society's sheltering, structuring embrace.

While life in the "shadow country" is brutal and hard, Leon's thoughts here also show the clarifying effects of geographic and psychological alienation on Leon's understanding of the world. Expelled from the social and economic systems that used to give their lives meaning—work, friends, social standing—the Prevants are forced to examine their lives and the mistakes with a greater level of clarity. In the shadow country, which is "a territory without comfort or room for error," Leon now recognizes and understands the consequences of making an error, whereas when he was a part of society, society distracted him, providing the illusion of a safety net that would be there to catch him if he made a mistake.

In the distracting, claustrophobic embrace of society, Leon mistakenly believed himself to be invincible. He wasn't overly concerned about making mistakes because he believed tragedy couldn't happen to him. His biggest concern was embarrassing himself in front of Alkaitis, which is what motivated him to invest in a financial scheme he didn't understand. Now, though, Leon's concerns are stripped down to the basics. Embarrassment is of little concern compared to basic elements of survival—to having a roof over one's head and food on the table.

When he was a part of society, he let social pressures like avoiding shame and embarrassment guide his decisions. In the alienating abyss of the shadow country, he has a less obscured, subjective view of reality. He sees through lies. He sees things for what they are. As a member of the shadow country, he is no longer living in the Glass Hotel.

Chapter 15: The Hotel Quotes

It turned out that never having that conversation with Vincent meant he was somehow condemned to *always* have that conversation with Vincent.

Related Characters: Paul (speaker), Ella Kaspersky, Vincent

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 284

Explanation and Analysis

While Ella Kaspersky and Paul meet up for drinks after a music festival in Edinburgh in 2018, Kaspersky asks Paul what became of Vincent. Paul realizes that he doesn't know. In his head, he runs through a hypothetical conversation he never got around to having with Vincent, in which he tries to justify stealing her video recordings and using them to accompany his musical compositions 10 years ago.

This passage illustrates the haunting quality of Paul's guilt. Not working through things with Vincent leaves Paul in an in-between world in which he's perpetually oscillating between trying to justify his poor behavior and feeling guilty about making excuses for it. The hypothetical, unspoken quality of the conversation means that no matter how nuanced, complex, or convincing Paul's arguments might become, he'll never reach a resolution, since the person to whom these arguments are directed—Vincent—isn't there to accept or reject his words. Left unresolved, Paul's unspoken conversation with Vincent becomes a haunting, ghostly presence in his life, forever reminding him of the mistakes he's made and the delusional, selfish thinking that prevents him from fixing them.

There are so many ways to haunt a person, or a life.

Related Characters: Paul (speaker), Vincent, Charlie Wu, Paul's Mother, Vincent's and Paul's Father

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 293

Explanation and Analysis

This passage occurs in 2018. Paul is in Edinburgh for a music festival and thinks he sees Vincent's ghost on his way back to his hotel. As he contemplates whether she was really there or if it was just his imagination, he notes that "there are so many ways to haunt a person, or a life." Paul's observation alludes to the way guilt, complicity, and regret tie people together in an interconnected web.

Paul has lived a life characterized by haunting: after he gives Charlie Wu bad ecstasy tablets that result in Charlie's death, he's haunted by the ghost of Charlie, which may be seen as a manifestation of Paul's grief. More broadly, Paul is haunted by regret. He spends his life angry at Vincent for the role her birth played in his parents' divorce, and the years of suffering and searching that the divorce caused for him. As a result, he spends his life hating Vincent, feeling guilty about hating Vincent, and inadvertently hurting her in a multitude of ways, including when he writes a threatening message that makes Vincent relieve the trauma of her mother's possible suicide on the glass wall of the Hotel Caiette's lobby. Paul never tells Vincent he's sorry for any of this, nor does he fully accept accountability for his actions. Instead, he's wracked by guilt, haunted by the things he's let remain unsaid and unexamined.

More broadly, this passage alludes to the way that every harm a person causes—whether they are punished for them like Alkaitis or escape the consequences as Paul does—can weigh heavily on their psyche, haunting them internally, even if they escape external consequences in society.

Chapter 16: Vincent in the Ocean Quotes

"I'm sorry," he says. "I'm sorry for all of it.,"

"I was a thief too," I tell him, "we both got corrupted."

Related Characters: Paul, Vincent (speaker), Jonathan Alkaitis, Charlie Wu

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 301

Explanation and Analysis

This passage occurs as Vincent's spirit visits Paul in Utah, after she has died and while he is in rehab for a lifelong drug addiction. The half-siblings have been estranged for years now, and Paul has struggled with the guilt he feels for mistreating Vincent and stealing her work. He often replays hypothetical conversations in his head about what he'd say to her if he could see her again. Now, he has his chance and repents for "all of it," all the misery he has caused her, and all the ways he's thoughtlessly used and abused her for personal gain.

Vincent's apology expresses a broader, more complex remorse for the way she allowed herself to become a part of a web of greed, delusion, and self-interest that indirectly and directly hurt others. The drive for comfort and self-preservation sometimes forces a person to make decisions on behalf of their own self-interest and, in so doing, they become complicit in a system in which one person's gain is another person's loss. Even if Vincent had no intentions of becoming a "thief" when she accepted Jonathan's ticket into the upper echelons of society, she opened herself up to the allure of greed, comfort, and the financial stability she found there. Similarly, whether or not Vincent knew what was going on with Jonathan's investment fund, the fact remains that her cushy, upper-class lifestyle was funded by a massive Ponzi scheme that defrauded its investors and ruined many lives, and this is what Vincent alludes to when she tells Paul that she "got corrupted."

Vincent's remark also somewhat absolves Paul of guilt and blame, situating him, too, within a larger system wherein hardship and desperation can lead even the most well-intentioned person down a path of corruption and complicity. Lastly, this moment is important because it allows Vincent and Paul to experience a moment of mutual healing, giving both siblings the opportunity to absolve themselves of the remorse, bitterness, and misunderstanding that soured their relationship over the years. This moment between Vincent's spirit and Paul is a moment in which a ghost simultaneously symbolizes guilt and offers a path toward redemption and personal growth. Whereas Paul's earlier sightings of the ghost of Charlie Wu served only as a reflection of Paul's inner guilt (and offered no way out, since Paul wasn't yet ready to have accountability for his actions), his apology to Vincent's spirit offers him a path forward and the possibility of a life uninhibited by guilt and shame.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

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

CHAPTER 1: VINCENT IN THE OCEAN

In a series of connected fragments of speech, an unnamed narrator "begin[s] at the end," telling of falling off a ship into a stormy, violent **sea**, their camera escaping from their hands. Next, the narrator remembers the words "sweep me up," which they wrote on a window when they were 13. In another fragment, the narrator laments the coldness of the sea. Next, the narrator recalls standing by the shore in Caiette when they were 13, holding their new camera and filming the waves that lapped onto the shore. As the narrator filmed the waves, they repeated the phrase, "I want to go home."

The narrative's fragmented, non-linear quality establishes one of the novel's main themes—that a person's story and identity are constructed, assembled things. Given water's tendency to symbolize alienation and independence, the fact that this unnamed narrator is falling into the sea suggests that they're in a lonely, searching place in their life. The narrator's wish "to go home" supports this idea. Perhaps they are also dealing with unresolved issues from earlier in life, which is supported by their repeated reference to events that occurred when they were 13. It's a cliché that a person's life flashes before their eyes before they die, so the presence of these memories (and the fact that the narrator is plummeting into a stormy, violent sea) suggests that the narrator is near death.

The narrator wonders where they are, noting that they no longer feel cold. They recall the third mate greeting them as they boarded the *Neptune Cumberland* for the first time. The narrator expresses a desire to see their brother, Paul, with whom things are complicated, and whom they haven't seen in a decade. The narrator focuses hard and sees Paul slumped over in a doorway in a foreign city. It's unclear whether the narrator's brother sees them, too.

The fact that the narrator no longer feels cold implies that they have died. The fact that the narrator hasn't seen their brother, Paul, in a decade suggests that they have unresolved issues or grievances with him. When the presumably dead narrator wills to see Paul, it seems as though they are making Paul see their ghost.

CHAPTER 2: I ALWAYS COME TO YOU

It's the end of 1999, and 23-year-old Paul is studying finance at the University of Toronto. He wanted to study musical composition, but he sold his keyboard some years ago and, after many stints in rehab, his mother was unwilling to finance "an impractical degree." Paul is unhappy with his life, uninterested in finance, and feels out of place after rehab. He hasn't even been able to have much of a social life, as he's so busy with work, school, and trying not to use drugs. Paul did badly in his midterms and, as a result, spends a lot of time in the library, or alone in his extremely small room. He tries to focus on his studies but is distracted by a theoretical, simple piano composition he'd like to write.

Paul's troubled past makes him feel socially alienated from his comparatively young, carefree peers. Beyond this, Paul's lifestyle—he lives alone, and he's trying desperately not to fail out of college—physically alienates him as well. Paul's dissatisfaction with his life seems to stem from the fact that he regrets the time he lost to his drug addiction, which could have been better put toward creative, musical pursuits and toward forming connections with others.

In early December, Paul hears about a local band named Baltica. He does some research and finds the club at which Baltica is slated to perform late that night and decides to attend. Baltica turns out to be a trio made up of a guy on bass, a guy controlling electronics via a keyboard, and a girl playing an electric violin. The electronic music is jarring to Paul, who much prefers Beethoven. The violin player is strikingly beautiful, though, so Paul doesn't mind. Suddenly, the girl sings into the microphone "I always come to you," and the electronics create an echo effect, sustaining her words. The girl begins to play her violin and suddenly the music makes total sense to Paul, though this disappears as soon as she stops playing.

The girl's violin music appeals to Paul because it is reminiscent of the classical music toward which he normally gravitates. That Paul responds so intensely to the lyrics "I always come to you" is indicative of his social and literal alienation: he's lonely, and he wants somebody to "come to [him]," to make him feel less alone. It also frames the act of coming together as central to the human experience: people are always looking for connection and sympathy from others.

After their performance, Paul compliments the band, though he's mostly interested in the violinist. The bassist introduces himself as Theo before introducing Paul to Charlie, the keyboardist, and Annika, the violinist. Paul explains that he's new to Toronto and asks the group for places with good music to go dancing. Theo recommends System Soundbar, noting that Tuesday is the best night to go.

That Paul approaches the band after the performance is further evidence of his loneliness. Still, the special attention Paul pays to Annika implies that he's less interested in complimenting the band than he is in pursuing Annika romantically, which makes Paul's actions rather self-serving.

The Tuesday after exams (which Paul barely passes) he heads to System Soundbar; to his disappointment, Baltica is nowhere in sight. He buys a bag of blue ecstasy pills from a girl at the club. He takes half a pill and immediately feels like he's going to die. Paul takes a cab back to campus and is annoyed at the cabbie, who lectures Paul about alcoholism.

Baltica's absence suggests to Paul that the band was just being nice when they recommended System Soundbar to him—they hadn't actually wanted or intended to hang out with him specifically. It's perhaps Paul's disillusionment over the band's interest in him that leads Paul to despair, and he indulges in drugs to quell his pain. Paul's annoyance at the cabbie's lecturing suggests that he's in denial about the degree to which his substance abuse is negatively impacting his life and ability to connect with others.

Two weeks later, Paul is on campus, even though it's winter break, as his mom's therapist advised her to keep some distance from her son. Paul has a lonely Christmas day, which includes an awkward, superficial phone call with his father. On a Tuesday night between Christmas and New Year's, he walks to System Soundbar. When he gets there, he realizes he's wearing the same shirt he wore the last time he was there and that the bag of blue pills is still in his pocket.

This detail about Paul's mom gives a clearer picture of the extent of Paul's loneliness and alienation: not only does he lack friends, but he also lacks the support of immediate family. His shallow phone conversation with his father confirms this. It also illustrates the novel's larger theme of fraud and self-fashioning: even in interactions between immediate family members, people present themselves in a constructed fashion that conceals who they really are. That Paul returns to System Soundbar shows how determined he is to connect with Baltica and make friends. His eagerness also suggests a degree of denial about the band's disinterest in him.

Paul finds Baltica at the club. Annika looks beautiful, and in her Paul sees a new, alternate reality—one that transcends his current, failed college experience. The narrative flashes forward 20 years into the future; Paul talks to his counselor, explaining that he did what he did that night because Annika was his "ticket out of" his world.

Paul's belief that a life with Annika as a romantic partner could fix all his problems is deluded, wishful thinking that ignores the internal work Paul needs to do to recover from his substance abuse problem and become more connected with the world. The flash forward to Paul's session with his counselor reinforces the ways people narrate their lives and construct a version of reality that makes sense to them.

Back in the present, Paul approaches the band. Annika greets him, though rather impersonally. Paul asks out Annika, who immediately turns him down. He notices Theo watching him and realizes that he's imposing on the band. In response, Paul offers them some of the bad ecstasy pills, explaining that it's not really his thing and he doesn't want them to go to waste. Annika says she tried the same pills last week.

Paul should sense Annika's disinterest by her impersonal greeting, but his loneliness makes him desperate and willing to ignore Annika's signs of rejection. It's unclear why Paul offers the band the pills that made him sick the other night. He's either so desperate to ingratiate himself with the band, thereby making himself less lonely, that he's willing to forget or ignore the fact that the pills are probably bad, or else he's angry at the band's rejection of him and wanting to get even. Either way, Paul puts his own needs ahead of others' when he offers Baltica the pills without disclosing the full truth about their negative side effects.

The narrative flashes forward to Paul talking to his counselor, insisting that he didn't know the pills were bad—that he thought his negative reaction to them was just a fluke. He argues that he really believed Annika *had* tried the same pills as him, and that they were fine. The narrative switches back to the present. Annika takes one of the pills before giving two to Charlie, whose heart stops shortly after.

It's difficult to believe that Paul really had no reservations about the safety of the pills. His future insistence that he had no way of knowing his negative reaction to them hadn't been a fluke is his way of rationalizing his irresponsible behavior. This rationalization allows him to live with himself and the major role he played in Charlie's death. That Paul is discussing this incident many years down the road, however, implies that he harbors unresolved guilt about his actions.

It's New Year's Eve. The Y2K hysteria dictates that the world will collapse at midnight of January 1, 2000, and Paul's world feels on the verge of collapse, too. In the past 72 hours, he's barely been able to function. Now Paul is trying to call his half-sister, Vincent, at a pay phone at the Vancouver airport. After fleeing Toronto in the aftermath of Charlie's death, he doesn't have much cash left, and his new plan is to stay with his aunt Shauna, who has a huge house. Paul hasn't seen Vincent in five years, when she was 13 and he was 18, right after Vincent's mother died. Shauna was appointed Vincent's legal guardian after her mother's death.

Paul seems to be fairly out of touch with most of his family. It's possible that his history with addiction has led to this estrangement, but it also seems like Paul doesn't make much of an effort to maintain a relationship with them, either—evidenced by the fact that he hasn't talked to Vincent since her mother died. It's possible that Paul only reaches out to family when he's in the midst of a personal crisis, which makes his relationship to them somewhat self-serving: he contacts family when he needs their support, but not when they need his (when Vincent was grieving her dead mother, for instance). This section also gives some context to the novel's opening scene: it seems reasonable to assume that the unnamed narrator in the opening section is Vincent, Paul's half-sister.

Aunt Shauna finally picks up, addressing Paul cautiously. She tells him that Vincent moved out about a year ago to live in the city with a friend from Caiette, and that they parted on strained terms. Paul wonders what kind of apartment Vincent is living in, and who she's living with. He recalls Vincent's friend Melissa, who was present when Vincent was suspended for graffitiing a building.

Aunt Shauna's aloof, guarded tone implies that she's not close to or comfortable with Paul. The information she reveals about Vincent suggests that Vincent, like Paul, is a troubled character: after all, people who have good relationships and for whom life is going well don't typically run away from home.

The narrative flashes back to the graffiti incident. Vincent has just sprayed the words "*Sweep me up*" on one of her school's **windows** in the town of Port Hardy, located at the very tip of Vancouver Island. Paul sees Vincent do it, and he, Vincent, and Melissa stand silent in the aftermath of Vincent's actions. Vincent explains that she just liked the phrase. Paul tries to convince them all to hurry to catch the school bus back to Grace Harbour, and Vincent reluctantly agrees.

*The recurrence of the graffitied words "*sweep me up*" confirms that Vincent is the opening scene's unnamed narrator. There's a myth that the words "sweep me up" were the last words of the philosopher Soren Kierkegaard, though this is untrue. Regardless, Vincent's decision to write these words on her school's window suggests she feels desperate. Given the context that Vincent is writing these words in the immediate aftermath of her mother's death, it's reasonable to surmise that she's feeling lonely, depressed, and wanting to be "swept up" from, or to escape, the pain and sorrow that plagues her life.*

The three ride back to Grace Harbour where a mail boat picks them up to take them back to Caiette, which is so unpopulated and remote that it makes Port Hardy look like a bustling city in comparison. The mail boat docks in Caiette, and Vincent and Paul return home, where Dad and Grandma are waiting for them. Grandma normally lives in Victoria and Paul in Toronto, but they moved here after Vincent's mother disappeared two weeks ago, her canoe abandoned in the **water**.

Vincent's feelings of emotional alienation in the wake of her mother's death are supplemented by the physical alienation of the remote, hard-to-reach place she lives. That Vincent's mother died in the water reinforces water's symbolic weight: in this instance, it's water that separated Vincent from her mother and therefore gave her feelings of immense alienation, sorrow, and loneliness.

Dad confronts Vincent about the graffiti. He tells her she's been suspended for a week. Vincent silently goes to her room. Paul feels that he disappointed the grownups in his failure to look out for Vincent. His family out here seems to be under the impression that Paul "made a noble sacrifice" in moving to Caiette, but in reality, he'd been kicked out of school and his mother's house. Paul entertains the notion that a person can be "admirable" and "awful" at the same time.

Paul seems incapable of living up to his responsibilities. The fact that he traveled to Caiette not to honor his emotional obligation to Vincent, but because he had nowhere else to go, shows that his cross-country move wasn't an act of kindness, but an act of self-serving necessity. Paul's idea that he can be simultaneously "admirable" and "awful" is a way for him to narrate his life in such a way that he can justify his feelings of guilt at not being there for Vincent: in other words, it's okay that Paul's move to Caiette was self-serving since it might have been (at least partially) selfless as well. This kind of thinking is a way for Paul to delude himself into believing he's more selfless than he actually is.

Dad says he can't take Vincent to work with him and entertains the idea of sending Vincent to live with his sister Shauna. Grandma asks if there are any nearer jobs Dad can take, which would enable him to keep Vincent here, but he says there are none. Even the new hotel isn't an option, as it'll be under construction for another year, and he doesn't know anything about construction. Beyond this, he's not sure that being around so much **water** is good for Vincent.

The mention of a hotel is a possible allusion to the titular "glass hotel." Vincent's father recognizes the triggering effect water might have on Vincent, given the direct role it played in her mother's death. His comments also reinforce the geographical features of their home and the negative effects these might have on Vincent: they live on a remote tip of Vancouver Island. As such, they are surrounded completely by water, cut off figuratively and literally from the rest of the world. Such circumstances aren't going to be positive for Vincent, who is dealing with the fresh grief of her mother's death and will need all the comfort and connection she can get.

Paul goes upstairs to check on Vincent in her disheveled, old room. Vincent confronts Paul about being too old to be in year eleven of school, and he admits that he fell behind after being in rehab last year. Vincent asks Paul if he did drugs because his parents split up and then accuses him of smoking weed in his bedroom. Inwardly, Paul expresses a hatred not toward Vincent, but toward "the idea of Vincent," as she is the product of his father's impulsive love affair with Vincent's mother, the much younger "hippie poet" who broke up his parents' marriage.

This scene between Vincent and Paul gives the reader some context for the half-siblings' eventual estrangement: Paul hates Vincent because he blames her very existence for his parents' divorce. Paul's hatred of "the idea of Vincent" is misguided and illustrates his tendency to project his own failures and shortcomings onto others. In this instance, Paul is unable to deal with the way his drug addiction has negatively affected his life, so he crafts a narrative in which Vincent and his parents' divorce is responsible for his own failure to take control of his life.

After the marriage broke up, Paul and his mother left Caiette for the Toronto suburbs, and Paul would return to British Columbia for summers and Christmases, shuffled between two households while Vincent got to live with both parents all the time. Paul leaves Vincent to go and smoke weed in his room, but Dad catches him, and he's shipped back to Toronto later that week.

The divorce fragments and destabilizes Paul's life, which leads to him feeling rootless and lonely. Being sent away absolves Paul of his responsibility to care for Vincent. In this way, his decision to use drugs—something he surely knows his father won't approve of—may be seen as a self-serving action.

The narrative returns to New Year's Eve, 1999, which is the next time Paul sees Vincent, when he takes a bus downtown from the airport, Bach blasting through his headphones. Vincent's apartment is in a very rundown neighborhood, the streets of which are populated by zombie-like drug addicts. Paul knocks on the door, and Melissa answers. When Paul sees her, he imagines that she can see on his skin the truth of what he did to Charlie Wu. Paul can see from Melissa's style that she's really into the rave scene: she wears blue, faux fur pants, a rainbow sweatshirt, and her hair is dyed bright pink.

The zombie-like drug addicts illustrate the depressing, alienating effects of substance abuse. Paul's paranoia that Melissa will be able to sense what he did to Charlie shows that he's feeling guilty about his actions. It also suggests that there's a limit to one's ability to control the trajectory of one's life: despite Paul's efforts to conceal his past, there's always the chance that his past will catch up to him.

Melissa leads Paul downstairs, into the dilapidated basement apartment. Vincent is there, making coffee in the kitchen. Her hair is its natural shade of brown, no longer blue like it was the last time Paul saw her. She looks put-together, and Paul has to remind himself that he doesn't hate her. The three sit around the living room and drink their instant coffee. Vincent fills Paul in on her past, explaining how she dropped out of high school. Paul isn't sure if he should try to convince Vincent to go back to school or mind his own business; after all, given what he did to Charlie, he's certainly no role model.

In comparison to Melissa, who goes to great lengths to alter and disguise her outer appearance, Vincent appears more natural and unedited. Perhaps her more natural look suggests that she is honest and upfront about who she is—or perhaps Vincent's put-together appearance is merely a disguise she puts on to conceal a more troubled interior life. Paul's reasoning that his past transgressions make him unfit to give Vincent advice absolves him of his responsibility to be a role model. It's a way for Paul to justify his own inaction and failure to give Vincent advice that might improve her life, which, if her run-down apartment is any indicator, is in dire need of improvement.

The three decide to go out dancing. Paul resolves to be a better person if the world survives Y2K. He and Melissa head to the bar to order drinks and the strikingly beautiful Vincent begins to dance alone, "lost in her own world," as Vincent's mother used to describe it. Melissa and Paul silently consider "the Tragedy of Vincent."

Paul's goal to be a better person shows how dissatisfied he is with the way his life has panned out, but his decision to put off doing anything about it until after the new year might also imply that he believes that change is beyond him. Vincent's solo dancing reveals to Paul and Melissa the sad, lonely existence that Vincent hides beneath her put-together exterior.

Later on, they join Vincent on the dance floor. Paul thinks he sees Charlie Wu in the crowd and becomes paralyzed with fear before realizing it's only a random kid. Still, the hallucination stuns him, and he stumbles into the cold streets to get some air. Later, at a diner, Melissa asks why Paul came here for New Year's, since the bars are probably better in Toronto. Paul explains that he's moving here, which prompts Melissa to ask if he's in trouble. He tells them about the bad E. The narrative flashes forward to a conversation between Paul and his counselor in Utah in 2019, in which he admits knowing he would get away with Charlie's death.

That Paul sees Charlie's ghost is further evidence of his guilt. Paul's confession to Melissa and Vincent also implies that he's feeling guilty and wants to get this guilt off his chest. Despite the protestations of ignorance Paul undergoes in his future therapy sessions, it's clear that, deep down, Paul knows he is responsible for what happened to Charlie, and that the claims he makes about not knowing the pills were bad are only a defense mechanism he employs in an attempt to rid himself of this guilt. In this latest flash-forward to Paul's future therapy sessions, the novel outlines a dichotomy between being absolved of guilt in a legal, external sense and being absolved of guilt internally; despite the fact that Paul knew (correctly) that he'd get away with what he did to Charlie, he still feels internally guilty for what he did and for the fact that he was never forced to face the consequences.

In a basement club later that night, Paul recognizes the music and lyrics: "*I always come to you, come to you, come to you—*" which spins him into a panic attack: it's a club mix of the Baltica song. As they enter the club and begin to dance, Paul is overcome with the sense that he's being watched, and he again thinks he sees Charlie Wu out of the corner of his eye. He tries to shrug it off and dance. Y2K doesn't destroy the planet, and it's suddenly 2000.

Hearing the Baltica song at the club reinvigorates Paul's feelings of guilt. The song is itself a ghostly presence, reminding Paul of his past transgressions and the lack of consequences he faced for them. Since "Y2K" didn't destroy the planet (many feared that the Y2K bug—a computer programming flaw affecting dates beyond 1999—would wreak global havoc), Paul will have to try to be a better person if he wants to make good on the promise he made to himself, though it remains to be seen if he'll follow through on this ambitious new year's resolution.

At the end of the night, they return to Melissa's old car and congratulate themselves on surviving. Vincent curls up to sleep in the back, and Melissa, red-eyed, drives too fast and chats too easily. Paul is overtaken by a sense of hope at the possibilities this new century could afford him. If he could make it through seeing Charlie's **ghost**, he figures, he can make it through anything. The chapter ends with a flash forward to Paul speaking with his counselor, in which Paul reveals that this was only the first time he saw Charlie's ghost.

The start of a new year fills Paul with a false, misguided sense of hope. Just as Paul thought that a relationship with Annika might help him turn his life around, he seems to believe that the structure of a new year will give him the strength he needs to become a better person. In reality, neither of these things will make a difference if Paul fails to search within himself for the will to change. That Paul continues to see Charlie's ghost for years to come reflects the pervasive, long-lasting impact of the guilt he feels over giving Charlie bad drugs. It shows that, despite the lies Paul tells himself, he knows that he's responsible for knowingly giving Charlie bad pills.

CHAPTER 3: THE HOTEL

The words "*Why don't you swallow broken* **glass**" are etched in acid paste on the glass wall of the Hotel Caiette. The only guest to see the graffiti, a shipping executive who had checked in the day prior, drinks a whiskey and wonders who could do such a thing. It's 2:30 a.m. Walter, the night manager, has taped paper over the message and moved a potted plant in front of the wall to further hide the vandalism. Vincent, the bartender, stands behind the bar and observes the scene. It's nearly 3:00 now, and Walter's shift is nearly over. He goes to Vincent, who is crying. Walter checks on the shipping executive, whose name is Leon Prevant, to see if he needs anything before returning to the front desk to write up an incident report.

The message on the glass wall of the Hotel Caiette recalls the one that Vincent wrote on the window of her school so many years before. For this reason, it's not outside the realm of possibility that she's responsible for this new, threatening message, though her troubled response suggests the contrary. And the message in question is certainly troubling: to "swallow broken glass" would likely result in heavy bleeding and injury, so the message basically reads "why don't you kill yourself." Symbolically, the message and the effect it has on hotel staff and guests represents how a person's actions (in this case, the graffiti "artist" and their message) can impact others.

The narrative flashes back to three years ago, when Walter's general manager, Raphael, first told him about the job at Hotel Caiette: They meet in a coffee shop on the pier in Toronto to discuss the position. Hotel Caiette has been open since the 1990s but has recently been renovated in a "Grand West Coast Style," with exposed wooden beams and grand **glass** walls. Raphael reiterates that the hotel is remote, accessible only by boat. Raphael hands a map to Walter, who's never been as far west as Vancouver before. He points to an inlet at the north end of the island, showing Walter the hotel's isolated location. Raphael explains that the fancy hotel is for rich guests who want to observe the wilderness without actually being in it, highlighting the "surrealism" of this contradiction.

The Hotel Caiette's remoteness gives its wealthy guests the illusion of solitude and complete peace. In reality, though the hotel's geographic location might make it literally isolated, the guests are anything but alone, as they have the privilege to be attended night and day by the hotel's staff. As Raphael explains to Walter, this contradiction creates a "surreal[]" experience, wherein guests can craft a narrative in which they're escaping society to be alone in the wilderness when, in reality, they are doing so within a heavily controlled, monitored environment.

After the meeting, Walter trudges back to his small, depressing one-bedroom apartment. Somewhere across town, his ex-fiancée, a dancer, is living with a lawyer. He'd been with the dancer for 12 years, and the breakup was unexpected. Even though his friends cautioned him not to make any rash, sudden changes to his life, he decides to accept the position at the Hotel Caiette. A month later, on a cold, dreary day in November, he journeys west. As he waits at the pier to catch a boat from Grace Harbour to the hotel, Walter tries not to think of his ex and her new partner.

Walter seems to take the job at the Hotel Caiette because of the loneliness he's suffering in the aftermath of a harsh breakup. He seems to believe that the solitude and remoteness of the hotel will be the impetus he needs to embark on a journey of personal growth. This is similar to Paul's misguided belief that a new relationship or a new year will give him the encouragement he needs to undergo inner change. It will be interesting to see whether Walter's big leap will work for him, or whether he's just as deluded as Paul is regarding the personal initiative he must have in order to change his life.

The boat docks and Melissa greets Walter at the pier. They make their way to the hotel as darkness settles over the **water**. Suddenly, Walter spots the hotel before them: it's a grand, beautiful building whose supposed "surrealism" is immediately apparent, with the lobby situated behind a massive wall of **glass**. Walter shakes the doorman, Larry's, hand as he makes his way through the entrance. He finds Raphael waiting at the reception desk. After dinner and signing contracts, Walter thinks about something Raphael said earlier, about the hotel "existing outside of time and space."

Already, disparate lives are beginning to converge when Melissa, who previously lived in Vancouver and seemed to be part of a different narrative arc, meets Walter. It seems plausible that the Hotel Caiette might serve as the center point at which the novel's different stories and characters will come together and become part of some intertwined, larger story. Raphael's comment about the hotel "existing outside of time and space" supports this idea: the hotel brings together stories, characters, and lives that don't clearly intersect in physical reality.

The narrative returns to the present day (2005). Although Walter was very happy all throughout his first year in Caiette, the graffiti he sees now casts a darkness over the place. He notes that the graffiti was written backward on the **glass**, implying that whoever did it intended for it to be viewed from the lobby. Later that day, Raphael commends Walter on his detailed incident report. He agrees with Walter that the graffiti is disturbing. They investigate the surveillance footage, though it's not very useful, showing only a hooded figure approaching the glass panel and scrawling their nefarious message there before leaving less than 10 seconds later. Raphael asks if Walter has witnessed any strange behavior lately, and Walter admits that the night houseman, Paul, has been acting somewhat odd.

The graffiti seems to remind Walter that the hotel doesn't actually exist in a magical, remote utopia: it's part of a larger society and, as such, is just as susceptible to the violence, suffering, and chaos that plagues the rest of the world. Walter's comment about Paul acting weird reveals that Paul's story, too, leads to the Hotel Caiette. If Walter's insinuation that Paul is responsible for the graffiti is correct, this would make sense, as Paul seems to have a tendency toward self-destructive behavior, and vandalizing one's place of work certainly fits into this category.

Paul has been at the hotel for three months. He doesn't smile but does his job well. Walter recalls how, the night the graffiti appeared, Paul came back from his break at 3:30 a.m., his eyes immediately drifting toward the **window**. Paul asked about it, and Walter found there to be something rehearsed about Paul's tone. Paul asked if "Mr. Alkaitis" saw the graffiti, gesturing toward Leon Prevant. Walter corrected him, informing Paul that Alkaitis's flight was delayed and he had yet to arrive. Paul avoided eye contact before making his way to Vincent to see if she needed him to change the kegs.

It seems as though Paul is (badly) trying to hide the fact that he vandalized the hotel's glass wall. If this is true, Paul's decision to ask about "Mr. Alkaitis" implies that the message was intended to be a threat against this man, though it's unclear what the man did or how Paul knows him at this point in the novel.

Back in the present, Walter explains to Raphael that he found it unusual that Paul would have studied the guest list to know that Alkaitis was supposed to arrive that day. He also found it odd that Paul's eyes drifted immediately toward the vandalized wall. Walter's shift continues that night. Paul continues to clean. Walter finishes his incident report and goes through his end of shift checklist. He tries not to think about the graffiti. Sometime after four, after Leon Prevant leaves to go to bed, Jonathan Alkaitis arrives at the hotel. All the staff pull themselves together to greet this important guest.

That Walter is suspicious of Paul's curiosity about Alkaitis reinforces the idea that Paul is responsible for the graffiti. It's unclear what, if anything, Alkaitis did to deserve such a message. At any rate, that Paul would write something disturbing without thinking about how the message would affect other guests shows that he's still a self-centered, careless character. The upset Paul's message has caused and the staff's hurried attempts to appear unfazed for Alkaitis suggest that Alkaitis is an important figure at the hotel.

Walter will be interviewed on numerous occasions in the future about Alkaitis, though his answers will never satisfy his interviewers. There just isn't much to say about Alkaitis: he'd first come to the hotel with his (now deceased) wife and had become enamored with and bought the place. He lived in New York and visited the hotel only a few times a year. Alkaitis "carried himself with the tedious confidence of all people with money," dressed well, and was reasonably in shape. None of these details, though, would suggest that he would spend the end of his life in prison.

Walter's reflections reveal that Alkaitis is an important figure because he's an exceptionally wealthy man who owns the Hotel Caiette. They also reveal that, at some point in the future, Alkaitis's life will take a drastic turn when he's convicted of a crime and sentenced to life in prison, though at this point it's unclear what those charges will be. The juxtaposition between Alkaitis's "tedious confidence" and his later run-in with the law suggests that outward appearances aren't necessarily an indicator of the type of person someone is, or of what misdeeds they are capable of committing.

In the present day, Alkaitis sits down at the bar and strikes up a conversation with Vincent, who is trying her best to be magnetic and engaging. The narrative shifts to Leon Prevant's perspective. At 4:30 that morning (shortly before Alkaitis's arrival), Prevant returns to bed, beside his wife, Marie, who is sleeping. He's had too much whiskey in an effort to fall asleep, but the graffiti has rendered him wide awake and fearful. He considers telling Marie he's worried about money but thinks better of it.

Here, the novel presents two characters who go to great lengths to conceal their inner anxieties. Beneath her outwardly engaging, light attempts at small talk with Alkaitis, Vincent is likely still upset and rattled from Paul's graffiti. Similarly, Leon keeps his financial worries a secret from his wife. He also uses alcohol to lull himself into forgetting them.

Leon had booked a stay at the Hotel Caiette as a surprise for Marie to celebrate their anniversary. The couple was immediately enchanted by the hotel and spent their days soaking in the lobby's live music and the allure of the surrounding wilderness. Leon planned to relax on the trip but now finds this to be an impossible feat as, right before he and Marie left home, he'd heard rumors of a merger at work. Leon has a strong feeling that he'll lose his job because of it: Leon is 58, and "senior enough to be expensive, and close enough to retirement" to be fired without weighing too heavily on anyone's conscience. He and Marie just bought an above-budget house in Florida, which they planned to move into after Leon retired to avoid the New York winters and taxes. Leon stays awake until nearly 7:00 a.m.

Leon's financial anxieties reveal the limitations of the Hotel Caiette's serenity and isolation: though Leon manages to push aside his worries temporarily, the relief is fleeting, and his money issues remain very real and of pressing concern to him. Leon's anxiety and insomnia suggest that he feels guilty about purchasing a new house and not being more frugal with his money: he's kept awake by the haunting feeling of buyer's remorse, of giving in to greed and desire instead of planning for the worst.

Walter returns to the lobby the next evening to find Leon dining at the bar with Alkaitis. Alkaitis tells Leon that he owns the hotel and that he works in finance. The narrative flashes forward to Alkaitis's sentencing. In her "victim impact statement," a woman recalls how Alkaitis "made you feel like you were joining a secret club." Leon will come to agree with the woman's sentiment, though he also admits that it's Alkaitis himself who is so captivating. Alkaitis's trick, Leon will observe, is that he projects such an air of indifference around others that others can't help but ask themselves what Alkaitis thinks of them.

The placement of the flash-forward to Alkaitis's sentence immediately after Alkaitis reveals to Leon that he works in finance suggests that Alkaitis's crime might have something to do with finances or fraud. That this flash-forward occurs as Leon meets Alkaitis for the first time suggests that Leon might become a victim of Alkaitis's crime as well. The observation that the woman will make in her "victim impact statement," combined with Alkaitis's own observations, paints Alkaitis as a sort of conman: he uses flattery, appeals to victims' emotions, and people's shared desire for social acceptance to persuade people to go along with whatever crime it was that he committed.

Back in the present, Alkaitis asks Leon to elaborate on his career in shipping. Leon smiles, explaining that his industry is "largely invisible," however critical it might be in distributing goods across the globe. Alkaitis asks if Leon ever gets distracted by all the shipping routes he has to keep track of. With a laugh, Leon admits that Alkaitis is only the second person ever to have guessed this. Inwardly, he reflects on the first person who intuited his relationship to shipping, Clarissa, Marie's psychic friend from Santa Fe who had visited the couple when Leon was still based in Toronto. Over dinner, Leon had asked Clarissa what it was like to hear so many people's thoughts in a crowded room. Clarissa compared it to shipping: you can choose to tune into conversations, or else let them "become background noise."

Leon's comments about the "largely invisible" characteristic of the shipping industry is a metaphor for the similarly "largely invisible" connections that bind people together: just as people take for granted how goods and materials are shipped across the globe, so too do they take for granted the social and economic systems that bind them together. Clarissa's comment about the choice a psychic has to tune into conversations or let them "become background noise" expands on this same metaphor, alluding to the choice a person has to acknowledge the way their actions have consequences for the people to whom they are connected, or to ignore these connections and act as though one's actions affect oneself alone.

Back in the present, as Walter passes by Alkaitis and Leon again, he observes that the conversation has shifted toward Alkaitis's line of work. Walter engages Larry in conversation to do some more investigating into Paul's demeanor earlier that night. Walter asks if Paul asked Larry about guest arrivals that night, which Larry confirms Paul did do. Walter tells Larry he'll fill him in on everything later before running off to confront Paul, who he's sure is to blame for the graffiti.

Alkaitis seems to be putting Leon at ease by steering the topic of conversation toward something about which Leon is passionate. If Alkaitis is some kind of conman, it would be to his advantage to make Leon feel comfortable, get his guard down, and see what insecurities he can exploit. It's possible that, if the men are talking about Leon's work, some of Leon's current financial anxieties might come up in conversation.

Walter finds Paul cleaning a window in the staff hall and confronts him about the graffiti. Paul feigns innocence, though he's a terrible liar. Walter orders Paul to pack his things and leave, or else he'll call the police. Paul tries to apologize, stuttering something about having "debts," but he doesn't reveal why he committed the act of vandalism. Walter berates Paul, demanding to know if he'd bothered to think of Vincent before committing the indecent act, as it was she who was kind enough to get Paul the interview at Hotel Caiette.

Unlike Alkaitis, who, apparently, is capable of presenting an image of calm, charm, and confidence, Paul is a bad liar. Paul's odd comment about having "debts" might imply that someone paid him to write the message, though it's not entirely clear. If Paul was bribed to write the message, this is yet another instance in which Paul acts out of self-interest, with little regard for how his actions affect others.

Walter trudges through the remainder of his shift and meets with Raphael in the morning. Walter tells Raphael he saw Paul loading his belongings onto a boat. As the men talk, Walter painfully realizes that Raphael doesn't like him very much. The men part ways, and Walter thinks about what Paul said earlier, about having "debts," and wonders if Paul meant that he needed the hotel job, or if someone paid him to write the message.

Walter's disappointment at realizing that Raphael doesn't like him reflects a larger human need for acceptance and community. That Walter wonders if Paul was paid to write the message reflects the doubts he has about what happened. Regardless of any lingering doubts he might have, though, Walter fails to investigate the matter any further. It's as though Walter is willing to turn a blind eye to the doubts he has if it makes things more convenient for himself, which shows how people can delude themselves into accepting a narrative that justifies their actions and ignores their transgressions.

Leon Prevant and his wife leave the hotel that morning, and Alkaitis leaves two days later. When Walter comes in that night, he finds Khalil tending bar. Khalil informs him that Vincent took a sudden vacation. The next day, Vincent informs Raphael that she won't be returning to the hotel. The vandalized **glass** panel is eventually replaced. A year passes. The following spring, Ella Kaspersky, a Chicago businesswoman who is a frequent guest, checks into the hotel. Alkaitis always goes out of his way to avoid Ella, though why he does so is a mystery.

Vincent's sudden departure seems connected to the appearance of the threatening graffiti, though the precise connection remains unclear. The replacement of the glass panel might symbolize how readily people forget or fail to learn from their transgressions—especially how those mistakes harm others. When the glass wall is replaced, it's as though the message—and the violence it evoked and the upset it caused—never happened. Alkaitis's feud with Kaspersky remains mysterious, though it might be related to whatever crime Alkaitis is convicted of in the future.

Upon Ella's arrival, Walter makes sure that Alkaitis isn't in town, and it's at this point that Walter realizes that Alkaitis hasn't visited the hotel in quite some time. Once things settle down in the lobby that night, Walter Googles Alkaitis and finds photos of him at a charity fundraiser, Vincent by his side. The caption beneath the photo reads "Jonathan Alkaitis with his wife, Vincent."

It seems that Vincent left the hotel the previous year to be with Jonathan Alkaitis. It's plausible that Vincent saw the limitations not having a college degree and working as a bartender placed on her future, recognized a life with Alkaitis as a way out of her current situation, and seized the opportunity. Of course, the knowledge that Alkaitis will eventually be sentenced to life in prison does imply that Vincent's life with Alkaitis likely won't be a happily-ever-after situation for her.

CHAPTER 4: A FAIRY TALE

Swan Dive: "Sanity depends on order," Vincent thinks to herself as she contemplates the routine she's adopted since arriving at Jonathan Alkaitis's enormous home in suburban Greenwich, Connecticut. Vincent's routine consists of rising early, running, and not returning until Jonathan has left for the city. Later in the day, Vincent has Jonathan's driver take her to the train station, where she boards a train for Manhattan, has breakfast, shops, or visits the Metropolitan Museum of Art. After this, she returns home to make herself beautiful for Jonathan's arrival later that evening. Vincent reflects on how much time there is to kill in what she refers to as "the kingdom of money."

Vincent's observation that "sanity depends on order" reflects the novel's larger theme of constructed identity: humans impose order on their lives and personal narratives in order to stay sane and feel purposeful. That Vincent thinks of herself as living in "the kingdom of money" reflects just how vastly different and strange it is to her to not have to worry about money. Whereas her previous life involved worrying about working enough to be able to cover rent and food expenses, her only concerns now are how to fill the endless empty hours of the day.

Vincent once asked Jonathan why they couldn't live in his apartment on Columbus Circle in Manhattan where they stay after going to the theater, but Jonathan explained that he prefers the tranquility of the suburbs. Vincent outwardly agreed, though she really prefers the bustle of the city. Jonathan also reminded her that she'd miss the pool if they moved to New York. Vincent considers her relationship to the pool to be complicated, though, since she swims in it to rid herself of her fear of drowning.

This exchange between Jonathan and Vincent about where to live reveals the inauthenticity of Vincent's communication with Jonathan: she lies about liking the tranquility of suburban Connecticut. She also conceals her fear of drowning from Jonathan. For whatever reason, she feels compelled to keep her thoughts and anxieties a secret from Jonathan, which effectively denies her the opportunity to connect fully with another person and quell some of the pains of social/emotional isolation. In addition, Vincent's fear of drowning hearkens back both to her mother's death and to the book's opening passage.

Crowds: Vincent breaks down her "contract" with Jonathan: she is to be available to him at all times, and beautiful. In return, she can have unlimited access to his credit card, live in a beautiful home, and travel to her heart's content. Jonathan is nearly 40 years older than Vincent, and Vincent knows that she is his "trophy wife."

Vincent and Jonathan's relationship is even more inauthentic than the novel initially presented it to be. Not only is Vincent emotionally reserved around Jonathan, but the entire "marriage" is built on lies and appearances. Vincent and Jonathan aren't legally married, and there's no element of vulnerability or intimacy present: Vincent has to do and appear exactly as Jonathan wishes and, in effect, the true Vincent remains unknown and mysterious to him.

Vincent was swimming when she first met Jonathan's daughter, Claire. It was a cool April evening. Claire's sudden presence at the poolside caught Vincent off-guard, though she knew Claire would be arriving that day. The women greeted each other coldly, with Claire wordlessly handing Vincent a towel. Claire remarked on the oddity of a "girl" (she emphasizes girl) being named Vincent. Vincent informed Claire that her parents, who are both dead, named her after the poet, Edna St. Vincent Millay. Though Claire wasn't happy about her father marrying such a young woman, she agreed to be polite to Vincent.

Claire's comments about Vincent being a "girl" are meant to ridicule the absurdity of Vincent being married to a man nearly 40 years her senior. Claire's promise to behave civilly toward Vincent conceals Claire's inner discomfort about her father being married to someone so close to her own age. It suggests that Claire, like her father, realizes the importance of keeping up appearances.

Ghosts: Vincent's mother used to be a poet. Vincent recalls reading Edna St. Vincent Millay's poem "Renascence" over and over again throughout her childhood. Millay wrote the poem when she was 19, and its success transported her from the poverty of New England to the bohemian, artistic poverty of Greenwich Village. Vincent's mother would commend Millay on "rais[ing] herself into a new life by sheer force of will," which made Vincent wonder how happy her mother was with her own life, so consumed was she with housekeeping and childrearing in the wilderness, when what she must have wanted was to write poetry in the wilderness. Vincent considers the difference between "the idea of wilderness" and "the unglamorous labor of it."

"Renascence," the Millay poem to which Vincent refers, is about a woman's life, suffering, death, and rebirth, and it seems to reflect some of Vincent's mother's anxieties and desires for her own life. Vincent's mother's admiration for St. Vincent Millay stems from the poet's success in drastically changing her life's circumstances, which Vincent takes to mean that her mother is unsatisfied with the domesticity and predictability of her own life. This adds another layer of complexity to Vincent's grief over her mother's death: at this point it's been stated that Vincent's mother died by drowning, but would she have drowned herself intentionally? Was she so unhappy with marriage and childrearing that she took her own life? If this is the case, Vincent might feel somehow responsible for her mother's death, as it was Vincent's very existence that imposed so many limitations on her formerly free-spirited, transient mother.

Vincent believes Vincent's mother couldn't have imagined the "arrangement" Vincent finds herself in now—in a fake marriage with Jonathan, who thinks a marriage will project the idea of stability to the clients whose money he manages, so he gives Vincent a ring to wear. The marriage is fake, though, because Jonathan's wife Suzanne died just three years earlier, and he's not ready to be married again. Only Vincent and Jonathan know they're not actually married—not even Claire knows the truth.

Vincent is ashamed of what her mother might think of her relationship with Jonathan because it's the exact opposite of what Vincent's mother admired in Millay: Vincent isn't changing her life by her own efforts, but by glomming onto an older, richer man. She's not fiercely independent, like her mother wanted to be; instead, she's become meek, subdued, and wholly dependent on Jonathan. Vincent's thoughts about her mother imply that she regrets becoming so dependent and helpless. That Claire doesn't know her father's marriage is fake shows how false and impersonal their relationship is.

Accomplices: Vincent and Jonathan are having cocktails at a bar in Manhattan with a couple from Colorado, who've invested millions of dollars in Jonathan's fund. Vincent has only been part of Jonathan's world for a few weeks now, and everything seems strange to her. The wife notices Vincent's and Jonathan's rings and offers her congratulations. Vincent makes up a story about getting married at city hall, and Jonathan lies and tells the couple that they plan to honeymoon in Nice and Dubai next week.

The ease with which Vincent concocts a false story about her and Jonathan's wedding shows how accustomed to deceit she's become in her short time as Jonathan's "wife." It also gives the reader more insight into the responsibilities Vincent has in the relationship: she's supposed to make polite, harmless chit-chat around investors, giving the impression that Jonathan is a loving man who's invested in his relationship with his wife.

It's easy for Vincent to lie, since she used to be a bartender. She thinks back to when she first met Jonathan at Hotel Caiette. She'd been bemoaning inwardly a sense of being stuck in life: of a future doomed to work in bars, of wanting to go to college but afraid of loans, and mostly afraid that college might not change anything for her, anyway. When Jonathan spoke to her that night, she saw a chance at a different life, and she took it. She cares about lying about being married, but not enough to exit this new life.

Self-fashioning isn't new for Vincent: she's used to making people feel at ease from her years in the service industry. In fact, it was a willingness to lie and ingratiate herself with others that made her relationship with Jonathan possible in the first place. So far, the novel has depicted Vincent as someone who's had a hard life and who's often been down on her luck, but her willingness to lie and pretend in order to live a life of financial privilege with Jonathan shows that she's just as susceptible to greed and self-serving behaviors as anyone else.

Variations: Jonathan doesn't talk about Suzanne, "his real wife," who had died some years ago, though he and Vincent do talk about their pasts. Vincent tells Jonathan about graffitiing a philosopher's last words on her school **window** when she was 13. He calls her morbid. She leaves out the fact that, when she wrote it, her mother had just died.

That Suzanne is referred to as Jonathan's "real wife" suggests that their emotional relationship was authentic and intimate, unlike Jonathan's relationship with Vincent, which is defined by its superficiality. That Vincent doesn't tell Jonathan about her mother's death underscores this superficiality: though she might disclose to Jonathan vague details about her past, she's very careful not to offer anything that would put her in a position to be honest or vulnerable around him.

Vincent grew up reading newspapers in an effort to become knowledgeable and engaged, but, in this "age of money," she finds herself distracted by the opposite of the reality presented in news stories: a world in which there is no Iraq War, no nuclear tests in North Korea, no terrorist bombings in London. She plays these kind of mind tricks on herself often, envisioning alternate worlds.

Vincent's habit of imagining alternate worlds seems to be a metaphor for the way she thinks about her own life: things could be completely different had she not met, courted, and allowed herself to be swept away by Jonathan Alkaitis. That Vincent is so preoccupied by how things might have been implies that she's not fully satisfied with the reality of her current situation.

Shield: Vincent recalls one of the first things she bought at the beginning of her time in the kingdom of money, a Canon HV10. She's been recording videos since her mother disappeared, when her Grandma Caroline presented her with a Panasonic video camera. Caroline explained that when she went through a difficult time in her youth, a photographer friend gave her a camera to take pictures until she felt better, which had worked. Caroline said that "the lens can function as a shield between [Vincent] and the world." Shortly after this, Vincent began taking videos, recording five minute, still segments of the beach in Caiette, and the places she would go to throughout her life, including the infinity pool at Jonathan's suburban Connecticut home.

Vincent seems to have taken Grandma Caroline's suggestion that the camera "lens can function as a shield between [Vincent] and the world" to heart: it's only through her videos that she's honest and unburdened by artifice. In her videos, she sees and interacts with the world in an authentic way; in all other settings, though most notably in her marriage to Jonathan, she is a performer, appearing and behaving as others expect her to behave. When Vincent must interact with Jonathan's social circle, she has to play the part of the perfect, glamorous wife; when she's alone with her camera, she can be herself.

Shadows: Jonathan introduces his "shadow" to Vincent as they sit together on the terrace at the villa in Nice. Yvette Bertolli, one of Jonathan's investors, who had accompanied them, has just retired to the guest bedroom. Jonathan tells Vincent that "success attracts a certain kind of attention," specifically a negative kind. After Anya, the cook, brings them coffee on a silver tray, Jonathan tells Vincent about Ella Kaspersky, whom he'd met in 1999 at the Hotel Caiette. At first Ella had expressed interest in investing with Jonathan, but she suddenly decided that Jonathan's returns seemed fraudulent. Vincent counters that this could also just mean that Jonathan is good at his job, with which he agrees.

This section offers some clarifying information about Kaspersky and Alkaitis's prickly relationship. Given what the reader knows about Alkaitis's future behind bars, it's plausible that there's some truth to Kaspersky's claims about the fraudulent activity involved in Jonathan's investing firm's returns. Jonathan and Vincent's relationship is built almost entirely on performance and inauthenticity, so it's also plausible that both of them are lying here: Jonathan is lying to Vincent about the legitimacy of his investment firm, and Vincent is lying to Jonathan when she states her belief that Jonathan's perfect returns are evidence of his skill. In reality, Jonathan could be involved in illegal activities, and Vincent might be more inclined to believe Kaspersky's side of the story. If Vincent really does suspect Jonathan of fraud, things become more complicated, as keeping this information to herself makes her indirectly complicit in whatever illegal activities exist.

Jonathan continues, telling Vincent how Kaspersky contacted the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC), and that the commission investigated him, though they didn't find anything suspicious. Kaspersky didn't stop there, though, and has continued to tell other people about Jonathan's supposedly fraudulent business practices. Vincent wonders whether Jonathan can sue Kaspersky for defamation, but Jonathan argues that in his business, reputation is everything, and he can't risk making the headlines.

Jonathan's argument about not wanting to attract negative attention seems rather weak and might make Vincent (and the reader) more suspicious about the nature of Jonathan's business—about whether Kaspersky's accusations are warranted. Jonathan's comments about reputation mattering also speak to the larger philosophy around which he orders his life—that a person's success depends upon an outward appearance of success and positivity. As Jonathan's trophy wife, Vincent contributes to this illusion of success.

Jonathan later realized that Kaspersky's money was an inheritance she had received from her recently deceased father, so it must have been grief that motivated her attempts to discredit him. Jonathan tells Vincent about an "unhinged" letter Kaspersky sent him before asking Vincent if she ever came across Kaspersky online or in Caiette, but Vincent doesn't remember. Vincent theorizes that Kaspersky is probably just jealous of the very successful, wealthy Jonathan. Later on, Vincent stands alone on the terrace to film the Mediterranean, wondering if her current, ambitionless life is enough. Maybe she can continue filming five-minute clips forever, and maybe this will be enough to complete her.

In sharing this detail about the origins of Kaspersky's money, Jonathan seeks to discredit Kaspersky's allegations against him. In Jonathan's logic, Kaspersky's "unhinged" allegations are grounded more in emotion than fact. Jonathan's decision to tell Vincent about these allegations could be his attempt to gauge her loyalty to him: had Vincent responded to Jonathan's story with anything but sympathy for his supposed plight, it might threaten her position in his life. When looked at from this angle, Vincent's outward faith in the legitimacy of Jonathan's firm becomes somewhat suspicious: does she mean it when she says that Kaspersky is jealous of Jonathan's success, or is she simply telling Jonathan what he wants to hear, knowing that her own financial stability depends on her ability to stay in Jonathan's good graces? That Vincent follows this odd interaction with Jonathan with a recording session implies that she needs to disconnect from society and be alone with her thoughts for a while, which supports the idea that her support of Jonathan was feigned. Vincent's anxieties about living an ambitionless life also hint at the idea that Vincent is becoming disillusioned by the disconnected, artificial quality of her life with Jonathan.

The Astronaut: Vincent meets Jonathan's employees later that summer at his Fourth of July party, which is an elaborate annual affair involving charter buses, a live band, and caterers. Vincent asks Jonathan if the asset management team is "a little standoffish," gesturing toward a man named Oskar who tries to juggle cups at the edge of the party, surrounded by his team. Jonathan explains that "they work on a different floor."

The asset management team's "standoffish" behavior might be another clue that there's something fishy going on with Alkaitis's business. Jonathan's comment about these people "work[ing] on a different floor" might suggest that there's something different—and perhaps illegitimate—about this sector of the business, though this is mostly speculation.

After the guests leave, Jonathan and Vincent sit by the pool, dipping their feet in the **water**. Jonathan calls Vincent "poised," to which she inwardly muses that it's her "job" to be poised, though she admits that this is unfair, since she actually does like (though not love) Jonathan. She muses internally whether there needs to be love to make a relationship real.

Vincent seems conflicted about her existence as a trophy wife: on the one hand, she feels somewhat oppressed by Jonathan's expectations for her, which is why she reacts with inward disdain about his comment about her being "poised." On the other hand, Vincent's admission that she really does like Jonathan seems to suggest that she acknowledges—if subconsciously—that being in this performative relationship is a decision she has made for herself, and that she's somewhat complicit in her own oppression. She seems conflicted about the ways in which being in this relationship has forced her to settle, personally and morally. Vincent's musings about love pose a larger question about authenticity in relationships: does love make a relationship more real, or are people always pretending, to various degrees?

Mirella: The first winter that Vincent is with Jonathan, they fly to a private party at a club in Miami Beach where Jonathan is a member. The Winter Formal is full of women in gowns and men in tuxedoes. Vincent roams about, playing the part, laughing at bad jokes, smiling. Jonathan has known many of these people for years, and many of the women were friends with his wife, Suzanne. Vincent leaves Jonathan as he talks to a potential investor and makes her way to the bar, where she spots a tall, young woman in a fuchsia dress. The woman introduces herself as Mirella and invites Vincent to join her on the terrace.

Vincent must feel particularly out of place at the Winter Formal since all the people Jonathan knows there knew his first wife, Suzanne, but Vincent aptly disguises her unease, aware of the expectations of the role she must play as part of her arrangement with Jonathan. In Mirella, Vincent seems to sense an internal unrest similar to her own, and this might be why she gravitates toward her.

Vincent notices a man in a dark suit has followed them out to the terrace and correctly assumes that he is Mirella's bodyguard. Vincent asks if it's suffocating to be followed, and Mirella admits that she hardly even notices him anymore, though she hates to be the kind of person "to whom other people are invisible." Vincent wonders how long it takes for people to become invisible, thinking about Jonathan's house staff. Mirella asks Vincent who her husband is and, on hearing Vincent's answer, reveals, with a smile, that her boyfriend, a Saudi prince named Faisal, invests with Jonathan.

Vincent's question about what it's like to have a bodyguard underscores the novel's larger theme of the clarity of mind a person can achieve when they are alone, especially in contrast to the stifling, distracting effects society has on a person. Mirella's response that she's gotten used to being followed underscores the idea that being a part of society and larger systems can prevent a person from examining themselves and the world around them. Mirella's comment about hating to be a person "to whom other people are invisible" suggests that she's ashamed of the ways in which her privilege has made her complicit in larger systems of oppression. Still, she chooses to remain in the system. Mirella and Vincent are in similar situations: both women have achieved a higher level of privilege due to the relationships they have with rich, older men.

Mirella and Faisal and Jonathan and Vincent go out for dinner sometimes after this initial meeting. Faisal is elegant and doesn't work; he and Mirella moved to New York because he feels "free" there, disconnected from his many relatives. He'd been something of a disappointment to his family, wanting to learn about music and the arts instead of worrying about marriage and family. Since his successful investments with Alkaitis, however, he has somewhat redeemed himself in his family's eyes.

That Faisal's investments with Alkaitis have redeemed him in his family's eyes illustrates one of the allures of wealth. It might be tempting to pass off Alkaitis and his investors as greedy, immoral people, but the novel illustrates that people have drastically different ways of seeking to acquire more wealth, and that everyone is capable of letting greed and social acceptance inform their decisions.

One day, a month or so after they first meet, Vincent takes Mirella to see one of her favorite exhibits at the Met. They talk, and Mirella admits that, despite the fact she and Faisal have lived all over the world, her life has been virtually the same everywhere, just with a different "background scenery." Mirella asks Vincent if she came from money, and Vincent tells her she did not. Mirella admits that she didn't either and explains that, since experiencing wealth, she's come to think of money as "its own country." Inwardly, Vincent contemplates that the big difference between hers and Mirella's entry into money is that Mirella actually loves Faisal, whereas she doesn't love Jonathan.

Mirella's comments about the unchanging quality of her life abroad suggest the limitations of money in changing a person's identity. That neither Mirella nor Vincent come from a privileged background helps explain why they remain invested in their relationships to their respective older men—both women know what it's like to have nothing, which makes them all the more terrified of losing everything. Vincent's thoughts about the absence of love in her relationship compared to Mirella's shows how dissatisfied she is with her relationship with Jonathan—it seems likely that Vincent won't be able to ignore these feelings of regret and disappointment through material indulgences, lavish vacations, and spending sprees indefinitely. Despite the fact that having money makes things easy and fun, Vincent seems to desire an authentic, meaningful life that can't be bought.

The Investor: One of Jonathan's investors with whom Vincent doesn't get along is Lenny Xavier, a music producer from L.A. As they walk into a restaurant to join Lenny and Lenny's wife for dinner one night, Alkaitis explains that Lenny is his "most important investor." Lenny is dressed in an expensive suit with intentionally messy hair, and his wife, Tiffany, is beautiful but hardly speaks.

The juxtaposition of Lenny's expensive suit with his intentionally messy hair shows just how much thought and effort he puts into his external appearance. This description suggests that Lenny is shallow and artificial, which also might mean that he's untrustworthy. Given that he's Alkaitis's "most important investor," it seems plausible that he might develop into an important character.

As the night draws on, a drunk Lenny engages Vincent in conversation, telling her about a girl he once knew, an aspiring singer, who failed to "recognize opportunity." Vincent nods, feeling uncomfortable as she recalls the opportunity she recognized when Jonathan walked into the Hotel Caiette so many nights ago. Vincent asks where the girl is now, and Lenny scoffs, saying he doesn't "give[] a fuck" where Annika is now.

Vincent's feelings of discomfort in response to Lenny's comment about "recogniz[ing] opportunity" suggests that she feels guilty about using Jonathan for self-serving reasons, and about how her role as his wife forces her to behave inauthentically. It seems plausible that the Annika Lenny is speaking about now is the same Annika whom Paul met in Toronto, so this scene presents another example of previously disparate characters converging in an unexpected, almost fateful way.

Lenny continues to talk about Annika, berating her. He explains that Annika was beautiful, enigmatic, and talented. They were on track to release an album when, suddenly, Annika told them she was quitting because the production studio was "violating her artistic integrity," which Lenny found ludicrous. These days, Lenny says, Annika is touring Canada in a van, playing shows in small, nothing towns. He scoffs, reasserting Annika's inability to recognize an opportunity, unlike him—he immediately recognized the opportunity of investing with Jonathan, once he "figured out how his fund worked." Jonathan immediately suggests that he and Lenny not "bore [their] lovely wives with investment talk." Vincent thinks Jonathan has been listening to Lenny talk to her, afraid that he'll "reveal" something Jonathan doesn't want him to reveal.

Annika's rejection of Lenny and his production company is significant because it's the first time a character has actively dismissed an opportunity on the grounds that it would make them complicit in actions and ideologies that go against their personal values. In contrast to Annika, for example, Vincent continues to take advantage of the opportunities being with Jonathan affords her, even though she feels ashamed of her cushy, privileged lifestyle at times. Lenny's odd comment about wanting to work with Jonathan after he "figured out how his fund worked" hints at the possible illegal nature of the fund. Perhaps the claims that Ella Kaspersky has been making for years (and which Jonathan has always denied) have some truth to them. This is also supported by Jonathan's sudden eagerness to change the subject. Regardless, Vincent either doesn't see anything suspicious in Lenny's comment, or she chooses not to understand it in order to keep the peace with Jonathan.

Poolside: It's summer, about six months from the end of Vincent's stay in "the kingdom of money." Faisal has returned to Riyadh to spend time with his sick father, during which time Mirella takes the car to Greenwich every day to spend time with Vincent beside the pool. During one of these visits, Mirella asks Vincent to tell her about where she's from, and Vincent, who is in the process of filming some trees, explains that she "grew up on a road with two dead ends." She explains that her hometown was only accessible by boat or floatplane: that it was all forest surrounded by **water**, and nothing else. In fact, it was so remote, they didn't even have a TV until she was 13.

It's symbolically significant that Vincent spends time with Mirella beside the pool. The novel uses water to symbolize isolation, and Vincent typically goes to the pool to be alone with her thoughts and demons. Inviting Mirella to share this space with her suggests that Vincent is willing to open up to another person in a way she hasn't before. Vincent's comment about how she "grew up on a road with two dead ends" is literally true (Caiette was remote and not accessible by car) but also reflects the hopelessness with which Vincent has always regarded her life and her prospects: she saw no way out of her circumstances, no avenue for upward mobility. This helps to explain why she stays in her loveless, phony relationship with Jonathan: because opportunity has so rarely come her way, and she's afraid of not finding anything this good again.

Mirella recalls her lightly depressing but mostly boring upbringing in a duplex outside Cleveland. Vincent tells Mirella her mother drowned when she was 13, and she appreciates when Mirella simply nods in response. When their conversation steers away from the past, Vincent is glad, since it's hard for her to talk about Caiette.

Vincent and Mirella seem to understand each other so authentically that they don't need words to make their feelings known to each other. The difficulty Vincent has in discussing the past gives more insight into the lingering trauma and grief she carries with her in the aftermath of her mother's death and the other letdowns she's suffered in life.

Mirella explains how she and Faisal met: Mirella had been a struggling actress in Los Angeles when she ran into Faisal at a party and thought, "why not you?" Vincent recalls how she met Jonathan when she was a bartender; her father had just died of a heart attack, and she'd stuck around Caiette to take the job at the hotel, though she felt immediately "claustrophobic" working in her hometown alongside her childhood friend and brother. Mirella remarks that she hadn't known Vincent had a brother, and Vincent explains that Paul isn't really part of her life before segueing into a recollection of the disturbing graffiti that appeared on the Hotel Caiette's **glass** wall that night, and that she suspects that Paul did it.

Mirella's initial encounter with Faisal mirrors Vincent's initial encounter with Alkaitis: they were both struggling financially, down on their luck, and happened upon a rich, older man who was willing to sweep them away into a life of opportunity, financial excess, and ease. Until this point in the novel, Vincent's feelings about Paul and the role he might have played in the graffiti remain unknown, but it's clear now that she's estranged from him and still deeply disturbed by the graffiti.

Mirella agrees that the graffiti message is horrible but doesn't know why it bothers Vincent so much. Vincent explains that the thing that bothered her about her mother's death is that she never knew whether or not it was an accident. That Paul—who is aware of this uncertainty—would scrawl a message connected to suicide on a **window** with "that **water** shimmering on the other side" is what bothers her.

Vincent's remarks clarify what haunts her most about her mother's death: that she'll never know for certain whether it was planned or an accident—if her mother met a tragic fate, or knowingly and willingly abandoned her. Paul's message inadvertently alluded to this insecurity, and she feels hurt and betrayed that Paul would so carelessly advertise suicide without any regard for how it would affect her.

Inwardly, Vincent recalls how Jonathan had left her a $100 tip that fateful night at the Hotel Caiette, with his business card folded up inside the bill. Looking back, while the gesture was "mortifying," she "appreciated the clarity of his intentions," of his willingness to make their "transactional arrangement" known.

Rather ironically, Alkaitis's initial proposition to Vincent is one of the most authentic and straightforward interactions they will have in their relationship: it will be rare for her to know Jonathan's true intentions after his initial proposal of their "transactional arrangement."

Soho: During the last summer of money, Vincent and Mirella meet up in Soho, spending some time in Faisal and Mirella's loft before shopping. It begins to rain, and they seek cover in an espresso bar. In this moment, Vincent realizes that she suddenly feels at ease for the first time in her life. She imagines "**ghosts** of [her] earlier selves" staring at her in her expensive, beautiful clothes.

The "ghosts of [her] earlier selves" Vincent sees are reflective of the guilt she feels at becoming part of a system of greed and self-interest. Just like Mirella, who hated becoming a person who doesn't see other people (by which she means the staff or lower classes), Vincent hates that she's become reliant on materialism and excess.

CHAPTER 5: OLIVIA

Olivia, a painter, stands on the street in Soho as Vincent and Mirella pass by. Olivia came here because it's the site of a doorway she once passed through in the late 1950s, when Jonathan's brother was looking for models. Now, in 2008, Olivia takes shelter from the impending rain under an awning.

The appearance of Olivia introduces a new character whose life will converge with the existing storylines: Olivia becomes connected with Vincent and Mirella as they pass by on their walk through Soho, and she apparently has connections to Alkaitis as well, since she knew of Alkaitis's brother in the 1950s.

The narrative flashes back to 1958, when Olivia is a young artist living in Manhattan. Olivia buzzes her way into Lucas's studio by simply saying "it's me," into the buzzer. Lucas Alkaitis is an artist "on the run from the suburbs," like so many other people his age. Still, Olivia has met lots of "fake painters" and knows Lucas to be the real thing. Currently, Lucas is working on a series of nudes—of men and women sitting on a sofa. Though Olivia finds the paintings to be "ravishing," she finds Lucas himself to be rather cliched in appearance and mannerisms.

Olivia knows that there's a lot of pretense and artifice in the art world, but she recognizes Lucas to be legitimately talented. That Olivia observes a distinct difference between Lucas and his paintings suggests that Lucas feels freer to be himself in his work; in contrast, the way he presents himself in person is contrived and stiff. The fraudulent experience of existing versus the liberating honesty of art may be seen in Vincent's video recordings as well: she's poised and practiced when she's in society, but she's more honest when she's alone with her camera.

When Olivia arrives at Lucas's studio, she tells him she'd like to model for him. Lucas is pleased and offers to pay Olivia, but she offers her own proposition: he can paint her if she can paint him. Olivia is an artist with mild success and gallery representation and is working on a portrait series of her own. Lucas humors the proposition for a moment before declining.

The transactional nature of Olivia's proposal is a blunt example of the way people use others for personal gain, though the arrangement she outlines for Lucas is at least mutually beneficial.

Sometime later, Olivia is in her studio painting her friend, Renata, who makes up **ghost** stories to pass the time. Suddenly, Lucas arrives at the studio, apparently having changed his mind about posing. Olivia finishes with Renata as Lucas investigates Olivia's paintings. Renata leaves to pick up her kid and Lucas reluctantly takes off his clothing to pose. Beneath his clothing, he is "skinny and unpleasantly pale." Olivia asks Lucas to reposition his arm, but Lucas just smiles and does nothing, and Olivia catches a glimpse of the bruised veins that stretch across his inner elbow. She proceeds to paint the bruises.

The novel uses ghosts to symbolize guilt and haunting. Olivia and Renata's propensity for telling ghost stories seems more playful, but perhaps it foreshadows guilt that will plague one or both of them in the future. Lucas's bruised veins imply that he suffers from intravenous drug abuse. His unwillingness to show these marks to Olivia suggests that he feels guilty or ashamed of his addiction and tries to hide it from the world.

Five months later, at the opening of Olivia's show, Lucas corners her, irate, and calls her a "liar," though, in only 10 months, he will overdose behind a restaurant. Olivia remembers going to one of his shows right before he died and telling him she liked one of his paintings. She saw Jonathan Alkaitis at that show, looking very suburban and out of place. Lucas introduces them, and Jonathan calls out Olivia for lying about liking Lucas's paintings. Inwardly, Olivia admits that the paintings are unoriginal and on the nose. She says she was just trying to be polite.

Olivia betrays Lucas's trust by painting and putting on display the drug addiction he has tried desperately to conceal from the world. It's unclear whether Olivia's decision to paint Lucas's bruised veins stemmed from a desire for honesty, or perhaps from her belief that such a painting would be provocative and attract a lot of attention. If the latter is true, Olivia has used Lucas's pain for personal gain. That the young Jonathan Alkaitis calls out Olivia for lying about liking Lucas's paintings suggests that Olivia isn't fully committed to artistic integrity and authenticity—that she is just as prone to dishonesty and moral compromise as anyone else.

Lucas's funeral was small, in Greenburgh, where his family lived. Olivia hadn't known about his death until a month after it happened. Her life was chaotic then, and she was often poor, behind on rent, and needing to call her sister, Monica, for help. In the midst of these troubles, 40 years later, one of her paintings, *Lucas with Shadows*, sold at an auction for $200,000.

That Olivia earns $200,000 from her painting of Lucas means that she has benefited financially from exploiting him and his substance abuse problem. This is morally problematic, regardless of whether her original intentions behind painting Lucas were honest and purely artistically motivated.

In the aftermath of this good fortune, Olivia rents an old house in Monticello, New York. She sits there with Monica, who suggests that she invest the money. By some strange fateful connection, the man with whom Monica invests her savings is Jonathan Alkaitis, Lucas's brother. Olivia tells Jonathan who she is when she calls him, and, to her surprise, he remembers that night at the gallery. Olivia invites him to lunch, which he accepts, and they continue to see each other a few times over the following years. Jonathan likes talking about Lucas, whom he didn't know that well because of their age difference. In another meeting, Jonathan discloses to Olivia that he bought her painting of Lucas, having hunted it down from the first buyer, and that it's now hanging in his apartment in the city. Olivia is immensely moved.

This is another odd coincidence in the novel that leads to the unlikely intersection of seemingly disparate narratives: Olivia benefits financially from the money she made by exploiting Lucas, and then, by chance, the man to whom she's referred to invest her newfound wealth is Lucas's brother. It's an unlikely coincidence and probably wouldn't happen in real life, but the novel uses it to show how interconnected people are to each other, and how every action has a corresponding consequence that has the ability to affect others. Interestingly, though Olivia and Jonathan do form something of a friendship with each other, the friendship seems to appeal to both parties for self-serving reasons: Jonathan uses Olivia to hear stories about his deceased brother, and Olivia might choose to tell Jonathan these stories because she feels bad for doing wrong by Lucas so many years ago and wants to absolve herself of her guilt.

Olivia continues to recall memories with Jonathan. In 2003, when they meet for dinner, Jonathan is no longer wearing a wedding ring, and Olivia takes this to mean that Suzanne, whom she's never met, is dead. It's a sad moment.

Despite Olivia's and Jonathan's possibly self-serving reasons for being friends, the fact that Jonathan feels comfortable enough around Olivia to tell her about Suzanne's death suggests that they've developed an authentic, close bond.

Three months before his arrest, Jonathan invites Olivia on a yacht trip with him and his second wife, Vincent. Olivia compliments Jonathan on Vincent, calling her lovely and praising her ability to make cocktails. Jonathan says that Vincent would be good at anything she did, and Olivia wonders what it would be like to be good at everything; lately, she's doubted even her ability to paint.

Olivia's self-doubt shows how the identity she presents to the world (painter, artist, creative) doesn't necessarily align with or guarantee the prolonged existence of a matching, internalized identity. Sometimes the things a person proclaims themself to be is a deluded attempt to impose order and structure on a chaotic world.

Jonathan and Olivia continue to talk about Vincent. Jonathan observes that Vincent's talent is that "she sees what a given situation requires, and she adapts herself accordingly." The comment makes Olivia uneasy, as it seems as though Jonathan is describing "a disappearing act," one in which Vincent and her real personality are dissolved into Jonathan's life. Olivia pretends to be interested in what Jonathan has to say about Vincent, though she inwardly decides that Vincent is not "a serious person."

Olivia's reservations about Vincent's ability to mold herself to fit Jonathan's expectations parallel Vincent's own reservations about the restrictions her new life imposes on her. The ability to "adapt[]" that Jonathan so admires in Vincent is only possible if Vincent performs "a disappearing act," denying herself the choice to live authentically. Still, Olivia's reservations imply that it's possible for a person to live authentically: that being a successful member of society doesn't require everyone to "see[] what a given situation requires," and "[adapt]" themselves to those requirements, even though life repeatedly pressures people to lie, be polite, or make moral compromises in order to ingratiate themselves to others, be liked, and survive.

CHAPTER 6: THE COUNTERLIFE

The words "no star burns forever" are carved into the wall next to Alkaitis's bunk. His cellmate, Hazelton, explains that Roberts, a man who was there before Alkaitis, wrote them. Alkaitis was arrested in December of 2008 and sent to a medium-security prison in Florence, South Carolina. There's a maximum-security prison there, as well as a hospital, which frightens Alkaitis, as "it's the place where old men disappear." He gets letters from journalists who ask him what it's like to be sentenced to 170 years in prison. He doesn't answer them but inwardly decides "it feels like delirium," likening it to a time in his 20s when he had a bad fever.

Alkaitis probably relates to the words carved on his cell wall: he was a "star" for a prolonged length of time before he was arrested, convicted, and extinguished. The hospital Alkaitis fears is likely somewhere old men go when they're too sick to live among the prison's general population any longer. Alkaitis's fear of the hospital reflects his broader fear of mortality. His comment that being sentenced to 170 years in prison "feels like delirium" suggests the unreality of his situation: it's too extreme for him to wrap his mind around.

FCI Florence Medium isn't all that bad: nobody has tried to kill Alkaitis, and he's taken up jogging and weightlifting and has never been in better shape in his life. He didn't have time to read in the outside world, but now he's joined a book club led by a visiting professor, and he reads and discusses the works of F. Scott Fitzgerald. Alkaitis sleeps better in prison, no longer awake late into the night being anxious about being arrested.

Ironically, imprisonment gives Alkaitis more mental freedom and clarity, since before he was arrested, he was perpetually haunted by the fear of one day being arrested. The outer world was full of anxieties and distractions, and here his main task is to sit and reckon with himself. Alkaitis's newfound free time mirrors Vincent's entry into the so-called kingdom of money: both characters are thrust into a new, unstructured, and unreal world onto which they are tasked with imposing order and meaning. Just as Vincent had to learn how to fill the many hours in her day as a wealthy, unemployed woman, Jonathan must learn to structure the remainder of his days in prison.

During one visit with Julie Freeman, a journalist who is writing a book about Alkaitis, Freeman asks Alkaitis why he never bothered to flee the country if he was afraid of being arrested. He reveals that the thought never occurred to him, though he has other regrets: he wishes he had more friends as an adult, though he did enjoy the company of several of his investors, like Olivia and Faisal, though Faisal is now dead. The people with whom he associates these days are not people he respects, though he recognizes the hypocrisy of this stance. He recalls a conversation he had with a convicted bank robber named Nemirovsky over breakfast, in which Nemirovsky described money as a "game," a stance with which Alkaitis agrees: money is a game, and it's one "he knew how to play."

It's possible Alkaitis never thought to flee the country because he hadn't imagined a reality in which he was caught and punished for his crimes: he made the choice to move through life believing he would never be caught because to do otherwise would mean giving in to the constant, haunting presence of anxiety and paranoia. Alkaitis deluded himself into believing he was invincible in order to not crumple under the psychological strain of fear. Alkaitis's comments about money seem to confirm that his crime involves money/finances—perhaps Kaspersky's accusations about the illegitimacy of his firm were correct all along. Alkaitis's agreement with Nemirovsky that money is a "game" suggests a detachment from reality: believing that money is a game in which he is a player absolves him of having any moral responsibilities. If money is a game, it's detached from reality; and if it's detached from reality, it means he can't wrong anybody by defrauding them—not really.

Thinking about Julie Freeman's question about fleeing the country, Alkaitis reflects on his habit of daydreaming about his "counterlife," of a world in which things had panned out differently for him. Maybe he fled to the United Arab Emirates, a place he so enjoyed. Maybe he pretends not to know what Claire is talking about when she confronts him the day after the office holiday party. Maybe, early the next morning, pretending everything is normal, he gives himself a buzz cut, wears a hat and sunglasses, and gets a ride down to the street with a window washer, whom he bribes with money. Maybe then he might board a flight to Dubai and escape his old life.

Alkaitis's "counterlife" is completely detached from reality. It functions more as an escapist fantasy than an outline of the different, more morally upstanding choices Alkaitis might have made to avoid being arrested. The alternate reality that Alkaitis constructs in this counterlife illustrates the regret he feels at being arrested, but not any remorse about committing crimes in the first place. It's not an examination of wrongdoing, but an expression of frustration with his current imprisonment. As a result, Alkaitis denies himself the opportunity to reflect on his moral failings.

In their second meeting, Julie Freeman asks Alkaitis about Vincent, and he admits that he doesn't know what became of her. Freeman tries to ask Alkaitis about Claire, but Alkaitis refuses. Inwardly, he reveals that it was Claire who called the FBI, and that she never visits him in prison. He wrote to her when he was first incarcerated, but she responded only with pages of transcripts from the trial, in which he admitted his guilt.

It's painful for Alkaitis to acknowledge that it was Claire who turned him in to the authorities, but his internal lament also fails to account for the fact that he's actually guilty of the crimes for which Claire reported him. Alkaitis deludes himself into thinking he's a victim of a ruthless daughter, not the instigator of a crime himself.

CHAPTER 7: SEAFARER

The Neptune Cumberland: Vincent sets sail on the *Neptune Cumberland*, a container ship, off of Port Newark in August 2013. Geoffrey Bell and Felix Mendoza, the ship's third mate and steward, welcome her aboard. Tonight, Vincent will start working as the ship's assistant cook. Mendoza leaves Vincent to unpack. Vincent's room is plain and small. Everything in it is nailed to the floor or fastened to the wall. As Vincent unpacks her things, including her camera, she thinks about Geoffrey. Although she doesn't believe in "love at first sight," she'll allow for "recognition at first sight" and believes that Geoffrey will play some critical role in her life.

Since the earlier chapter "A Fairy Tale" (outlining the years Vincent spent as Jonathan's wife) took place from 2005-2008, it's reasonable to assume that Vincent goes to sea in the aftermath of her breakup with Jonathan and Jonathan's arrest. Since the novel uses water to represent isolation and self-contemplation, one might interpret Vincent's decision to go to sea as an intentional act of reinvention and self-discovery in the aftermath of what was likely a chaotic break-up with her criminal ex.

It took a lot of work and preparation for Vincent to go to **sea**, and she can hardly believe she's here. Her first night on the job is so hectic that she barely realizes that the ship has left the harbor until she smells the intoxicating smell of the sea. As Vincent peers out across the Atlantic Ocean, she decides she "never want[s] to live on land again."

In the wide, endless sea, Vincent seems to achieve a sort of clarity and calm that were impossible for her when she was preoccupied by the artifice and attention to detail required of her to perform the role of Jonathan Alkaitis's wife. Vincent considers the sea the antithesis of the land and seems to think that the farther she travels from shore, the farther she'll travel from her personal troubles.

The first time they talk, around a week into the voyage, Geoffrey Bell asks Vincent why she wanted to go to **sea**. Geoffrey invites Vincent to walk with him to a corner of the C level deck, which he likes because it doesn't have security cameras, and he finds that life at sea is often so devoid of privacy. Answering Geoffrey's earlier question, Vincent offers a vague explanation of being with a man and the relationship ending badly. Inwardly, she considers going into more detail but settles on being mysterious, revealing only that she "left land because she kept running into the wrong people."

It's possible that Vincent is vague with Geoffrey because she doesn't want to bear the negative stigma of having been associated with the likely now-imprisoned Jonathan Alkaitis. After all, being Jonathan's wife might lead some people to believe that she was complicit in (or at least aware of) the crimes Jonathan was committing.

Last Evenings on Land: The narrative flashes back to the immediate aftermath of the Ponzi scheme's unraveling. Vincent wakes up alone in the apartment in Manhattan, well aware of the fate that is in store for Jonathan. She packs some gowns she thought she could sell, $5,000, and some jewelry. She examines her face in the mirror as she passes by the bathroom. Vincent is almost 28, and she appears noticeably older and tired. She realizes that in all the years of her fake marriage to Jonathan, she has never once not worn makeup.

Knowing that Jonathan will likely be convicted of serious crimes, Vincent goes into survival mode and begins to assemble items to sell. Though she might have grown to like Jonathan over the years, the choices she makes now show that Vincent's biggest priority has always been self-preservation. Vincent's realization about always wearing makeup reveals the falsity of her life over the past three years: in this moment of crisis, she sees how much she's compromised in order to keep her position in Jonathan's world of material excess and financial stability.

Given the current situation with Jonathan, Vincent decides it could be beneficial not to look like herself. She finds a pair of scissors and cuts off all her hair. Later, she purchases a pair of reading glasses. With the new hair, glasses, and lack of makeup, she looks like an entirely different person. Later that week, she finds a place to live outside the city, in a room above a garage. She finds a job bartending in Chelsea, but it's not fulltime, so she also works as a kitchen trainee at a restaurant, which she prefers, since "bartending is a performance." She lives in constant fear that she'll run into former investors.

It's ironic, after years of donning a disguise of makeup and exquisite clothing to perform her role as Jonathan's wife, that Vincent now must don a new disguise. That Vincent believes she looks like a new person after she cuts her hair and removes her makeup underscores the extent to which being with Jonathan forced her to assume an entirely different identity. Years of living this way have made Vincent keenly aware of how out of touch she's become, which is why she's glad not to have to undergo the "performance" of bartending fulltime. Vincent's fear of running into investors might stem from the guilt she feels about not being able to prevent them from falling victim to Alkaitis's Ponzi scheme.

Vincent sees Mirella once, a year and a half after everything blew up. She's bartending in Chelsea when Mirella enters the bar with some friends. She's dressed in an outfit that initially looks "casual," but the more one investigates it, one sees a series of "coded signals," of intentionally ripped designer jeans, expensive sweatshirt, etc. Ned, an MFA student and Vincent's coworker, explains that they're regulars. Vincent has tried to contact Mirella after Jonathan's arrest and later on, when she learned of Faisal's death, but Mirella wouldn't take her calls. Vincent excuses herself to smoke, and when she returns, Mirella and a friend are sitting at the bar. Vincent thinks about what she's wanted to say to Mirella after all this time: that no words can convey her regret, that she hadn't known what Jonathan was up to, and that if she had she would have called the FBI.

Mirella's outfit is a useful illustration of constructed identity: though her clothing looks casual, each element is intricately designed and stylized, a series of "coded signals" that were crafted with attention and care. Though her exterior might look effortless, it is the product of a great deal of effort and precision meant to convey wealth. Mirella's refusal to speak to Vincent in the aftermath of Alkaitis's arrest suggests that she thinks Vincent knew about his fraud and failed to inform Mirella and Faisal. It's not clear how Faisal died, but Mirella's cold behavior toward Vincent suggests the death might be tied to the Alkaitis scandal—it's possible Faisal killed himself after being defrauded by Alkaitis. Vincent's insistence that she knew nothing of Alkaitis's illegal activities might be sincere, but it seems unlikely that she didn't suspect anything fishy was going on, given the surplus of hints she should have witnessed over the years—such as Kaspersky's accusations and Alkaitis's strange behavior in response to Lenny Xavier's comment about knowing how the business operated.

Mirella smiles at Vincent and asks for bar snacks, though she fails to address Vincent personally. Vincent addresses Mirella by name, which Mirella ignores. Vincent wonders if Mirella, who used to be her best friend, really doesn't recognize her, or if she's only pretending. She wonders if Mirella is disguised like Vincent, only Mirella's disguise also involves pretending not to know the people from her old life.

Mirella's behavior is like her outfit: though it might appear casual and incidental on the surface, this appearance is the result of careful, premeditated planning. Mirella wears a disguise, and she acts in a way that disguises her inner hurt and anger. Given Vincent's own efforts to conceal her past, it's interesting that she initially seems unable to respect the steps Mirella has taken to conceal her own. Perhaps Vincent is in denial about the extent to which she hides herself from the world.

Distraught, Vincent walks off the job and heads to the Russian Café in lower Manhattan, a place she'd gone to often with Alkaitis. Her favorite manager, Ilieva, is working. Vincent tells Ilieva about quitting her job, and Ilieva offers her a glass of wine on the house. That night, Vincent decides to take on more hours at her kitchen job to gain the experience to go to **sea**, which was something her mother did in her early 20s. When Vincent was younger, she'd always tried to get her mother to tell her stories from when she was a child, but Vincent's mother had always been secretive about her "miserable childhood in a small town in the Prairies," though she did reveal that "she got a job as a steward on a Canadian Coast Guard vessel that maintained navigational aids in the shipping lanes."

The background information that Vincent reveals about her mother positions the mystery of Vincent's mother's death as the culmination of a life dominated by secrecy. Vincent seems to have inherited this secretive, protective shield from her mother, as she, too, conceals much of herself from the world.

Vincent's mother would serve two rotations on the boat before driving across the country with a boyfriend, then living and writing poetry in Caiette before falling in love with a married man, Vincent's father, all before she was 24 years old. But of all these stories, Vincent was most interested in her mother's life at **sea**: of the icebergs, of the northern lights, of the "dark gray sea." She tried to picture her mother then, as a young person, but "her mother was stranded forever at [36]," the age she was when she died. She remembers her mother coming to her room to say goodbye—the last time she saw her before she died.

The trajectory of Vincent's life also mirrors her mother's: they both live precarious, transient lives before meeting older married men and settling for unsatisfying but stable lives of domesticity. Given the similarities of their lives, Vincent might believe that going to sea, like her mother had so many years before, will make her feel closer to her mother and ultimately, perhaps, find peace in relation to her mother's uncertain cause of death. The sea so appeals to Vincent because in its vast emptiness, she might gain the mental clarity she needs to find these answers and confront her personal demons. To Vincent, the sea is the opposite of the domestic sphere she and her mother found so stifling and oppressive.


The day after Vincent sees Mirella at the bar, she takes a southbound train to stand on a white-sand beach and films the waves. A container ship passes by. She thinks back to when she first met Jonathan at the Hotel Caiette, when another guest staying at the hotel with his wife had mentioned being in the shipping industry. The moment stood out to her because it was obvious that the man loved his job. Standing on the beach, recording the waves, and remembering the man who worked in shipping, Vincent resolves to get a job at **sea**.

That seeing the container ship plays such a pivotal role in Vincent's decision to go to sea intertwines Vincent's story with Leon Prevant's, which is another example of the novel's strategy of bringing together previously disparate storylines to show how people's actions directly and indirectly affect others.

Geoffrey: The narrative returns to Vincent's time onboard the *Neptune Cumberland* in 2013. Vincent has just explained to Geoffrey that she's going to Thailand when it's time for her leave. It's been three months since Vincent first went to **sea**: three months of rising in the middle of the night to shower and start cooking breakfast, of engaging in a sexual relationship with Geoffrey, of routes that have taken her all around the world. Most of the men who work on the ship work for six months and then take three off, and she's decided to do the same.

Vincent's desire to go to Thailand during her time off reflects her larger desire not to return to her old life. Geographically, Thailand is located on a peninsula, too, which suggests that even when she's not working at sea, Vincent has a desire to be near or nearly surrounded by water. Water is clarifying to Vincent and seems to make her feel closer to her mother.

Vincent and Geoffrey sit in his room making decorative paper cranes, as the room could use some cheering up. He asks her if she read the book he got her for her birthday, a book of narratives written by the crew of the *Columbia Rediviva*, a trading ship that travelled during the end of the 1700s. Vincent says she did and that she loved it. Geoffrey tells Vincent that his father dreamed of being a pilot but became a coal miner instead, so Geoffrey went to **sea** so he wouldn't have any regrets. Vincent says she's never been so happy as she is at sea.

Like most other characters in the novel, Geoffrey can't escape the burden of regret and remorse over a life unlived. His father's disappointments motivate his decision to follow his dreams of going to sea. This is similar to Vincent's desire to run away from the stifling oppression of domesticity—something her mother's early death prevented her from doing for herself.

CHAPTER 8: THE COUNTERLIFE

In Alkaitis's counterlife, he "moves through a nameless hotel." Beyond the hotel lies "a shadowless pale blue **sea**." Churchwell interrupts Alkaitis's daydreams to complain about some white men doing calisthenics on the other end of the recreation yard. Alkaitis mentions the men wanting to find some kind of "code" to live by, but Churchwell argues that a "code of honor" is irrelevant when you're serving decades for child pornography.

Alkaitis continues to imagine alternate realities in which he avoids imprisonment. The inclusion of "a shadowless pale blue sea" in his daydreaming suggests that he, like Vincent, longs for a world unburdened by the artifice, delusion, and distraction of society. That Vincent and Alkaitis are both preoccupied by thoughts of the sea connects them on a psychological plane, which suggests that the impact people have on each other can be felt even after they've exited each other's lives. That even convicted men desire a "code" to live by illustrates how integral the illusion of a stable identity is for a person. It also presents a complex view of morality, in which the morally corrupt can still be capable of order in their lives and benefit from it.

In response to the increasing amount of time Alkaitis spends in his "counterlife," he decides that it's important to keep this life and reality separate, though he finds the task "increasingly difficult," often mistaking memory with counterlife. In one memory, he stumbled out of bed to find Vincent at the Hotel Caiette speaking with Walter in the lobby. For an instant, her "mask slipped just a little," and he saw that "she wasn't happy to see him." In his memory, he engaged in a stupid conversation about jet lag, but in his counterlife, he instead looked out the window, the world became Dubai, and the hotel lobby was empty.

Alkaitis's counterlives have morphed from intentional exercises in escapism into haunting reminders of the people he's wronged and the lack of authentic relationships he's had in his life. The memory of Vincent speaking with Walter in the lobby is painful to Alkaitis because it reaffirmed the transactional, fake nature of their relationship. When Vincent's "mask slipped just a little," he was forced to confront the fact that she was only pretending to like him—that he would never know or relate to her in a meaningful, vulnerable way.

Alkaitis wonders if other men in prison have counterlives and scans their faces to find out what they're thinking. He wasn't curious about others before he went to prison. In 2015, he asks Churchwell if he "ever think[s] about alternate universes." He and Churchwell are loose acquaintances, bonded by their shared reality of never being free again. Churchwell, a former double agent, readily admits to considering alternate universes. In one such alternate universe, he reveals, he got away with his crime and lives in a nice place in Moscow. Alkaitis says he'd live in Dubai. He says it again and only realizes from the look on Churchwell's face that he's repeated himself.

When Alkaitis unknowingly repeats himself to Churchwell, it becomes apparent that his ventures into the counterlife aren't completely of his own accord: he's actually losing touch with reality, perhaps in a more serious way than he originally thought. Alkaitis is likely in his 70s by this point in the novel, and the insinuation here is that he's experiencing the onset of dementia.

Sometime later, Alkaitis sees the doctor. He explains that he's had trouble with his memory, though he doesn't say anything about the hallucinations, because he doesn't want to be put on heavy tranquilizers. Anyway, he notes inwardly, hallucination isn't quite the right word—it's more a "collapsing [of] borders" between memory and counterlife. The doctor asks him some basic questions to assess the extent of Alkaitis's memory problems, starting with the date. Alkaitis gets the year right but mistakes the date, as he's been thinking about a trip he took to Dubai with Vincent that occurred in a different month.

Alkaitis constructs a narrative that minimizes the seriousness of the hallucinations he experiences when he ventures into the counterlife. If he can think of his hallucinations as a mere "collapsing [of] borders," he can, perhaps, maintain the illusion of control over his increasingly out-of-control existence in prison. Alkaitis's inability to answer the doctor's simple question correctly shows that his attempts to rationalize his increasing reliance on the counterlife is beyond his control.

As Alkaitis continues to answer the doctor's questions, his thoughts drift back to the hotel on the island shaped like a palm tree in Dubai. He and Suzanne had gone there and held hands over dinner. It was the year before her diagnosis, so she was likely already sick, though they hadn't known it yet. Suzanne had been beautiful, and it had been nice to have "a co-conspirator." Back in the present, the doctor asks Alkaitis to repeat the address he'd given him earlier. Alkaitis answers "Palm Jumeirah," which is the name of the island in Dubai, but not the address for which the doctor is asking.

Beneath the happy façade of Jonathan and Suzanne's trip to Dubai, there existed the unknown, dark reality of her failing health. This memory of Suzanne reframes Alkaitis's recurrent memories of Dubai, rendering them manifestations of his unresolved grief over Suzanne's early death. In his grief over Suzanne, he mourns not only his wife, but the last person with whom he had an intimate, authentic relationship. When Alkaitis refers to Suzanne as a "co-conspirator," he insinuates that Suzanne (unlike Vincent) knew about the fraud he was committing.

Alkaitis leaves the doctor's office knowing he's messed up. He reasons that he's "distracted, not demented," disoriented by the sameness of his days and forced into the world of memories "or into the counterlife," the lines between them beginning to blur. He's wonders if he'll die in the counterlife, too, if he dies in prison. In his cell sometime later, he asks Hazelton if he believes in **ghosts**. Hazelton isn't sure. Alkaitis doesn't tell him that he sees the ghost of Faisal standing in the corner.

Claiming to be "distracted, not demented" is another attempt by Alkaitis to minimize the extent of his psychological deterioration and exercise control over his life. That Alkaitis sees Faisal's ghost in prison is further evidence of both Alkaitis's deteriorating mental state as well as the guilt he feels for the role he played in Faisal's death. This serves as additional evidence that Faisal killed himself in the aftermath of Alkaitis's arrest.

CHAPTER 9: A FAIRY TALE

The Boat: The last September that Vincent and Alkaitis are together, they go on a boat with Alkaitis's old friend, Olivia, and have drinks on the deck. Vincent feels embarrassed for Olivia, who is dressed too formally and trying too hard to please Jonathan. Olivia mentions that her sister has just seen a show at the Brooklyn Academy of Music (BAM). The next month, Vincent looks up BAM to find something to do with Jonathan and finds her brother Paul listed as a performer there.

Unlike Vincent, whose outward appearance masks her inner thoughts, Olivia's appearance and mannerisms betray hers: she's infatuated with Jonathan and being obvious about it. The embarrassment Vincent feels on behalf of Olivia's earnestness shows how accustomed she's become to playing a part. Vincent's discovery of Paul on the BAM website is significant because it's the first time she's heard of him since she left the Hotel Caiette in 2005.

Melissa in the **Water**: Paul apparently has become a semi-successful composer and has a series of performances coming up in December called *Distant Northern Land: Soundtracks for Experimental Film*. Vincent hasn't seen Paul since she left the Hotel Caiette three years ago. The images from Paul's performance that are included on the BAM website feature Paul messing with electronic knobs and dials as a screen projects images of Caiette's shoreline—images that Vincent recognizes from her own video recordings, which she'd left behind in her childhood room. It becomes clear that Paul has been passing off the videos as his own.

Because Paul has stolen a major component of the pieces through which he's garnered some success in the music world, Paul's success as a composer is inauthentic. Vincent's videos are the medium through which she can be most authentically herself. Recording video footage was the way she learned to cope with the trauma of her mother's death and is integral to her personal development. For these reasons, when Paul steals the videos, he metaphorically steals a part of Vincent's identity as well.

Vincent recalls a time in her childhood when Paul visited their father in Caiette and had been horrible to Vincent, making fun of her whenever she talked. On the ride back from dropping off Paul at the airport, noticing how upset Paul's behavior had made Vincent, Vincent's mother observed that "the thing with Paul [...] is he's always seemed to think you owe him something." Vincent's mother insisted that Vincent owes Paul nothing.

This memory positions Paul's theft as the latest step Paul has taken to get back at Vincent for the role she played in his parents' divorce. Even as a grown man, Paul still misguidedly blames Vincent for the depression, displacement, and alienation the divorce caused him.

Knowing that Paul has stolen her videos makes it difficult for Vincent to uphold her promise to Jonathan "to maintain an air of lightness," though he doesn't seem to detect that anything is off with her, as he's been working and "distracted" so much of the time. Without telling Jonathan, Vincent goes to the Brooklyn Academy of Music to see Paul's performance.

So far, Vincent has managed to repress the tragic elements of her life enough to perform the role Jonathan expects of her, but the discovery of Paul's latest attack against her causes Vincent's protective, self-fashioned shield to crumble.

Paul walks on stage. He's very thin and looks genuinely happy to receive the audience's applause. A title appears on the screen on stage—"Melissa in the **Water**"—and one of Vincent's videos begins to play on the screen. This one features a beach in Caiette with children playing in the water, including Melissa, who would have been 14 at the time. As the video plays, Paul plays music on a keyboard that he then electronically manipulates using a laptop. Vincent recognizes the video as being recorded during the first summer after her mother's death. Vincent reflects on the years of college, dancing, and addiction that would plague Melissa's life years later, and how the video shows no evidence of this troubled future.

Paul's thin stature might suggest that he's still suffering from substance abuse, though this is speculation. Paul's response to the audience's applause shows how desperately he needs others' approval to feel good about himself. His desire for approval is so strong that it causes him to act in ways that harm others, namely Vincent. In a way, Paul's actions are similar to Olivia's: both artists exploit others (Paul exploits Vincent, and Olivia exploits Lucas Alkaitis) to fulfill their need for success and social acceptance.

Vincent leaves before the performance ends. She entertains the idea of suing Paul, but part of her deal with Jonathan is that she is "a calm harbor" for him, with "no drama" attached. As she rides the train back to Jonathan's home in Greenwich, she can't believe how dependent she is on him and realizes, with great disappointment, that she's become this way "because dependency was easier."

Paul's theft of her videos deprives Vincent of the final semblance of self she had left, and it's for this reason that she finally realizes the extent of her dependency on Jonathan. Vincent's realization that "dependency [is] easier" than independence reflects the novel's larger theme of alienation and self-reflection: Vincent chose to become dependent on Jonathan because doing so gave her the order and stability she needed to repress the unresolved inner turmoil she had in the aftermath of her mother's death and her tumultuous past. When Paul's theft of her videotapes disrupts this order, Vincent realizes her current life has been nothing but a delusional façade: that her troubles still exist beneath the glossy exterior of wealth.

A Nightmare: The following week, Jonathan works so much that he's hardly around, which is nice, since Vincent is having a hard time keeping things light. As she reads news stories about the economic collapse, she entertains the notion of waiting outside the theater doors in Brooklyn and confronting Paul, but she doesn't want to see him. The next week, she has a nightmare about a "vague impression of falling, a sense of catastrophe." She gets up to run, dressing in the darkness. When Vincent returns from her run, she leaves a note for Jonathan, who is still sleeping, then she showers, dresses, and goes to catch the train.

Jonathan's extra hours at work indicate that his company isn't doing well, which is probably the result of the economic collapse Vincent reads about in the paper. Vincent's dream seems to foreshadow her fall from the Neptune Cumberland (outlined in the fragmented, opening chapter of the novel) or else the collapse of Alkaitis's business. That Vincent and Jonathan sink deeper into themselves instead of going to each other for support in moments of crisis illustrates the falsity of their relationship.

On the train, Vincent thinks about Paul and wonders how he could steal her video recordings. When she arrives in Manhattan, she walks around, popping inside cafes and a bookstore. She momentarily thinks she sees her mother in a crowd of tourists. Vincent is about to go into the Met when Jonathan calls to remind her of the Christmas party tonight, about which she'd completely forgotten. Though she left her dress in Greenwich, she doesn't feel that it's an emergency, so she walks into the Met and looks at her current favorite painting, Thomas Eakins's *The Thinker*. She thinks her mother would have liked it.

Unlike Jonathan and Paul, whose ghostly visitors symbolize their guilt and moral failings, Vincent's sighting of her mother seems to stem from her own loneliness and sadness at being betrayed by Paul. It's as though her desire for comfort and compassion during a moment of personal crisis is so great that she manifests her mother's spirit. Vincent's failure to return home to pick up her dress for the Christmas party suggests that she no longer cares about her relationship with Jonathan or keeping up appearances. The facade of wealth and success she's coasted on for the past three years is beginning to crumble.

On Vincent's way out, she runs into Oskar, who works for Jonathan in the asset management unit. They engage in some small talk and for the first time, Vincent feels regretful of her relationship with Jonathan, realizing that it would be nice to be with someone she loved, or at least was attracted to. Vincent and Oskar part ways, and she goes to Saks to buy a dress for the party that night, after which she spends some time in the Russian Café.

Vincent seems to feel attracted to Oskar, which only heightens her feelings of dissatisfaction regarding her artificial existence and phony relationship with Jonathan.

By 5:00, Vincent grows impatient and travels to Midtown, near Jonathan's office, so as to arrive at the party perfectly on time. While heading to the subway, though, she is suddenly gripped with a feeling that if she goes down there, she will die, and that her mother is waiting for her down there, so she runs back up the stairs to sit on a bench. Just then, she gets a call from Jonathan's receptionist, who tells her to come to the office immediately.

Vincent suffers a panic attack the moment she gives in to habit by making plans to arrive at the party right on time. This indicates that, at least on an unconscious level, she's no longer able or willing to maintain the illusions involved in her life with Jonathan: that the pressure of doing so will literally kill her if she continues down this false, prescribed path. That the panic attack precedes the urgent call from Jonathan's receptionist evokes an ominous tone—that, perhaps, bad news is waiting for Vincent at Jonathan's office.

Vincent rides in a taxi to Jonathan's office. When she arrives at the Gradia Building, the receptionist, Simone, ushers her into Jonathan's office. Simone will be a key witness in the trial that will occur in several months. Vincent enters the office to find Jonathan sitting at his desk, looking waxen. Claire is there, too, and a man in his 50s or 60s sits on the sofa. The man introduces himself as Harvey Alexander. Vincent demands to know why everyone is acting so strangely. Jonathan orders her to shut the door. Vincent notices that Claire is crying. Jonathan pauses before asking Vincent if she knows what a Ponzi scheme is.

This confrontation in Jonathan's office marks the first time Jonathan has explicitly admitted to the fraudulent activities of his business. Claire's tears imply that she was unaware of her father's fraud, which makes sense, in light of their impersonal relationship; after all, Claire hadn't even known that Vincent and Jonathan's marriage was a sham.

CHAPTER 10: THE OFFICE CHORUS

The narrative picks up earlier that same day, from the collective first-person perspective of Jonathan Alkaitis's employees. The morning of the holiday party, Enrico fetches everyone at their desks, announcing that Alkaitis wants to see them on the 17th floor later that day, which is unusual, since "the Arrangement was something [the 17th floor employees] did, not something [they] talked about."

"The Arrangement" seems to refer to 17th floor employees' agreement with Alkaitis to cover up any illegal activities they were conducting. It's interesting to note that both Alkaitis's illegal operation and his relationship with Vincent are referred to as "the arrangement," which draws a parallel between the fraudulent behaviors he exhibits in his business and in his personal life.

During the meeting that afternoon, Alkaitis announces that the company has "liquidity problems," and that he's arranged to receive a loan for some temporary relief. Simone enters the room with coffee and senses that something is gravely wrong. Ron smiles at her, but Joelle, Oskar, Enrico, and Harvey can only stare blankly ahead. Alkaitis states that everyone in the room "know[s] what we do here." Later, some of the employees will act as though they hadn't heard this, but Simone's future testimony will speak to the contrary. Some people, like Joelle, will claim that they are "as much a victim as [the] investors," while others, like Harvey, will "confess to things he hadn't even been accused of."

When Alkaitis claims that everyone "know[s] what we do here," he confirms his staffers' complicity in the Ponzi scheme. Though everyone is united in their complicity, they will have vastly different responses to dealing with the crisis of the scheme's collapse: Joelle will try to minimize her involvement, insinuating that she, too, is "a victim" of Alkaitis, and Harvey will try to come clean in an effort to absolve himself of his crimes though, of course, doing so occurs too late to be anything other than his self-serving attempt to avoid prison time (rather than an attempt to take the moral high ground, for example).

But for those who did hear Alkaitis's fateful words, it will be "the moment when it was no longer possible to ignore the topography and pretend that the border hadn't already been crossed." Everyone at the company knows what the company does, except for maybe Ron, though it seems crazy that Ron wouldn't know that the company was running a Ponzi scheme. Ron comments about the company doing so much trading with the London office, which is followed by an awkward silence: the "London office" is only a sham company, comprised of a single man with multiple email addresses to transfer funds to New York to make it seem as though Alkaitis's company is conducting European trades.

Alkaitis's employees deluded themselves into not seeing the reality of Alkaitis's scheme because, as the proverb says, they wanted to have their cake and eat it, too: they wanted to reap the financial benefits of perpetuating Alkaitis's scheme, but they didn't want to feel accountable for the immorality and illegality of conducting this kind of business. The exception to this theory is Ron, who, somehow, seems to have remained ignorant of the reality of Alkaitis's fraud, though it remains unclear whether Ron is clueless or merely a convincing actor.

The meeting ends shortly after this, and Alkaitis returns to the office on the 18th floor, which the narrative describes as "a different world." The people who work on the 18th floor are doing legitimate business: trading stocks, investing. In contrast, the 17th floor is "running a criminal enterprise in lieu of investing [] clients' money." When Alkaitis arrives on the 18th floor, Olivia Collins is there, and Alkaitis seems to wince before he sees her. Simone brings them coffee in Alkaitis's office. While she's there, Alkaitis asks Simone if she can stay late tonight to assist with "a project." Simone agrees, though rather reluctantly.

That Alkaitis winces when he sees Olivia suggests that he feels guilty about betraying someone who has become a friend to him. Whatever "project" Alkaitis has in mind for Simone, it's likely going to be ethically dubious—perhaps he wants her to destroy pertinent documents in case of an investigation. Simone is new at the office and unaware of the fraud, which renders Alkaitis's decision to involve her in the destruction of documents manipulative and dishonest, as he's essentially taking advantage of her ignorance to benefit himself.

After the meeting with Alkaitis, the 17th floor gets busy: Harvey begins to write a confession, Joelle steps out for a walk to stop herself from panicking, Enrico buys a ticket to Mexico, and Ron distracts himself by watching inane internet videos. Oskar looks up real estate prices in foreign countries. He leaves the office, walks to the subway, and imagines how he will describe this predicament to future employers, crafting a fake scenario in which he walks off the job that day, the day he realizes the company has been committing fraud. In reality, though, Oskar has known about the fraud for more than a decade. Later, he will claim that you can "both know and not know something."

Harvey is the only employee to directly confront the reality of the situation and resolves to make himself as useful as possible to prosecutors, possibly throwing himself and his coworkers under the bus in the process. The other employees are too shocked to begin to process the crisis they're in. Oskar engages in the escapist strategy of imagining an alternate universe that Alkaitis will later employ when he's in prison. Oskar's later claim, that a person can "both know and not know something," suggests that people will lie to themselves ("not know something") in order to justify their immoral or illegal behaviors. In Oskar's case, he constructed a narrative in which he engaged in illegal business practices but pretended not to realize such practices were illegal.

The narrative delves into a monologue about the difference between the employees' "secret lives," in which they would "all die for the truth," or "at least make a couple of confidential phone calls and try to feign surprise when the authorities arrived," and their "actual lives," in which they "were being paid an exorbitant amount of money to keep [their] mouths shut." The narrative concludes that people don't have to be completely "terrible […] to turn a blind eye to certain things." After all, the money they were paid to do so put food in their mouths and roofs over their heads. Then, of course, is the fact of loyalty: if anyone at the company would have called the authorities, it would mean betraying their colleagues.

The employees' "secret lives" are the identities they construct to make themselves feel like good people: in these "secret lives," they possess clear moral compasses and will "die for the truth" in order to uphold their values—or, at least, they'll act as though these things are true. In contrast to these "secret lives" are the employees' "actual lives," in which they tossed their morals aside to accept the wealth and success that Alkaitis's fraud gave them. The narrative a paints a complicated, ambiguous rendering of morality, though, in which people can do bad things for good reasons, such as accepting dirty money in order to provide for their families. The narrative also complicates Harvey's outwardly moral action of writing a confession: Harvey's actions might be perceived as morally good in the sense that he's cooperating with authorities, but it's ultimately a self-serving act that will result in the betrayal and likely imprisonment of his friends and coworkers.

The narrative switches to a scene between Alkaitis and Simone, when Alkaitis asks Simone to go to the office supply store and purchase some paper shredders. Alkaitis accompanies her, wanting to get some air, which makes Simone uncomfortable, since he's her boss, and they're on totally different levels. On the way to the store, Alkaitis calls Joelle and orders her to bring the "Xavier box files" to the 18th floor conference room. Simone and Alkaitis reach the store and Simone selects a shredder that looks good. Alkaitis pays with cash.

Alkaitis's phone call with Joelle and his trip to the office supply store with Simone confirms that he's likely recruited Simone to help destroy incriminating documents. The "Xavier box files" refers to Lenny Xavier. If Alkaitis has reason to shred Lenny's files, it likely means Lenny is complicit in the scheme in some way, which explains why he's Alkaitis's most important investor. It also explains the odd comment at dinner years back, about knowing the truth of how Alkaitis's business operated.

When Simone and Alkaitis return to the 18th floor conference room, the Xavier boxes are there. Shortly after, Claire appears in the doorway looking for her father. She is alarmed to see Simone shredding the files. Claire leaves. In the midst of the shredding, Simone reads a piece of paper in her hands. It's a memo from Alkaitis to Joelle that reads: "Re: L Xavier account: I need a long-term capital gain of $561,000 on an investment of $241,000 for a sale proceed of $802,000." She pockets the paper.

Simone's instinct to pocket the critical document suggests that she's not as naive as she seems. She recognizes that destroying these documents makes her complicit in Alkaitis's scheme and wants to possess leverage to present to authorities in the event that she suffers consequences for her involvement.

Claire approaches her father in his office. Harvey is on the sofa, looking strange and almost "giddy." Investors have been pulling out, and the withdrawals amount to more than the company has in its accounts. Claire demands to know why Simone is shredding papers. Alkaitis lies, insisting that he just wants to clear space. Claire asks Alkaitis about a transfer from yesterday, "the loans from the brokerage company to the asset management side." With these loans, the company would have taken out 11 loans this quarter, which, Claire reluctantly suggests, portrays "the appearance of impropriety." Claire and Alkaitis go back and forth, with Claire expressing concern for "the optics of the thing," and "the timing," and Alkaitis trying to brush it off, though he eventually admits that he can no longer keep up the charade of not having suffered such losses.

Claire's shocked reaction to seeing Simone shredding documents suggests that she's legitimately unaware of the scheme unfolding on Floor 17 of her father's business (Claire works on Floor 18, the legitimate side of the business). Her decision to voice her concerns about the large number of loans the company has taken out this quarter shows that too much evidence has surfaced for her to keep quiet any longer. Alkaitis's confession illustrates the direness of his financial situation: he's had no qualms about hiding the truth about his business or marriage from his daughter, so things must be pretty bad for him to feel that he has no choice but to confess to the fraud.

The narrative flashes forward to the interrogations that occur the next year. When questioned about ordering Simone to shred the documents, Alkaitis will pretend not to understand the question. In his own testimony, Harvey will suggest that Alkaitis might have been trying to protect Lenny Xavier, an important investor who had understood the business to be a Ponzi scheme from the beginning and had occasionally given Alkaitis extra cash. Or, perhaps Alkaitis had figured that Simone, being only a receptionist, might not understand the documents. The narrative returns to the present. After some time, Alkaitis returns to the conference room and instructs Simone to call for Vincent.

Everyone who prosecutors interrogate responds with half-truths and willful ignorance, in an effort to avoid implicating themselves. The strategy is reminiscent of Oskar's earlier claim about knowing and not knowing things and operates on the premise that a person can't be judged for what they don't explicitly admit to, consciously or unconsciously.

At 7:30, Harvey arrives with pizza. He offers some to Simone and tells her he's going to take over the task of shredding: she can head over to the party whenever she wants. Simone asks Harvey why they're shredding all the files, and he refuses to answer. Harvey leaves the room to bring pizza to the others. Simone can sense that something bad is about to happen and wants to be in the office when it happens.

Harvey's decision to take over the task of shredding can be seen as altruistic or self-serving depending on how one looks at it. On the one hand, Harvey might be attempting to spare Simone the burden of being complicit in the destruction of key documents. On the other hand, Harvey might want to get rid of Simone so that he can steal important documents that he'll later use as leverage to aid in his own defense.

The narrative returns to a first-person perspective. Everyone on the 18th floor has left for the party, but everyone on the 17th floor stays behind, except for Enrico, who has fled, and Oskar, who is at a bar. Harvey is looking through the Xavier boxes. Sometime later, everyone in the asset management unit heads to the party. Later on, they will remember the event differently, either because of drinking too much or because of everyone's decision to change their memory of the party "to fit personal narratives." Ron's wife, Sheila, joins them, as does Joelle's husband, Gareth, and Harvey's wife, Elaine. Finally, Alkaitis and Vincent arrive.

That Harvey is looking through the Xavier boxes suggests that he had self-serving motivations for taking over shredding the documents for Simone. That Alkaitis's employees remember the party differently "to fit personal narratives" suggest that they remember or forget selective pieces of information in order to absolve themselves legally or morally. For example, an employee not wishing to implicate themselves in Alkaitis's fraud might claim that they didn't sense an odd vibe at the party in order to feign ignorance about the unfolding crisis they had on their hands that evening.

In the future, the employees will have different takes on Alkaitis's demeanor that night: Ron will remember him as seeming normal, and Oskar will remember him appearing off. When Alkaitis and Vincent left that night, Oskar recalls seeing her flinch as Alkaitis touched her back. Later, he will see Vincent refuse to get into the car with him. After Alkaitis gets into the car, Oskar will pause a moment before following Vincent.

Employees' differing recollections of Alkaitis's demeanor at the party that night suggests that there's often no absolute, objective version of the truth: that people will project onto reality a version of the truth that they want to believe. Vincent and Oskar seemed to share an intimate moment at the museum earlier that day, so it's possible Oskar is following her for romantic reasons.

Back in the office, Harvey continues to shred papers, moving all the supplies to Alkaitis's office to work there. Joelle joins him later on. Harvey asks her what she told her husband about staying late, and she says she told him it was an emergency. Joelle doesn't notice that Harvey is saving the most incriminating pages, sparing them from the shredder. Harvey finds some scotch in a cabinet and pours some for Joelle and himself, though he takes less, wanting to stay sober as he gathers more evidence of the company's crimes.

Joelle's explanation to her husband about needing to return to the office that night is technically correct, but it conveniently spares her from having to confess to her complicity in Alkaitis's Ponzi scheme. Harvey's decision to pour Joelle more scotch is self-serving and manipulative; it compromises Joelle's ability to think clearly and puts himself in a better position to gather evidence he can later use to negotiate with investigators.

Meanwhile, Oskar is following Vincent home to Alkaitis's apartment. Oskar wills himself to be in the moment: there is no prison, there is nothing else. As they approach the building, Vincent pauses: she thinks she's just seen her mother, though she comes to her senses shortly after. They make their way to the 37th floor of the nearly empty building; Vincent explains that rich people usually buy units here for investments and rarely show up.

Oskar's efforts to be in the moment parallel the strategy he employed while working for Alkaitis: take advantage of the opportunities the situation affords him and conveniently forget that there's anything wrong or morally ambiguous about his actions. While working for Alkaitis, Oskar accepted a hefty paycheck and turned a blind eye to the fraud he and others committed; tonight, Oskar accepts Vincent's company and the possibility of a sexual encounter and fails to consider that she's in a relationship and that her husband's collapsing business might render her emotionally vulnerable.

The windows of Alkaitis's modern apartment overlook Central Park. Oskar and Vincent have wine and toast to their bad days. Vincent explains that Alkaitis just admitted to her that he's a criminal. Oskar stutters, unable to articulate his fears of going to prison. He suggests that they change the subject.

Oskar doesn't want to talk about the collapsing scheme because the only way he can enjoy himself tonight is if he denies the existence of his troubles, the looming consequences he'll surely face, and the reality that he's not as morally uncompromised as he'd like to think he is.

Back in the office, Harvey and Joelle continue to shred papers and discuss their options moving forward. Harvey is optimistic about their futures, thinking it's possible they could still get off with probation. Joelle compares their experience to an "out-of-body experience," and Harvey inwardly agrees that their situation "[doesn't] seem quite real."

The situation doesn't seem real to Harvey and Joelle because, if they wanted to continue doing the illegitimate work Jonathan Alkaitis's business demanded of them, they had to deny the possibility of facing consequences. Now that consequences are imminent, they're totally caught off guard.

Joelle finishes shredding papers at 11:30 and leaves for her office, where she promptly falls asleep under her desk. Harvey finds her there later, covers her with her coat, and leaves to contemplate which incriminating documents to keep. At midnight, he's alone in his office, surrounded by boxes of incriminating evidence. He'll go through it later, perhaps find ways to incorporate it into his confession. He leaves the building and takes a cab home.

The kind gesture of covering Joelle with her coat complicates Harvey's character. Of course, he immediately returns to his efforts to find ways to get himself off the hook. The series of events illustrates how people can be capable of both moral and immoral actions.

At 2:00 a.m., Harvey is pacing around his house, trying to commit all its details to his memory. Meanwhile, Simone is in her Brooklyn apartment drinking wine with her roommates. Simone tells them about her work predicament, which the roommates agree sounds sketchy. Back in the Gradia Building, Joelle remains asleep. In Alkaitis's apartment, Oskar sleeps naked next to Vincent. Jonathan is at his home office trying and failing to write a letter to Claire.

Harvey tries to commit his house to memory because, despite the efforts he's made to make himself a valuable resource to the prosecution, he's still worried that he'll face prison time for his role in Alkaitis's scheme. Oskar and Vincent appear to have slept together; it seems as though Oskar is using sex and the charm of Vincent's company to avoid thinking about his more pressing issues.

Oskar wakes up at 3:00 a.m. in Alkaitis's apartment. Vincent is still asleep. Oskar wants to flee, as he's heard that the FBI often arrests people in the early morning, when they're still groggy and disoriented; he fears they'll come for him soon. He walks out to the living room, blinded by the lights that he and Vincent left on last night. He's confronted by a huge portrait of a young, too-pale man sitting in a chair, his left arm covered in bruises. He sees the signature, Olivia Collins, which he recognizes as the name of one of Alkaitis's investors. While some of Alkaitis's investors are institutions, funds, and schools, others are normal people like Olivia, who invested a modest sum of money, and who is an old friend of Jonathan's. Oskar leaves the apartment in tears.

Oskar puts his own interests above Vincent's by abandoning her without saying goodbye in the morning. The painting Oskar sees in Alkaitis's living room is the portrait of Lucas that Olivia painted in the 1950s. Seeing Olivia's work up close humanizes her and makes Oskar realize that his complicity in the Alkaitis scheme will result in catastrophic financial ruin for people like Olivia, who invested everything they had in Alkaitis's fund.

Joelle wakes up under her desk at 4:00 a.m., still drunk. She notices that she's been tucked into her coat and feels overcome by gratitude at the small gesture. Shortly after this, Alkaitis wakes up in his home to the sound of the doorbell ringing. Around the same time, Oskar is in bed, at home. He's thinking about the moment Harvey first asked him to backdate a trade on Lenny Xavier's account. Though Oscar was initially unwilling to do it, Harvey gave him a Christmas bonus, telling him he'd "entered into a higher degree of trust." He promised that the bonuses would keep coming, so Oskar gave in to the demands. "In a **ghost** version of his life," Oskar refuses to backdate the trade and calls the authorities. But in reality, he does not. Oskar knows he's complicit.

The insinuation behind Harvey's comment about Oskar having "entered into a higher degree of trust" is that Oskar can expect to receive more bonuses if he continues to backdate trades and undertake Alkaitis's other illegitimate business affairs. Unlike the counterlives Alkaitis will imagine while he's in prison, which fail to imagine an alternate reality in which Alkaitis doesn't commit fraud, Oskar's "ghost version of his life" entertains a reality in which Oskar does the right thing and refuses to backdate the trade. What both Alkaitis's and Oskar's alternate realities have in common, though, is that imagining them does little to absolve either man of their real, unchangeable complicity in a major case of securities fraud.

CHAPTER 11: WINTER

It's the day after the holiday party. Oskar sits at his desk at work, still unsure of whether he should stick around or flee the country. He walks by Harvey's office and sees him writing frantically at his desk. Joelle is by the photocopy machine, staring into space. Oskar goes to the 18th floor to use the photocopier there. Although Oskar wishes he could be happy for the "legitimate" workers who reside on the 18th floor, he's "resentful." When Oskar arrives on the upper floor, Alkaitis is not in his office. In his place are two men in suits looking around through his things. Simone silently watches the men work before informing Oskar that Alkaitis was arrested this morning.

Harvey is probably writing his confession, choosing to tackle the crisis and looming threat of arrest proactively. Joelle takes an opposite approach, seemingly still too shocked and in denial to do anything. Oskar's longing to be happy for rather than "resentful" of Alkaitis's "legitimate" staff illustrates the gap that exists between an idealized version of himself and the person he actually is. Oskar wants to be a selfless person, but in reality, he mostly just feels sorry for himself. Of course, it's likely the case that, were the Floor 18 staff in Oskar's position, they'd feel just as self-pitying and resentful as Oskar. Simone's news about Alkaitis's arrest confirms what everyone likely predicted. It also predicts what will soon be their fates as well.

Simone's phone rings continuously, with angry people on the other end demanding to know what's going on. Oskar urges her not to answer any more calls, stating that she "doesn't deserve this," before heading back to Seventeen. After grabbing his jacket, he continues down, nearly tripping on Joelle, who's sitting on the 12th floor landing, anguishing over what her husband will think when he hears that Alkaitis has been arrested. She knows she'll either have to lie to him about how much she knows or come clean about her involvement. She asks Oskar if he's ever considered "why [they] were chosen" to work on the illegitimate side of the business—how did Alkaitis know they'd comply?

Oskar's advice to Simone seems to come from a place of compassion, as it indirectly acknowledges that her lack of involvement in the scheme makes her an unworthy recipient of the callers' anger. Just as Jonathan kept Vincent in the dark about his firm's fraud, Joelle has lied to her husband about her role at work, and she's now faced with the option of continuing to lie to him or else come clean about what likely amounts to years of lies. Joelle's question to Oskar about "why [they] were chosen" to work the illegitimate side of Alkaitis's business is complicated. On the one hand, it's clear that Alkaitis is a conman who preys on people's personalities and insecurities to get them to do what he wants; on the other hand, the employees who committed fraud for him ultimately did so of their own accord.

When Oskar reaches the lobby, he's suddenly surrounded by a swarm of panicked, upset investors and the security guards who won't let them through to Alkaitis's offices. Oskar passes by Olivia Collins on his way out, though she doesn't recognize him.

The remorse Oskar felt for Olivia early that morning seems to have been replaced by shame, and he hurries out of the building without helping her.

That morning, Olivia awoke to a phone call from a sobbing Monica, who broke the news to her about Jonathan's security fraud. When Monica's phone call came through, Olivia was sitting in the apartment she rented with the proceeds from her investment with Jonathan and had a hard time comprehending what Monica was saying. She told Monica she would go to the office and see what she could find out.

Olivia's inability (or unwillingness) to understand Monica's words probably stems from the fact that she already realizes she won't be able to continue living in the apartment she's only been able to rent because of her investment with Jonathan. The collapse of the Ponzi scheme is more catastrophic for investors like Olivia, who aren't extremely wealthy, than for its perpetrators.

The lobby is in chaos when Olivia arrives, full of angry, confused people and overwhelmed security guards. Olivia tells a guard that she's a personal friend of Alkaitis's, and he tells her to call someone in the offices to come get her. She calls Alkaitis multiple times, but no one picks up. Eventually the chaos of the lobby becomes too much for her, and she returns to her apartment, dejected and trying to make sense of her new world. She calculates how many more months she can afford to stay in her apartment.

In the end, Olivia's friendship with Alkaitis does nothing to save her from impending financial ruin. Their friendship was a farce, and the reality is that a person she trusted was defrauding her all along.

Though it's dark in New York, it's only 3:00 p.m. in Las Vegas, where Leon Prevant is in the middle of a conference. Since being laid off a few years ago, Leon works as a consultant. Leon's phone buzzes, and he excuses himself from the conference, though when he sees the call is from his accountant, he lets it go to voicemail. Leon returns to the meeting, in which shipping executives discuss their current "significant overcapacity problem." Leon chimes in to tell of a friend at CMA who said they have ships anchored and not making any routes in Malaysia, "just sitting there," as Miranda, Leon's junior colleague, puts it. D'Ambrosio, Leon's boss, reasons that this probably isn't a bad option. Another colleague describes the unused ships as a "ghost fleet" and wonders whether they should just scrap them. Everyone debates this strategy some more, and the meeting ends.

The shipping company is also suffering from the economic collapse that brought about the implosion of Alkaitis's Ponzi scheme. The company has a "significant overcapacity problem" because the bad economy has resulted in financially anxious consumers demanding fewer goods. This scene is significant since it's the first time the narrative has visited Leon since his stay at the Hotel Caiette in 2005. It confirms that Leon's fears about being laid off were correct, and though he manages to get jobs here and there as a consultant, he's not as important a figure as he used to be. The effect the worldwide economic collapse has on the shipping industry resonates within the novel's larger theme of complicity and interconnectedness, positioning the economic collapse as exerting a domino effect on different industries.

After the meeting, Leon finds Miranda sitting on a couch in the atrium. She compliments his idea about parking unused ships in Malaysia, and he insists that they steer the subject away from "the economic downturn." Miranda concurs that "there's something almost tedious about disaster." At first it's chaotic, but then the economy just continues to collapse. Leon agrees, noting that it's everyone's "surprise" at the downturn of the shipping industry that bothers him: shouldn't everyone have expected economic collapse to be followed by a decrease in people buying goods?

Miranda's observation about the "tedious" aspect of the economic collapse shows how people can become accustomed to and accepting of disaster. In a more general sense, her observation cynically suggests that people's adaptability allows them to turn a blind eye to broader social and economic ills, which indirectly renders them as complicit, willing participants in systems of exploitation and oppression.

Leon excuses himself to return his accountant's call. Sounding "deeply shaken," she tells him about Alkaitis's arrest and the fraud. She informs him that his money wasn't actually invested—it was stolen, and now it's all gone. Leon can't believe how stupid he was to have believed in the too-good-to-be-true returns. He hangs up the phone and leaves the conference center, trying to convince himself that he can recover from this.

The narrative confirms that during Leon's conversation with Alkaitis at the Hotel Caiette in 2005, or perhaps sometime shortly after, Alkaitis managed to persuade Leon to invest everything in his fund. It's likely that Leon's decision was guided by his fear that he would soon lose his job and that, in Alkaitis's externally charming, reassuring sales pitch, he saw a new opportunity for financial stability. Leon's desperation probably affected his willingness to believe in Alkaitis's suspiciously good returns.

Leon thinks back to the day so long ago when Alkaitis had explained his work to him, had made him feel that the returns made sense and could be trusted. He walks down the Las Vegas Strip back to his hotel and passes by men and women wearing shirts that read "GIRLS TO YOUR ROOM IN 20 MINUTES." He imagines the mundane, depressing existence of these girls as he tries to make a plan for his future. Near the hotel entrance, he calls Marie, who already knows.

Alkaitis is a conman, and he used an external façade of charm, reassurance, and trustworthiness to con Leon into handing over all his savings. The direness of Leon's circumstances forces him to remove the rose-tinted glasses through which his former financial privilege allowed him to see the world, and he's more attuned to the miseries that exist around him, such as the lives of the "20 minutes" girls.

That evening, Ella Kaspersky is on CNN. Olivia and Leon watch, in New York and Las Vegas, respectively, and Oskar and Joelle watch at a bar in Midtown. Ella talks about how the "nearly perfect" angle of Alkaitis's returns was what tipped her off to the fraud. She relays her history with Alkaitis to the CNN interviewer, explaining how, after being approached by Alkaitis in the lobby, she did the math, realized the returns were impossible, and contacted the SEC, who were unhelpful. Ever since then, she's tried to reveal the truth about Alkaitis. Joelle observes that Ella "couldn't be happier" about being right.

Joelle's wry remark that Ella "couldn't be happier" about being right about Alkaitis's Ponzi scheme implies that Ella is selfishly, subjectively pleased by the securities fraud, since it gives her personal credibility. Her happiness is selfish because it comes at the expense of Alkaitis's defrauded investors, as well as the staffers like Joelle who likely will also face prison time. Ella seems to have deluded herself into believing that her pursuit of Alkaitis was for the greater good when, in reality, it likely was at least partially motivated by her personal vendetta against him.

The investors return to the Gradia Building the next morning. Harvey tries to avoid making eye contact with them, but Olivia recognizes and confronts him, asking if he knew about the fraud. Harvey brushes her off and goes upstairs. When he arrives on Seventeen, he finds the police there and, rather than flee, he introduces himself to them. Joelle doesn't go into work that day, choosing to take her kids for a day out instead, though she sporadically bursts into tears. On the way home, she tells them they'll remember this day forever.

Harvey represses the reality of the consequences he's sure to face, actively snubbing Olivia as she desperately demands answers. When he's confronted by the police on Seventeen, though, it suddenly becomes to his benefit to address the scandal in order to ingratiate himself with the authorities, so he changes his tune, likely offering to come clean about everything he knows in order to negotiate a lighter sentence.Joelle tries to treat her kids to a fun day as though nothing is wrong, though her sporadic tears prove that she's unable to completely suppress the thoughts of her impending fate.

After spending the day feigning confusion, Oskar is the last to leave the office. On his way out, he runs into Simone, who is carrying some things from Claire's office, one of which is a photo of Claire and her kids. Oskar postulates that "in the **ghost** version of his life," in which he'd gone to the authorities so many years ago, Claire and her kids are spared all this turmoil. Oskar invites Simone to get a drink, but she immediately turns him down, which irritates Oskar. Simone exits the Gradia Building and meets Claire in the back of an idling SUV.

Oskar's "ghost version of his life" positions him as a person who was capable of doing the right thing, but who failed to do so. Thinking about this alternate reality and the life Claire and her family might have had in it makes Oskar realize that his inaction has consequences that extend far beyond his own life.

Claire, who seems almost sedated, quietly thanks Simone for retrieving her things before ordering the driver to take Simone home to East Williamsburg. It begins to snow outside. Simone asks Claire how many people knew about the fraud. Claire thinks that everyone in asset management knew what was going on, though probably nobody on Eighteen. Before dropping off Simone at her apartment, Claire tells her that she's lucky: for the rest of her life, Simone will be "a person with a really excellent cocktail story."

Claire's wry remark to Simone cynically reduces her own suffering, and the damages incurred by Alkaitis's investors, as fodder Simone can repurpose and use for personal gain, to entertain people at parties and make herself seem like an interesting person with an eventful, scandalous life.

Meanwhile, downtown, Oskar has just left work. The snowfall grows heavier. Two detectives flash their badges at him almost immediately after he exits the Gradia Building. In another world, he imagines himself running from the detectives. In his real life, however, he stays and allows himself to be arrested and handcuffed by the FBI agents.

Similar to the counterlife daydreams Alkaitis has in prison, Oskar's alternate reality scenario is pure fantasy: it's a dream world in which Oskar can commit a crime while simultaneously avoiding the resultant consequences. Oskar's dream is an attempt at escape, not an expression of remorse.

It's six months later, at the sentencing hearing. Alkaitis's lawyer begs the judge for mercy, reasoning that everybody makes mistakes. The judge looks amazed at this understatement of the century, and Olivia, who is attending the hearing, wonders if the lawyer recognizes his error. The lawyer, Veer Sethi, presses on with his story, attempting to humanize Jonathan. He speaks of a modest family, Jonathan, Claire, and Suzanne, living in a small, suburban house, taking modest vacations close to home, and visiting parents over holidays. Claire goes to college and takes a job at Jonathan's legitimate brokerage company, and then Suzanne is diagnosed with cancer. Without making excuses for Alkaitis's behavior, Sethi reasons that Alkaitis's grief can explain why and how the fraud began during this time.

Sethi attempts to minimize Alkaitis's complicity in the Ponzi scheme, suggesting that defrauding investors of millions of dollars is a misstep that could befall anyone. He deprives Alkaitis of agency when he suggests that the fraud was a side effect of Alkaitis's guilt, rather than a crime he committed while he was of sound mind.

Sethi continues, painting the fraud as "something that *happened*" to Alkaitis and his investors rather than something Alkaitis did himself. He explains how Alkaitis had invested in dot-com companies, how he'd been caught off-guard by their failure, and how all this led up to his grave mistake of using a new investor's money to cover his losses. Ultimately, Sethi claims that Alkaitis made this mistake out of fear. He had lost so much already—his wife, his money—that all that remained for him was his work, which he was so terrified of losing that he would do anything to stay afloat.

Sethi continues to position Alkaitis as a victim of broader economic hardship rather than an active and willing participant in a Ponzi scheme. Though Sethi's apologist narrative of Alkaitis's crimes unfairly minimizes his role in them, it accurately depicts how fully Alkaitis relied on other people and external pursuits to give his life meaning and to shape his identity. It's probably true, to an extent, that Alkaitis needed to perpetuate a narrative of success and perseverance in the aftermath of Suzanne's death.

Sethi continues, claiming that while Alkaitis might be "deeply flawed," he's not "an evil man." As Sethi finishes making his case, the state's lawyers smirk before making their own case, in which they argue that the Ponzi scheme began well before the dot-com crash, in the 1970s. In the end, Alkaitis is sentenced to 170 years in prison.

Sethi's claim that Alkaitis is "deeply flawed" but not "evil" might very well be true, but Alkaitis's position as a flawed protagonist of sorts doesn't absolve him of the crimes he committed of his own accord, and it doesn't negate the impact those crimes had on Alkaitis's victims, which is why the court rules to convict him of those crimes and hands down a harsh sentence.

Olivia ruminates on the judge making the obligatory plans for Jonathan's supervised release, as futile as those plans might be. As Olivia emerges from the subway outside her sister's home, she thinks of two ideas for **ghost** stories: one, of a man who is granted supervised release after a 170-year prison sentence, and the other of "a woman who drift[s] unseen through the city of New York until she fade[s] into the crowds and the heat."

That the judge makes plans for Jonathan's release is ridiculous because Jonathan would be over 200 years old by the time he's released from prison. Olivia's ideas for ghost stories harks back to the game she and Renata would play as Renata posed for her. It's clear that the two ghosts Olivia creates are Jonathan and herself, respectively. In transforming herself and Jonathan into hypothetical ghosts, Olivia implicitly alludes to the complete destruction they've both incurred as a result of the scheme: Jonathan's crimes have essentially given him a death sentence, and they've doomed Olivia to a life of financial ruin. Imagining herself and Jonathan as ghosts speaks to the finality of their grim fates.

CHAPTER 12: THE COUNTERLIFE

In prison, Alkaitis steps outside one morning and sees Yvette Bertolli, he thinks, though this is impossible, as Yvette is dead. He'd first met her in the 1980s in Paris, where she gave him some "high-net-worth" clients. The morning of his arrest, those clients had $320 million invested in Alkaitis's fraudulent accounts, and Bertolli died of a heart attack later that day. Bertolli continues to walk around the prison yard, talking with Faisal.

That Alkaitis sees Bertolli's and Faisal's ghosts in prison implies that he feels guilty for the role he, his scheme, and his greed played in their deaths.

During one of Julie Freeman's visits with Alkaitis, she asks him about his employees. Alkaitis insists that they're "good" people. Freeman finds this descriptor interesting, given their involvement in such a big crime. She changes the topic to discuss Oskar Novak, who was quoted as saying "it's possible to both know and not know something" when confronted about his suspicious computer search history, and for whom things didn't go well. After Freeman leaves, Alkaitis considers Oskar's statement about knowing and not knowing, relating it to his own life: though he knows he was a "criminal" and a "liar," and has destroyed lives, he still feels his punishment is unfair.

Interestingly, Alkaitis seems determined not to turn on his "good" employees. Though at first one might interpret this as an act of loyalty, one shouldn't ignore the fact that Alkaitis also must realize that he has nothing to gain in turning them in—it would be purely out of spite (and therefore the lowest of lows) to do so. It's possible that if Alkaitis were in a position to negotiate with prosecutors in exchange for a lighter sentence, he'd be willing to throw his employees under the bus, though this is speculation. Still, given Alkaitis's history as a conman, it's not outlandish to suggest that he'd use his staff for personal gain—after all, he manipulated and exploited his unsuspecting investors for years. Alkaitis uses Oskar's observation about knowing and not knowing in the same way Oskar did: to acknowledge and excuse his transgressions simultaneously.

When Alkaitis is at the commissary one day, he sees Olivia, dressed in the blue dress she wore on the yacht the summer before he was arrested. The next time Julie Freeman visits him, he asks her to look up Olivia Collins. When he sees Freeman on their next visit two weeks later, she informs him that Olivia died a month ago, which Alkaitis already knew. Alkaitis then asks Freeman why she's writing about him, and she explains that she's long been interested in "mass delusion." To Freeman, it should have been obvious to an experienced investor that Alkaitis was a fraud, which means that, for him to succeed, a lot of people had to lie to themselves for a long time.

As with the other ghosts he sees in prison, Alkaitis sees Olivia because he feels guilty about defrauding her and taking advantage of their friendship. The thesis of Freeman's book about Alkaitis relates to the novel's major theme of greed, delusion, and self-interest. While it's true that Alkaitis willfully and knowingly defrauded investors, it's also true that he wouldn't have been successful if he didn't have people open to being conned. After all, Ella Kaspersky saw right through Alkaitis's scheme, which is proof people could've uncovered the truth about his scheme if they'd wanted.

Next, Freeman asks Alkaitis about Ella Kaspersky, whom Alkaitis admits is not his "favorite person." They met in 1999 at the Hotel Caiette. Suzanne was sick already and had stayed behind. He hadn't wanted to leave her but needed investors, and he felt that negotiating a deal at a place he owned lent him an additional layer of credibility.

The additional credibility Alkaitis acquires by meeting potential investors in the Hotel Caiette is as fraudulent as the similar technique he'd later employ by bringing Vincent along to business dinners: both create the superficial illusion of credibility and stability, when in reality, Alkaitis has neither of these things.

The narrative flashes back to the onset of the Kaspersky-Alkaitis saga: Alkaitis goes downstairs to the Hotel Caiette bar and finds Ella Kaspersky there, looking elegant and drinking whiskey. They talk a while before Alkaitis mentions his investing, and Ella mentions that her father just died and left a large sum of money to their family's charity fund, and that she's in charge of making investment decisions for the fund. Alkaitis goes into greater detail about his investing strategies and, since Ella is a few drinks in at this point, he figures she won't retain much of what he says.

Meeting Kaspersky (and other clients for that matter) is another deceptive, manipulative technique Alkaitis employs, since inebriated people might be less skeptical of Alkaitis and more willing to go along with whatever he proposes. This scene also reveals the personal, emotional investment Kaspersky has in her family's charity, since she's acquired it in the aftermath of her father's death.

However, Alkaitis is proven wrong when a letter from Ella arrives a few weeks later. Ella has conducted her own research, consulted with some experts, and ultimately decided that the kind of returns Alkaitis's funds were seeing would "require an almost psychic knowledge of when the market was going to fall." In short, Ella believes that Alkaitis's numbers don't add up.

Unlike Alkaitis's other investors, who were willing to turn a blind eye to Alkaitis's unnaturally good returns, Kaspersky is acutely skeptical of Alkaitis from the very start. Her insusceptibility to mass delusion makes her a unique character in the novel.

Ella also reveals her discovery that her family's private foundation, which was founded to fund research for colon cancer, the disease that killed her mother, is already invested in Alkaitis's company. She brought her concerns to the foundation, which immediately sent out a request to withdraw the investment. She also forwarded a copy of her letter to the SEC. When Alkaitis shows Enrico Ella's letter, Enrico's hands shake, but he insists that Ella can't prove anything she asserts in the letter.

One reason why Kaspersky is so skeptical of Alkaitis when others are not is that she has personal reasons to have a vendetta against him, since Alkaitis's fund is in control of money she associates with her deceased mother. Had Kaspersky not investigated Alkaitis's fund and discovered evidence of fraud, her family's fund for colon cancer research might have been gone forever. This suggests that it's the personal stakes Ella already has in Alkaitis's fund that prevent her from falling prey to the scheme that others succumbed to, rather than superior moral standards or a greater level of intelligence.

Alkaitis's story continues. Next, his company gets a letter from the SEC informing them that they were opening an investigation. Alkaitis assumes they'll be caught, but they aren't. In the present, Freeman asks Alkaitis if he saw Ella again, and Alkaitis lies and says no, because the last night he did see Ella is too horrible to contemplate.

It's unclear why the SEC didn't find anything in Alkaitis's business worth prosecuting, though it's worth noting that the same thing happened in the Madoff investment scandal, the actual Ponzi scheme on which the novel is loosely based. Though questions about the Madoff investment fund's legitimacy were raised as early as 1999, Madoff wasn't arrested until 2009, and the SEC would later be criticized for not investigating Madoff thoroughly enough.

Alkaitis's story continues. Alkaitis and Suzanne have been eating dinner at a favorite restaurant of theirs, Le Veau d'Or, though Suzanne can hardly eat. They've just visited the oncologist, who's given them bad news. Suddenly, Alkaitis hears the sound of breaking **glass**. He turns and sees Ella sitting a few tables away from them. A busboy has dropped her wineglass, which has shattered onto her bread plate. Alkaitis informs Suzanne that the woman is Ella Kaspersky. Suzanne finishes eating and tells Alkaitis to get the check as she continues to study Kaspersky carefully. Alkaitis begs Suzanne to leave, but to do so, the couple are forced to walk directly past Ella's table. As they walk nearer to the table, Ella finally looks up, her facial expression hardly changing as she registers Alkaitis's face.

The broken glass in Kaspersky's breadbasket harks back to the graffiti message that appeared on the Hotel Caiette's glass wall at the beginning of the novel: "why don't you swallow broken glass?" Given Paul's insinuation that the message was intended for Alkaitis, it's possible that this story and the threatening message are related. This scene is also important because it's the first glimpse the reader has gotten into Suzanne's character. Thus far, she's existed only in minor comments made by other characters.

Alkaitis only says good evening to Ella; the SEC has just closed their fruitless investigation, and he doesn't want to brag too overtly. Ella sips her wine, pauses, and tells Alkaitis that he is "beneath [her] contempt." Alkaitis is stunned into silence. Slowly, Suzanne picks up a shard of broken **glass** that remains in the breadbasket, places it in Ella's water glass, and says to her, "*why don't you swallow broken glass?*"

Ella's comment that Alkaitis is "beneath [her] contempt" frames his fraud (and narrow avoidance of facing legal consequences for it) as personally *repugnant to her, which underscores the idea that Ella's legal pursuit of Alkaitis is something of a personal vendetta, motivated by her distaste for him. This scene also confirms that the message that will appear on the glass wall of the Hotel Caiette in 2005 is taken directly from Ella, which implies that Ella is somehow responsible for the graffiti. Paul had insinuated something about being in debt when Walter confronted him, so it's possible that Ella approached and bribed Paul to write the message to antagonize Alkaitis.*

Alkaitis's story ends, and the narrative picks up in the present, in prison. The professor who runs the book club sets aside the usual Fitzgerald reading assignments to discuss an allegory of "the swan in the frozen pond," a story about a swan who loves the lake so much he lacks the foresight to leave it when winter comes, and he freezes to death. In a later discussion with Freeman, Alkaitis admits that he'd thought he could get out, and then he was embarrassed, not wanting to disappoint his investors, whom he calls "greedy," on account of "the returns they expected." Freeman accuses Alkaitis of blaming the investors for his fraud, which Alkaitis denies, though, on a certain level, he did feel pushed to deliver what they wanted.

Alkaitis relates to the frozen swan from the allegory. Like the swan, he'd been so wrapped up in the allure of money and success that he'd deceived himself into thinking he could conduct his scheme indefinitely. In his later discussion with Freeman, Alkaitis positions his investors as complicit in his downfall, reasoning that he wouldn't have continued to commit fraud if his "greedy" investors hadn't expected such high returns on their investments. Alkaitis's formulation enacts a vicious cycle of delusion, in which Alkaitis's investors' delusion about their high returns deludes Alkaitis into thinking he can get away with his scheme forever.

Alkaitis continues to see **ghosts** from his past parading around the prison yard: he sees Yvette Bertolli, Olivia, Faisal, and a middle-aged man he doesn't know. He is aware of four suicides related to the fraud; Faisal was one of them, and he wonders if this man is another. Alkaitis grows mad, not knowing why these **ghosts** have to torment him; it's not as though he made them die or commit suicide, and, further, they could've gotten out whenever they wanted.

This scene confirms what the narrative has hinted at on several occasions now, which is that Faisal's death was the result of a suicide. That there were at least four suicides that happened in response to the Ponzi scheme's collapse indirectly implicates Alkaitis in more deaths as well, though Alkaitis's assertion that he didn't force *these people to die is true, too: ultimately, the investors chose to remain oblivious to any red flags that might have appeared over the years, and chose to respond to the Ponzi scheme's collapse by ending their own lives. Alkaitis's anger at the ghosts might actually be anger at himself for not being able to rid himself of the guilt he feels for these investors' deaths.*

In a scene from Alkaitis's counterlife, he walks through a corridor in the hotel on Palm Jumeirah. When he reaches the lobby, it's empty except for Vincent, who's been waiting for him. She's older now, wearing a gray uniform and chef's apron. Her hair is shorter, and she wears no makeup. She greets him, explaining that she's "just visiting." He looks behind himself and sees Yvette and Faisal. When Alkaitis turns back around, Vincent is gone.

That Alkaitis sees Vincent in his counterlife suggests that Vincent has died (which the reader knows will happen, since the novel's opening chapter, "Vincent in the Water," features a woman aboard a ship falling overboard into the stormy sea). This theory is also supported by the fact that Vincent appears as she does when she's employed as a chef aboard the Neptune Cumberland. *It also suggests that Alkaitis feels responsible for the chaos and hurt he inflicted upon Vincent over the course of their relationship and in the aftermath of his conviction.*

Later, back in Alkaitis's "noncounterlife," he laments the "unfairness" of the **ghosts** he's been forced to see. Why can he not see Suzanne or Lucas? Alkaitis realizes he's in his counterlife more than he is in reality—that the world has begun to slip away from him. He takes Churchwell's pen and labels his left hand "L." He decides that he'll make a habit of thinking of Lucas every time he sees the L, since "he heard somewhere that habits are the last to go." Churchwell tells him that the problem with memories, though, is that they become less and less sharp every time you go to them. This worries Alkaitis, who lately has been able to summon forth one memory of Lucas, and he fears that one day even that will be gone.

That Alkaitis now refers to reality as the "noncounterlife," in terms of how it differs from his counterlife, suggests that the counterlife has replaced reality as the place where Alkaitis spends most of his time. Literally, this might mean that Alkaitis's dementia is worsening. Symbolically, it speaks to the all-encompassing intensity of the guilt and remorse Alkaitis feels over the lives he destroyed with his Ponzi scheme. That Alkaitis only sees the ghosts of people he's wronged (and not the ghosts of people whose deaths he mourns, like Lucas and Suzanne) underscores the ghosts' symbolic connection to guilt and responsibility.

Alkaitis's memory is from the last summer Lucas was alive, when Alkaitis was 14. Lucas had come home from the city to attend a family picnic. When his family greeted him at the train station, he was very thin and wore dark glasses, and he was late, which had worried their parents. On the drive out to the picnic, Alkaitis asked his brother how his painting was going, proud to be having such an adult conversation with his older brother. Though Alkaitis was young at the time, he could still sense that Lucas's tone and responses were off, and that their parents were concerned; their father told Lucas he could come back home to have a change of pace, but Lucas refused. What Alkaitis remembers most about this memory is the "sense of calm at the end of the long strange day, a temporary peace" that occurred after the picnic.

Lucas's lateness and off behavior are the result of his drug addiction. Alkaitis's memory humanizes him, providing the reader with a glimpse into Alkaitis's life before he succumbed to the allures of financial excess and greed. It's possible that the loss of Lucas instilled in Alkaitis a heightened fear of loss more broadly, which might explain the greed that he would succumb to later in life: one way to negate loss, perhaps, is to accumulate as much as one can.

CHAPTER 13: SHADOW COUNTRY

It's December 2018, and Leon Prevant has been working a menial job in receiving at a Marriott in a small town in Colorado. Leon has been in Colorado for half a year when Miranda calls him. Leon is sitting in the RV after work, alone, as Marie just got a night job at Walmart.

Though the Prevants were formerly wealthy enough to afford a trip to the Hotel Caiette, the collapse of the Ponzi scheme forces them to take whatever work they can get.

The call surprises Leon, who hasn't heard from Miranda in the 10 years that have passed since he left the corporate world. Miranda admits that she's not calling for a happy reason before asking Leon if he'd like to return for a short, temporary consulting job. Leon enthusiastically accepts before Miranda can fill him in on the grim details of the job: there's been an accident (or maybe not an accident) on a Neptune-Avramidis ship, the *Neptune Cumberland*, in which a female cook disappeared while at sea. Miranda is putting together a committee to evaluate crew safety more generally, and Vincent Smith's death, specifically.

It's rather apparent that the "Vincent Smith" who disappeared aboard the Neptune Cumberland *is the Vincent who formerly lived with Alkaitis, which would complicate Leon's role in the investigation, as his past associations with Jonathan Alkaitis would create a conflict of interest for him. That Leon is called in to assist in the investigation of Vincent, the former wife of someone he met halfway across the country over a decade ago and who later defrauded him of his life savings, is only possible by an almost supernatural set of coincidences. It's yet another instance in which the novel pulls together formerly disparate narratives to make a larger point about the interconnectedness of people within a society.*

Hearing of a woman named Vincent jogs Leon's memory, and he tells Miranda he once knew—or "knew of"—a woman named Vincent, but Miranda mostly ignores Leon's comment. Speaking bluntly, she tells Leon that this investigation will be all Vincent gets, though she wishes she had the budget to undergo an external investigation, as "companies have a way of exonerating themselves." Hiring Leon is a way of splitting the difference: an internal investigation, but done by someone she "trust[s]." Miranda and Leon talk about travel logistics for a while and then end the phone call.

Leon suspects that he once knew, or "knew of" the woman whose disappearance Miranda is hiring him to help investigate as an external (and therefore unbiased) source, yet he makes minimal efforts to alert Miranda of this potential conflict of interest, even though doing so would be the morally right thing to do. Leon's hesitancy to disclose his ties to Vincent shows that a person's morals can be compromised if an incentive is present. In this case, Leon is short on funds and doesn't want to disqualify himself from being brought in as a consultant on Vincent's disappearance.

The narrative flashes back to the immediate aftermath of Alkaitis's arrest. Leon and Marie's life changes drastically after the collapse of the Ponzi scheme and the loss of their savings, and they're struggling to keep up with their mortgage. In the months that follow Alkaitis's arrest, Leon tries to get more consulting work, though it's difficult, since his company put a freeze on hiring consultants. The RV the couple bought right before everything fell apart seems to mock them in the driveway.

This passage gives the reader additional insight into the Ponzi scheme's impact on the Prevants. The Prevants are in a similar financial situation as Olivia Collins: both the Prevants and Olivia had some financial security when they invested with Alkaitis, but they weren't as immensely rich as some of his biggest investors. As a result, they incurred the most harm when the scheme collapsed.

One night that summer, though, Marie mentions a conversation she had with her old friend Clarissa, who recently lost her house and is living out of a van. Marie talks of all the jobs a person can get on the road, like ticketing at fairs or working in warehouses around the holiday season, and suggests they abandon their house and live in the RV. At first the idea seems ludicrous, but the couple soon realizes that if they do it, they can leave a lot of their financial woes behind. As the couple drives along the highway the morning they abandon their old lives, their decision "fe[els] unexpectedly like triumph." Still, as Leon glances lovingly at Marie, he can't help but feel scared at being so "adrift."

Being "adrift" frightens Leon because it deprives him of the social safety nets he and Marie previously relied on to give their lives meaning and direction. Without the comforts of friends, work, and financial stability, the Prevants have only themselves to give their lives meaning and shape the contours of their identities.

The couple spends much of that summer in a campground on the central coast of California. Leon loves walking along the stretches of abandoned beach between Oceano and Pismo Beach. When Leon sees freighters pass through the **waters**, he tries to imagine their routes. The couple agrees that their retirement years are very different than the ones they imagined they'd have, and though there are true moments of joy in their transient lifestyle, they are now "citizens of a shadow country [...] a country located at the edge of an abyss," and populated by the drifting and the downtrodden. It's a life that doesn't allow for "any kind of error or misfortune," and this terrifies Leon.

The "shadow country" to which Leon refers describes a world of transient people who have also fallen outside society's reach. Everyone who lives in the shadow country has only themselves to rely on: there are no helping hands and no forces to reassure them. Though there's something liberating in being so detached from society's constraints, the shadow country is also a dangerous place, where "any kind of error or misfortune" can result in grave, permanent consequences. When a person is part of society, they can rely on their social connections to repair and turn around their life. When a person lives an unanchored existence in the shadow country, there are no connections available to help them, and the smallest mistake can become a matter of life and death.

The narrative returns to the present (2018), and Leon has journeyed back east to tackle the consulting job. Miranda asks Leon how his retirement is going, seemingly unaware of his tragic involvement in the Alkaitis fraud. Miranda passes Leon a file labeled VINCENT SMITH, inviting him to take his time going over the materials. She explains that a man named Michael Saparelli, a former NYPD police officer, will conduct the interviews in the investigation, and that Leon will serve as a witness to the interviews, to protect against an internal coverup. So, if it appears that whatever happened to Vincent was the fault of the company, Miranda explains, she wants to know about it. The plan is for Leon to head to Germany tomorrow.

Miranda's failure to discover Leon's connections to Jonathan Alkaitis and his former wife Vincent make his involvement in the investigation unethical, but Leon chooses to go along with it anyway. His desire for financial stability outweighs his obligation to disclose the conflict of interest to Miranda.

Leon reads through the files that evening. Vincent Smith was 37 at the time of her disappearance, and she worked as the assistant cook on the *Neptune Cumberland*, a container ship. She would be at **sea** for nine months at a time, and then off for three months. She had no permanent address, though that wasn't unusual for seafarers. She continued in this pattern until the night she vanished off the coast of Mauritania. The primary suspect in her disappearance was Geoffrey Bell, who was dating Vincent when she died.

Vincent's file reveals a nomadic lifestyle and emphasizes how completely she transformed her life after Alkaitis's arrest. If she had regrets during her life with Alkaitis of becoming so dependent on another person, she certainly turned things around after the dissolution of their relationship, becoming so independent and isolated that she didn't even possess a permanent address. It's surprising that Geoffrey Bell is considered a suspect in her disappearance; the novel hasn't shown much of their relationship, but what it has presented hasn't given any indicators that Bell was violent or harbored any bad feelings toward Vincent.

Apparently, two people overheard Bell and Vincent arguing in her cabin the night she disappeared and, after this, security footage showed her leaving her room and moving to C deck, even though they were in the midst of a heavy storm and the crew had been instructed to stay inside. Because there was a corner of C deck where no cameras could reach, Vincent was hidden from view. Less than an hour later, Bell was seen following Vincent and stepping into the same blind spot. He remained hidden for five minutes, at which point he reappeared, but Vincent was never seen again. Bell insisted he had gone to look for her and was unsuccessful, but the captain didn't believe his story, and Bell left the ship at its next stop in Rotterdam.

The ship's security footage parallels the fragments presented in the novel's opening chapter, "Vincent in the Water." Even though the security camera didn't capture what happened to Vincent, the reader can assume that Vincent fell overboard, since this is what's insinuated to have happened in the earlier chapter. Still, it's not clear how Vincent got there, and Bell's decision to flee the ship does seem suspicious. Vincent's decision to ignore the instructions to stay inside during the storm emphasizes how determined she is to be independent and in control of her own life.

Leon meets Saparelli when he boards the plane to Germany, where the investigation will take place. Saparelli clarifies how their partnership will work: Saparelli will ask the questions, and Leon will stay silent. He fills Leon in on some of the investigating he's done so far: apparently, Geoffrey Bell had a recent history of barfights back home. Leon and Saparelli spend much of the rest of the flight in silence. Leon investigates Vincent's security badge more closely: it's plausible she could be Jonathan Alkaitis's beautiful ex-wife, but the middle-aged woman in this photo is plain and unsmiling—so much the opposite of the Vincent he'd known.

Saparelli's instructions show that Leon's involvement in the investigation will be minimal. He's really just there to create the illusion that the shipping company is conducting an unbiased investigation into Vincent's disappearance. The unrecognizability of Vincent on her security badge speaks to the lengths she'd gone to earlier in life to disguise and mold herself into the person Jonathan wanted her to be. After she left Jonathan, she looked like—and effectively was—a totally different person.

Leon and Saparelli arrive in Germany and are transported to the shipping terminal. They head toward the *Neptune Cumberland*, and Leon feels as though he's "haunting a previous version of his life." Saparelli asks the crew some questions about Geoffrey Bell. An Australian crew member explains that though he never gave them any trouble, he was rather "antisocial." One officer recalls seeing Vincent and Bell holding hands, though the chief engineer contends that "they were rather discreet" as a couple. The steward, Mendoza, who was Vincent's boss, calls her "competent" and good to work with. He also recalls that she "liked to shoot videos of nothing." For example, she'd stand on the deck and film the ocean, which they found strange but respectable—the way she'd keep up with it.

Leon's observation that he's "haunting a previous version of his life" is almost identical to the thought Vincent has when she's surrounded by expensive purchases after a day of shopping with Mirella, back when she was living as Alkaitis's wife. Both Leon's and Vincent's observations express a disillusionment with the way their lives have unfolded. Here, Leon remarks on the strangeness of exiting and returning to the world of shipping under such bizarre and unexpected circumstances: he'd initially lost his job in the company merger; then he lost all his savings; then, many years later, he's called back to work for his old company to investigate the disappearance of the ex-wife of the man who caused him to lose all his money.

Saparelli asks if Vincent ever seemed depressed, but Mendoza says she seemed happy: she'd travel all around the world while she wasn't at **sea**, to Iceland, or Thailand, or Italy. Leon and Saparelli investigate Vincent's cabin, which is exactly as she'd left it. Barely any of her things are there: just some clothes, a few books. Before they leave, they pack up her things to take with them.

That Vincent seemed happy with her transient lifestyle reflects the peace she found in removing herself from the people and social and economic systems that oppressed her during her time on land.

It's late afternoon by the time the investigation wraps up. As Leon and Saparelli are about to leave the ship, Mendoza reappears and offers to walk them out. Saparelli initially declines, but Leon can sense something in Mendoza's expression, so he nods for him to come along. Quietly, Mendoza reveals that he heard Bell hit a woman with whom he had a relationship a few years ago, when they were on rotation on another ship, though he didn't witness it directly. He also heard Bell threaten to throw the woman overboard.

Mendoza's account complicates the formerly straightforward investigation, turning it from an accidental death to a possible murder. As a witness to the investigation and as a moral person, Leon has a responsibility to include these findings in his report.

Saparelli looks ill. Leon imagines what would happen if these allegations came to light. Leon and Saparelli leave the ship and don't talk to each other in the car. They both scribble in their notebooks; Leon tries to transcribe Mendoza's transcription word for word and assumes that Saparelli is doing the same.

Leon takes his moral and professional responsibilities seriously. Perhaps he wants to compensate for his earlier failure to report his conflict of interest to Miranda.

In the car on the way to the airport the next morning, Saparelli asks to see Leon's notebook. Leon hands it to him, and Saparelli removes and pockets the pages on which Leon transcribed Mendoza's confession. Saparelli then confronts Leon, informing him that he knows all about his transient lifestyle and his victimization in the Ponzi scheme. He tells Leon that if he ever wants more opportunities at consulting work, he'll choose to forget everything Mendoza told him and spare the company the huge mess that revealing the confession would create.

Saparelli gives Leon an ultimatum: he can either go public with Mendoza's testimony and create a scandal for the shipping company, all but ensuring that he'll never be invited back for another consulting gig, or he can keep quiet and open up the possibility of receiving future work. Saparelli's ultimatum forces Leon to choose between what is morally correct (not withholding information from the investigation report) and what will benefit him (withholding information and possibly improving his precarious financial situation).

Saparelli contends that while Mendoza might have told them "an unsettling anecdote," it changes nothing about the investigation or the facts of the case; no matter what Saparelli includes or fails to include in his report, Vincent will still be dead. He also reveals that he knows about Leon's connection to Vincent. Leon is stunned. Saparelli suggests that Leon's involvement in the investigation is itself a conflict of interest and asks if Miranda is aware of Leon's connection to Vincent. Leon stutters, insisting that Miranda could have looked up something on Google if she'd really wanted to know. Saparelli is silent. After a long pause, Saparelli informs Leon that he'll recommend him to Miranda for future consulting jobs.

Saparelli's conclusion that the outcome of Vincent's investigation won't change the fact that she's dead depicts a cynical worldview in which individual humans are powerless to enact real, positive change: that tragedies and miscarriages of justice will always exist, and that any attempts to rectify these misfortunes are futile and misguided in the grand scheme of things. As Leon attempts to justify his failure to inform Miranda about his connections to Vincent, he realizes he doesn't have a choice but to go along with Saparelli's orders. If Leon tries to include Mendoza's testimony in his report, Saparelli will tell Miranda about Leon's conflict of interest in the case, which will invalidate Leon's findings and prevent him from being called back for future consulting work. Ultimately, Leon's desire for future work wins out over his moral obligation to include Mendoza's testimony in his report.

After the investigation in Germany, Leon ruminates about how people spend life "moving between countries." He recalls an essay he once read by a man with a terminal illness who was helped by EMTs "into the country of the sick." Leon relates this idea to his own life. Just as the EMTs transported the essayist to the country of the sick, Alkaitis transported him to "the country of the cheated." Certain comforts, such as retirement, a permanent home, or trust, are now impossible for Leon because of this journey. Likewise, certain things, such as "any certainty in his morality," are impossible for him after his trip to Germany.

Leon's dire financial situation limits his ability to author his identity and control the narrative of his life. He can no longer make any assertions about what kind of person he is or the unethical behaviors he's capable of since both of these things change according to Leon's need to fulfill his basic needs for survival. Though he might have been able to call himself honest and morally uncompromised in the past, his decision to withhold Mendoza's testimony from his report in exchange for a paycheck complicates this. Desperation and the drive for self-preservation force Leon to do things he never thought he'd do.

The week after the investigation, Saparelli sends Leon a video retrieved off Vincent's laptop, which seems to suggest that Vincent regularly shot video in bad, hazardous weather and, therefore, supports the theory that her death was "accidental." Leon recognizes Saparelli's email as a kind attempt to soothe Leon's conscience.

Saparelli's email vaguely absolves Leon of his guilt; if it's true that Vincent's death was an accident, then Leon hasn't failed in his moral responsibility to investigate her death as a murder, and it's only in principle that his mishandling of Mendoza's testimony was unethical.

It's now been a year since Leon's return from Germany. He and Marie are camped outside Santa Fe after spending a grueling holiday season working in a warehouse in Arizona. Marie comments on the surrounding beauty, and Leon agrees. Leon feels chilly, though, and he knows he can't blame it on the weather. He reflects on his and Marie's earlier decision not to have children. At the time it seemed like the right thing to do—a way to avoid stress and "heartbreak," and it had certainly made their lives easier. Now, though, he recognizes their childlessness as the root of their not having an "anchor," and wants nothing more than to be "more anchored to this earth." Marie and Leon watch the sun set before heading to bed. Marie falls asleep as Leon stays awake.

This scene parallels an earlier scene in the novel, when Leon lies next to a sleeping Marie, kept awake by his personal anxieties. Leon's story ends tragically: though he and Marie find moments of peace and contentment in their transient lifestyle, their lives are made scary and uncertain by their inability to rely on friends, family, and social and economic systems for comfort. They have nothing to distract themselves from the terror and alienation that are inevitable components of the human experience.

CHAPTER 14: THE OFFICE CHORUS

It's 2029, and Simone is at a cocktail party in Atlanta, where she lives with her family. Exuberantly, she tells her colleagues about the time in 2008 when she worked as Jonathan Alkaitis's secretary. Her much younger assistant, Keisha, doesn't recognize the name (much to Simone's annoyance), but an older colleague recalls how Alkaitis "stole" all her grandpa's retirement money and turned him into a bitter, broken man. Over the past couple decades, Simone has "honed the story" and "made it sharper and more entertaining," though she can't think of Claire's broken, sedated figure in the backseat of the SUV that day, or she feels too guilty.

Claire's earlier prediction that Simone will use her experience working at Alkaitis's office as fodder for a cheesy cocktail party story comes true. The exaggerated, "entertaining" way Simone tells her story is rather gross, given the magnitude of suffering and tragedy that lies at the core of Alkaitis's Ponzi scheme. Simone is essentially exploiting this suffering to impress her colleagues.

The narrative switches to a first-person perspective and gives an overview of the trajectory of Alkaitis's employees' lives after his arrest. Simone is now in her 40s, by which point everyone who was convicted has served their sentences. Because of his cooperation with the state, Harvey is sentenced to time served and has since moved to New Jersey to live in his sister's basement. Though Ron isn't convicted, he's now divorced and lives with his parents in Rochester. After her release from prison, Joelle moves in with her sister in North Carolina, without her children. Oskar was released but later reincarcerated on drug charges. Enrico is still free and living in Mexico, now married and with two daughters, though he lives every day in fear of the day authorities will finally find him.

The novel presents Alkaitis's former employees in a sympathetic light. Though they were all complicit in the Ponzi scheme that destroyed many lives and livelihoods, they are people, too, and their own lives are characterized by suffering and disappointment following the scheme's collapse.

CHAPTER 15: THE HOTEL

1: It's 2005 at the Hotel Caiette. Paul is sweeping the lobby when a guest speaks up to say, jokingly, that he missed a spot. The guest is Ella Kaspersky, who draws him near to speak with him privately. She asks him how much longer he plans to work at the hotel, and Paul admits that he likely won't be there much longer. Inwardly, Paul laments his hatred of Caiette, of how painful it is to be reminded of his recently deceased father, and of his dislike for his coworkers. Ella asks him what he plans to do instead, and Paul says he wants to be a composer. Ella tells Paul she's going to tell him a story "which will end with a business proposition." Paul agrees to hear out Ella.

Ella's exploitation of Paul seems to mirror Alkaitis's exploitation of his investors: both characters prey on their targets' needs and vulnerabilities and the blind spots they develop because of them. In a way, Ella is as much a con[wo]man as Alkaitis is. This formulation complicates what might be the reader's instinct to villainize Alkaitis and valorize Ella, since it suggests that the supposedly "good" character is just as capable of manipulation and exploitation as the novel's villain.

Ella explains that she wants to convey a specific message to Jonathan Alkaitis when he arrives at the hotel, and she wants it "to be delivered in an unforgettable way." Paul offers his memory of Vincent graffitiing the school wall with an acid marker many years ago, and Ella thinks this will be the perfect method of delivery for her message.

This scene confirms what the novel has alluded to in a number of earlier passages: that Paul was bribed to write the message on the Hotel Caiette's glass wall, and that it was Ella who paid him to do so.

Paul writes Ella's message during his dinner break on the arranged night, and it gives him a feeling "like stars exploding in his chest." After shedding his dark hoodie and gloves, he returns to the lobby and watches the horrified responses of people as they take in his message. He tries to act cool, asking Walter what happened to the **window**, but Paul can hear that his voice sounds off. He approaches Vincent, who is so upset by the message that she's begun to cry and excuses herself. Paul gazes at the **glass** wall and notes that "the lobby [is] reflected with almost mirrorlike fidelity," but now this image is "pierced by a white light out on the **water**" as a boat on the water carries Jonathan Alkaitis toward the hotel.

The feeling "like stars exploding in his chest" that Paul gets when he writes Ella's message seems to be one of exhilaration and reflects Paul's characteristic disregard for others' feelings, and his failure to see how his actions have consequences that don't start and end with himself. Paul's observation that the glass wall "reflect[s]" the lobby "with almost mirrorlike fidelity" exacerbates Paul's disconnect with the world. If the glass wall really does reflect the lobby and everyone in it as honestly and as accurately as a mirror, then he should have no trouble seeing the pain his threatening message has caused others, and the self-delusion within himself that was necessary for him to agree to write such a message in the first place. But Paul's speculations are cut short by the reflection of Alkaitis's boat in the water, and his attempt at self-reflection grinds to a screeching halt. The glass wall might reflect a mirror-like honesty, but that honesty is also vulnerable to the distorting forces of greed and delusion, represented by the "pierc[ing…] white light" of Alkaitis's boat.

It's now three years later, in December 2008, and Walter is reading of Alkaitis's arrest. He immediately grows faint, and his coworkers rush to his side. Larry sees the headline Walter has just read and immediately understands. Walter explains that he's an investor, and that he's lost all his life's savings. In a daze, Walter goes to see Raphael, who informs him that the hotel's future is now in jeopardy, as well.

Like Olivia Collins and the Prevants, Walter isn't particularly rich, so he feels the devastating effects of the collapse of Alkaitis's Ponzi scheme more intensely than the wealthier investors.

Next week, they find out that the trustee hired to manage Alkaitis's estate has decided to sell the hotel. Raphael reveals that the hotel hasn't made a profit in years and that it's unlikely a hotelier would be interested in buying. They soon learn that the hotel is for sale, with no interested buyers, and will close in a few weeks. Suddenly, an idea occurs to Walter. He calls the trustee, Alfred Selwyn, and asks if he can be the hotel's caretaker, explaining his love for the place. Selwyn is puzzled by Walter's request and concerned that he'll go crazy living alone in a place so isolated, but tells Walter to send him some references and he'll get back to him.

Walter's world came crashing down when he discovered he lost everything to Alkaitis's Ponzi scheme. His interest in becoming the abandoned hotel's caretaker seems to stem from a desire for the opportunity for healing that isolation can offer a person.

When Walter tells Raphael of his plans to stay on and act as the hotel's caretaker, Raphael thinks he's crazy. Still, he tells Walter he's willing to give him a positive reference. Inwardly, Walter contemplates how much the hotel and Caiette mean to him, how it's the first place he's ever really loved. Mostly, he loves the place's quietness, seclusion, and absence of people; after what happened with Alkaitis, he knows he won't trust anybody ever again.

Not only has Alkaitis's Ponzi scheme destroyed Walter financially, but it also makes him hyperaware of people's capacity to deceive and exploit others. He sees society as a system that perpetuates and even encourages greed and corruption and wants nothing to do with that system, so he removes himself from it, cutting himself off from the world geographically and psychologically.

It's a decade later. Paul is in Edinburgh at a bar with Ella Kaspersky, whose name he can't remember. Paul accompanies Ella outside to the terrace for a cigarette and finally remembers who she is. Ella touches Paul's arm and apologizes for making him write the message all those years ago; she explains that she was drunk, angry, and got carried away. Paul contends that he "could've said no," and while Ella agrees, she also knows she shouldn't have asked him at all. Paul observes that she was at least right about Alkaitis.

Paul and Ella's agreement that neither should have played any part in the vandalism of the Hotel Caiette's glass wall positions both characters as actors in a system wherein most people are morally compromised in one way or another. It's not fair to blame the threatening message on Ella or Paul alone, since both of them had to agree to ignore or compromise their personal values for the act of vandalism to occur.

Paul tells Ella about Vincent's relationship with Alkaitis, and Ella is fascinated to learn about the connection and wants to know what became of Vincent. Paul admits that he doesn't know. The last he saw of her was at his performance at the Brooklyn Academy of Music, where he saw her sitting in the front row, though when he gazed at her again, she was gone. He imagines the confrontation they would have had. He would excuse his use of her video recordings on the grounds that she'd left them behind and clearly wasn't going to do anything with them; she would retort that all this still didn't give him the right to take what was hers. But they would never get the chance to have this conversation and, as a result, he's doomed to repeat it in his head from now to eternity.

This scene confirms that Paul did see Vincent at the BAM concert a decade ago, which Vincent hadn't known for sure. Paul's hypothetical conversations with Vincent are reminiscent of Alkaitis's daydreams of the counterlife: both alternate realities allude to the guilt characters feel about their moral failings, yet Alkaitis and Paul both fall short of fully admitting to the things they did wrong. Here, for instance, Paul tries to justify why it was okay for him to take Vincent's tapes. But by not admitting to his guilt, Paul condemns himself to unresolved suffering and remorse. Just as Paul is haunted by the ghost of Charlie Wu for the role he played in his death, so too is he haunted by regret over the conversations he never had with Vincent.

Paul's hypothetical argument with Vincent continues, with him explaining that his use of her videos led to future collaborations, to performances around the world, to a teaching position. Vincent asks him if these successes "justify" his theft, and he admits that he doesn't know, also adding that, after the BAM performance, he never used her tapes again.

In his hypothetical conversation with Vincent, Paul crafts a self-serving narrative that justifies his mistreatment of Vincent. He's clearly still bitter about the role she played in his parents' divorce and thinks she owes him something in return.

Ella's voice calls Paul back to the present moment. Paul apologizes, blaming his spaciness on the jetlag (he's just flown from Toronto to Edinburgh). Ella looks at him with concern, giving him "a certain kind of look" that lately he's been getting more often. Paul asks how Ella ended up at the party where they crossed paths, and she says her husband is a theater director. They order drinks, and Paul talks about the strangeness of his success as a composer while inwardly continuing his hypothetical argument with Vincent.

The "certain kind of look" Ella gives Paul implies that Paul looks high. That he's been getting this look a lot suggests that Paul continues to struggle with addiction. Paul's fixation on this hypothetical conversation with Vincent is a reflection of both his guilt and his unwillingness to accept responsibility for his mistreatment of her.

Ella compliments Paul on a recent video art program he created. She asks him about his musical influences, and Paul says that everything he writes sounds like Baltica, a Canadian electronica group from the 1990s, which is something he's never told anyone. Ella misunderstands Paul's admission, assuming that he used to be a part of Baltica. Paul plays along, explaining that the group has since gone their separate ways.

That Paul can't stop emulating Baltica in his compositions is evidence of the unceasing guilt he feels about the role he played in Charlie Wu's death. It's as though the ghost of Charlie continues to visit him in the form of musical inspiration.

Back at the Hotel Caiette, Walter stands in the old staff quarters and talks to his sister on the phone. It's been 10 years since he became the caretaker of the closed hotel, and she can't believe he's not lonely. The narrative reverts back to 2009, two months after Alkaitis's arrest, when the last guest checks in and the other employees begin to leave. Raphael leaves for his new job in Edmonton, boarding a boat driven by Melissa, whose last day is today. She promises to stop by the following week to check on Walter. Walter watches the boat make its way away from the pier before returning to the hotel through the **glass** doors of the lobby. Though the hotel is empty, Walter doesn't feel quite alone and observes that the hotel feels haunted by its previous inhabitants.

The presence of former guests and staff that Walter observes might be a metaphor for the lasting impact people have on others' lives. It also illustrates how nearly impossible it is to remove oneself from society completely. Though it's possible to achieve physical isolation, it's difficult to build a life that's completely untouched by society's sphere of influence.

Back in the present, on the phone with his sister, Walter remarks how he woke up today and realized he's been the caretaker for the past 10 years. He contemplates the last decade of his life and realizes he has loved his solitary experience here. When he hangs up the phone, he returns to the empty lobby and sees it as "a vast empty space with a panorama of wilderness beyond the **glass**."

Walter uses the Hotel Caiette's glass wall in a way that's similar to Vincent's use of her camera lens: as a way to edit interactions with the world in a way that filters out everything that's too hard to see or bear. Walter is happy with his solitary life behind the safe confines of the lobby's glass wall because it allows him to filter out the people he no longer trusts in the aftermath of Alkaitis's betrayal.

Back in Edinburgh, Paul is talking to Ella and drinking tea, though he's growing more and more tired. Ella suggests they part ways, telling him good luck with "the unbearable smugness of the nonaddicted," and he hates her in this moment, though he knows he's not doing well—he'd ODed only a month ago. He's been able to remain functional as a heroin addict for the past decade, but now heroin is sometimes mixed with fentanyl (which is stronger), or even carfentanil (which is far more potent than fentanyl), and this scares him. Recently, he read about a rehab facility in Utah, and he knows it's a good idea to go back to rehab.

The "unbearable smugness" with which Ella treats Paul is similar to her behavior in the aftermath of the collapse of Alkaitis's Ponzi scheme, wherein she appeared genuinely and smugly pleased to have been right about the scandal. Ella appears to take pleasure in being smarter or more morally upstanding than the cheated investors or the drug-addicted Paul, respectively. In reality, though, it's deluded of Ella to assume that she's impervious to corruption, exploitation, and illness. Her orchestration of the Hotel Caiette's vandalism a decade earlier is evidence that she, too, isn't above moral corruption.

Paul leaves the bar to walk back to his hotel in the rain. As he walks, his thoughts trail back to Vincent. On his way, he sits to rest in a doorway. He wonders again if he should try to find her and share some of his wealth with her, though he decides against this, as he needs everything he has. He reflects on the fact that he's "never been able to completely grasp what [his] responsibilities are," something he's admitted in his hypothetical conversations with Vincent. Suddenly, Paul feels someone watching him from across the street. He looks up and sees a cook watching him. Just as it strikes him that the cook might be Vincent, she disappears.

Paul's reflection about having "never been able to completely grasp what [his] responsibilities are" alludes to his mistreatment of Vincent over the years, but it also refers to his broader failure to see himself within a larger community of people, and to recognize the way his actions can affect those people in ways he might never be aware of. That he sees Vincent's ghost is a reflection of his guilt over stealing her work, and for unfairly hating her all these years. It's also possible that Paul is actually seeing Vincent's ghost, since the narrative has previously revealed that Vincent (most likely) dies at sea in 2018.

For the rest of his life, Paul will talk of sitting in a doorway in Edinburgh, seeing his sister staring at him from across the street, and later learning that she had died that very night. In his story, though, he is never hallucinating; he has actually seen Vincent's **ghost**. He'll reflect on the "many ways to haunt a person, or a life," and the uncertainty of that moment, which will always plague him.

Paul's comment about the "many ways to haunt a person, or a life" alludes to the ways guilt, uncertainty, and regret have haunted him his entire life.

CHAPTER 16: VINCENT IN THE OCEAN

In a series of fragments, Vincent describes her final moments on earth, instructing herself to "begin at the end," with a depiction of her falling off the ship with her camera. She revises her previous statement, beginning "twenty minutes earlier," instead, when she is sitting in her room onboard the *Neptune Cumberland* with Geoffrey Bell. It's December 2018, and they've been a couple for years, though things aren't perfect. Geoffrey has wanted to marry Vincent, but she refuses to be dependent on anyone ever again, and she never wants to return to land.

This chapter bears the same title as the novel's opening chapter, which officially confirms that the unnamed narrator featured in Chapter 1 was Vincent. Vincent's refusal to be dependent on anyone again might be seen as her attempt to atone for the way her dependency on Alkaitis indirectly implicated her in his Ponzi scheme and, by extension, the destruction of many investors' lives.

Tonight, in particular, there is tension between the two of them because Geoffrey is mad at Vincent for walking on deck during hazardous weather when the crew had been instructed to remain indoors until the storm subsided. Vincent broke the rules last night to go outside to film the **sea**. Geoffrey insists he's not ordering her around to control her, but to protect her. Vincent accuses Geoffrey of "being melodramatic," but he refuses to back down. They lay in bed and watch Vincent's suitcase move back and forth across the room as the sea sways underneath the boat.

Geoffrey's concern is warranted, given the sea's treacherous conditions. Vincent's pathological need to be independent prevents her from seeing Geoffrey's concern as authentic, and she distorts this concern, transforming it into a nefarious attempt to control her.

Suddenly, Vincent rises from the bed and walks onto the C deck and into the storm. She loves the feeling of the rain, the violent flashes of lightening. She walks to the blind spot corner of the C deck, turns on her camera, and records the storm. Vincent clutches the railing with one hand, but she lets go for a moment to steady the camera. Suddenly, she thinks she sees someone at the other end of the deck but realizes she must be alone, since she thought she saw a woman, and she's the only woman on this ship.

Vincent's need for complete independence leads her to venture outside to film the storm, disregarding Geoffrey's sincere feelings of concern for her wellbeing. It's possible that the woman Vincent thinks she saw was her mother. The fact that Vincent associates her mother with water and the open sea supports this idea.

But Vincent realizes she wasn't mistaken: there is a woman there, illuminated with each flash of lightning. The figure is not fully human, more "a disturbance of the air" that appears and fades with each lightning strike. Suddenly, Olivia Collins is standing beside Vincent at the railing, though she's "younger" and "less substantial" than she was the last time Vincent saw her. Vincent is still holding the camera over the ship's railing. As Olivia turns to speak to Vincent, Vincent loses her grip on the camera, and it slips from her hands into the **water**. Vincent reaches for it, but she bends too far, loses control, and falls overboard, feeling "weightless" as she tumbles through the air into the water.

Seeing Olivia's ghost is a reflection of the guilt Vincent feels over the financial devastation Olivia experienced when Alkaitis's Ponzi scheme collapsed. Though Vincent wasn't directly complicit in the scheme, the defrauded money funded her lifestyle. That Vincent feels "weightless" as she falls from the ship suggests that dying will rid Vincent of the burdens of guilt, grief, and remorse she's carried with her over the years.

The narrative breaks down into more fragmented, surreal pieces as Vincent splashes into the "annihilating" cold of the **water**. She is a small child holding hands with her mother and gathering mushrooms in Caiette. Now she exists in "the moment before sleep," in a state of subconsciousness, and then she is sputtering and drowning in the seawater. Olivia apologizes to Vincent, explaining that she was thinking of Vincent, of that time on the yacht with Jonathan, and suddenly she was standing beside her. Vincent describes the two of them as existing "in some in-between space."

The narrative explores the common trope that a person's life flashes before their eyes when they die. That Olivia could indirectly cause Vincent's death from beyond the grave suggests that people have the ability to irreparably alter the course of other people's lives. It asks the reader to imagine a world in which every mistake a person makes has consequences, even if such consequences are unintended.

Vincent's consciousness flashes back to her teenage graffiti: "*sweep me up*." Next, she flashes to the moment when Geoffrey kissed her on the C deck and told her he loved her. She repeated the words back and meant them for the first time. Vincent moves forward in time, to the moment when Geoffrey leaves the ship at the Port of Rotterdam, despite Mendoza's warning that it makes him look guilty. He looks "so alone and so bereft," and Vincent wants to comfort him but cannot.

Vincent unintentionally ends up hurting Geoffrey in a way that parallels how her mother's death hurt her. Vincent spent her life haunted by the uncertainty of whether her mother's death was an accident or a suicide, and it's plausible that Geoffrey will suffer the same uncertainty after Vincent's death.

Now, Vincent is in a hotel in Dubai. She sees Jonathan in the lobby and greets him. She tells him she's "just visiting," but doesn't say from where, as she's distracted by the sight of Faisal and Yvette Bertolli walking past the window. Vincent's consciousness flashes much further into the future; she sees Paul sitting in the doorway in Edinburgh. Next, she sees Mirella sitting alone in a loft somewhere, but Mirella doesn't see her.

Vincent's final interaction with Alkaitis gives the couple some closure, though most things remain unsaid between them. That Vincent's spirit visits Mirella one last time shows that Vincent still feels a nagging guilt over the role her complicity in Alkaitis's fraud played in Faisal's suicide. Though Vincent previously wanted to tell Mirella she knew nothing of Alkaitis's fraud, it's clear this isn't entirely true—that, perhaps, she had doubts about Alkaitis but chose to ignore them.

Now, Vincent's at Le Veau d'Or with Jonathan as he speaks to Lenny Xavier, one of her least favorite investors. Lenny makes his covert remark about the scheme of Jonathan's company, and Vincent recognizes that she'd known then that something was off with Jonathan's business, but that she'd "chosen not to understand."

Vincent finally comes to terms with the fact that she was more complicit in Alkaitis's scheme than she'd allowed herself to believe—that she'd merely "chosen not to understand" because the comfortable life she'd made with Jonathan was too good to give up.

Vincent visits Paul once more, only this time he's in the desert, standing outside smoking a cigarette. When he sees her he drops his cigarette, asking if she's "really there." Vincent tells him that she "[doesn't] know how to answer either of those questions." Paul tells her he was just speaking about her with his counselor. He looks like he's been crying. He apologizes to her for everything, but Vincent comforts him, explaining that she "was a thief too," that they "both got corrupted." Paul doesn't understand Vincent's words, and suddenly she wants to be someplace else, so she journeys back to Caiette.

When Vincent says she and Paul "both got corrupted," she's referring to the way greed and self-preservation encourage people to act selfishly, often at the expense of others. In truth, they've both behaved opportunistically throughout their lives. Paul stole Vincent's video recordings to elevate his music career. Vincent indirectly stole from Alkaitis's investors when she chose to ignore her suspicions about the Ponzi scheme. Paul and Vincent make peace with each other in this scene, but there's a tragic element to the fact that they weren't able to repair their relationship during Vincent's lifetime. This underscores the novel's theme of regret and disillusionment.

Now, Vincent is on a beach in Caiette. Her mother sits on a log in the distance as though she is waiting. She's 36 years old. In this moment, Vincent knows her mother's death was an accident: "of course it was, she would never have left me on purpose. She has waited so long for me. She was always here. This was always home." Vincent calls her mother's name, "and [her mother] looks up in amazement."

In the complete isolation and mental clarity death affords her, Vincent finally makes peace with her mother's death, realizing that her mother "never would have left [her] on purpose." With this realization, Vincent lays to rest the uncertainty that has haunted her for her entire life. When Vincent says, "this was always home," she implies that the truth about her mother had always existed, but Vincent had been too caught up in the struggles and suffering of daily life to access it. That Vincent is only able to discover the truth about her mother in death suggests that uncertainty is an inevitable part of life.

HOW TO CITE

To cite this LitChart:

MLA

Charles, Carly. "*The Glass Hotel*." *LitCharts*. LitCharts LLC, 8 Nov 2021. Web. 8 Nov 2021.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Charles, Carly. "*The Glass Hotel*." LitCharts LLC, November 8, 2021. Retrieved November 8, 2021. https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-glass-hotel.

To cite any of the quotes from *The Glass Hotel* covered in the Quotes section of this LitChart:

MLA

St. John Mandel, Emily. The Glass Hotel. Vintage. 2021.

CHICAGO MANUAL

St. John Mandel, Emily. The Glass Hotel. New York: Vintage. 2021.